

# Recognizing Accomplishments



Recognition is an important part of the 4-H experience. Youth need to know how well they contribute to the group and learn new skills. Recognizing their individual and group efforts provides them with feedback. Youth development professionals must be skilled in providing recognition that supports growth and in training staff to understand and use recognition appropriately.

## *Basic Beliefs About Recognition in 4-H Youth Development Programs*

Recognition for 4-H youth and volunteers is based on the following beliefs:

- Recognition is a basic human need.
- Recognition builds positive self-esteem (for competencies demonstrated).
- A balance between intrinsic (self-evaluation) and extrinsic (rewards given by others) recognition is essential.
- Everyone needs to be recognized at some time for their efforts.
- Recognition is more meaningful when it occurs *soon* after it is earned and is related to a specific task.
- Appropriate recognition for an individual varies depending on their age, past experiences, family lifestyle, community and cultural heritage.
- Recognition is more meaningful when given by someone closely related to the person.
- Recognition motivates people to excel and take worthwhile risks.
- Individual choices in learning and participation need to be allowed and recognized.

Recognition and awards programming in 4-H is a strategy for helping people become more capable and competent. Through the acknowledgement, affirmation and positive reinforcement of each person's effort, feelings of competence and capability increase and participation continues.

## ***The 4-H Recognition Model***

The 4-H Recognition Model is a comprehensive plan that acknowledges positive learning behaviors in young people. The model is designed to meet the needs, interests, and aspirations of young people from different backgrounds and life experiences.



The 4-H recognition program includes five types of accomplishments or goals. Each goal is unique in the way it motivates young people and recognizes their achievements. The five types of accomplishments 4-H measures for recognition are:

1. Participation in educational experiences
2. Progress toward self-set goals
3. Achieving standards of excellence
4. Excelling in peer competition
5. Excelling in cooperation within a group

### ***Participation in Educational Experiences***

Participation includes attending, participating in, and successfully completing an experience or activity. Youth participation in any program needs to be recognized. Recognition of participation demonstrates that a young person was “there” and can take the form of names in the paper, event T-shirts, participation ribbons, etc. Recognition of participations is best received from someone the young person cares about and/or looks up to such as project leaders, camp counselors, teachers, etc.



### ***Progress Toward Self-Set Goals***

This form of recognition is more about the *process* than the outcome. Adults serve to help youth set realistic goals that are likely to result in successful outcomes. Ultimately goals are decided by youth they serve. Self-set goals:

- are useful with all ages (early grades until later).
- must be realistic and reachable.
- are evaluated by both the youth and adult.
- are a way to measure youth progress.

Answers to questions like “how are you coming along?” or “how is it going?” reflect one’s progress.

Several or more steps are involved in reaching a goal. Recognizing accomplishment of steps along the way can provide motivation to continue the effort.



### **Achieving Standards of Excellence**

Recognizing accomplishments of self-set goals involves comparison of a product or behavior to a standard of excellence. This involves recognition of how accomplishments compare with set standards and is an external form of recognition.

Accomplishments that are recognized include behavior, product preparation, skills, and/or knowledge.

1. The standard of success comes from an outside source or specialist and serves as a measuring stick. Recognition is determined by how closely performance matches set standards.
2. To use this form of recognition, standards must be clearly defined. Adults must ensure that youth are well-informed about them.
3. Recognition based on a set of standards is *not* a comparison of one person's performance to another's. Judges must be well-informed of the standards. They must be impartial and be diligent about not comparing work to that of other youth.
4. Standards measurement involves a judging system and rating categories are often used. 4-H uses a ribbon placement system in recognizing the achieving of a standard of performance. A blue ribbon indicates accomplishment. A red ribbon indicates a rank of "needs improvement" and a white ribbon indicates a "needs more effort" ranking.



### **Excelling in Peer Competition**

The quest to be a champion can be a strong motivator for some youth. However, it is not a motivator for all youth.

1. Because youth under the age of 12-13 have limited ability to deal with the ambiguities that may accompany competitive judgment calls, and because they are maturing at very different rates, comparison to peers can negatively influence their concept of their own potential. Recognition based upon competition with peers is not recommended for youth under the age of 12.
2. The desire to win may overpower the desire to learn from the experience. It is easy to confuse the means with the ends when striving for recognition through competition! Youth development professionals must help youth remain focused on the experience rather than the competition and prepare youth for both winning and not winning.
3. Rules and procedures must be clearly spelled out so that everyone knows exactly what will be judged and how that judging will take place. Competition creates stress that can result in conflict, hard feelings, and disagreement. Negative stress and conflict can be reduced by making sure that everyone involved understands exactly what is going to be expected.
4. The positive side of competition is recognition by others and rewards such as trophies, scholarships, plaques, and publicity. Adults should remember that this form of recognition is designed to promote the development of youth rather than the success of their program.
5. Competition helps a youth's sense of recognition but does not serve as a positive motivator for all youth.



### ***Excelling in Cooperation within a Group***

Because of the increasing interdependence of groups in today's world, cooperation skills are a necessity. Recognition of cooperation relies on the following guidelines.

1. Cooperation must involve: all youth within a given group, opportunities to develop a group identity, and group-defined tasks such as coming up with ideas and solutions as a group.
2. Developing mutually agreed upon goals by looking at a variety of options.
3. Gaining understanding of the way a group works. Leadership skills that promote the involvement of everyone in the group are essential.
4. Knowing that ultimate goal of cooperation is not recognition. Recognition for cooperation is based on how group members work together rather than over who has accomplished the most as an individual.
5. The realization that everyone in the group is recognized when cooperation is measured.



### ***Providing a Balance of Recognition Opportunities***

The most important part of the 4-H Recognition Model is that it provides for *balance* across all types of recognition. The model is applicable to a variety of educational experiences for youth at the individual and group levels. The model acknowledges young people for their continuing development of life skills, as well as project accomplishments. It recognizes and rewards volunteers for providing effective leadership in the area of positive youth development, regardless of the role volunteers serve within the 4-H system.



#### **Recognition**

Recognition in 4-H is the acknowledgement and affirmation of the personal growth of an individual or group.

#### **Awards**

Awards are things we give persons or groups to symbolize our recognition of their accomplishments or effort.