



# Maryland 4-H Membership Policies, Procedures, & Guidelines

University of Maryland Extension (UME) administers the 4-H Youth Development program. The mission of Maryland 4-H is to provide a supportive and inclusive setting for all youth to reach their fullest potential in a diverse society. Youth learn beneficial and cognitive life skills through community-focused, research-based experiential education programs. Each of Maryland's 23 counties and Baltimore City conduct 4-H programs to accomplish this goal. Youth can participate in 4-H in many ways, but membership policy and guidelines are consistent across the program.

## MEMBERSHIP POLICIES

**Eligibility:** Membership is open to all youth and adults without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, age, national origin, political affiliation, physical or mental disability, religion, protected veteran status, genetic information, personal appearance, or any other legally-protected class.

**Program Year:** The 4-H program year is January 1 – December 31. Members may enroll in 4-H at any time during the year, up to December 1. No new enrollments will be processed in December.

**Enrollment Requirement:** To be considered a 4-H member, an individual must have an approved member enrollment record in the 4-H Online Enrollment Management system. Members must enroll each year through their 4-H Online member profile. All youth who participate in Maryland 4-H clubs, units, and camps must be enrolled for the current program year.

**Enrollment Fee:** Maryland 4-H charges an annual enrollment fee of \$10.00 per youth and Cloverbud member. Families enrolling more than three children as 4-H members pay a maximum of \$30.00 per family (family cap). The annual enrollment fee is paid in 4-H Online as part of the enrollment process. County/city 4-H programs and clubs may also collect small fees or dues to help cover the costs of 4-H programs and events.

**Eligibility for Events and Competitions:** 4-H programs, events and competitions have various membership and eligibility requirements. 4-H youth and families should contact their local 4-H office to learn more about local, state, national and international opportunities and eligibility requirements.

**Program Age Divisions:** Certain programs, contests, and events provide opportunities to youth members based on age. A youth member's "4-H age" is their age on January 1 of the program year. The Maryland 4-H Age divisions are:

- Cloverbuds – ages 5-7
- Junior 4-H members – ages 8-10
- Intermediate 4-H members – ages 11-13
- Senior 4-H members – ages 14-18



**Eligibility of Young Adults with Disabilities:** Young adults with disabilities who are eligible for free appropriate public education (FAPE) beyond age 18 may enroll in Maryland 4-H if they participate in a qualifying FAPE program. Eligible young adults with disabilities may participate as 4-H members through age 21 (4-H age as of January 1).

**4-H Family:** For purposes of enrollment, a “4-H Family” includes all immediate members of a family who participate in 4-H and who reside together, at least part of the year, at the same address. 4-H Online requires creation of a family profile, which contains individual youth, Cloverbud, and adult volunteer member profiles for each family member involved in 4-H.

**NOTE:** In the following section, the term “county” refers to the enrollment unit designation applied in 4-H Online. The “county” designation includes the Baltimore City 4-H program as well as Maryland’s 23 county-based programs.

**Family County:** When enrolling in 4-H for the first time, a 4-H family will choose their family membership county. The family county identifies the local 4-H program to which the family “belongs” and represents at State 4-H competitions, events, and leadership opportunities. Youth and adults are generally expected to join and participate in a 4-H program in their Maryland county of residence. However, families may request approval to join a 4-H program in a county other than where they live. A 4-H Family and its members may have only **one** 4-H family county.

**Membership Across County Lines:** A family may request to join a 4-H program in a Maryland county different from their county of residence. Requests for membership across county lines must be based on reasonable and/or compelling circumstances. For instance, a family may request to join 4-H in a county other than their residence because it is where parents work, where children attend school or after-school care, or where the family maintains social or familial ties. Requests for membership across county lines will be approved only where a positive educational experience will result. Requests motivated by perceived competitive advantage, controversial issues, or other similar reasons will not be considered.

**Membership Across State Lines:** A family that lives in another state may request to join a 4-H program in a Maryland county. Youth who are enrolled in 4-H in another state may join Maryland 4-H. However, they must meet the qualifications of Maryland 4-H membership, properly enroll using 4-H Online, and follow Maryland 4-H policies, procedures, and guidelines. Requests for membership across state lines must be based on reasonable and/or compelling circumstances and will be approved only where a positive educational experience will result. Members who participate in both Maryland 4-H and another state’s 4-H program may be limited or restricted in their participation if a conflict or unfair advantage is created because of the dual-state membership.

**Changing Enrollment County:** A 4-H family’s county of membership (“family county”) endures from year to year. A 4-H family may request change of their family county by making a written request. The request must include justification for the change of family county and must be approved by 4-H Educators in both affected programs. Approved change of family county will apply to all members of the 4-H family. A 4-H family may not change their family county multiple times without exceptional justification.

**Membership in 4-H Clubs and Units:** 4-H members may participate in more than one 4-H club or unit in their family county. There is no limit on the number of clubs/units a 4-H member may join, but the member is expected to actively participate in and follow bylaws and rules of each.

**Membership in 4-H Clubs and Units Outside the Family County:** 4-H members may participate in 4-H clubs/units in a county other than their family county. Members must request membership in another county's club/unit and receive approval from club leader(s). Approval for outside-county club/unit membership must be renewed each year. Membership in a club/unit outside the family county is restricted as follows:

- If a club/unit in the 4-Her's family county offers a project or experience, the member may not instead join a club/unit offering that **same** project or experience in a different county without exceptional justification.
- If the 4-Her is a member of a project or activity club in their family county, they may not **also** join a club/unit of the same focus in another county.
  - Access to a particular discipline or sub-genre of a 4-H project is an acceptable basis for membership in **similar**-type project clubs/units in both the family county and another county. For example, a 4-Her may join the 4-H Shooting Sports Archery Club in a neighboring county, in addition to being a member of their family county's 4-H Shooting Sports Shotgun Club. Each club offers instruction in a different project discipline.
- A 4-Her may not join a club/unit in another county to gain access to or advantage in a 4-H contest or competition.

**Representation at State 4-H Events:** As a general rule the 4-Her represents their **family** county at State 4-H competitions and events. A 4-Her's club/unit membership does not determine their eligibility or representation for State 4-H events. Refer to event rules for more information.

**Requesting Membership Permissions:** Members and parents/guardians must follow procedures for requesting and maintaining membership across county or state lines, change of family county, and/or participation in clubs/units outside the family county. Local 4-H Educators will coordinate and make decisions on requested actions. If agreement cannot be reached between 4-H Educators or if the requesting family challenges the decision, the State 4-H Program Leader will be the final decision authority. All membership actions will be recorded in the family's/member's enrollment profile in 4-H Online.

**Independent 4-H Learning:** While 4-H encourages participation in club settings to promote friendships and interaction with others, for some youth this may not be possible. Independent 4-H members participate in planned learning outside of a club/unit setting. Their work is self-directed with guidance and support of parents and mentors. Refer to Independent 4-H Learning policy and resources for additional information.

Independent 4-H Learning is limited to 4-Hers who do not enroll in any other type of club/unit in their family county. It is an alternative to club/unit membership.