



4-H Charters: Frequently Asked Questions

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What are 4-H Charters?

A 4-H Charter certifies a group as an official Virginia 4-H entity that meets minimum requirements as set by the Virginia 4-H program. A 4-H group with a charter has the following privileges:

- Authorization to use the 4-H name and emblem.
- Inclusion under the Tax-Exemption Group ruling for 4-H.
- Authorization to raise, allocate, and disburse funds in support of local 4-H programs, projects, and groups.

What groups are required to have a 4-H Charter?

The United States Department of Agriculture requires all 4-H groups to have a charter signed by the Secretary of Agriculture and the Director of the National 4-H Headquarters and issued by the state 4-H office.

Beginning with the 2006-07 4-H year, the following 4-H groups in Virginia **must** have a 4-H charter. Each of these 4-H groups must also renew its charter annually.

Youth-based 4-H groups:

- All types of 4-H clubs including school-based clubs;
- Cloverbud groups.

In general, any group of 4-H members who are organized as a specific club or Cloverbud group should be chartered. See the definitions of 4-H club and Cloverbud group below for more information. Temporary youth-based groups such as 4-H judging teams and 4-H camp counselors are not required to be chartered unless they are organized as a club.

Adult volunteer-based 4-H groups:

- Unit, district, and state 4-H volunteer leader associations or their equivalent;
- Unit, district, and state 4-H Leadership Councils or their equivalent;
- Unit, district, and state 4-H All Star organizations;
- State IFYE Association;
- 4-H Foundation;
- 4-H educational centers; and
- 4-H collegiate clubs.

In general, adult volunteer-based groups that use the 4-H name and/or handle 4-H funds should be chartered. 4-H subcommittees of unit ELCs do not need to be chartered if they do not handle 4-H funds. If the 4-H subcommittee or the unit ELC handles 4-H funds then this group needs to be chartered.

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4-H Programs versus 4-H Groups:

A distinction must be made between 4-H clubs and groups and 4-H programs. 4-H school-enrichment programs, special-interest programs, after-school programs, and 4-H EFNEP/SCNEP programs are presently not required to have charters. These programs are not organized using the club/group delivery method. However, if an after-school program includes an after-school 4-H club, then that club must be chartered.

The following information details specific minimum requirements that 4-H groups must meet in order to be eligible for a 4-H Charter.

What is a 4-H club?

A 4-H club is an organized group of youth, ages 9 to 19, with elected officers and a planned program that is conducted throughout the year or the majority of the year. Youth are responsible for decision making, including the collection and distribution of funds. Clubs are led by trained volunteer leaders. Members may focus on one or more project areas and will participate in a variety of learning experiences during the year. 4-H clubs may be operated on the unit, district, or state level. 4-H clubs that are required to have 4-H Charters include community clubs, project clubs, after-school clubs, and military clubs. 4-H clubs that draw members from across the whole school population such as a middle or high school 4-H club also must have a 4-H Charter. In-school, classroom-based 4-H clubs are also required to have 4-H Charters; however, they must meet slightly different charter application requirements.

What are the minimum requirements for a 4-H Charter for clubs?

1. Membership of at least five 4-H members (preferably both boys and girls)
2. At least two enrolled and trained volunteer leaders (an agent can serve temporarily as one of these leaders)
3. Enrollment, Health History Report, Code of Conduct, Standards of Behavior for Virginia 4-H Volunteers, and Media Release forms on file for all members and leaders. (see VCE publications 388-002 or 388-019, 388-003, 388-906, 388-044, and 388-054)
4. Elected and trained youth officers (see *A Guide for 4-H Club Officers*, VCE publication 388-274)
5. An adopted club constitution and bylaws (see *Virginia 4-H Club Constitution and Bylaws*, VCE publication 388-211)
6. A written annual club program plan (see *Virginia 4-H Club Annual Goals and Program Plan*, VCE publication 388-210)

What are the requirements for the annual 4-H Charter renewal for clubs?

