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# The Great Eight: Arizona 4-H Pathways of Participation for Thriving

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
Cooperative Extension



AZ# 1951-2021  
Published September 2021

## The Great Eight: Arizona 4-H Pathways of Participation for Thriving

*When a 4-H youth member joins 4-H, a common first question is “How do I do it?” or “How am I successful?” The objective of The Great Eight: Arizona 4-H Pathways of Participation for Thriving is to explain to 4-H youth members and their caring adults the 4-H goals and how to support youth to achieve those goals over time. The Arizona 4-H program has identified eight specific pathways: Agriculture, Civic Engagement, Community Service, Cultural Understanding, Healthy Living, Leadership, and STEM. A 4-H youth member can work towards thriving by focusing on one pathway, yet, the hope is a youth will have high-quality experiences in all pathways.*

### Introduction

The 4-H program was established in 1902 through informal Boy’s corn clubs and Girl’s canning clubs. Youth were encouraged to adopt new agriculture and homemaking skills developed at the nation’s land-grant universities through youth competitions (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). In the passing of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, the Cooperative Extension system was established with a mission to improve people’s lives through research-based information with a focus on agriculture production, and health and nutrition for adults and youth (Hillison, 1996). Today, 4-H has three mission mandates, - citizenship, healthy living, and science. The educational foundation of 4-H lies in these three mission mandates. These mandates reiterate the founding purposes of Cooperative Extension (e.g., community leadership, quality of life, and technology transfer) in the context of 21st century challenges and opportunities (USDA, 2011). The Great Eight: Pathways of Participation for Thriving give Arizona 4-H employees, volunteers, families, and a youth a framework to understand how youth can turn their spark into mastery with the wide array of educational opportunities that are offered.

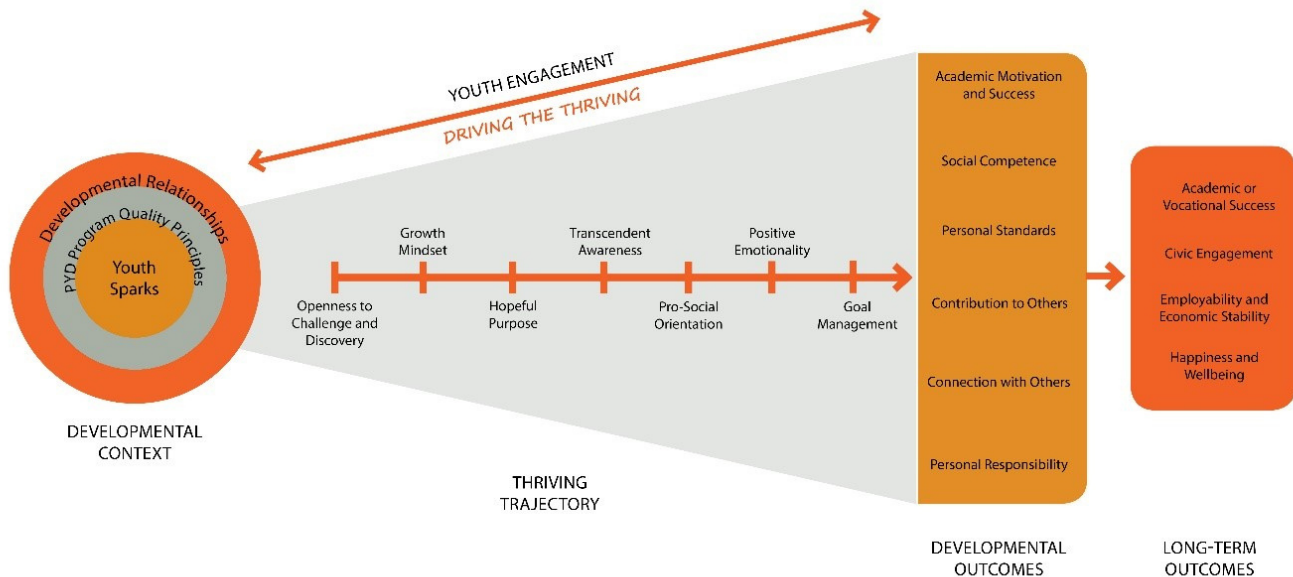
### Objectives of 4-H Youth Development

The 4-H program aims to positively develop youth to become contributing members of society by supporting academic and vocational success; employability and economic stability; civic engagement; and, happiness and wellbeing (Arnold, 2018; Arnold & Gagnon, 2019, 2020). When a youth is supported in achieving these outcomes, they are working towards thriving (Ettinger et al., 2020; Lerner et al., 2003)

