

Illinois 4-H Experience Application Tips and Deadlines



Application Deadlines:

- *Check with your County Extension office for local deadlines.*
- Counties must submit Diamond and Emerald entries to the Illinois 4-H Office by October 15.

Before Beginning the Application:

- This application is a great planning tool to map out your 4-H experiences for the year.
- Work on this application throughout the year to record what you have been doing in 4-H.
- State level submissions (Diamond and Emerald) must be typed.
- Diamond and Emerald levels are meant to show depth of experience in one dimension - community service, leadership or project learning. Participation is NOT a qualified focus area at the Diamond and Emerald levels. All required experiences should be within the same dimension (e.g. community service). That is, leadership and project learning experiences cannot be counted toward a Diamond application in "Community service".

Definitions to note:

- Individual- Activities done by the 4-H member related to their 4-H projects or interests. (Ex. - *Visual arts project area- take an art class to learn more. Member plans and coordinates a food drive at their school.*) Not every event will need to be sponsored by 4-H, these can be individualized learning experiences. (Ex- *If you enrolled in Horticulture- attended a workshop hosted by Master Gardeners on preparing soil for planning. Enrolled in Health- went to a program sponsored by local fire department on fire safety in your home.*)
- Club- Events done with your local 4-H Club (Ex- Project tour, monthly club meeting, making and distributing care packages as a group.)
- County- Event hosted by your County Extension Office. (Ex- *Lake County Public Speaking Contest, Macon County Livestock Judging Contest, McLean County Federation Member.*)
- Unit- Event hosted for all counties within your unit (Ex-*Unit 4 Dog Show, Unit 8 Horse Show*) (Ex of a Unit- *Unit 1=JoDaviess, Stephenson, and Winnebago County*)

- State- Event hosted by Illinois 4-H or another state 4-H program (*Ex- Illini Summer Academies, New Jersey 4-H Lego Masters Virtual Event, Everyday Sportsman Challenge*).
- National- Hosted by National 4-H Council or on a nationwide scale (*Ex- National 4-H Conference, National 4-H Congress, National 4-H Day of Service with reported data to state.*) Event designed specifically as networked national experience (national summits, 4-H Conference, Congress, CWF etc.)
- International- Activities on an International Scale related to 4-H (*Ex-States' 4-H International Exchange Program or States' 4-H International Pen Pal Program*)

How to Fill out the Application:

- Not all boxes need to be completed. This compressive list is to provide a view of the many and varied experiences available in the 4-H program for members, do not let it overwhelm you! Refer to the rubric at the end of the application to see what level you qualify for.
- All experiences – unless indicated otherwise – are to be 4-H related! This is a 4-H Experience Form. That means it should be a 4-H experience or a youth could attend because they are a 4-H member or because they were representing the 4-H program for their county or state. (Advocating Leadership is to be 4-H related except for the last item noted for the State/National/International level.)
- All items (except the 2-3 that refer to “two years in a row” or “multiple years) should be only from the 4-H year the member is reporting on. For example, the award applications submitted in the fall of 2026 it should include only experiences from 9/1/2025-8/31/2026.
- In the “Details” boxes, you need to include the date and name of the experience. For the reporting five meeting dates you can just include date (Ex-10/6, 11/7, 12/10, 2/8, 3/10). Please include any details that would help the judge.
- Abbreviations can be used if they are easily understood. (i.e. Wksp for workshop, Dept. for Department, VA for Visual Arts, or Ldrshp for Leadership). Acronyms should not be generally used unless it is extremely well-know.
- When posting something in a “multiple level” box (Multi-county, State, National, or international), circle or highlight the level the experience falls under. Reviewers may or may not agree, but this at least provides them with what the member was thinking.

Where does it go on the Application?

- When in doubt, speak to a parent, club leader or your local Extension office.
- Virtual events do count towards this application! These can be a little tricky to figure out what level of event they fall under.

- Hosted by a county (in IL or a different state)- County
- Hosted by a state (Illinois State 4-H Events OR if in a different state please indicate what state in the details)
- If a club or county planned experience takes place out of state, it is still a CLUB/COUNTY level program, not a state level program.
- Members cannot use the same experience/event for more than one spot on the entire form. So, if one uses “Visual Arts Workshop/March” as part of “five or more county 4-H activities” in Participation, they cannot also use it for the “one county 4-H activity” in Participation nor can they use it for “Participated in a county 4-H workshop related to my project” in Project Learning.
- However, members can “double up” or “group” multiple experiences, but they need to be specific in their post. For example, if a member is a Teen Teacher and teaches 2 different curriculums, they could post “Teen Teacher – Jr. Chef” in one area and then post “Teen Teacher – Ag in Classroom” in another. However, members should not divide their responsibilities within a specific role. (i.e. Teen Teachers both Plan and Teach – do not duplicate “Teen Teacher – Jr. Chef” in both of those areas.) The same thing would apply for a situation where a member may have “participated” on a club community service activity and “planned a group service activity” for that same community service activity if they were on the planning committee. That experience should be posted in only one slot.

Specific notes on certain events:

- NAILE is NOT considered a 4-H event if the member was exhibiting livestock. However, if the member was there as a 4-H judging team member or quiz bowl team member that can qualify as a national event. Be specific in noting how they were involved.
- National Youth Science Day participation is not a “national” experience. It may be a county, multi-county or possibly a state experience (depending upon how and what the member was doing), but generally it is a “local” experience of a nationally-sponsored activity.
- National 4-H Day of Service can ONLY be included as a national event IF the club registered the event on the national website in advance of the actual event with accompanying report.
- Citizenship Washington Focus is a national 4-H event. Even though the member would be part of an Illinois delegation, it is a nationally sponsored event in a national location.

- National 4-H Week participation is NOT a national event; it is at the level you complete the activity. Wearing your 4-H shirt to school or posting on social media is an individual experience.

Upon Completion of the Application:

- If the application is being submitted for the Diamond or Emerald level, fill out the entire application. Reviewers may not agree with the member's view of events/levels, so may explore other sections to see if they met criteria in another dimension. Gold, Silver & Bronze levels require items in all 4 dimensions.
- Applications should be reviewed on the county level and Diamond and Emerald applications will be reviewed on the State level. Members should be aware that the judges may not view the experiences at the same levels they did.

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