“Good Job!”
“Here is your pin for completing a year of 4-H club work.”
“You have received a blue ribbon for the excellent job you did on your project.”
“Congratulations! You have received an outstanding award on your project.”

No matter how we say it, we continually recognize young people for their achievements in 4-H. Recognition comes in many forms, and can be linked to participation, achievement, cooperation, or competition. It’s important to understand why children need recognition, and how we can recognize them for their accomplishments.

- Recognition is a basic human need with security, new experiences and responses.
- Recognition should be a part of all 4-H learning experiences.
- Appropriate recognition takes many forms.
- Respect for individual differences is essential.
- Recognition must be structured to build positive self-esteem.
- Opportunities for self-assessment and reflection allow youth to learn.
- A range of opportunities and challenges provide choices to meet individual needs.
- Adult support is essential in youth learning and recognition.
- Everyone should be recognized at some level.
- A balance between all elements of the recognition model is essential.

Written by: Ginny Powell, Regional 4-H Agent, North, 1990, revised 1994
The following model represents a national policy statement about recognizing individuals and groups, youth, adults, families, and partnerships. The purpose of recognition is to encourage and support the efforts of young people in learning to improve their knowledge and develop their life skills.

**National 4-H Recognition Model**

*For: Individuals & Groups, Youth, Adults, Families, & Partners*

Recognition, support, and encouragement for learning is provided equally in all five areas. Cooperation partly overlaps Participation, Progress toward self-set Goals, Standards of Excellence, and Peer Competition. Cooperation is part of all four. The intent of the graphic is to show that recognition is given to individuals and people working together in teams or groups.

It is important to acknowledge the participation of 4-H members in an educational activity. For younger members, especially Prep age (grades 1 - 3), participation is the major form of recognition. It should be easy and simple for members to earn this type of recognition. Being recognized for a year of 4-H club work by receiving a year pin is one example of recognizing participation.

Criteria for earning this recognition should be simple. All youth who meet the criteria are recognized. Recognition can be earned several times. The awards should be part of the learning experience.
An important part of 4-H is to help members learn to set goals and plan ways to achieve those goals. Setting goals is appropriate for all ages and all activities. A 4-H member may have a goal of learning to put in a zipper, or a 4-H club may have a goal of collecting food for a local homeless shelter. Personal goals set by a member allow for the unique growth of that member. Adults, both leaders and parents, should be part of this goal setting process to help the member set realistic and reasonable goals, as well as to evaluate progress toward achieving them. Setting and achieving small goals will lead to accomplishing a long-term goal, such as completing the year’s project. Refer to *Helping Youth Set Goals*.

### Goal setting questions:

1. What would you like to accomplish in your project or activity?
2. What resources do you need to reach your goal?
3. What are the steps you need to take to reach your goal?
4. Is this goal worthy of your time and abilities?
5. Are you happy with your goal?
6. Have you recorded your plan?

Measuring a member’s accomplishments against a set of standards is one of the most common ways that 4-H members have been traditionally recognized. Fairs are excellent opportunities for youth to have their work compared to standards. The Danish system of judging allows members to receive colored ribbons (blue, red, yellow, white), based on a score determined according to established standards. However, when members are then ranked against one another and an overall winner is selected, recognition moves to the level of peer competition.

When recognizing members’ achievement of standards, it is important that the standards be well-defined, usually on a score sheet. All participants should know and understand the standards they need to achieve. After members are evaluated, feedback from the judge is needed to help them learn how well they rated on a set of standards and to receive suggestions for improvement.

Peer competition is recognition for the best team or individual at that specific time and place. It is a strong motivator for some but not all young people. Participation in peer competition should be optional, and is not appropriate for younger children (Prep-age).
This type of recognition is more extrinsic than intrinsic, with the award being a trophy, rosette, or plaque. If properly designed and implemented, this type of recognition showcases the best things produced by 4-H’ers. It is important to establish specific selection procedures. Rules must be stated, understood, and enforced.

Cooperation

Learning and working together promotes high achievement. Cooperation may take advantage of all the skills represented in the group, as well as the process by which the group approaches the learning task or goal. Everyone is rewarded.

Summary

Designing a recognition system involves:
• Looking at the young people: their needs, interests, attitudes and aspirations.
• Understanding differences between people based on background and experiences; difference in behavior in same person; differences between similar types of people.
• Using recognition that encourages and supports learning, and satisfies intrinsic and extrinsic needs. It has to balance recognition for participation, progress toward self set goals, achievement of standards of excellence, competition, and cooperation.

This Recognition Model is appropriate and useful at all levels of 4-H. Recognition committees and councils at the local, county, state, and national levels utilize this approach in all recognition programs. Using a comprehensive, recognition program can lead to more youth being recognized and can provide a way to say to every youth:

“You are a valued and important member of the 4-H program.”

Reference:

4-H Youth Development Education: A National Model for Recognition in 4-H Programs. National 4-H Council and 4-H Youth Development, ES-USDA.