### 4-H Thriving Model

The 4-H Thriving Model is a rigorous and data informed model that explains how high-quality 4-H programs can support 4-H youth members thriving trajectory (Arnold, 2018; Figure 1). In other words, the 4-H thriving model predicts that participation in high-quality 4-H programs increases youth thriving, and thriving youth, in turn, achieve key developmental outcomes (Arnold, 2018). The 4-H Thriving Model has many components, if you would like to learn more visit:

<https://health.oregonstate.edu/thriving-model/home/about>.



## Youth Sparks

4-H participation must start with a youth's spark. Youth sparks are an essential ingredient of thriving. When a youth has a spark, it gives a young person a sense of direction and encourages goal setting. Youth sparks are different from mere leisure activity in that:

1. Sparks create actions that not only contribute to the benefit of the young person, but also society at large.
2. Sparks provide the intrinsic fuel for a young person's growth in knowledge and skill.
3. Sparks enhance a young person's networks as he or she encounters others with similar sparks, particularly adults with expertise who can facilitate learning and opportunities for engagement.

Youth sparks cannot be manufactured and thus it is important to expose youth to the full-breadth of the 4-H program. A youth might start in one project, be exposed to another opportunity, and that new experience may result in their spark. The parent, project leader, and youth should enjoy the journey of finding a youth's spark.

How often have you heard the refrain "it'll keep you out of trouble" said to a youth who is excited about an activity? While the phrase is almost always said tongue and cheek, youth sparks are a protective factor for young people (Arnold, 2018). Because a youth is intensely focused on their Spark, they have less opportunity to make poor or dangerous choices. And, a spark motivates youth to succeed in personal, social, and academic areas of their life (Arnold, 2018).

## Youth Engagement Drives the Thriving

A youth's spark is encouraged and nurtured with PYD Program Quality Principles. When the PYD Program Quality Principles are in place a youth is eager to participate, supported by caring adults, and continue to seek the next level of opportunity available in the 4-H program. The amount of engagement a youth has in the 4-H program changes the likelihood youth are positively impacted by

their involvement in the 4-H program (Arnold, 2018). It makes sense that a youth who participates only minimally in 4-H programming will be impacted differently than a member who is active over multiple years and is participating in multiple educational events, contests, and opportunities including, community service and leadership (Roth et al., 2010).

#### Positive Youth Development (PYD) Program Quality Principles: The Context

“PYD is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths” (Youth.gov, 2021)

Positive youth development program quality principles create a context that includes a goal of promoting PYD, a positive atmosphere that supports youth agency and hope, and, learning opportunities that allow youth to explore their interests, build skills, and experience leadership (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The 4-H program has been on the cutting edge of establishing and implementing program quality principles. In 4-H, we refer to these as the 4-H Essential Elements. The 4-H Essential Elements are Belonging, Independence, Generosity, and Mastery. PYD program quality principles are most effective when all four components of the essential elements are consistently present in the experience (USDA, 2011). It is important to recognize that program principles or goals do not automatically result in a positive youth development context. Constant focus by all youth, volunteers, parents, and staff are required to ensure the positive youth development context exists and is effectively supporting youth experiences. See Resources for additional reading on the 4-H Essential Elements.

### **Types of Participation**

It is the goal of the 4-H program to support youth sparks, through PYD Program Quality principles to ensure ongoing engagement by youth across their childhood.

#### **Point of Entry**

4-H has developed numerous points of entry for a young person to either identify or explore their spark. Points of entry can occur at any age. There are specific programs designed for youth ages 5-18. Points of entry may start with joining a Community Club or by starting at educational events.

#### **Community Club & Project Work**

The foundational components of the 4-H program are club and project work. At the Community Club

youth learn how to conduct business, practice democratic processes, and engage in organizational dynamics. Youth sign-up for projects. A project is facilitated by an authorized 4-H adult, who with the input of research-based curriculum and youth request establishes a year long experiential learning plan. A 4-H youth can explore multiple projects. Once a youth has found a project, they are excited about, they will participate year after year working towards self-established goals year-in and year-out as they strive towards their own definition of Mastery.

