A self-determined project allows you to plan what you want to do and learn in 4-H, regardless of the subject. Before starting your self-determined project, read this entire project guide. By being familiar with all the necessary steps, many wasted efforts and much time may be saved.

It is important to have a plan at the beginning of a self-determined project. Review your plan with an adult; in this way, you can obtain suggestions and guidance.

SELECTING YOUR SELF-DETERMINED PROJECT

It is important to learn how to make decisions. The selection of a worthwhile and interesting project is an important decision you have an opportunity to make.

This guide was designed to help you select, plan, and evaluate projects of your own choosing.

One way to begin is to make an inventory of your interests, needs, aspirations, and concerns. This inventory is not necessarily related to anything you are now doing or have done—it could include something new you want to do.

As you work on your inventory, you may want some help and guidance from other people. For example, you could talk with friends, neighbors, parents, leaders, teachers, Extension workers, clergy, counselors, scientists, artists, craftspeople, business people, farmers, ranchers, homemakers, engineers, mechanics, dietitians, nurses, doctors, dentists, or laborers. You can probably think of other people who can also help you.

Before you make an inventory of your interests, needs, aspirations, and concerns, review these definitions.

- An interest is something that excites your feelings and gains your attention or curiosity. It causes you to say, “I’d like to do that!”
- A need is something that you, your family, or your community wants, lacks, or requires. You say to yourself, “Yes, I can see that it is necessary to do that.”
- An aspiration is a strong wish, something you long for or seek to attain. It makes you think, “I really want to try to reach that.”
- A concern is something that affects the welfare and happiness of you, your family, your club, and your community, society, or world. A concern causes you to say, “I care about that.”

Making an Inventory

Think of yourself in relation to others. List five to eight ideas that interest you. List ideas that are related to you and your ever-expanding relationships with other people: you, yourself; you and
your home and family; you and your friends; you
and others in your community, county, state, na-
tion, and world.

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________
4. __________________________________________
5. __________________________________________
6. __________________________________________
7. __________________________________________
8. __________________________________________

Include ideas or problems you’d like to investi-
gate; something that you’d like to be able to do,
find out about, or learn; situations about which
you feel strongly; things that you think you need
to do or wish you could do; ways in which you
could be helpful to other people.

Making a Choice

When you have listed your interests, needs, aspi-
rations, or concerns, narrow these down to three
ideas you might be able to do something about
this coming year.

Consider these things when trying to choose your
ideas.

• What are your personal experiences?
• How and where can you get information?
• How much is it going to cost?
• How worthwhile is the project going to be to
  you?
• What do you think you might be able to learn
  from it?
• What other people besides you will benefit
  from it? Should your idea be an individual
  project or should a group of people work to-
  gether on it?
• What other things (such as your school activi-
  ties) will you be doing which may affect your
time, energy, how well you can do the project,
cost?

• Do you have someone to go to who is willing
to help and who knows something about what
you want to learn?
• Would this help you decide your future career?
• Will it fit in with your home and family situ-
tation?

Using the suggested criteria for making choices,
select three ideas from those you listed earlier.

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________

Now, pick one of the three ideas (above) which
you (or you together with others) will develop as
a project. Circle it. Tell why you chose this project
and what things you considered when making
the selection.

____________________________________________
____________________________________________
____________________________________________
____________________________________________
____________________________________________
____________________________________________
PLANNING YOUR PROJECT

We all plan ahead; we have to. A plan is what we make ahead of time so we can do something we want in the future.

Some plans are just thoughts; other plans are written. It is well to write down a plan when there are many things to consider—for example, facilities, equipment, availability of subject matter material, seasonal planning, and expenditure of time and money.

Setting Goals

Goals are meaningful if stated in terms of “what I hope to learn.” Learning implies change or growth, and takes place in three interrelated areas:

1. Attitudes, feelings, values, beliefs, dedications.
2. Skills, ways of doing things, actions, behavior.
3. Knowledge, facts, information, thinking, understanding.

