

There are several ways to write a set of bylaws for your club or make revision to your current bylaws.

- (1) You can complete the Bylaws Worksheet and return it to the 4-H Office and a staff member will generate a set of bylaws based on your choices.
- (2) You can complete the Bylaws Worksheet and review these guidelines and make an appointment for representatives of the club to meet with a staff member at the 4-H Office to write a set of bylaws and print enough copies for your members. This meeting should take about 3 hours.
- (3) You can use these guidelines to generate your own set of bylaws, and then send to the 4-H Office for review by a staff member.

## **4-H CLUB BYLAWS GUIDELINES**

BYLAWS OF THE \_\_\_\_\_ 4-H CLUB

Adopted on \_\_\_\_\_

### **ARTICLE I: NAME**

The complete, exact proper name should be inserted in the following sentence:

"The name of this organization is the \_\_\_\_\_ 4-H Club. This club is affiliated with Macomb MSU Extension and Michigan State University 4-H."

### **ARTICLE II: OBJECTIVES**

Begin with the 4-H youth development mission (to bring youth and adult volunteers together to provide positive, experiential, educational opportunities designed to support the development of each youth participant's full potential and to equip them with the knowledge and skills they will need as adults). You may also include other opportunities the club offers, like recreational activities, community service, etc. You may also wish to mention particular project areas. If you do so, include the phrase "and other project areas decided by the membership on an annual basis" to avoid having to change your bylaws each year. This article may be written in paragraph form or objectives can be lettered A, B, C, etc. as a list.

### **ARTICLE III: MEMBERS**

Sections under this article should explain: who is eligible for membership; how one becomes a member; the requirements for being a member in good standing; procedures for determining that a member is not in good standing, the consequences of that and what s/he needs to do to regain good standing; and procedures for determining and collecting dues and fees.

**Section A: Eligibility and Enrollment.** Your bylaws should say that the club is open to all interested youth between the "4-H ages of 5 (or 9 if you exclude Cloversprouts) and 19 without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, or family status." If you have restrictions on the participation of Cloversprouts, explain them next. End by saying that one becomes a member by enrolling with the County 4-H Office. If the club wishes to have a size limit (which requires that a waiting list be maintained and used to fill vacancies) start this section with the following language: "Membership in the club is limited to \_\_\_\_\_ youth between the 4-H ages of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. The General Leader will maintain a waiting list of interested youth from which new members will be selected as openings occur without regard to race, color, etc."

**Section B: Dues and Fees.** Explain how the club will support its activities financially. If you have dues, state how and when they are determined and collected. For example: "Dues will be set each year by a vote of the membership at the September meeting." If there are fees in place of, or in addition to, dues describe them. For example, "Members will pay their fair share of expenses as these occur." If dues or fees are different for members joining after November 1<sup>st</sup> this needs to be explained. Don't include the specific amount of dues in your bylaws, unless you are prepared to change them every time you change the amount. It is recommended that you give the General Leader the authority to waive fees and dues of payment schedules as they see fit.

### **Section C: Members' responsibilities.**

List the expectations (i.e. requirements for good standing in the club) of members. This should start with following the 4-H Code of Conduct at all 4-H functions and paying their dues and fees in a timely manner. If you have participation expectations, these should come next. Only include rules your club can actually live with. Avoid inflexible requirements that won't be followed on a regular basis.

**Section D: Restriction of Privileges.** MSU 4-H does not allow a club to "kick out" a member who wishes to remain in the club, but it does allow a club to restrict the privileges of members who are not in good standing. This may include prohibiting them from showing in the fair under the club name or participation in a particular club activity.

1. Start this section by explaining what "penalties" you wish to have for members who do not maintain good standing.

Then include this exact procedure for acting on an issue good standing.

