

ANATOMY OF A TOP-NOTCH 4-H PROJECT

We don't judge our 4-H projects, but if we did, what would the blue ribbon winners look like? 4-H projects run the gamut: sheep to swine; camp to cake decorating; web design to wilderness experiences; rabbits to rocketry. Though topic areas are diverse, the elements of the 4-H project are similar. They make a 4-H project...well, a 4-H project. They differentiate a dog project from a kennel club or baking project from cooking lessons. Really great 4-H projects include:



- *Opportunities for members to design their experience:* Youth in 4-H should not arrive to a pre-planned program year, but be given the chance to make decisions about what they do and learn.
- *Youth leadership opportunities:* Adult leadership shares authority and responsibility with older youth for running the project. Great projects model youth-adult partnership where team members recognize and appreciate each other's gifts. Even younger project members take on age-appropriate leadership roles.
- *Learning about project-specific subject matter:* 4-H is about education. Learning should be engaging, progressive and age-appropriate. Mastering knowledge and skills builds confidence.
- *The chance to reflect:* Learning about oneself and our world happens through self-reflection. Great projects foster exploration through one-on-one conversations, group discussions, even record books. In fact, the best record books tell the story of personal growth.
- *A welcoming environment:* There's no room for cliques in a truly great project. Friendships are formed and strengthened, and all feel included and valued.
- *Adults in leadership roles who enjoy, support, and care about young people:* There is no greater gift to a young person than an adult who fills the role of advisor and friend. Great project leaders know their members and provide encouragement, counsel and affirmation.
- *Service to others:* In 4-H we recognize a responsibility for the collective good. We embrace the notion that we are part of the answer to building a better community, and that hope and empowerment grow in young people who take action on things important to them.
- *Fun and celebration:* This is all-important. Learning can be fun. Being together and attending meetings should be enjoyable. If not, something needs adjustment.

What do you think? How does your project measure up to the above criteria for excellence? What areas are strong or weak, and why? If you feel your project's a great one, let me know. I'd like to talk with you...and maybe give a ribbon!

By, Marianne Bird, Central Valley Region Academic Coordinator