

History of National 4-H Congress

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In 1919, over 100 young men and women from around the country made a trip to the International Livestock Exposition at the Union Stockyards in Chicago. The tour quickly became an annual event. Youth met to exchange ideas and receive recognition for individual accomplishments and community service. The number grew and by 1922 this annual event was renamed "National Boys and Girls Club Exposition." The meeting in 1922 is officially considered the first National 4-H Youth Congress.

During the 72 years in which National 4-H Congress was held in Chicago, over 100,000 delegates, volunteers, partners, and Extension staff members had the opportunity to participate. Congress was sponsored by National 4-H Council, the Cooperative Extension Service, the United States Department of Agriculture and numerous industry partners. Youth gathered from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, Micronesia and Northern Mariana Islands. Getting to go to Congress at the splendid Chicago Hilton was a goal which motivated many 4-H youth.¹

When National 4-H Council and some of the partner sponsors discontinued their support, National 4-H Congress was in jeopardy. The 72nd National 4-H Youth Congress: Celebrating Traditions, Creating Visions was the last one held in Chicago and was expected to be the last congress ever held.

The following year southern states rallied and provided the support needed to continue Congress. All states and U.S. territories were invited to send delegates to the 1994 Congress held in Orlando, Florida. A number of states did not participate that first year but began returning in succeeding years. After Orlando, Congress was held in Memphis, TN and then moved to Atlanta, GA.

Although record books had been the basis for selection of Congress delegates in the past, beginning in 1994 each state determined how delegates would be selected. Kentucky delegates are chosen from youth who complete medals as part of Honors Achievement.

¹ Information from the program distributed at the 72nd Congress