TEXAS 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

SELF-DIRECTED PROJECT GUIDE TO SUCCESS

2026-2027

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Want to learn more about a specific subject or interest you may have, but cannot find a project to go with it? Self-directed projects might be for you! With the guidance of your 4-H leader and county Extension agent, you can turn your interest into a self-directed 4-H project.

A 4-H Self-directed Project is an opportunity for members to explore a new topic which may not fit into the current project offerings. A 4-H Self-directed project may not be supported with resources from the Texas 4-H Youth Development Program.

Step 1: PROJECT GUIDELINES

Project Guidelines

1. Make an inventory of your interests or something you would like to learn more about. Identify a topic for your project.
2. Discuss your ideas with family, friends, and your county Extension agent. Decide what it is you want to do and learn.
3. Set a goal. Decide what the end goal of your project will be and necessary steps to achieve your goal.
4. Gather information about your topic using credible resources. The web address can help you identify the kind of organization responsible for the website:
   - An educational institution is indicated by .edu
   - Those with .gov are funded by a government agency
   - Professional organizations, such as scientific or research societies, are identified by .org
5. List all the things you want to learn about your topic.
6. Complete at least six experiential learning experiences. Experiential learning includes activities, research, programs, or other experiences where learning takes place. The National 4-H Experiential Learning Fact Sheet indicates this type of learning occurs when:
   - Youth **experience** the activity—perform or do it.
   - Youth **share** the experience by describing what happened.
   - Youth **process** the experience to figure out what was most important and identify common themes.
   - Youth **generalize** from the experience and relate it to their daily lives.
   - Youth **apply** what they learned to a new situation.
7. Plan and complete at least two leadership/citizenship activities.
8. Share and report your project accomplishments to your club, community, and county agents.

Step 2: LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Learning Experiences

Choose at least six learning experiences from the example list below (or create your own).

- Participate in a clinic, or workshop related to your topic
- Attend a demonstration, or speech on a topic related to your project
- Research your topic online using credible resources
- Interview an expert in the field
- Tour a facility, agency, or business related to your topic
- Participate in online learning sessions

Step 3: LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Leadership/Citizenship

Choose at least two leadership/citizenship activities from the list below (or create your own).

- Help in setting up and/or cleaning up for a show or event
- Help someone with his or her project
- Provide leadership at a workshop or program related to your project
- Encourage a friend to join 4-H and choose a project
- Teach someone something that you learned about 4-H or about your topic
- Invite someone to talk to your club about your topic
- Give advice to a member who is a preparing a project for the fair
- Prepare an exhibit or display promoting your topic or 4-H
- Prepare a public service announcement for school, radio, television, or social media on a topic related to your project
- Help organize a club activity on this project
- Prepare your own demonstration, illustrated talk or exhibit

Step 4: RECORD YOUR SUCCESS

Record your Experiences and Success

Record keeping is a valuable life skill. Record keeping is a way to develop the skills necessary to set goals, work toward achieving those goals, reflect on experiences, and set new and higher goals. Record keeping can be done through a variety of ways, either formally in a 4-H Record Book or informally through personal journaling.

- Record keeping – keeping a history of one's activities such as financial dealings or life events by entering data in ledgers, journals, calendars or putting items into a file system; an essential life skill
- 4-H Record Book – the competitive event where 4-H members assemble their records into a specified document and submit those for evaluation against other 4-H members. However, one may choose to complete a record book just for the skill learned and not choose to submit for competition

Adapted From

- Ohio State University | https://ohio4h.org/sites/ohio4h/files/imce/books_resources/Curriculum/365-Self-Determined-Project-Guide.pdf
- Iowa State University | https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/projects/selfdetermined
- Penn State | https://extension.psu.edu/programs/4-h/leaders/resources/publications/m9800a
- University of Florida IFAS Extension | https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/4h243

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