## Educational Events

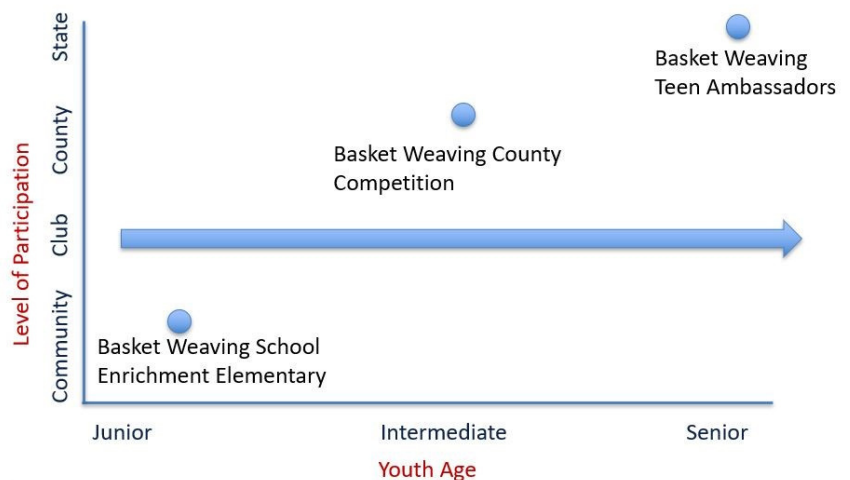
To support a youth's' educational pathway towards Mastery there are numerous events that are held at the county, state, and national levels. These educational events are designed with the Essential elements in mind and are often focused on a specific content area.

## Competitive Events

To give feedback to a youth about their progress towards Mastery there are numerous events that are held at the county, state, and national levels. These competitive events are designed to be a source of motivation and feedback for youths.

## The Pathway to Participation

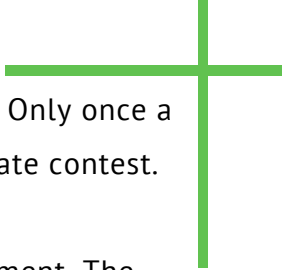
The 4-H program is built up of numerous cycles of experiential learning to foster a youth's thriving trajectory. A 4-H project meeting is a learning experience, centered around a youth doing an activity, intentionally reflecting on what they did, and then being encouraged to apply what they have learned. Project meetings when joined become a 4-H Project. The 4-H Project is another experiential learning unit bounded by goal setting at the



### Basket Weaving

beginning, many opportunities for youth to do, and then reflection at the end (e.g. 4-H Member Project Record). Additionally, as a youth progresses through 4-H a member can choose to add in Competitive or Educational Events to enhance their growth towards Mastery. The more opportunities a youth chooses to engage the more the youth's thriving trajectory is supported (Arnold, 2018). Thus, a participation pathway is comprised of project work; educational and competitive events at the club, county, state, and national level (Figure 2).

Just like in Monopoly, a youth should not "Pass Go" unless they have done the hard work of going through the process. A 4-H youth member needs to maximize the opportunities at each educational experience before progressing to the next (Figure 3). For example, a youth should



explore their Spark in their project work before advancing to a county-level competition. Only once a youth achieves demonstrable success in a county contest should they progress on to a state contest. All while, they continue to invest and work on their growth at the club and county-level. The Great Eight Arizona 4-H supports eight 4-H Participation Pathways for youth engagement. The eight pathways are informed by the Mission Mandates (USDA, 2011) and 4-H Essential Elements (Gressley et al., 2009).

### **Agriculture**

The 4-H Agriculture pathway encourages youth to develop their passion for the diverse aspects of the agriculture industry. Through hands-on projects and activities, 4-H youth learn life skills while pursuing an area that sparks their interest. Youth develop an innovative entrepreneurial spirit while developing projects in areas of environmental, plant and animal science. All 4-H animal projects are included in the agriculture pathway, including Beef, Cat, Cavy, Dairy Cattle, Dairy Goat, Dog, Horse, Meat Goat, Pigeon, Poultry, Pygmy Goat, Rabbit, Sheep, Small Pets, and Swine. Additional agricultural projects include Entomology, Gardening, Livestock Judging, and Veterinary Sciences.

