



Michigan 4-H Advisory Groups

By-Laws: Sample Template

The Backbone of Advisory Groups

A well-written set of by-laws will provide organizations with direction and structure. In addition they outline the major functions of the organization. Generally, by-laws comprise all the rules by which an organization is governed, and are usually considered one in the same with organizational constitutions. By-laws are of such importance that they should not be changed, except after suitable notice is given to the members, and then a vote of the entire membership has taken place. Because of the overall organizational implications associated with by-laws, programmatic rules and regulations are generally held in a separate document and should be maintained separately from the organization's constitution and bylaws. The following template provides a basic structure and suggested language for 4-H clubs and organizations.

Article I- Name

Article II- Object/Purpose- The purpose drives the work of the organization. An entire article has been developed to creating an organizational purpose statement: Creating a strong purpose creates a strong committee. 4-H organizations should review MSUE and 4-H vision, mission, and guiding principles as a potential starting point for purpose statements.

Article III- Members – This section can include language regarding the qualifications of members, number of members, tenure, resignation, vacancies, attendance policies, etc. It is required that all 4-H organizations follow Michigan State University Extension's civil rights policies and assure that our programs are open to all. It is recommended to include the most updated MSUE indicia in this section, the current statement follows:

Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, or veteran status.

Further, MSUE 4-H staff members have ultimate authority over 4-H organizations, and serve on all advisory groups as ex-officio members. Consider the following language:

Michigan State University Extension 4-H Staff serve as ex-officio members of all 4-H organizations and committees without voting rights. No staff member shall hold an elected office or be an elected member of the organization.

Article IV- Officers- This section should outline each office, the duties associated with that office, the process for electing, terms, tenure, vacancies, and any considerations for when individuals may need to be removed from office.

Article V- Meetings- If the organization functions using a standard meeting date (such as the first Thursday of the month), it should be noted here. It's also wise to add the following language incase alternative meeting dates are determined.

...unless otherwise specified by the membership or executive board.

Requirements for quorum, special meetings, and meeting notices should also be outlined in this section.



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Article VI- Executive Board- often comprised of the officers of the organization, but sometimes also involve otherwise elected members. This section should specify the composition, specific powers of the board, and meeting times if separate from that of the general membership. (For example, some executive boards are granted the authority to approve expenses up to a certain amount without needing to get approval from the entire membership, this type of power should be spelled out here.)

Article VII- Committees- Be sure to note in this section if officers (often the President) serve as ex-officio members on all committees. MSU Extension Staff should also be listed as ex-officio members of all committees.

Article VIII- Authority- This section can outline the governing documents that organizations can refer to when not otherwise outlined in the by-laws. Roberts Rules of Order is the standard protocol for all parliamentary matters. Using the language “current edition” will allow the organization to follow the most updated procedures without needing to change their bylaws every time a new edition is published. The Michigan 4-H Treasurer’s Record Book and MSUE Financial Guidelines serve as the reference point for all financial questions not addressed in the by-laws.

Article IX- Restrictions- This section outlines any further restrictions that the organization must function within. For example, all funds raised in the name of 4-H must have a policy in place for their disbandment, project based advisory groups typically turn over property to the county 4-H council. County 4-H councils typically turn over property to the county MSU Extension Office. Sample language follows:

Upon dissolution of this organization, all remaining funds and property will be turned over to the county MSU Extension Office.

Because MSU Extension 4-H Staff are ultimately responsible for the decisions made by advisory groups, MSUE staff must maintain an ability to veto decisions in conflict with MSU Extension/4-H policies. It is understood that this veto authority is used with discretion. Sample language follows:

Any decision passed in conflict with the policies or practices of the county 4-H program or MSU Extension may be vetoed by the MSUE 4-H Staff.

1. Veto Authority

Article IX- Amendments of Bylaws- There is no one set way to amend bylaws. Each organization can decide for itself how to changes can be made. Always specify the exact requirements for making amendments, and make sure that the rights of all members continue to be protected.

For further assistance in establishing by-laws for your 4-H club, advisory council or committees, contact the MSU Extension Leadership Civic Engagement work team at 4-HLeadership@anr.msu.edu.