2. "The following procedure will be followed in deciding issues of good standing:

- The General leader will inform the 4-H office in writing of any potential restrictions of privileges in a timely manner and before any action has been taken.
- The issue must be determined by the club membership at a club meeting.
- Members must be notified in advance that an issue of good standing is on the agenda.
- The member in question must be given an opportunity to respond to the complaints against him/her prior to the vote.
- A 4-H staff member (or individual designated by the staff if a staff member is not available) will conduct the hearing and count the ballots.
- The staff member will inform the general leader and the member in question of the results within two days of the vote, but not at the meeting itself.
- Prior to voting on the issue, the club will determine what actions, if any, the member must take to regain good standing should the vote be in favor of restricting privileges. It is understood that in some situations, good standing may not be regained until the next program year.

## **ARTICLE IV: PARENTS/FAMILY MEMBERS AND LEADERS**

Use the 4-H Club Organization/Responsibilities Diagram as a starting point for deciding the expectations of parents/family members and leaders.

### **Section A. Parents/Family Members.**

They should follow the 4-H Code of Conduct at 4-H activities. If you have attendance expectations they should be listed here. You should also say that they are encouraged to become screened volunteers and serve as project or resource leaders. They may represent the club on a county program committee, or serve on the 4-H Council and its subcommittees.

### **Section B. Leaders.**

Use the following specific language:

1. "General Leaders who become screened volunteers, recruit members and resource/project leaders, register the club with the County 4-H Office, advise and oversee the officers, provide all records required by the County 4-H Office, follow the Code of Conduct, and attend appropriate 4-H and MSUE trainings. They are encouraged to serve on the county Program Committees or the 4-H Council and its subcommittees."

2. "Project and Resource Leaders who become screened volunteers, plan and carry out the activities connected with their project, follow the Code of Conduct and attend appropriate 4-H and MSUE trainings. They are encouraged to serve on the county Program Committees or the 4-H Council and its subcommittees."

## **ARTICLE IV: OFFICERS (or OFFICERS AND TEEN LEADERS)**

This section should include a list of officers, the requirements for holding office, the duties of each officer, an explanation of when and how officers are elected, the steps for filling a vacancy, and the reasons and procedures for removing an officer in mid-term. If your club regularly has teen leaders who assist adult volunteers, expectations for them should be added.

### **Section A: List of Officers.** "The officers of the club will be \_\_\_\_\_"

Almost all clubs will have a president, vice president, secretary (or clerk), and treasurer. The offices of historian and reporter (or the two combined into one office) are also common. Large clubs may wish to have a sergeant-at-arms to help keep order at meetings.

**Section B: Nominations and Elections.** "The officers shall be nominated and elected annually by the membership in \_\_\_\_\_ (tell what month), by \_\_\_\_\_ secret ballot if there is more than one candidate, otherwise by voice vote. Add any requirements (like age, length of time as a club member, or previous experience as an officer for Presidential nominees). End by saying that "officers will assume their positions at the conclusion of the meeting at which they were elected." If you nominate officers at one meeting and elect them at the next, adjust the first sentence in this section accordingly.

### **Section C: Vacancies.**

Options for filling vacancies are: special election by the members, selection of someone by the remaining officers, appointment by the President. You also need to decide whether the Vice President will automatically become President if there is a vacancy in that office, or whether you want to use another method. If you are holding an election, you should do so at the first meeting after the vacancy occurs. If you are using another method, the selection should take place sometime between the occurrence of the vacancy and the next club meeting.

"Vacancies in club offices shall be filled \_\_\_\_\_ (explain how) at the first meeting after they occur." If the vice president automatically becomes president, then this sentence should be "vacancies in club offices other than President shall be filled \_\_\_\_\_"

### **Section D: Removal of Officers.**

There are basically only two reasons to remove an officer: (1) failure to perform their specific duties and (2) failure to maintain good standing in the club. Follow reasons for removal with a statement that the procedure described in Article III, Section D, will be followed in removing an officer.

### **Section E: Duties of Officers.**

See the 4-H Club Organization/Responsibilities diagram and the 4-H Publications on each office for a complete description of duties.

