



## Risk Management for 4-H Youth Development Work: Records and Contracts<sup>1</sup>

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This is the fourth of an eight-part series that explains Risk Management for 4-H Youth Development Work. This publication will focus on risks faced when dealing with records and paperwork.

In many 4-H activities, it is important to recognize the possibility of risks occurring. The goal of any 4-H experience is to successfully conduct educational events and activities that coincide with the 4-H mission and mandates while protecting participants. The safety of participants, sponsors, property, finances, and the goodwill/reputation of the 4-H name can be at risk. Although risk may sometimes be avoided, other times it is inevitable or worth the trade-off for the activity planned. This risk management guide has been created to prepare for activities that may involve risk and outline ways to deal with the risk.

### Contracts

During the course of the year, faculty and volunteers may need to rent facilities, obtain permission to use equipment, schedule events at restaurants, or plan activities that involve contracts.

- Faculty, staff, and extension volunteers are not allowed to sign contracts. This is to protect the individual and the University from committing personal resources or the recourses of the University in case something happens that is not in the favor of the vendor.
- If faculty, staff, or volunteer signs a contract, it means that he or she, personally, becomes liable for the terms of the contract.

Contract approvals and signatures may be obtained by working with the county extension director and district extension director. Try to allow adequate time to mail or fax the document. Include in your cover letter any specific requirements and guiding statements that would be helpful to the University purchasing officer (who is authorized to sign) in understanding your event, e.g., whether or not to work directly with the vendor, special accommodations, and the time frame.

The UF purchasing staff who have authorization to sign will have the best interests of you and the University in mind. UF Purchasing will cross out those things that are not allowed by state law. It will

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protect you from taking actions that place you or your program at risk. It may take some discussions back and forth between the vendor and the purchasing officer. Work closely with your district extension director to obtain approval and signatures for the contracts.

## Public Records

It is important to know in advance what legal rights the public has to the records that are located in the Florida Extension offices. According to the University of Florida Legal Counsel citing Florida Statutes § 119.011(12):

...public records are all documents, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, data processing software, or other material, regardless of the physical form, characteristics, or means of transmission, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any [State of Florida] agency.

Copies of public records can be requested at any time. The exemptions that apply to 4-H are related to student records and social security numbers. In general, names, addresses, and telephone numbers of individual 4-H members are not furnished under a public records request. Instead, a family mailing list may be provided which does not detail the number, age, or name of specific 4-H members. 4-H "newsletters, fact sheets, web pages, videotapes, and bulletins are open to the public. In general, our mailing lists and most correspondence are open to the public" (Legal issues).

For records, requests can be made verbally or written. The request should be forwarded to the district extension director, who will be responsible for accessing the requested information. The records must be given to the requestor in a reasonable amount of time. There may be a charge of 15 cents per page for any copies that are made. Emails may also be considered public record if they are applicable to the information being requested.

## Records Retention

As youth programs are implemented, participants complete a variety of forms including but not limited to enrollment forms, participation forms, registration forms, etc. Any information that includes personal information must be treated with confidentiality. Records are subject to Florida public record laws. Retention of most 4-H records is required for a minimum of three years with financial records being retained for seven years. The following link provides specific information on timelines for records retentions:

<http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/barm/genschedules/gs05.pdf>

## References

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