States' 4-H 2021 Summer Pen Pal Program
July – September 2021

Program Timeline:

Recruiting and Selection of Pen Pal Participants:	June 10 ~ June 25
Matching Information is Distributed to Participants:	June 28 ~ June 29
Pen Pal Program Period:	July 1 ~ September 23, 2021

Dear Coordinators:

Thank you for your interest in the States' 4-H 2021 Summer Pen Pal Program. The following information is an outline of the program's structure, responsibilities, timeline, and goals.

1) **Program:** This program will run from **July 1 – September 23, 2021**.

2) **Requirements:**

   - Be between the ages of 9-18
   - Currently reside in a States' 4-H member state (AK, AZ, CO, FL, IA, ID, IL, KS, KY, MD, MI, MO, MT, NC, NJ, NY, OH, OK, OR, SD, TX, VA, WA, WI)
   - Be a 4-H member or former States' 4-H Exchange participant
   - Participants must have two reliable email addresses (one of these can be a parent's email address) We recommend that participants use Gmail or another large email provider to help reduce the chance of blocked or unreceived messages.
   - States' 4-H strongly encourages participants to provide alternative methods of contact when registering (mailing address, phone number, App ID)

3) **Registration:** U.S. participant registration starts on **June 10, 2021 at 9:30AM Pacific time**. Interested youth may sign up for the pen pal program by filling out the registration form at the following link:
   https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2H962HB
   Note: the registration form at this link will not be accessible before June 10.

4) **Registration Fee:** A positive and enthusiastic attitude is crucial for this program to succeed. We have introduced **a new $10 registration fee** to help ensure those participants who sign up are serious about wanting to communicate with a new friend from abroad and will take advantage of the opportunities this program offers. SurveyMonkey provides a built-in payment processing system operated by Stripe (https://stripe.com). This payment field is located directly on our registration form and only requires a credit card to complete.

5) **Matching:** States' 4-H will conduct the matching process by reviewing the information received on the registration forms and pairing youth with an appropriate match to the best of our ability. Finalized matching information is sent directly to both email addresses listed on the participant's registration form.

6) **Letter Writing:** Youth participants are tasked with exchanging a letter or message via their preferred communication method. **The expectation is that they communicate (at least) a few times with their match during the program period. They may write as many times as both parties feel comfortable with.**
   - Either party can initiate the first communication.
   - States' 4-H will provide a few writing topics each month during the program to help foster ideas of what to write if pen pals would like to use them. These are completely optional.

7) **End of Program:** At the end of the program (late-September) States' 4-H will provide an online space for participants to post their comments/reflections of their pen pal experience. This is not a required part of the program, but participants will be encouraged to share anything they have learned or appreciated about the experience. Posting photos (with permission from their pen pal) is encouraged.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. How much does this program cost? How is payment handled? What about refunds?

$10 per participant. Payment is handled through SurveyMonkey using the Stripe payment platform (https://stripe.com). Payment is handled directly within the registration form. Only credit cards are accepted as a form of payment, and payment must be completed before the registration form can be submitted. All refunds are handled directly through Stripe. States' 4-H will send the request to refund their registration fee, and Stripe will return the money to the participants bank or card issuer. They will see the refund as a credit approximately 5-10 business days after the request is submitted to Stripe, depending upon the bank/card issuer.

2. How will our pen pal participants register for the program?

- The online registration period will open on June 10th at 9:30AM Pacific time.

- The online registration period will end on June 25th.
  Online registration link for U.S. participants: **https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2H962HB**
  Note: the registration form at this link will not be accessible before June 10.

3. **Is there a limit to the number of participants who can apply?**

We will have an initial U.S. registration cap of 250 participants. These initial 250 participants will be accepted on a first-come, first-serve basis. Additional U.S. applicants will continue to be accepted and added to the program waitlist. They will be notified that they are applying to the waitlist before starting the registration process. All those who are waitlisted but not matched with a pen pal partner, will receive a full refund of their registration fee. This initial registration cap is needed to ensure balance for both the U.S. and international registrations.

4. Will youth participants be guaranteed a pen pal from the countries they select on their registration form?

Matches may be limited based on the number of applicants we receive from our international partners. We will do our best to match all youth with one of their top 3 country preferences if possible.

5. What if a participant does not receive a reply from her/his international pen pal?

1. Please ask your participants to try the alternative methods of contact provided at the time of matching: second email address, App IDs, phone number, etc. You should also inform States' 4-H that the participant is not receiving responses. *Note: we have found that larger email services, such as Gmail, tend to see more success in having messages send properly. We might suggest they try making a Gmail account if they are having continued difficulty connecting to their pen pal partner.*

2. If your participant continues to not receive a response after **more than 1-2 weeks** of trying the alternative contact options, States' 4-H will make its best effort to re-match the participant with a new pen pal. *Note: re-matching will be done based on availability, participants may not have a second pen pal who is the same age/gender as their first pen pal.*

6. Who is responsible for what?

States' 4-H:
- Provide the online registration website
- Pair international participants with U.S. participants
- Send pen pal match information to the international partners and directly to U.S. youth participants. Matching information will include name, age, gender, two email addresses, and any additional contact information available
- Follow up with unresponsive U.S. participants and re-match as necessary

State and Local Coordinators:
- Recruit participants
- Alert States' 4-H if participants are not receiving responses or are facing other issues

Participating Youth:

- Fill out the registration form
- Communicate (at least) a few times with their match during the program period. They may write as many times as both parties feel comfortable with.

Please feel free to contact us with additional questions or further clarifications about any of the above.