

About UNHCE Volunteer Programs

What We All Have in Common

UNHCE has many different volunteer programs under its umbrella, each one different in structure, management, size, geographical location, and training requirements. For example, some programs are highly structured, requiring intensive management and supervision. Other programs train volunteers to work off-site in their own communities, and require less day-to-day oversight. However, despite these differences, UNHCE volunteer programs have several unifying elements. This section outlines the fundamental definitions and policies common to all of our volunteer programs and projects.

Who is a UNHCE “Volunteer”?

A UNHCE “volunteer” is anyone who, without compensation or expectation of compensation beyond reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of Extension. A “volunteer” must be officially accepted and enrolled by Extension prior to performance of the task (s). Unless specifically stated, volunteers shall not be considered as “employees” of Extension and are not covered by workers’ compensation insurance.

Volunteer Policies – Why Do We Need Them?

Policies are critical to managing risk in working with volunteers (see Section 8). The process of developing and writing policies (or “best practices” in the case of suggested policies) has many other benefits for UNHCE staff and programs. In the publication, “By Definition: Policies for Volunteer Programs,” Linda L. Graff provides an excellent case for why we need volunteer policies¹. Her examples include:

- All organizations make policy decisions regularly. They just do not call them policies, and they often do not write them down. So, writing your policies can be a simple matter of formalizing decisions which have already been made.
- Writing decisions in the form of policies and distributing them to paid and volunteer staff can lend them greater import and perhaps ensure better compliance.
- Many policies are developed because of crises or problems. When something goes wrong, it becomes apparent that a position or policy is needed, either to decide what to do now, or to prevent the situation from recurring. Policies determine action and set boundaries beyond which one cannot go.

¹ Excerpted from By Definition: Policies for Volunteer Programs, by Linda L. Graff, © 1997, Graff and Associates. From Energize, Inc. website at www.energizeinc.com

- Policies clarify responsibilities and define lines of communication and accountability.
- Policies provide a structure for sound management. Since they often identify the ‘what’ and sometimes even the ‘how,’ they can bring about program improvements and increase effectiveness.
- Policies ensure continuity over time and from staff to staff. In this sense, policies endure. They promote equity and standardization.
- Policies establish values, beliefs and directions for volunteer involvement. They connect the volunteer program to the larger organization and its mission.
- Policies can be a source of pride and satisfaction for managers of volunteers in a well-run program. They articulate the importance of volunteers and form an important, concrete, ongoing element of volunteer recognition. Policies thereby contribute to increased volunteer satisfaction and productiveness, and enhance volunteer retention.

Policies Governing Overall Volunteerism at UNHCE

As outlined in the introduction, UNH Cooperative Extension accepts and encourages the involvement of volunteers at all levels of the organization and within all appropriate programs and activities. Extension staff are encouraged to create meaningful and productive volunteer positions and to recruit volunteers from the community.

The policies that occur throughout this resource (unless specifically stated) apply to all volunteers in all programs and projects undertaken on behalf of Extension. Volunteer policies apply to all Cooperative Extension sites throughout the state of New Hampshire.

Volunteers may be utilized in all programs and activities of UNHCE, and serve at all levels of skill and decision-making. Volunteers should not, however, be utilized to displace any paid employees from their positions.

The I.S.O.T.U.R.E. Model

To develop the framework for the UNHCE volunteer management system, the I.S.O.T.U.R.E. model of volunteer management and development was selected. This structure is practical and easy to understand, yet is based on strong leadership development theory and research. It applies to all volunteer programs regardless of purpose, size, or structure, and it uses terms that are familiar to all.

The acronym stands for the seven parts of the volunteer management and development process: Identifying, Selecting, Orienting, Training, Utilizing, Recognizing and Evaluating. Below is a brief overview of each area, summarized from Michigan State Cooperative Extension’s excellent reference, “Achieving Success Through Volunteers.”

- **Identifying** volunteer opportunities within UNHCE and developing appropriate written position descriptions for them
- **Selecting** (recruiting) volunteers best qualified for the volunteer opportunity
- **Orienting** volunteers both to UNHCE as an organization and to the specific volunteer responsibility
- **Training** volunteers to develop additional knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes that will help them be successful in fulfilling their volunteer responsibility
- **Utilizing** volunteer knowledge, attitudes and skills to contribute to the organization's success and growth, and to effectively manage the day-to-day work of volunteers
- **Recognizing** volunteers for the positive contributions they make to the organization
- **Evaluating** the total volunteer program, professional support of volunteers, and/or the individual volunteer's performance in their position.