1. "The President will . . . ." Usual duties are to chair meetings, prepare an agenda with the help of the other officers and/or the general leader, attend Club Officer Training, represent the Club in the community, appoint committees, call special meetings, and cancel meetings in emergencies. Add other duties you want, and end with "and perform all other duties decided by the members."

2. "The Vice President will . . . ." Usual duties are to assist the president as needed, chair meetings when the President is absent, and become the President if that office becomes vacant in mid-term, attend club officer training. Other common jobs for the Vice President include being in charge of club programming or acting as Historian or Reporter if the Club does not have separate officers for these jobs. End with "and perform all other duties decided by the members."

3. "The Secretary/Clerk (use term you prefer) will . . . ." Usual duties include: attend club officer training, take attendance at meetings and other activities, take minutes at meetings, read the minutes of previous meetings, file required Secretarial reports with the County 4-H Office, and conduct club correspondence. End with "and perform all other duties decided by the members."

4. "The Treasurer will . . . ." Usual duties include: attend club officer training collect dues and fees, maintain financial records, present a report at each meeting, and file appropriate reports with the County 4-H Office.) Include the following language: "The treasurer will work with a designated adult volunteer who is responsible for seeing that club financial records follow required accounting procedures and are reported to the County 4-H Office as required."

5. "The Historian will . . . ." Usual duties include maintaining a scrapbook or other record of the club's activities over the years and attending Club Officer Training. These duties may be combined with those of the Reporter, or they may be given to the Vice-President.

6. "The Reporter will . . . ." Usual duties include providing information about the club's activities for the 4-H Family Notes and other 4-H communications, and to the local media, and attending club officer training. These duties may be combined with those of the Historian or they may be given to the Vice-President.

7. "The Sergeant-at-Arms will maintain order and otherwise assist the presiding officer at club meetings and activities and attend Club Officer Training."

8. "Teen Leaders will . . . ." Usual duties include assisting younger members with projects. They will indicate their desire to serve in this capacity at the time of annual enrollment with the County 4-H Office.

## **ARTICLE V: MEETINGS**

This article should include how the club determines its schedule of meetings, procedures for altering that schedule and dealing with emergency situations that affect the schedule. It should also specify procedural rules that the club will follow at meetings.

### **Section A: Schedule of regular meetings and activities.**

This section should be general in nature. Its purpose is to affirm that the club has a democratic procedure for approving a schedule of meetings (vote of the membership) and activities and changing that schedule during the program year if necessary. If your club has a special "program planning meeting" at which these decisions are made, the month of that meeting should probably be mentioned. It is suggested that you not include specific dates and locations of meetings (like "second Monday of each month at the Ray Township Hall") because a future change in time or location will necessitate a bylaws amendment. The following language will illustrate what is needed here.

"The membership will approve of a schedule of business meetings annually in \_\_\_\_\_(month). This schedule may be altered as needed by the members during the program year. Project leaders will develop schedules of project meetings taking into account the wishes of members, availability of facilities, and seasonal nature of the project where applicable."

**Section B: Cancellation of meetings and activities.** Explain what expectations the club has when a cancellation must be made. Who will be involved in a decision to cancel? What procedures will be followed to inform members? Since most cancellations are a result of an emergency situation involving members or leaders or the weather, don't make rigid time requirements like "48 hours prior to the event". If the cancellation of a meeting is triggered by a school cancellation, be sure to specify what district. Schools may be closed in Armada and Romeo, but open in Utica and Warren. Explain which methods of communication are acceptable (phone or e-mail or both).

### **Section C: Procedural Rules.**

This section should explain that the club will follow common parliamentary procedures in making decisions.