1. Continue to fulfill the six minimum requirements for an initial 4-H Charter
2. Submit a 4-H Club and Organization Civil Rights Compliance Form (see VCE publication 490-156)
3. Acquire and report a federal EIN tax number for the club if handling funds (acquired on-line from the IRS at <http://www.irs.gov>)
4. Submit a 4-H Club Annual Audit Report if handling funds (found in the *4-H Treasurer's Record Book*, VCE publication 388-025)
5. Submit a 4-H Property Inventory Report if property is owned (see VCE publication 388-140)

What are the minimum requirements for a 4-H Charter for in-school, classroom-based clubs?

For unit Extension programs where there are 4-H clubs organized by school classrooms that meet during the school day, the 4-H staff person giving leadership to the unit 4-H program, can issue one 4-H Charter per grade in a school upon verification that all classroom 4-H clubs in the grade meet the following requirements.

1. Membership of at least five 4-H members (preferably both boys and girls)
2. One enrolled and trained volunteer leader if that leader is the classroom teacher. If the club leader is a person other than the teacher or paid Extension staff member, there must be two enrolled and trained volunteer leaders present.
3. Individual or Group Enrollment form for all members and leaders (see VCE publications 388-001, 388-002 or 388-019, and 388-003)
4. Elected and trained youth officers (see *A Guide for 4-H Club Officers*, VCE publication 388-274)
5. An adopted club constitution and bylaws that can be generic for all clubs in the school (see *Virginia 4-H Club Constitution and Bylaws*, VCE publication 388-211)
6. A written annual club program plan that can be generic for all clubs per grade (see *Virginia 4-H Club Annual Goals and Program Plan*, VCE publication 388-210)

What are the requirements for the annual 4-H Charter renewal for in-school, classroom-based clubs?

1. Continue to fulfill the six minimum requirements for an initial 4-H in-school, classroom-based club 4-H Charter.
2. Acquire a federal EIN tax number for the club if handling funds (acquired on-line from the IRS at <http://www.irs.gov>).
3. Submit a 4-H Club Annual Audit Report if handling funds (found in the *4-H Treasurer's Record Book*, VCE publication 388-025).
4. Submit a 4-H Property Inventory Report if property is owned (see VCE publication 388-140).

What is a 4-H Cloverbud group?

A 4-H Cloverbud group is an organized group of youth ages 5 through 8, without elected officers, which emphasizes parental involvement and support. It is led by trained adult volunteers with a focus on hands-on, non-competitive, learn-by-doing activities.

What are the minimum requirements for a 4-H Charter for Cloverbud groups?

1. Membership of at least five 4-H members (preferably both boys and girls)
2. At least two enrolled and trained volunteer leaders (an agent can serve temporarily as one of these leaders)
3. Enrollment, Health History Report, Code of Conduct, Standards of Behavior for 4-H Volunteers, and Media Release forms on file for all members and leaders. (see VCE publications 388-002 or 388-019, 388-003, 388-906, 388-044, and 388-054).
4. A written annual program plan (see *Virginia 4-H Club Annual Goals and Program Plan*, VCE publication 388-210).

What are the requirements for the annual 4-H Charter renewal for Cloverbud groups?

1. Continue to fulfill the four minimum requirements for an initial 4-H Charter for Cloverbud groups.
2. Submit a 4-H Club and Organization Civil Rights Compliance Form (see VCE publication 490-156).
3. Acquire a federal EIN tax number for the club if handling funds (acquired on-line from the IRS at <http://www.irs.gov>).
4. Submit a 4-H Club Annual Audit Report if handling funds (found in the *4-H Treasurer's Record Book*, VCE publication 388-025).
5. Submit a 4-H Property Inventory Report if property is owned (see VCE publication 388-140).

What are the minimum requirements for a 4-H Charter for 4-H adult volunteer-based groups?

4-H adult volunteer-based groups are any structured group of adults who are formed to support the mission and programs of 4-H. Minimum requirements include:

1. A minimum of five enrolled 4-H volunteers.
2. Elected and trained officers.
3. Enrollment, Health History Report, Standards of Behavior for 4-H Volunteer Leaders, and Media Release forms on file for all organizational officers (see VCE publications 388-003, 388-906, 388-044, and 388-054)
4. An organizational purpose which is consistent with the mission and goals of Virginia Cooperative Extension and Virginia 4-H.
5. An adopted constitution and bylaws.

What are the requirements for the annual renewal of the 4-H Charter for adult volunteer-based groups?

