AI and the 4-H brand

A guide to responsible AI use in 4-H communication

Generative artificial intelligence tools *(like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and Claude)* have made it easier than ever to create content. When used thoughtfully, AI can help volunteers and staff communicate more effectively. But, because the 4-H Name and Emblem are federally protected marks, extra care must be taken when AI is used in 4-H communication.

This guide will help you use AI responsibly while protecting the integrity of the 4-H Name and Emblem and maintaining the trust of the communities we serve.

Never ask AI to create, recreate, redraw, redesign, or "improve" anything with the 4-H Clover.

The 4-H Emblem

The 4-H Name and Emblem are federally protected marks, with legal protections similar to those of the *Presidential Seal* and *Smokey Bear*.

Unlike a typical logo or trademark, the use of the 4-H Name and Emblem is governed by federal regulations and overseen by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. Authorized use is limited to 4-H clubs, Extension, USDA, land-grant universities, and others specifically approved under federal law.

4-H uses AI to *enhance*, not *create*.

AI is a great tool that can help save time but it should not replace official branding or human judgment. This approach aligns with University of Illinois Extension's human first mindset: "Whenever possible, choose authentic photos, videos, voices, and stories from our programs."

It's also important to remember your audience. Many 4-H audiences prefer authentic communications and may respond less favorably to materials that appear heavily AI-generated.

What AI could help with

- Brainstorm an event name.
- Help provide a first draft of copy for use in newsletters, flyers, and agendas.
- Improve grammar and clarity.
- Provide a first draft of a social media caption or suggest potential graphics.
- Generate illustrations, backgrounds, or decorative graphics that you can't find elsewhere and that do not include the 4-H Clover.
- Help summarize meeting notes or organize information.
- Remove backgrounds, scale up graphics, or assist in editing (with tools like Photoshop).



AI can save time, but it doesn't know 4-H policies, branding standards, or the unique context the makes your club, community, country, and world so special. It may make mistakes, invent information, or alter the 4-H Clover. It can also look impersonal and rushed.

You should never take something that AI has generated and use it as is. You should always carefully review and make changes to produce a second draft. The final responsibility *always* belongs to the "human" (not AI).

Never ask AI to design with the 4-H Clover

Anytime the 4-H Clover appears anywhere, it *must* always come directly from an approved logo file provided to you by the Extension Office. AI tools will frequently redraw, simplify, or alter protected logos, *even if you upload the official logo as a reference, and prompt it to not change the Clover.*

Any Clovers generated through AI should not be trusted. Even if you prompt it to not change the clover.

Compare the AI generated Clovers below to the official version

This is one of the OFFICIAL versions of the 4-H Clover. While some are very similar, generative AI tools are unable to make a 100% perfect match.



AI Generated:



Design first. Use AI second.

Whenever possible, design items yourself or start with a 4-H or Illinois Extension template. Using a template can save you time and ensure the final design is 4-H and Illinois Extension brand compliant *(and your audience will trust it more!)*.

If you choose to use AI, think of it as a creative assistant rather than a designer. AI can help refine ideas, strengthen writing, or create decorative elements you can't find.

Best practices:

- **Start with a template or design yourself if possible.** Consider programs like Canva or Adobe Express which have free plans that can help you create materials without relying on AI to generate the entire design.
- **Use AI to enhance your work.** Instead of asking, *"Generate a flyer for a 4-H county fair goat show,"* create a basic design first, then ask, *"How can I improve this flyer?"* You could also ask AI to create a supporting element, such as *"Generate a pencil drawing of a goat visiting the county fair."*
- **Add the official 4-H Clover *after* all AI work is finished.** Always use an approved logo file, and never ask AI to recreate, edit, or incorporate the Clover.
- **Review everything carefully.** Check all AI-generated text and graphics carefully then edit as needed.
- **When using AI with photos or videos, follow the *Illinois 4-H AI Media Guidance*.** Do not use AI to create, alter, or "enhance" images of minors. While AI can be used for non-youth graphics, any images should follow University photo consent policies.
- **Keep in mind that AI doesn't understand copyright.** Be mindful of images, logos, branding, and characters that may have copyright protections. Just because AI generated it, doesn't mean you can use it.

Before you publish, a human is required.

Before sharing or printing any AI-assisted material, take a few minutes to review it carefully. Use the checklist below to help:

- [ ] **Is all the information accurate?**
  Double-check dates, times, locations, names, registration links, contact info, and other important factual elements

- [ ] **Does it sound like... you?**
  AI-generated text may not reflect your voice or the voice of 4-H in your club, community, or county. Be sure to edit as needed to reflect your style. AI text is *rarely* perfect right out of the tool.

- [ ] **AI didn't generate the clover, right?**
  Verify that the clover came from an approved logo file, not from the AI tool.

- [ ] **Do the graphics make sense?**
  Pay particular attention to graphics. Watch for unrealistic images, extra fingers, anatomically incorrect animals, strange nonsense "text."

- [ ] **Does it represent 4-H?**
  If someone was unfamiliar with 4-H, would they find the information you are presenting trustworthy? Does it sound too much like AI generated content?

- [ ] **Would you put your name on it?**
  Even if AI generated it, you are still responsible. If you aren't comfortable signing your name to a design, then you probably aren't there yet. If something feel off, revise it before sharing.

- [ ] **Are the photos of youth real?**
  It is against Illinois 4-H policy to generate or alter images of minors. Any photos that you include should be real and should follow University photo consent policies.

You are responsible for the final product, whether it was created by you, AI, or a combination.
Accuracy, and compliance with policies is your responsibility.

More reading and helpful resources:

This resource is not exhaustive. For more information on AI, marketing, and 4-H branding, consult the resources below:

- **Illinois 4-H Brand Guidelines and Logo Downloads** — Download graphics, apparel guides, brand checklists, and more
- **Marketing Resources from National 4-H Council** — Marketing resources from the 4-H Professional Resources website
- **Illinois Extension Branding Guides** — Full resources including proper wordmark downloads, cheat sheets, and more
- **Introduction to Generative AI** — This Illinois library guide explores the basics behind generative AI, ethical issues, etc.
- **Illinois Extension AI Guidelines** — A guiding policy from the Illinois Extension Office of Marketing and Communications
- **Artificial Intelligence by CLOVER** — A 30 minute lesson on AI for grades 3-8
- **What do youth think about AI?** — exploring a National 4-H Council survey

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AI Disclosure: This guide includes AI-generated logos solely to illustrate common trademark abuse. These are clearly marked. Some were collected from real world examples, others were generated for the purposes of this exercise.