



# Montana County 4-H Councils and the MSU County Extension Agent

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## The Link Between County 4-H Councils and MSU Extension

### 4-H Councils

County 4-H Councils have provided key support to 4-H programs and have strengthened youth development since Montana 4-H's earliest beginnings. With a small number of professional staff, leaders organized councils as a way to share information, establish more uniformity in programs and events, and to provide training for new leaders.

The first county 4-H leaders' association was formed in 1926 in Cascade County, and the form spread widely. By 1930, refinements were made which produced the first County 4-H Councils. Montana was one of the first states to adopt the council idea. During council meetings, arrangements were made for details related to fairs, achievement days, tours, demonstrations, picnics, dress revues, camp awards, and trips to conferences and conventions. Finances, transportation facilities and other ever-present needs, as well as general promotion and marketing, all lay within the province of the 4-H Council.<sup>1</sup>

Today, the purpose of 4-H Councils remains the same. Councils help organize county and regional events and activities, plan achievement programs, support trips to conferences and all the rest. Councils are still designed to promote youth development opportunities for boys and girls in urban, rural and suburban areas, and to increase the number of volunteers. For example, 4-H Councils can help with the following roles—

### Education

- **Organize and support additional programs for youth**  
Establish or support educational opportunities for youth beyond the club level, including camp, member exchanges (intra- and inter-state) county fair and project activities.
- **Support volunteer education**  
Conduct adult and youth volunteer training, provide financial support for volunteer education and promote volunteer development via meetings, newsletters and phone.
- **Advise county 4-H program development**  
Explore new 4-H youth development opportunities and challenges. Provide advice on youth and volunteer needs and issues to the county Extension agent. Work to ensure that all youth participating in Extension youth programs (after-school programs, camps, clubs, and other programs) have equal access to 4-H programs.

### Support

- **Manage budget and raise funds to support 4-H youth development work.**  
Develop and manage a budget that supports 4-H youth development work. Do fund-raising to support these budgets.
- **Coordinate county level recognition.**  
Develop meaningful recognition for young people and volunteers.

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<sup>1</sup> Burlingame, M.G. (1984). The Montana Cooperative Extension Service: A History 1893-1974. Bozeman, MT: Montana State University. p. 196-97.

## Connect

- **Represent 4-H Youth Development in the community.**  
Establish a promotion committee or Ambassador program.
- **Connect all clubs in the county.**  
The 4-H Council can provide a vital communication link for all clubs in the county. Common interests and goals can be coordinated, such as with fund-raising and community service activities.
- **Advocate for 4-H youth development with public officials.**  
Maintain personal contact with government officials so that they understand the benefits of 4-H work and 4-H programs.

## **The Roles of the County Extension Agent**

As paid employees of the MSU Extension Service, County Extension agents have ultimate responsibility for and leadership of the 4-H program at the local level.

- **Educator**  
The role of the salaried Extension 4-H staff is to educate youth and adults, and to develop and manage a system through which Extension and other volunteers provide educational programs that enhance subject matter knowledge and life skills development in youth. Extension personnel serve as educators, change agents, leaders and program managers, including ensuring fiscal responsibility of 4-H programs.
- **Mission Guardian**  
4-H program policy authority is held by Extension personnel. Moreover, the county Extension agent has final authority in matters of conduct, discipline, health and safety in connection with 4-H members and leaders attending 4-H events and activities in the county.
- **Link to Larger System**  
Extension agents are the link to the larger 4-H youth development and MSU Extension system. They have knowledge of state and national level resources, new programs, policies and sources of training. They report local progress and concerns to state staff who support the work of the county 4-H organization.
- **Youth development**  
The Extension agent ensures that programs are focused on positive youth development and essential elements of positive youth development settings. The county agent also provides youth development programming in the community, promotion of outreach 4-H programming such as after-school clubs, summer youth program, community garden programs, community youth leadership groups, and short-term youth programs taking place in the community.

4-H Councils are not responsible for the hiring or supervision of 4-H youth development faculty or staff. At the same time, 4-H Councils do not determine 4-H program policies, but can advise the county Extension agent on policy matters for the county-wide program.

4-H Councils are accountable to MSU Extension for their activities and finances. Their continuing existence is dependent upon MSU Extension's authorization and oversight. 4-H youth development volunteers are expected to abide by the code of conduct established for 4-H volunteers, and to conduct themselves as positive role models for youth. All 4-H youth development volunteers are ultimately accountable to MSU Extension for their 4-H related activities and actions.