1. Continue to fulfill the five requirements for an initial 4-H Organization Charter.
2. Submit a 4-H Club and Organization Civil Rights Compliance Form (see VCE publication 490-156).
3. Have a federal EIN tax number (if handling funds).
4. Submit a 4-H Organization Annual Audit Report if handling funds (found in the *4-H Treasurer's Record Book*, VCE publication 388-025).
5. Submit a 4-H Property Inventory Report if property is owned (see VCE publication 388-140).

How does a 4-H group receive a charter?

The organizational leader of a 4-H group first completes a 4-H Charter Application Form (VCE publication 388-069 for 4-H clubs and Cloverbud groups, VCE publication 388-141 for adult volunteer-based groups, or VCE publication 388-145 for in-school, classroom-based clubs). Leaders of locally based 4-H groups submit the application form to the local Extension office for approval from the Extension staff member providing leadership to the unit 4-H program. Clubs that are based at a district or state level (such as 4-H Cabinet) must submit their charter application to the State 4-H Youth Development office at Virginia Tech. For schools with large numbers of classroom-based clubs, the Extension staff member giving leadership to the unit 4-H program, can use one application form, VCE publication 388-145, to verify that all classroom 4-H clubs per grade in the school meet the necessary requirements.

Local club charter applications are then submitted to the State 4-H Youth Development Office at Virginia Tech. Upon final approval by the State 4-H Leader, the charter certificate is returned to the unit office. The 4-H agent (or representative) then presents the charter certificate to the local 4-H group.

When should a 4-H group seek a charter?

All Virginia 4-H groups listed above **must** have a charter beginning in the Fall of 2006. This includes existing as well as new 4-H clubs and organizations.

An existing 4-H group that has documentation of an existing charter may continue to operate under its present charter as long as the group meets the minimum Virginia 4-H charter requirements for groups listed above and is operating under the original group name for which it was chartered. If an existing 4-H group does not have a charter, the organizational leader should work with the group and the unit 4-H staff member to meet the charter requirements. An existing 4-H group that has misplaced its charter certificate should reapply for a charter.

For new 4-H groups, applications for 4-H Charters can be submitted at any time during the year. Leaders for new 4-H groups should apply for a charter within the first three months of start-up. Provisional Charter status is granted to new 4-H groups for the first three months after start-up in order to provide time for the group to meet the charter requirements. The Extension staff member providing leadership to the 4-H group can grant an extension to the Provisional Charter for

an additional three months. If charter requirements have not been met after six months under Provisional Charter status, the group loses this status and the privileges accorded to it and must wait six months to reapply for a charter.

How long is the 4-H charter valid?

A 4-H charter will remain valid until the end of the 4-H year (October 1–September 30) in which it was issued. Groups can maintain their charters each year by complying with the renewal requirements. Beginning in October of 2007, all chartered 4-H groups must submit a charter renewal application form (VCE publications 388-059 for 4-H clubs and Cloverbud groups, 388-142 for adult groups or 388-146 for in-school, classroom-based clubs) in order to maintain their charters. The specific deadline for submitting charter renewal forms is determined by the 4-H office responsible for the group. 4-H groups failing to meet the minimum charter renewal requirements can be granted a Probationary Charter to provide time to return to full status. The Extension staff member providing leadership to the 4-H club or organization can determine if a Probationary Charter will be granted and the length of the probation period. However, the probationary period cannot be longer than six months. Failure to meet the minimum 4-H group charter renewal requirements after the probation period will result in the charter being revoked.

What circumstances might result in the loss of a 4-H Charter?

Failure to meet the minimum 4-H group charter requirements or the renewal requirements, changes in the 4-H group name, disbanding or separation of the group into multiple entities, or failure to follow Virginia Cooperative Extension/4-H policies can result in the loss of a 4-H charter. The Extension staff member providing leadership to the 4-H group, in consultation with the State 4-H Leader, has the right to revoke a 4-H group's charter in their unit. 4-H groups may re-apply for a charter.

After a group loses its charter (for what ever reason) it can no longer use the 4-H name or emblem or raise, allocate, or disburse funds in support of 4-H programs. The group no longer has tax exemption status.