### **Camping**

4-H Camp is an important positive youth development experience. Camp is a unique safe environment that allows youth to grow in their understanding of their self, personal responsibility, and how to interact with their peers. In addition, the Harold and Mitzie James 4-H Camp & Outdoor Learning Center is set in the middle of U.S. National Forest where youth are able to learn about the natural world and be in nature, perhaps for the very first time. Many participation pathways and projects can be explored during a high-quality camp experience.

### **Civic Engagement**

The 4-H Civic Engagement pathway encourages youth to learn how to make change in their communities. Youth learn about public service and the legislative process at the local, state, and federal levels. Youth also engage in civic activities by conducting community needs assessments, youth participatory action research and advocating for change in their communities based on their findings. Civic Engagement is a project, yet, a 4-H member has many educational opportunities to explore Civic Engagement through experiences and actions, including Leadership Washington Focus, Citizenship Washington Focus, True Leaders in Equity Institute, and Engaged Citizens Event.

### **Community Service**

The 4-H Community Service pathway is successful when 4-H youth are helping their communities by

using skills they learned through their project work (aka service learning). Building a strong culture of community service is important for a strong working society, and 4-H youth should experience authentic community service annually. Community service is not just a project, but activities a club or youth choose to do to give back to their clubs, communities, country, and world. A successful 4-H member should complete a community service project at least annually.

### **Cultural Understanding**

4-H members pledge their "head..., heart..., hands..., and health..." to their "world" at every club meeting. The 4-H Cultural Understanding pathway encompasses several aspects of how a youth can fulfill their pledge. Arizona 4-H offers opportunities for international exchanges for youth to host young people from across the globe for a month-long exchange, or to travel across the globe for similar exchanges. Arizona 4-H serves indigenous and latinx communities across Arizona, and we are committed to building culturally responsive programming that values indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing at all levels of programming (.e.g. club, project, educational events), and strives to create greater cultural respect and understanding between peer-to-peers, and youth-to-adults.

### **Healthy Living**

4-H healthy living pathway engages youth in positive development in areas of mental, emotional, and physical well-being to ensure healthy minds, bodies, and communities. Whether youth are working with substance abuse prevention or educating peers about healthy eating habits. 4-H healthy living programming helps youth to put their health-related passion into action. Projects in the Healthy Living pathway include all Family, Consumer, and Health Sciences (FCHS) projects including Arts and Crafts, Cake Decorating, Entrepreneurship, Foods Nutrition, Foods Preservation, Health and Fitness, Sewing and Textiles, Photography, and Personal Finance. Projects also include the Healthy Living Ambassador club program, and education programs like Tucson Village Farm.

### **Leadership**

The 4-H Leadership pathway is about youth self-determination. Youth leadership is not about title or role, but rather is about accomplishing change and providing service to their projects, clubs, community, state, country, and world. Youth should be experiencing opportunities to give age appropriate input and make decisions throughout their 4-H career. Leadership is a project, and it should be experienced across all of their projects. There are many opportunities to demonstrate and learn about leadership through Arizona 4-H. Some of events for youth to participate, are: State Ambassador program, Arizona 4-H Summit, J.O.L.T. (Journey: Opportunities for Leaders of Tomorrow), National 4-H Congress, and National 4-H Conference.

## **S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)**

The 4-H STEM pathway programs encourage youth to develop passion for the diverse aspects of agriculture, science, technology, engineering, and math. Through hands-on projects and activities, 4-H youth learn life and career-ready skills. Youth develop an innovative entrepreneurial spirit while developing projects in areas of augmented reality, rocketry, greenhouse management, robotics, and environmental stewardship, including water conservation. Projects in the STEM pathway include Aerospace, Augmented Reality, Agricultural STEM, Electricity, Geospatial, Shooting Sports, Robotics, Rocketry, and Woodworking.

## **Conclusion**

Over a 4-H career a 4-H youth should turn their spark into mastery in at least one Great Eight Pathway. A 4-H youth member should have a well-rounded 4-H experience taking on learning opportunities across multiple pathways. No matter how a youth chooses to participate the more engagement they have in the 4-H program the greater potential for the 4-H program to support youth thriving.

## **Resources**

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<https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1495.pdf>

## **Acknowledgement**

This publication was previously included as a Feature Article in the Arizona 4-H Volunteer newsletter. The author acknowledges the conceptual contributions of Dr. Nicholas Morris and Deb Lester to the Great Eight pathways.

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