

4-H Agent Guide for Managing the Approval, Denial, and Releasing of Volunteers in Florida 4-H

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Florida 4-H Volunteer Management Best Practices for Approving, Denying, and Releasing Volunteers

The UF/IFAS Extension Florida 4-H Youth Development Program relies on dedicated volunteers to help youth develop the knowledge and life skills they need to be productive and responsible citizens. Volunteers are the community support mechanism of 4-H and make many positive impacts in the lives of Florida's youth. In volunteer management, good communication is key! The purpose of these Volunteer Management Guidelines is to provide Extension faculty assistance with approving, denying, and releasing volunteers.

Florida 4-H Youth Development volunteers must comply with all UF/IFAS policies and procedures including best practices related to Positive Youth Development. This document contains several example letters that may be used and other useful tools to assist you with this process. This document demonstrates steps in approving, denying, and releasing volunteers. There are many training and mentoring opportunities for agents. These include a rigorous screening process, robust onboarding and training, and ongoing professional development for their volunteers.

Approving Volunteers

- Once a volunteer has been screened, interviewed, and selected, they should receive a letter of approval (Appendix A), along with a calendar of 4-H events and any information about volunteer training opportunities and club leader meetings. Volunteers must be approved on an annual basis at the start of each 4-H year, which begins September 1.
- The volunteer's 4-H Online profile should contain the following documents:
- Reference Check forms/notes that are completed by county
- Optional Interview notes
- Attestation of Good Moral Character (signed digitally in 4-H Online)
- ACHA Privacy Policy (signed digitally in 4-H Online)
- Sex Offender/Predator Search documentation, uploaded by state unless the process is handled locally, then uploaded by the county
- DCF screening documentation, uploaded by state unless

- the process is handled locally, then uploaded by the county
- Volunteer service description (signed digitally in 4-H Online)
- Record of Volunteer service (required completed by county in 4-H Online)
- Letter of approval uploaded annually by the county

Denying Volunteers

If a volunteer is not selected to serve, they should receive a letter of denial (Appendix B). This letter should be uploaded into their 4-H Online profile, and their profile should be updated to reflect inactive.

Releasing a Volunteer

A volunteer should seldom be surprised that they are being released. Volunteers serve at the pleasure of the University and may be released from service in accordance with University Regulation 3.0031.

“Volunteer services may cease, at any time, at the request of the volunteer or at the discretion of the University. A notice stating the effective date of the termination shall be provided to the volunteer.”

Sometimes it is necessary to release a volunteer, especially if there has been a serious breach in the code of conduct, if the volunteer has committed a felony, or if the volunteer's eligibility status is determined ineligible based on the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Clearinghouse. Faculty and staff with access to the DCF Clearinghouse will be notified of a volunteer arrest via email and can access the updated Record of Arrest and Prosecutions (RAP) sheet, which may result in a “not eligible” status in the Clearinghouse. RAP sheets are only accessible for thirty days. Although rare, when situations like these occur, agents need to consult with their County Extension Director (CED) and Regional Specialized 4-H Agent (RSA) immediately. Before issuing the letter of release, they should also notify their District Extension Director (DED), 4-H Volunteer Coordinator and Associate Program Leader. Appendix C is a copy of the letter of release. All letters should be cc'd to the State 4-H Volunteer Coordinator. The state office will then upload all materials into 4-H Online and make the appropriate changes in status. The agent is responsible for developing a transition plan for the club or committee the volunteer serves and for communicating the plan with the parents and/or other

volunteers in a timely manner. There is no appeal process for the release of a volunteer.

Sometimes, issues may arise with a volunteer that do not involve criminal behavior or serious infractions of the code of conduct. However, the issues may interfere with the success of the program or the positive youth development process. In these instances, the agent should have a conversation with the volunteer about the behavior. It is advantageous to involve an RSA or a CED in the conversation. Often, a simple phone call is all that is needed. For more serious or ongoing instances, a formal in-person meeting is necessary, and your CED should be included in this meeting. Disciplinary action can include a verbal warning, probation, or release from volunteer service.

A verbal warning informs the volunteer of violations or other behaviors that can be rectified by bringing them to the attention of the volunteer and mentoring them on the violations and/or expectations and how to improve the behaviors. A probationary period is a period of time that a volunteer does not engage in their volunteer role. This is a more serious mentoring session and should include the behaviors that need to change as well as other actions that need to take place to complete the probationary period. The successful completion of a verbal warning session or a probationary period brings the volunteer back to full standing.