If a group loses its 4-H Charter, the members and leaders of the group can still be involved in 4-H. They just cannot be part of 4-H in the group that lost its charter. They can (a) join other existing groups, (b) start a new group, or (c) become lone members. Adult volunteers can serve as volunteers in other capacities.

What are 4-H Club Charter Seals of Achievement?

4-H Charter Seals of Achievement are a means to recognize 4-H clubs with valid charters for reaching levels of achievement related to club organization and participation. In-school, classroom-based clubs and Cloverbud groups are not eligible for the Charter Seals of Achievement program; however, plans are under way to create criteria for these groups. 4-H clubs are encouraged, but not required, to participate. Charter Seals are awarded at the conclusion of the 4-H year. See *4-H Club Charter Seals of Achievement*, VCE publication 388-094, for more details.

What are the 4-H group leader's responsibilities as related to 4-H Charters and Charter Seals?

1. Be informed of the requirements for chartering 4-H groups.
2. If serving as a leader of an existing 4-H group, ensure that it has a valid charter by checking with the Extension faculty or staff member providing leadership to the 4-H group.
3. If the 4-H group does not have a valid charter, take the necessary steps to bring it into compliance as a Virginia 4-H chartered group.
4. If serving as a leader of a new 4-H group, work with the 4-H staff member in your local Extension office to become chartered. The group will be granted Provisional Charter status for the first three months while organizing to meet full charter requirements.
5. Make sure that the 4-H group renews its charter annually by October of each year.
6. Encourage participation of 4-H clubs in the Charter Seal of Achievement Program.
7. Ensure that the 4-H group maintains its charter.
8. Inform the appropriate Extension staff member if the 4-H group no longer complies with the charter requirements.

What are the responsibilities of the unit Extension 4-H staff member as related to 4-H Charters and Charter Seals?

1. Be informed of the requirements for chartering 4-H groups.
2. Provide 4-H Charter information to all affected 4-H groups in your unit such as clubs, Cloverbud groups, leaders associations, etc.
3. Assist where necessary to ensure that all existing 4-H groups in your unit have a valid charter before December 2006.
4. Assist new 4-H groups in your unit to become chartered.
5. For schools with large numbers of classroom-based clubs, the 4-H staff member giving leadership to the unit 4-H program, must verify that all classroom 4-H clubs in the school meet the necessary charter requirements.
6. Submit the charter application to the State 4-H Youth Development Office at Virginia Tech. Supporting documentation such as officer names, constitution and bylaws, etc. is not needed by the state office.
7. Present 4-H groups in your unit with their charter certificate. Keep a copy in 4-H group files.
8. Make sure that all of the chartered 4-H groups in your unit renew their charters annually by October.
9. Place 4-H groups in Probational Charter status if charter requirements are not met.
10. Revoke the charter of 4-H groups for failure to comply with charter requirements discussed in this publication.
11. Encourage participation of your 4-H clubs in the Charter Seal of Achievement Program, make determination of eligibility and present Charter Seals of Achievement to participating clubs.
12. Maintain current records of the status of chartered groups in your unit.

What are the responsibilities of the State 4-H Youth Development Office as related to 4-H Charters and Charter Seals?

1. Monitor and revise as necessary, the policies for chartering 4-H groups.
2. Provide 4-H charter information to all district and state-level 4-H groups.
3. Assist where necessary to ensure existing district and state-level 4-H groups all have a valid charter before December 2006.
4. Assist new 4-H groups at the district and state level to become chartered.
5. Process charter applications from unit-, district-, and state-level groups.
6. Send unit offices charter certificates on a timely basis.
7. Present district- and state-level 4-H groups with their charter certificates. Maintain records in 4-H group files.
8. Make sure that all district- and state-level chartered 4-H groups renew their charters annually.
9. Consult with unit staff concerning charter revocation of local 4-H groups.
10. Place district- and state-level 4-H groups in Probational Charter status if charter requirements are not met.
11. Revoke the charter of district and state-level 4-H groups for failure to comply with charter requirements discussed in this publication.
12. Encourage participation of district- and state-level 4-H clubs in the Charter Seal of Achievement Program, make a determination of eligibility and present Charter Seals of Achievement to participating clubs.
13. Maintain current records of the status of chartered groups at the district and state level.
14. Assist units with charter records maintenance and reporting.
15. Report charter statistics to National 4-H Headquarters as required.