#### 1. Quorum

This is the number of members who must be present in order for the club to conduct business (i.e., make decisions). The most "democratic" option is to use a simple majority (50%+1) as the quorum. It is also acceptable to use a different number. If the number is higher, the absence of a "minority" will prevent the majority from acting, but those who believe that "consensus decision-making"—getting everyone or almost everyone to buy into a decision—leads to a stronger club may favor a higher number (3/5 or 2/3)

and may be willing to postpone decisions until that many members are present. If the number is lower, a "minority" can control decision making. Some clubs have gone so far as to say that whoever is present constitutes a quorum, as long as it is at least 3 members. This may encourage better attendance, but it is also likely to create friction in a club where membership and participation is more important to some members than it is to others. The size of your club, the usual attendance at any given meeting, frequency of meetings (and consequently the amount of inconvenience in having to postpone a decision), and the degree to which club membership is uniformly important are all factors to consider in determining your quorum. Once, you have decided, this section should simply state "A quorum, which must be present, in order to conduct official club business, will be (fill in a % or fraction) of the membership."

## 2. Majority Rule

This section should simply state that "a quorum being present, a majority of those present and voting will decide an issue."

3. Parliamentary Authority. Part of the 4-H mission is to equip members with skills they will need as adults. In our democracy, knowledge of parliamentary procedure and how to run or participate in a meeting is one of those skills. The County 4-H Office has provided (or will provide upon request) each club with a copy of Doris P. Zimmerman's *Robert's Rules In Plain English: A readable, authoritative easy-to-use guide to running meetings*. It should be used to promote fair and effective meetings and decision making. The language for this section is as follows: "The rules contained in the current edition of *Robert's Rules In Plain English: A readable, authoritative easy-to-use guide to running meetings* by Doris P. Zimmerman, shall guide the decision making of the Club, unless these Bylaws contain other procedures."

## **ARTICLE VI: COMMITTEES**

This is an optional article that is most useful for larger clubs. If your club has permanent (year after year) committees, this article should list them and their duties, explain how they are selected and how the chairpersons are chosen. Common practices are: an odd number of members on a committee to avoid tie votes, the president selecting the committee members from a list of volunteers, the president naming the chairpersons (or the committee members choosing their own chairperson). If you have committees, divide this Article as follows:

### **Section A: List and method of selection.**

Follow this with a section for each permanent committee, explaining what duties that committee has, what its composition is, and how its chair is selected.

If you have no standing committees, but form temporary committees from time to time, you can use this article to explain that and describe the process by which they are set up. It is common to require at least three members, and you may wish set a ratio of youth to adults. Sample language might be: "The President will, from time to time, appoint and give directions to committees to handle the club's business. Committees will have an odd number of members with more youth than adults, and shall select their own chairpersons."

## **ARTICLE VII: DISSOLUTION.**

This article should explain what happens to the funds and other assets if the club ceases to exist. Under MSU guidelines, these must be given to the County 4-H Office to be used for remaining 4-H programs. There are no options here. Use the following language: "In the event of the dissolution of the \_\_\_\_ 4-H Club, all assets shall be given to Macomb MSU Extension."

## **ARTICLE VIII: ADOPTION and AMENDMENTS.**

This article should explain how your bylaws will be adopted and amended (or changed). This should be harder than making a decision at a meeting.

(1) You need to decide how much time there must be between giving members a written copy of the proposed bylaws or amendments. 1 week is suggested as a minimum, and 28 days (the least amount of time between two monthly meetings) as a maximum. With e-mail this is easy to do.

(2) You need to decide what percentage of the members must approve it for it to go into effect. 2/3 or 3/4, not just a simple majority, of the total youth membership, not just those in attendance, is common practice.

(3) If the vote is controversial, a secret ballot should probably be used. This can be handled by using a secret ballot if any two members (one to make the motion, one to second) request it. If no one makes the request, a voice (or hand) vote is acceptable.

Suggested language: "These bylaws and any future amendments will go into immediate effect following adoption by a 2/3 yes vote of the total membership. Members must be given written copies of these Bylaws and any future amendments at least 7 prior to voting on them. A secret ballot will be used upon the request of two or more members."

