



# Essential elements of the 4-H Experience



The Alaska 4-H Youth Development Program uses four primary delivery modes in fostering positive youth development. The delivery modes are **club**, special interest, school enrichment, and **camping**. While each delivery method is unique in its implementation, all are designed based on the essential elements.

	<b>Element</b>	<b>Club</b>	<b>Special Interest</b>	<b>School Enrichment</b>	<b>Camping</b>
<b>Belonging</b>	<p><b>Caring Adult</b> A caring adult is actively involved as an advisor, coach, guide, or mentor.</p> <p><b>Safe &amp; Inclusive Environment</b> Youth will participate in 4-H activities without the fear of physical or emotional harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program facilitated by club leaders, parents, community volunteers</li> <li>• Background checks on adult staff, leaders and volunteers, students;</li> <li>• Physical meeting space analyzed;</li> <li>• Supervision ratios of youth/adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program facilitated by trained group leaders, parents, community staff and volunteers, legal guardians, after-school coordinators</li> <li>• Background checks on adult staff, leaders and volunteers, students;</li> <li>• Physical meeting space analyzed;</li> <li>• Supervision ratios of youth/adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program facilitated by teachers, trained volunteers coordinators, school staff</li> <li>• Teachers, school, staff, and volunteers coordinators interviewed or reviewed;</li> <li>• Physical classroom space analyzed;</li> <li>• Background checks by school personnel</li> <li>• Supervision ratios of youth/adults=classroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program facilitated by trained camp staff, volunteer helpers, parents, legal guardians</li> <li>• Background checks on camp staff, volunteer helpers, parents, legal guardians, physical space analyzed annually for safety;</li> <li>• Supervision ratio of youth/adults for overnight generally 10/1; depends on age</li> </ul>
<b>Mastery</b>	<p><b>Engagement in Learning and Opportunity for Mastery</b></p> <p>The process over-time of building knowledge, skills, attitudes, and wisdom, and demonstrating their uses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hands-on club activities, project experiences, presentations; sequential, long-term learning may occur over several years</li> <li>• Broad knowledge learned in one or more project area; life skill development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hands-on group activities; short or long-term;</li> <li>• Knowledge learned in a specific area of interest; life skill development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hands-on class activities;</li> <li>• Usually short-term learning experiences;</li> <li>• May learn specific skill, usually skill or knowledge development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hands-on camp activities and project experiences, journaling</li> </ul>
<b>Generosity</b>	<p><b>Service</b></p> <p>Youth actively value and practice service to others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Club community service projects, individual service activity;</li> <li>• Members determine and plan activities;</li> <li>• Members help each other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group community service projects, individual service activity;</li> <li>• Members may help determine activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom, school community service projects;</li> <li>• Usually are participants in service activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teamwork with other campers, campground service projects</li> </ul>
<b>Independence</b>	<p><b>Self Determination</b></p> <p>Youth feel a sense of control over their lives and exercise their potential to become self-directing, independent adults</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation, project choices, goals, leadership opportunities;</li> <li>• Selection of hands-on club activities, project experiences;</li> <li>• High level – Member choice of project and activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection of hands-on group activities and individual project experiences;</li> <li>• Groups available for different interests, skills allow choice</li> <li>• Moderate/High-Topics may be adult or member determined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possible selection of hands-on group class activities and individual project experiences;</li> <li>• Low-level – Usually adult determined topics, may allow for extended activities of choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of opportunities based on interest and experience;</li> <li>• Hands-on camp experiences;</li> <li>• Camps available for different interests, skills – allow choice?</li> </ul>

# Essential Elements of 4-H

## Belonging

Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in the group. This “fellowship” has always been an important part of a 4-H experience. 4-H gives youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group. Current research emphasizes the importance for youth to have opportunities for long-term consistent relationships with adults other than parents. This research suggests that a sense of belonging may be the single most powerful positive ingredient we can add into the lives of children and youth.



## Mastery

To develop self-confidence youth need to feel and believe they are capable and must experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges. By exploring 4-H projects and activities, youth master skills to make positive career and life choices. To do so, youth must have access to quality research-based content and have the opportunity to learn by doing. Youth also need a safe environment for making mistakes and getting feedback, not just through competition but also as an ongoing element of participation. Finally, youth need the breadth and depth of topics to pursue their own interests.



