

Making 4-H Accessible for Participants with Disabilities: Inclusion, Accommodations & Using the Winning 4-H Plan OSU Extension Disability Services & 4-H Professionals Resource Sheet

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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 Ohio State University, Ohio 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://ada.osu.edu/resources/ada-information>)

School vs. 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.

Ohio 4-H and OSU Extension, as part of The Ohio State University, are required to provide reasonable accommodations and access through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This civil rights law prevents discrimination on the basis of having a disability. Any organization receiving federal funding must comply with Section 504. 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.

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. Planning resources and example statements are at <https://ada.osu.edu/resources/planning-accessibility>.

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?

Winning 4-H Plan

The Winning 4-H Plan (W4HP) assists Extension professionals and volunteers by providing resources to aid them in developing accommodation plans to meet the needs of Ohio 4-H youth with disabilities. It was developed in 2004 by Ohio 4-H Educators Nicola Eyre and Connie Goble and was updated in 2012 and reviewed by The Ohio State University ADA office.

Notification to the general public about the W4HP is at <http://www.ohio4h.org/about/join-4-h>. County staff additionally should inform volunteers and families about how to access the request form. There are a variety of ways this can be accomplished:

- Put a paragraph in the local 4-H newsletter.
- Make copies of request form available in the office with other registration materials (such as the Across County Line form).
- Send an email to all 4-H families.

County staff can access the forms in the Ohio 4-H intranet under Members <https://ohio4h.org/intranet/members>. Additionally, in 2012 all county offices received a notebook that provided lesson plans and resources. The items from the notebook are also in a folder under "Members" in 4-H Professionals Teams.

Basic Procedures for Creating a Winning 4-H Plan

- 4-H parent/guardian submits request form to local Extension office.
- County 4-H professional reviews request.
- Conduct a meeting with 4-H parent (and member) to discuss the request.
- Determine accommodations.
- Send notification of approved accommodations.
- Review annually.

Extension staff are responsible for notifying 4-H families of the availability of the W4HP process. It is the option of the 4-H participant if they want a plan or not. Not all disabilities need a W4HP.

Preparing for the Meeting

The goal of the initial meeting is to find out more information about the request. Follow-up meetings are sometimes necessary, and you may want to consult others to discuss possible accommodations. You do not need to come to the initial meeting with a list of accommodations ready for approval. These questions may guide you for the initial meeting:

- What further information is needed about how the disability affects the child's participation?
- Does the child or family have a plan for how they will complete the project or participate in the activity? What is needed to assist them in participation? Are the projects selected within the ability and scope of what the child can do?
- Are accommodations needed for meeting locations, for camp, or at other programs or events?
- Do advisors, members, or others need to know about the disability? If so, what aspects can/should be shared?

Parents will sometimes bring documentation to the initial meeting. We do not need proof of the disability; there is usually not a reason to ask for proof. Do not keep an IEP or other medical documentation.

Request that youth be actively involved, as much as they are able, in the process of communicating their disability and finding suitable accommodations. Ohio 4-H promotes self-advocacy, which provides the opportunity for youth to represent themselves, their beliefs, and their interests. When 4-H youth advocate for themselves, they have the opportunity to advance their confidence, communication, and leadership skills, which prepares them to be college and career ready.

Determining Accommodations

An accommodation is an adjustment or change that makes the site, project, and/or event accessible to a person with a disability. Extension is responsible for providing reasonable accommodations. To determine what is reasonable, first consider what is *not reasonable*.

A request is *not* reasonable and does not have to be granted if it:

- Requires a substantial change or alteration in the curriculum
- Requires a substantial change to an essential element of a course or program
- Fundamentally alters the nature of the service provided
- Poses an undue financial hardship or administrative burden (This consideration looks at Ohio State University resources - not just Extension or county resources.)
- Poses a direct threat to the health and safety of self or others

Consider each request on a case-by-case basis; providing an accommodation to one does not set a precedent that the same accommodation is guaranteed for another. Unlike what is done in the K-12 school setting, if the requested accommodation changes the program so much that it is no longer the program, that is not reasonable and does not have to be approved. However, with creativity and consulting others, most requests can be accommodated in a way that meets the overall goal for participation. Sample accommodations are further addressed in the *Developing an Accommodation Plan*

resource sheet. It is important to know that a request for accommodations cannot be denied without going through consideration by the Extension Disabilities Coordinator. Also keep the Associate State 4-H Leader apprised when the decision is made to deny an accommodation.

Be sure to also work with other partners, such as fair committees, to implement approved accommodations. Exhibitors who are members from school organizations (FFA, FCCLA, etc.) will receive accommodations through their school rather than through 4-H for fair-related accommodations.

Send Notification of Approved Accommodations

Once approved, send the *Project and Exhibition Accommodations* form to parents for final review. A parent letter and the form used to list the approved accommodations are available on the Ohio 4-H Intranet under Members <https://ohio4h.org/intranet/members>. It is suggested to attach the form in the inside of project books for judges to reference during interviews. Be sure to have the family remove the form if books are displayed publicly.

There are two essential components to this step. The first is that we give the family the opportunity to indicate they approve the accommodations or indicate if they want to make changes. The second is that it puts the parent or guardian in control of communicating the approved accommodations to those who need to know, such as advisors, and in other situations such as on camp health forms. The 4-H professional will still need to work with others such as fair staff, committees, and judges as necessary to meet the requirements of the approved accommodations.

Review Annually

It is best practice to review the documents and touch base with families annually. For all children, as they grow and develop, their needs change and the same is true for youth with disabilities. Sometimes a diagnosis may change or the technology behind an accommodation is updated. Including the youth participant in these communications will also give them the opportunity to self-advocate and build confidence in discussing their needs.

Resources and Assistance

The development of a plan for accommodations is not a cookie-cutter process. Often it is beneficial to brainstorm with others. Below are staff who can help you through the process.

Accommodating Disabilities 4-H Team

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Pam Montgomery, Morgan County	montgomery.221@osu.edu	740-962-4854
Jessica Runkel, Williams County	runkel.8@osu.edu	419-636-5608

OSU Disability Services

Laura Akgerman, Extension Disability Service Coordinator	akgerman.4@osu.edu	614-292-0622
OSU ADA Coordinators Office	ada-osu@osu.edu	614-292-6207
OSU ADA Website	https://ada.osu.edu	

OSU University Policy on Access for Individuals with Disabilities

OSU Office of Institutional Equity	https://equity.osu.edu	614-247-4113
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