Note that several different words are listed for each of the three areas to indicate the various meanings involved.

You have chosen a project. Therefore, it is self-determined. You want to have satisfaction from completing your project. Therefore, you need to set goals and describe ways you will go about trying to accomplish your goals.

You may want to find out what there is to learn in a project before you write down goals. So, you might want to visit with someone who can give you some information or ideas on the subject. There are all kinds of possibilities—parents, teachers, neighbors, friends, business people, farmers, laborers—anyone who is interested in the subject or who is doing something related to it.

Making Your Project Plan

Consider your goals and the techniques you will use to meet them when you develop your project plan.

Goals

What do you need to learn in order to complete this project? ____________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

What skills will you need to develop?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

Are any changes in your attitudes involved?

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

Techniques

What do you need to do? ____________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________

___________________________________________
Where can you get help? ______________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
What resources do you need? ________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
What kinds of record keeping will help you?
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
What learning experiences will help you accom-
plish your goals? ____________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
You may want to write a description or plan of
your self-determined project rather than answer-
ing the above questions. Include how and why
you chose the project; your goals; and techniques,
procedures, tasks, responsibilities, and learning
experiences you plan to use in order to accom-
plish your goals.

DEVELOPING YOUR PROJECT

In order to implement your plans and develop
your project, you may want to do some of the fol-
lowering:

• Review your project plans with other young
  people and with adults.
• Ask people for help—verbally, by letter,
  by e-mail. Make appointments with people;
  respect their time and energy.
• Write for literature and materials. Inquire
  about costs.
• Go to libraries. What books, magazines, or publications do
  they have which give informa-
  tion related to your project?
• Visit persons and places
  where information can be
  obtained on your project.
• Clip information from
  newspapers and magazines.
• Watch for help from radio
  and TV programs.
• Look on the Web.
• Ask to be included in
  meetings, tours, events, and activities related to
  your project.
• Try out, experiment, investigate, do many
  things which will aid learning.

List some of the ideas you have for developing
your project and resource people who can help
you. ________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________
EVALUATING YOUR PROJECT
Satisfaction comes when you can see your progress or improvement. Evaluate your progress throughout the project.

Progress is measured in terms of the goals you set at the beginning of your self-determined project. You need to answer these kinds of questions:
• What am I learning?
• What am I accomplishing?
• How well am I doing?
• How do I feel about what I am doing?
• How is this project helping me grow?

Recording Progress
Here are some ways to record progress toward your goals.

1. **Take pictures.** Photographs and slides can tell a story. Take before and after pictures. Plan a series of pictures to show the steps or different stages in the development of your project.
2. **Keep records.** There are many forms of records such as diaries, outlines, stories, notebooks, written reports, tables, charts, drawings, and pictures. Decide what best fits your project. Whatever methods you use, consider these questions:
   • How can you show the extent to which you are learning or accomplishing what you set out to do?
   • How can you describe or show what you did?
   • How can you show the data collected or the results of your investigations or work?
   • How does your project benefit other people?
   • Should you show how you used your time and energy?
   • Do you need to keep track of the money you spent and received?

3. **Have samples, models, or objects.** Some projects lend themselves to growing, making, or collecting. These examples of what you have done provide evidence of your growth in knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes.
4. **Talk with people.** You can gain insights about your progress by discussing your project with people who are knowledgeable about it.

Sharing What You Learn
Further satisfactions and opportunities for growth come from sharing what you have learned with other people.

Sharing can help you summarize, analyze, and further assess what you are accomplishing.

Consider these ways of sharing:
• Workshops, programs, meetings, and committees.
• Exhibits, window displays, bulletin boards, and fair booths.
• Demonstrations, illustrated talks, dramatic scenes, and TV programs.
• Talks, interviews, panel discussions, and radio and TV programs.
• Newspaper articles and features in magazines.
• A self-determined project open house.