

# History of Kentucky's 4-H Advisory System

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Involving clientele in determining program needs and planning and managing programs has been an Extension philosophy since the beginning of Extension work. In the late 1930s, counties formed county councils to assist with program planning. Youth members (called Junior 4-H Club Council) were added to adult councils.

The county 4-H council system has continued throughout the last 80 or so years. County councils are made up of 4-H and community leaders representative of various segments of the community—for example: both men and women, people who live in different geographic areas of the county, members of more than one race, economic level and age category, etc. Councils fill a role of advising agents, planning the county 4-H program and raising funds from private donors. Councils elect officers and hold regularly scheduled meetings.

Early county councils often included young members, but some counties discontinued that practice with the formation of “teen councils.” In the early 1990s the concept “youth/adult partnerships” brought youth membership on adult councils back into practice in some parts of the state.

## **Area/District Councils**

Over time, 4-H councils patterned after the county councils were established in Extension areas/districts (groupings of 10 to 20 counties). The area/district councils experienced much success, but program planning and advising proved a bit more challenging for volunteers and staff alike. In 2002-03, Kentucky Extension underwent a process of “re-envisioning.” One of the most obvious results of the process—the fourteen Extension areas were regrouped into seven districts. This reorganization raised a number of questions regarding the functions and purpose of area 4-H councils. Some districts chose to transition into “district” 4-H councils, and others decided that the area 4-H council would disband.

## **State Council**

The beginning of a 4-H council at the state level occurred on February 2, 1954, when administrators met with 4-H leaders (two per district) to form the Kentucky 4-H Clubs Committee. They met in Room 232 of the Agriculture Experiment

Station building (in a room down the hall from where the State 4-H Department was housed in 2009).

During that first meeting, the group adopted a constitution and bylaws, determined the nine leaders who would serve as the first directors of the committee, elected officers, discussed incorporation, compiled a list of issues brought forth from the districts, and set a date for the next meeting.

According to the minutes, Mr. J.W. Whitehouse (State 4-H Leader of 4-H Club Work) explained that the purpose of the organization was to help club work in general. The minutes mention that the delegates brought forth a list of topics that had been discussed in the districts. The 1954 list included the following:

1. Standardized program to meet the local needs of the district.
2. 4-H Club show to put later in the week at State Fair so more parents could attend.
3. Increase teaching staff at 4-H camps.
4. Employ staff director at camp.
5. Employ life guard and health nurse.
6. Something to increase participation of younger children on district and state level.
7. How to hold (*retain*) older Club members—that might include (*forming a*) better relationship with FFA.
8. Clubs be divided into smaller groups (project groups divided).
9. More streamlined literature (modernized).
10. Record book for cow and calf program (improved record book).
11. Beef breeding class for 4-H Club at State Fair.
12. Getting the Kentucky 4-H Fat Calf Show back to Louisville.
13. Send copies of these suggestions to the districts from the state meeting.
14. Program to include more non-farm members.

Minutes of the first meeting—**More. . .**(Link to doc Minutes of First Meeting held on Feb. 2, 1954 at the Ag Experiment Station, Lexington)

Minutes of the second meeting—**More. . .**(Link to doc minutes of Second Meeting held on June 19-20, 1954 at Camp Bingham)

In 1955 the name “State 4-H Club Committee” was officially changed to “Kentucky 4-H Leaders Council.” In 1958, the name was shortened to “State 4-H Council.” The State 4-H Council continued to function in much the same way until 2003.

In 2004, the State 4-H Advisory Group (SAG) was formed. SAG is made up of two entities—one for volunteers and another for agents/specialists. Each group meets with the assistant director of Extension for 4-H Youth Development to discuss topics which are statewide in scope. The State 4-H Advisory Group does

not have officers. It can be described as a communication system rather than an organization.

The Volunteer State Advisory Group is made up of two volunteers per district. Each volunteer serves a two-year term. The Staff Advisory Group is made up of two agents per Extension district and three or four state 4-H specialists as determined by the assistant director. Staff members serve two years. Each group meets with the Assistant Director three times per year. One member of the volunteer SAG meets with the staff SAG and vice versa.