



Making 4-H Accessible for Participants with Disabilities: Inclusion, Accommodations & Using the Inclusive 4-H Plan

MU Extension 4-H Volunteer Resource Sheet

General Information about the ADA and Accommodations:

About the Americans with Disabilities Act:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a law, signed in 1990 and amended in 2008, that prevents discrimination based on disability and therefore protects the rights of people with disabilities. It requires employers, local and state governments, and providers of public services to provide reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities.

As a part of the University of Missouri, Missouri 4-H must make all aspects of 4-H, including programming, projects, facilities, and activities, accessible to people with disabilities. Access and inclusion are created with a combination of accessible programming, events, interactions, and spaces, with the goal of allowing the individual maximum independence and minimal intervention from others (such as advisors and educators). The learning and experiences that a member gains through 4-H are just as important, if not more important, as a “perfect” final project or a blue ribbon at the fair. Creating access is more than ensuring the member can attend 4-H events and fairs, it includes choosing an appropriate project, holding meetings and activities in accessible spaces, and including all members in all activities.

What is considered a disability under the ADA?

The ADA does not include a list of disabilities. It defines disability as:

- a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (i.e., working, talking, hearing, seeing, thinking, communicating, caring for oneself, major bodily functions)
 - the record of such an impairment (e.g., someone having recovered from cancer or a serious illness)
 - being regarded by others as having an impairment (such as individuals with severe facial scarring)
- (Source: <https://www.ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/>)

Differences between School and 4-H:

There may be differences between 4-H accommodations and the accommodations received in secondary schools. Secondary school follows the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), which is the nation’s special education law. Schools may need to alter requirements and

provide accommodations, commonly with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), to ensure that students can be successful. Schools provide evaluation services to diagnose disabilities and identify accommodations.

Missouri 4-H and MU Extension, as part of The University of Missouri, are required to provide reasonable accommodations and access through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. These civil rights laws prevent discrimination based on having a disability. Any organization receiving federal funding must comply with Section 504 and the ADA. Unlike secondary schools, the family is responsible for seeking services, and an IEP does not directly transfer to 4-H. Although 4-H members are typically secondary school students, the accommodations process is similar to that of college students. [Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education](#) may help families set expectations for accommodations within 4-H.

Contexts where Accommodations can be Provided:

While competitive 4-H events such as achievement day, fairs, and annual awards may immediately come to mind when considering accommodations, the need for accommodations is not strictly related to competition. Keep in mind that accommodations should be considered for all 4-H events and activities, such as camps, conferences, project meetings, club meetings, applications to serve as a club officer, and more.

Proactively Planning for Access:

When planning, review an accessibility checklist to make your event or meeting welcoming to everyone who attends. As part of registration for Extension events, Extension professionals should use an accommodation statement and notify participants about who to contact to meet their needs. Below are a few questions to keep in mind when planning.

Event Location:

- Is the property/event welcoming to everyone of all abilities?
- Are there accessible parking and entrances? Are they well marked?
- Could a person in a wheelchair access the event, property, public bathrooms, barns, and activity/program areas?

Presentations and Materials:

- Is the website accessible to people who need technology to read a website?
- Are visual presentations and slides a legible size and in sharp, contrasting colors?
- Do you need alternative formats (large print, Braille, or electronic pdf) of books or other presentation materials?

Creating an Inclusive 4-H Plan:

The Inclusive 4-H Plan (I4HP) assists Extension professionals and volunteers by providing resources to aid them in developing accommodation plans to meet the needs of Missouri 4-H youth with disabilities.

Basic Process for Creating a Inclusive 4-H Plan:

University of Missouri, Lincoln University, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Local Extension Councils Cooperating

1. 4-H parent/guardian submits request form to local Extension office or completes the form via 4-H Online.
2. County 4-H faculty and staff reviews request.
3. Conduct a meeting with 4-H parent (and member) to discuss the request and ensure a good working understanding of the potential barriers and issues. Every accommodation is decided on a case-by-case basis, given the unique situation.
4. Determine appropriate accommodations (seeking advice from the MU Office of Accessibility and ADA, if needed).
5. Send notification of approved accommodations to the parent, member, and other 4-H staff who need to be aware.
6. Review annually.

