Helping Them Decide
Mentor’s Guide For Self-Determined Projects

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Overview

The Idaho 4-H Self-Determined project option is only available to youth 14-18 years of age. It is designed for members to explore appropriate educational interests in subject areas where either: (1) no Idaho-approved 4-H curriculum exists, or (2) members have completed all levels of the approved curriculum and desire to continue learning about that subject in greater depth. At no time shall it be used to substitute for currently approved Idaho 4-H curriculum. Because of inherent risk management issues, Self-Determined projects related to the 4-H Shooting Sports program are not permitted.

Furthermore, while supporting member’s creativity, for safety and liability reasons, all proposed Self-Determined project plans must be submitted to local county 4-H Professional for review and approval before members continue with their project. 4-H Professionals may require plan modifications and/or deny approval of the proposed plan if they foresee potential safety issues or if it does not comply with the parameters set forth above.

It is important for adults to prepare themselves to give guidance that will enable 4-H youth to plan, carry out and evaluate a Self-Determined project. Adult mentors should be familiar with the You Decide! Decision Making Guide for Self-Determined Projects #91001 (Rev. 2017) and be willing to contribute time, encouragement and knowledge for a successful outcome.

Project Requirements

What the youth will do:
- Choose a subject for project study.
- Set their own project goals.
- Develop a plan to reach their project goals.
- Implement their plan.
- Report their accomplishments.
- Evaluate their progress toward their goals.
- Make changes or revisions in their plan.
- Prepare a project report.
- Give an oral presentation (speech, demonstration, or illustrated talk) about their project.

What the Youth will exhibit:
You Decide! Decision Making Guide for Self-Determined Projects #91001 (Rev. 2017), a project report and 4-H Involvement Report #91910. The report includes the following:
- Their project idea and how they chose it
- The goals they set
- The methods and techniques they used to meet their goals
- What they learned
- Their conclusions and observations
- A self-evaluation of their project
Mentor Responsibilities

What the mentor will do:

♦ Help youth decide on a project idea; refer to pages 5-6 You Decide! #91001
Based upon interests and abilities, have the youth list ideas for projects. Most youth, already have a project idea in mind. Asking questions may be necessary to help get the ideas started. The member may have chosen many general subjects of interest. You will want to consider time, resources, family situation, cost and help available for each idea listed. Help the youth narrow down to a few realistic possibilities.

♦ Guide youth in goal setting; refer to page 7 You Decide! #91001
The next step is for the youth to write down more specifically what he or she wants to learn or accomplish by doing this project. Clearly stated goals and aims are a framework that will help the youth experience the satisfaction needed in learning. Most youth can tell you that they want to do a project but may not know why. Or, if they do have a certain reason for pursuing a project, they often have difficulty explaining the end product. Guide the 4-H member into setting goals by considering all three of the goal-setting areas; knowledge, attitudes and skills.

♦ Help youth develop a Plan of Action; refer to pages 8-10 You Decide! #91001
Mentors may need to give members step-by-step guidance as they decide their project work. Such as, help with the planning of experiences, methods, procedures, tasks and responsibilities that they will need in order to accomplish their goals. Mentors need to also provide empathetic understanding, support, encouragement and communication. In addition, mentors need to help youth gain knowledge, attitudes and skills. This should be done in conjunction with the youth as they proceed with the project.

♦ Support youth in implementing their Plan of Work; refer to page 11 You Decide! #91001
Note: Self-Determined project plans must be submitted to local county 4-H Professionals for review and approval. Mentors should make sure the youth receives approval before moving forward with implementing the Plan of Action.

♦ Assist youth in evaluating their project; refer to page 12 You Decide! #91001
Mentors can suggest many different ways by which a young person can see their own progress, improvement or need for change. Help youth determine ways to measure their accomplishment toward their goals. Remember, learning implies change in knowledge, attitudes and skills; work with the youth to determine if that happened.

♦ Emphasize the importance of completion - Project Reporting and Exhibiting;
refer to pages 13-15 You Decide! #91001
Record keeping and communication are important life skills learned in 4-H. Review the Self-Determined Project requirements with the youth and make sure all are met. Information for preparing the Project Report is outlined in You Decide! #91001. Be sure the youth is aware if there are any additional local county 4-H project or exhibit/display requirements. Help the youth prepare for the interview process with fair evaluation or other types of sharing that may be required.

♦ Congratulate the youth on a job well done and encourage them to continue to learn and gain life skills through exploration into subjects that interest them.
Important Things to Remember as a Mentor

♦ Each 4-H youth has individual abilities, interests, needs, background and home situations. No single list of projects can satisfy all youth.

♦ Many resources are available in a community. Youth should be encouraged to explore and investigate educational offerings.

♦ Youth want the opportunity to do things on their own, but they need and want the ideas, suggestions, and friendly advice from adult mentors.

♦ Youth are often more motivated to carry out self-chosen projects than those determined by others.

♦ An important part of learning is to assume responsibility through opportunities to make decisions and set goals.

♦ Youth are more secure when they are able to use their unique abilities and can develop their potentials.

♦ The youth’s personal growth is always more important than the ribbon or award they might receive for project completion.

Credits:

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