## Independence

Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. By exercising independence through 4-H leadership opportunities, youth mature in self-discipline and responsibility, learn to better understand themselves and become independent thinkers.



## Generosity

Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. By participating in 4-H community service and citizenship activities, youth connect to communities and learn to give back to others. It's clear that these experiences provide the foundation that helps us understand the “big picture” of life and find purpose and meaning. Community service projects allow 4-H club members to see that their effort to help others is important and valuable. Youth learn that they do not live in a secluded world, but in a global community, that requires awareness and compassion for others.





# USING ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FEEDBACK FORM

Date completed \_\_\_\_\_

**Most of the Time**  
**Sometimes**  
**Rarely**  
**Not Observed**

## BELONGING

### Positive Relationship with a Caring Adult

	1	2	3	4
Youth & adults participate equally to plan, implement, & evaluate club program	1	2	3	4
Call each member by his / her first name	1	2	3	4
Introductions and get-acquainted activities	1	2	3	4
Recruit parents and other caring adults to serve as volunteer	1	2	3	4
Adults listen to what youth are saying rather than promote their own ideas	1	2	3	4
Adults interact with youth (mingling with youth vs. sitting in the back)	1	2	3	4
Celebrate and fun together beyond club meetings	1	2	3	4

### A Safe Environment

	1	2	3	4
Club does not tolerate bullying, cliques or put downs	1	2	3	4
Volunteers are screened and trained	1	2	3	4
Members feel comfortable sharing idea	1	2	3	4
Members, parents and volunteers treat all members equally	1	2	3	4
Financial audit form submitted annually	1	2	3	4
Meetings start and end on time	1	2	3	4

### An Inclusive Environment

	1	2	3	4
Youth feel included rather than excluded	1	2	3	4
Club members encourage each other during activities and events	1	2	3	4
Youth feel a sense of belonging	1	2	3	4
Club signs, banners, t-shirts, etc identifying their club with 4-H clover emblem	1	2	3	4
Members invite and welcome new members	1	2	3	4
Activities and events include all grades of members	1	2	3	4
Club meeting site meets ADA requirements	1	2	3	4
Opportunities for family participation, shared youth and adult leadership	1	2	3	4
Ceremonies and traditions develop group cohesion	1	2	3	4

## MASTERY

### Engagement In Learning

	1	2	3	4
Meetings have a balance of education, recreation and business	1	2	3	4
Members working together, planning activities, and laughing	1	2	3	4
Members mature and grow from first year members to club officers	1	2	3	4
Club agenda available to members	1	2	3	4

### Opportunity for mastery

Active project leaders	1	2	3	4
Club involved in county activities	1	2	3	4
Members set project goals and gain knowledge through hands on activities	1	2	3	4
Members share their achievements with each other	1	2	3	4
Members receive public recognition for their achievements	1	2	3	4
Members assist or mentor other members	1	2	3	4
Members exhibit or demonstrate what they have learned	1	2	3	4

## INDEPENDENCE

### Opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future

Members try new projects and activities, as they get older	1	2	3	4
Active club officers or youth leadership team	1	2	3	4
Officers prepare agendas	1	2	3	4
Officers and members plan	1	2	3	4
Members draw on their project interest to help choose	1	2	3	4
Club has an annual plan/program	1	2	3	4

### Opportunity for self determination

Members attend meetings and actively participate	1	2	3	4
Club has constitution or bylaws	1	2	3	4
Members choose and plan club activities	1	2	3	4
Members talk about their experiences at meetings	1	2	3	4
Youth participate in decision – making activities in the club	1	2	3	4
Encourage older members to apply for leadership positions at the county	1	2	3	4
Older members plan, implement, evaluate programs for younger members	1	2	3	4

## GENEROSITY

### Opportunity to value and practice service for others

Club community service projects	1	2	3	4
Older members assist younger members	1	2	3	4
Share, reflect and recognize service contributions	1	2	3	4
Connection with local officials	1	2	3	4

The National 4-H Impact Design Implementation Team identified these essential elements as the critical elements in a 4-H experience.

Information adapted from: UW Extension, Feedback Form, and

Positive Youth Development: The Eight Essential Elements of a 4-H Experience, Iowa State University Extension

Helping Leaders Be 4-H Savvy: Positive Youth Development by Sheri Seibold, Extension Educator, University of Ill



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