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## 4-H Publication



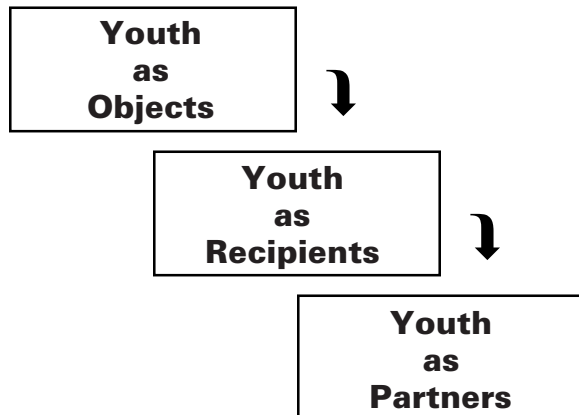
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# Engaging Youth in 4-H Advisory Groups

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Active youth participation is an important component of an effective 4-H advisory group. Whether an overall advisory group or a 4-H project advisory committee, young people can provide a valuable perspective in the decision-making and program planning roles of the group. Youth are more likely to promote and participate in programs in which they take an active role in planning and implementing. In addition, they are able to share the viewpoints of their peers. This will ensure that the programs planned will be of interest to other youth.

The ideal is for youth to be active full partners with adults in all phases of the group's activities. The shift to this model may be gradual, and to accomplish this change, it's important that the adults in the 4-H advisory group understand the roles of the youth. According to Lofquist (1990), in order to successfully partner with youth, the group must be able to move from a mindset of *Youth as Objects*, past the stage of *Youth as Recipients*, and into the realm of *Youth as Partners*.



### Youth as Objects

Youth are seen solely as objects of the group's efforts. No effort is made to involve them in program decision-making and planning. They are only involved as participants in the program.

*Example:* 4-H Leaders Association plans County Achievement Night and sends invitations to youth to attend.

### Youth as Recipients

Youth are asked for their opinions, or asked to use their skills in helping roles.

*Example:* 4-H Leaders Association plans County Achievement Night and asks Teen Council members to serve as MC's and hosts.

### Youth as Partners

Youth are given the opportunity to work directly with adults in planning and implementing events.

*Example:* 4-H Leaders Association and Teen Council representatives jointly plan County Achievement Night and determine together what roles teens and adults will play in the event.

### Strategies for Involving Youth

Effectively involving youth in advisory groups can be challenging for a variety of reasons, ranging from issues relating to the perceptions youth have of adults



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and vice-versa to scheduling problems. The following list of considerations should be given to facilitate youth participation in 4-H advisory groups:

- Schedule meetings when and where young people can attend, and keep to scheduled time.
- Provide “kid-friendly” refreshments—ask youth participants to help plan for refreshments.
- Offer transportation to meetings and special events.
- Provide youth an opportunity to “hang out” and socialize after meetings.
- Match youth with advisory groups that are appropriate for their skills and interests.
- Prepare both youth and adults for youth involvement through training.
- Provide mentors for youth members who will provide ongoing coaching and support, and prepare adults for this important role.
- Try to attain an equal mix of youth and adults, and a good mix of boys and girls.
- Develop an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. If needed, create and utilize a set of “ground rules” for discussion to ensure equal opportunity for expression of thoughts.
- Be aware of how you speak to youth—don’t intimidate or put-down, and avoid dated phrases and “insider’s” jargon.

- Be a good role model—set a good example through language and actions.
- Actively seek youth input—listen and ask questions!
- Validate the thinking of the youth members—let them know their ideas are welcome.
- Be willing to try youth members’ ideas, even if previous experience says the idea won’t work.
- Give young people meaningful roles and responsibilities.

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## References and Additional Resources:

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