Examples of Accommodations for a 4-H Participant:

When considering accommodations, look at what the 4-H participant can do, as well as what they can do with a modification to aid them. A meeting with the parent or guardian and the child is usually necessary to discuss needs and possible support strategies. Finding out what accommodations they receive in other settings, such as school, can help, but that is not the only consideration. 4-H is a unique environment. It is beneficial to look at accommodation strategies from resources that address academic accommodations as well as resources that address workplace accommodations.

Many accommodations are common and easy to implement. This list includes some strategies and accommodations that are more common. Note: this list is not exhaustive and is not a checklist of options.

- Typed responses or use of a scribe for written passages in a project book
- Extra time for performing a task (e.g., reading, writing, answering questions, judging, taking a test)
- Rephrasing or rewording questions as needed for understanding
- Breaking down tasks or questions into simple instructions
- Provide directions or questions orally
- Reduce the number of questions or items performed, if reasonable
- Change of location to a quieter setting for performing an interview, judging, or task
- Use of interpreter (e.g. sign language)
- Project books/materials provided in pdf, enlarged print, or another format.
- Use of a service animal or seeing eye person when deemed safe (including in the show ring)
- Use of device or tool that helps to perform the task
- Use of hand over hand to perform a skill or task (i.e., a helper's hand over the participant's hand to perform a movement)

Some accommodations take a little more thought and brainstorming, especially when judging, competition, and safety at the event are considered. There are several resources that provide ideas to find the most effective support strategies. The Job Accommodation Network (<https://askjan.org>) is an online resource that provides ideas for workplace accommodations and includes search functions by disability, limitations, topics, work-related functions, and accommodations. The ideas from this site can be used to brainstorm strategies that may be effective for 4-H participants. Additionally, the National AgrAbility Project has an online Toolbox database with many agricultural Assistive Tech items, and is searchable by task at <http://www.agrability.org/toolbox>.

Your Role as a Volunteer

As a 4-H volunteer, your assistance is invaluable in helping 4-H members with disabilities in completing the Inclusive 4-H Plan process. By encouraging members who have a need for accommodations to complete the Inclusive 4-H plan process, you are ensuring the highest quality 4-H experience for those members. It is, however, the option of the 4-H participant if they want a plan or not. Not all disabilities need a I4HP.

How can you support?

You may have member(s) in your 4-H club who have disabilities or serious medical issues. It is imperative to work with the child and his or her parents/guardians to set goals and modify experiences to meet the child's needs.

Examples of Common types of disabilities you may encounter:

- Physical/mobility issues
- Hearing disabilities
- Vision disabilities
- Diabetes
- Learning disabilities
- Autism
- Severe allergies

Best Practices for using the Inclusive 4-H Plan to Ensure a Positive Experience:

- Your goal is to provide a positive enriching experience for every 4-H member. Encourage all parents to explain disabilities on the 4-H enrollment form. Even though this is optional, the information can assist your county Extension professional in planning a positive 4-H experience for all youth.
- Learn about the child and their needs. Talk to the parents or guardians and research potential accommodations on the Internet, at the library, or through a local support group.
- Treat each child as a special child, regardless of any disabilities. Recognize each child's skills, abilities, talents, and needs.
- Recognize positive behaviors and give lots of positive reinforcement. Make expectations realistic.
- Help the total club membership appreciate and understand the disability of its members.
- Have parents or guardians share information with your county Extension professional to help the 4-H organization better prepare for the child's participation in project judging, camp, and other 4-H opportunities.
- Inclusive 4-H Plan resources and forms can be accessed by contacting your county Extension professional.

Resources and Assistance:

Please contact your 4-H Youth Development Specialist with any questions.