4-H RECORDS HISTORY

1. The National 4-H Record Form was used by all states, including Maine, prior to 1980. Volunteers and youth complained bitterly that the records were too difficult and time-consuming to complete. Maine responded in the early 1980s by developing three types of 4-H records: Beginner, Project Record and Achievement Summary. The latter two were printed as tri-folds.

2. Volunteers and youth initially seemed pleased with the new records, but as the years went by Extension began hearing complaints that the records were a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Extension responded by introducing a portfolio methodology in the 1990s. Records then became based on the life skills wheel and “evidences” provided by 4-H members. Counties received training, usually by/with the assistance of teen partners.

3. Volunteers and youth complained that these new portfolios were difficult to follow. Many stated that they preferred the old tri-folds because they included straight-forward information, financial records and a time management section. Others wanted to simplify the life-skills approach and eliminate the “evidence” portion.

4. In December 2000 a daylong work session was scheduled in Fairfield in March 2001 to address volunteers’, youth’s and educators’ concerns about 4-H records. Counties were urged to seek extensive input from clientele. Numerous volunteers offered suggestions in writing. Only nine people statewide registered interest in attending the session, and the facilitators expressed concern about the limited attendance and potential lack of buy-in. Registration deadline for the session was extended to March 16, 2000.

5. A group of about 10 4-H volunteers, educators and aides met in Fairfield on Saturday, March 24, 2000. The meeting goal was to refine the 4-H records, construct the necessary tasks and determine the action steps needed to integrate the revisions into the system. A draft of session outcomes was organized and distributed via e-mail, and participants were asked to provide feedback.

6. A group consisting of five volunteers and an educator met in Bangor on April 20, 2000, to revise the records based on the outcomes identified at the March 24 meeting. Two of the volunteers were home-school group leaders who firmly believed that 4-H records should be minimal. They wanted the forms to be short, simple, fun, and not include time management or financial information. They also recommended that records not be required. The other three volunteers were animal project/club leaders who firmly believed that 4-H records should reflect youth’s planning, organization, strategies, outcomes, and financial management, and that records be required for fairs and awards. The educator who facilitated the meeting tried to help the group reach consensus. The group finally agreed to return to the information provided in the tri-folds and to add the life skills information, examples related to animal- and non-animal projects, and two examples of résumé formats. The Beginner Record was minimally revised. Drafts of the finished products were presented to the 4-H PLT and circulated for comments and criticism.
7. Information about progress was included in the state 4-H core newsletter. The draft copies of records were revised to incorporate suggestions and corrections. Bids for printing the 4-H records as tri-folds proved to be cost-prohibitive. Following a poll of counties, a cost-saving decision was made to print copies on one-sided, collated, stapled sheets for distribution. The records were subsequently put on the Maine 4-H website so that counties, volunteers and 4-H members could download and print the pages themselves. This enabled people to print off single sheets or entire records as needed, without wasting expensive tri-folds or entire record sets on drafts or errors.

8. The resulting records documents are: Maine 4-H Project Record; Maine 4-H Beginner Record; and the Maine 4-H Portfolio, which contains the “Your 4-H Story” form and sample resumes.

9. Records were distributed to counties with the understanding that they were a work-in-progress and that they could be revised or replaced at any time.

10. Some counties require the new records. Others either continue to use records they have designed locally, have created simplified versions they can use at fairs, or have ceased requiring records.

11. No uniform statewide records requirement currently exists, and Maine now requires only the “4-H Story” and a resume for competition for state and national awards. Some counties found it necessary to eliminate the 4-H project records requirement in order to sustain acceptable exhibitor levels at fairs. The entire Maine 4-H Portfolio (which includes “Your 4-H Story” and a resume) is required for application for Pine Tree 4-H Foundation scholarships.

12. Anyone wishing to change the approach to or content of 4-H records should ask a county Extension educator to submit the request for discussion at a 4-H PLT meeting and state a desired outcome. Subsequent action will be determined by the PLT. Ideally, all counties would follow the recommendations.

13. 4-H Records are intended to help youth develop good documentation habits, provide them with information about their projects that will help them make wise decisions, and enable them to construct exemplary resumes for jobs and college. The records format is not carved in stone, but can be modified at any time to meet the needs of young people. Volunteers, parents and youth should be aware that record keeping is a part of life, however, and eliminating records completely may not be in the best interest of youth.

Beth Parks, Extension Educator
February 18, 2004

Updated June 1, 2004
Shirley Hager, Program Administrator