

Risk Management for 4-H Youth Development Work: Volunteers¹

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This is the sixth of an eight-part series that explains Risk Management for 4-H Youth Development Work. This publication will focus on risk management as it applies to Volunteers in the 4-H organization.

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.

Volunteers

Adults who work with youth should be responsible role models. Youth sometimes lack decision-making skills that are necessary to make well-informed decisions. Because of this, volunteers

should be knowledgeable and mature. To help volunteers learn more about risk management, agents must teach them.

- The first step in educating a volunteer about risk management is to include him in a screening process. He needs to understand that protecting the 4-H youth is the number one priority and interviews, background checks, and reference checks are necessary steps.
- Once the volunteer has been accepted, he must be trained to "do the job." It is essential that youth and adult volunteers have a good understanding of what 4-H is, what is expected, and how to deal immediately with risks that may arise. By knowing these things, chaperones can offer youth a safe and secure environment.

It is a privilege to serve as a Florida 4-H youth development volunteer. Volunteers have an important role in maintaining both a safe environment for 4-H youth and a sense of belonging within the 4-H group and organization.

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The Florida 4-H Youth Development youth protection process includes:

- a background record check for arrest and conviction records
- participation in the volunteer orientation program
- signing the Volunteer Behavior Expectations Form

All volunteers, age 18 and over, who work with youth in the 4-H youth program on an ongoing basis will participate in youth protection. The Volunteer Behavior Expectations Form must be signed annually by the volunteer to continue as a volunteer. Background records will be rechecked every three years for continuing volunteers. Additional information and guidelines for this process are located in the 4-H Program Handbook.

Volunteer Information

The status of 4-H volunteers in Florida is affected by state statutes. A volunteer is defined in Florida Statutes §110.501 as "...any person who, of his or her own free will, provides goods or services, or conveys an interest in or otherwise consents to the use of real property...to any state department or agency or nonprofit organization, with no monetary or material compensation."

Volunteer benefits, as outlined in Florida Statutes §110.504 include meals, lodging, and travel reimbursement under some circumstances. The statutes authorize incidental reimbursement including travel, lodging, and the like within the limits of the agency's budget (Florida Statutes §110.502). Volunteers may utilize state vehicles in the performance of their duty. Each department or agency using volunteers shall ensure that volunteers understand their duties and responsibilities, provide a receptive climate for volunteers, and recognize volunteers who have provided continuous and outstanding service. Volunteer service can count as partial fulfillment of experience requirements for state employment. It is important to note that while cost reimbursement and incidental recognition benefits or non-monetary awards do not change the

status of a volunteer under the statutes, receiving pay does.

Volunteers are provided with liability protection in the same manner as state employees as outlined in Florida Statutes §110.504 and 768.28. In addition, volunteers are protected by workers' compensation as provided in Chapter 440, Florida Statutes.

This statute has been further codified in the University of Florida Regulations (formerly known as rules) as 6C1-3.0031 and interpreted by Personnel Services. The forms recommended in this handbook have been submitted to University Personnel for review. They have indicated that our current procedures are sufficient, as long as we add instruction for filing a worker's compensation claim to our orientation material. Our health form is sufficient for authorizing treatment for our teen volunteers.

Volunteer Selection and Screening

The intent of the University of Florida IFAS Extension volunteer selection process is to share a common philosophy and follow appropriate protocol to provide safe and secure environments for everyone involved in Extension's youth programs. The guiding principle of this policy is to protect those who cannot protect themselves. The volunteer selection and screening efforts is designed to:

- Reaffirm the organization's dedication to youth and their well being.
- Carefully select adults to work in youth programs.
- Establish consistent guidelines to help provide safe learning environments.
- Provide education and resources to help protect participants.
- Provide documentation of volunteer selection for coverage under the State of Florida Tort Claims Act.

A selection and screening process is a method of strengthening recruitments and placement of volunteers and staff in University of Florida IFAS

Extension youth programs. When all volunteer and paid staff are purposefully selected and requested to uphold high standards, there is increased credibility of all individuals working in University of Florida IFAS Extension youth programs. Every University of Florida IFAS Extension youth program should consistently meet acceptable standards for safety and the well-being of participants. The University of Florida IFAS Extension program joins youth-serving organizations across the nation to institute similar policies. Courts are finding employers liable for negligent hiring and placement of employees/volunteers.

References

Bolton, Elizabeth B. (2008) Legal aspects relating to volunteers in Florida (FCS9078/HE109). Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/he109>.