If the behavior does not change after the conversation, consult with the RSA and CED to determine if releasing the volunteer is in the best interest of the program or if further mentoring is needed. If they agree that releasing the volunteer is the best viable option, the process to be followed is issuing a letter of release and uploading it into 4-H Online, updating the volunteer's profile to reflect inactive, and developing and communicating a transition plan approved by the CED and Associate Program Leader.

The appendix section contains various letters for 4-H agent use. The Appendix A letter is meant to be used for initial approval as a volunteer. Only the letter of approval may be modified to contain county-specific material. All other letters should be used unmodified, only adding the content for the underlined areas. Appendix B is for denial of a volunteer after screening and initial evaluation. Appendix C is used to release a current volunteer. Sometimes, a volunteer wishes to separate from 4-H for their own reasons. Some may wish to pursue other interests; others may have youth that have aged out. When this is the case, Appendix D may be used to document this separation.

Appendices

- A. Letter of approval template
- B. Letter of denial template
- C. Letter of release template
- D. Letter of release by mutual consent template

Appendix A

Letter of Volunteer Approval

(Print on University of Florida letterhead)

Volunteer Name: _____

Volunteer Address : _____

Date: _____

Dear _____,

Congratulations and thank you for your interest in being a University of Florida IFAS Extension Florida 4-H Youth Development Program volunteer in _____ County. After review of your application, background verification, and completion of the Annual Youth Protection Webinar Training on _____ (date), we are pleased to inform you that you have been approved as a 4-H volunteer. This approval is effective for the current _____ 4-H year. We look forward to having you as part of our team! Attached is a calendar of 4-H events and volunteer training opportunities. Training is an important part of being a successful volunteer. To better prepare you for your role you will need to participate in leader, club events, and meetings. If you have questions about volunteering for another role, please call our office at _____. I am looking forward to working with you to “make the best better” in _____ County!

Note, annual approval of volunteer services is required for each volunteer regardless of history or years of service. The department or academic unit may release a volunteer at any time, for any reason and without prior notice.

Sincerely,

County 4-H Agent

Cc: County Extension Director _____

State 4-H Volunteer Coordinator _____

Appendix B

Letter of Volunteer Denial

(Print on University of Florida letterhead)

Volunteer Name _____

Volunteer Address _____

Date _____

Dear _____,

After considering your application and the additional information you have provided, the University of Florida IFAS Extension _____ County has decided not to approve your application for volunteer service at this time. We appreciate your interest in our organization.

Sincerely,

County 4-H Agent Signature

County Extension Director

Cc: State 4-H Volunteer Coordinator

Appendix C

Letter of Volunteer Release

(Print on University of Florida letterhead)

Volunteer Name _____

Volunteer Address _____

Date _____

Dear _____,

Thank you for your service as a University of Florida IFAS Extension Florida 4-H Youth Development Program Volunteer in _____ County. The purpose of this letter is to notify you that, after careful consideration, you are hereby released you from your volunteer service, effective on _____ (date).

Note, annual approval of volunteer services is required for each volunteer regardless of history or years of service. In accordance with University regulations, the department or academic unit may release a volunteer at any time, for any reason and without prior notice.

Please return any club equipment or supplies to the Extension Office by _____ (date).

Thank you for your service to _____ County 4-H.

Sincerely,

County 4-H Agent

County Extension Director

Cc: State 4-H Volunteer Coordinator
Regional Specialized 4-H Agent
District Extension Director
Associate Program Leader

Appendix D

Letter of Volunteer Release Upon Mutual Consent

(Print on University of Florida letterhead)

Volunteer Name _____

Volunteer Address _____

Date _____

Dear _____,

Thank you for your _____ years of service as a University of Florida IFAS Extension Florida 4-H Youth Development Program volunteer in _____ County.

Now that you are no longer a UF/IFAS Extension service volunteer, you are no longer a volunteer within the Florida 4-H program. Should you wish to return as a 4-H volunteer, you will need to complete the process as if you were a new volunteer. If you would like to receive the newsletter or other communication to keep up with the goings-on in _____ County 4-H, please let us know!

As a final request, please return any club equipment or supplies to the Extension Office by _____(date). Thank you for your service to _____ County 4-H.

Sincerely,

County 4-H Agent

Cc: County Extension Director _____

State 4-H Volunteer Coordinator _____