Roles and Responsibilities in Working with Volunteers

Working with volunteers in a productive and meaningful way requires a planned and organized effort. Each program involving volunteers shall have one Extension staff member who is responsible for coordinating the overall volunteer program. This person will oversee policies and procedures, especially those unique to the program, and will be responsible for on-going operations. This volunteer coordinator (or "manager"), in consultation with his or her supervisor, takes primary responsibility for all aspects of volunteer program management in the ISOTURE model: identifying, selecting, orienting, training, utilizing, recognizing and evaluating volunteers. Other Extension staff who work with volunteers should also receive training on UNHCE volunteer management and policies through introduction to and familiarity with the contents of this resource.

Types of Volunteers

There are many different types or categories of volunteers, many of them already existing among UNHCE volunteer programs. Each group may have different strengths and/or special needs. Understanding how the groups or types of volunteers differ helps us, as volunteer coordinators, to effectively manage and support our volunteers.

- **Episodic volunteers** or "short term volunteer" are volunteers who use their volunteer time in short durations, for a specific event, or service at regular intervals for short periods of time. They require little training and work when well-matched with long term volunteers. For example, 4-H horse shows often use episodic volunteers, supervised by experienced volunteers, in such positions as gate keepers.
- **Teen volunteers** benefit from volunteer experiences that help them explore career goals, promote positive interactions with adults and peers, and provide opportunities

to be involved in service learning. Potential responsibilities might include mentoring other youth, assisting adult volunteers, doing promotional activities, serving as camp counselors, working with technology, and being a part of a committee.

- **Family volunteers** are a win-win opportunity for families and the organization. Some of the benefits include: strengthening of family relationships while the organization gains additional volunteers; easier management of youth volunteers with the extra supervision by adult mentors (as long as volunteer manager is not taking on parent role); and a legacy for future volunteering. Cautions might include: understanding family dynamics and tensions, and that decision-making can take longer.
- **Senior volunteers** bring their life experience to volunteer programs. This volunteer population continues to grow and considerations such as flexible scheduling, assistance with finding transportation, and helping with any possible technology barriers may help promote success for the volunteer and organization.
- **Virtual volunteers** are volunteers off-site. It is a way for an individual to volunteer without ever arriving at a workplace. These volunteers may be able to take a project and complete it from a remote location. Virtual volunteers don't replace traditional volunteers, but may have the potential to increase and diversify the volunteer pool. Virtual volunteers need to have on-site orientation to become familiar with the organization and should be included in recognition events.
- **College-age volunteers** are an age group that looks for opportunities to build resumes and portfolios. They require flexibility for class and vacation schedules, and can be technologically savvy. To recruit this population, UNHCE is well-situated by working with both UNH faculty and faculty from other colleges and universities. College volunteers may be highly motivated and are usually thrilled to work with an organization they admire.
- **Volunteers with disabilities** may pose unique opportunities for volunteering as well as some challenges. Each person's interests in volunteering should be the primary focus of the coordinator. Once the interests are determined, both the volunteer and the coordinator should work together to help accommodate any special needs. Look for new or unique opportunities such as virtual volunteering which may help accommodate the volunteer. Facilities need to be accessible by each individual that volunteers with the program. Staff and volunteers need to be informed of any special situations.
- **Unemployed volunteers**, an often underutilized volunteer group, may include seasonal workers, those on temporary layoff, and individuals without jobs. They may have a lot of time to positively affect an organization, possible skills from their work experience, and the volunteer experience may provide meaningful social networks.

Managing Risk

Section 8 of this resource provides additional information about managing risks associated with volunteers and volunteer programs. However, it is critical for all staff who works with volunteers to remember that considerations of risk should be a part of all of the steps of volunteer management (e.g. all parts of the ISOTURE model). Many of the policies and procedures outlined have been developed by taking into account risk management.

What is risk management and what exactly is risk? Risk is the possible deviation from what you expect to happen. According to the Nonprofit Risk Management Center, risk management is “the ongoing process of assessing that potential deviation and finding ways to minimize the chance that bad surprises will occur and increase the chance of good surprises”.

Risk management is about problem-solving. It is about the steps an organization takes to minimize the effect of an unforeseen event or loss that couldn't be prevented. It means continually considering the following questions when working with volunteers:

- What can go wrong?
- How bad could the damage be?
- What will we do?
- How will we do it?

Ultimately, risk management involves the development of good day-to-day operating policies, procedures and training. Many of the policies and supporting materials throughout this resource are designed to aid in this task.

Record Keeping

A key component of risk management is the maintenance of records. Their absence or existence (and their quality and consistency) can make all the difference in a legal dispute. All volunteer records relating to all steps of the ISOTURE process should be kept for a minimum of 3 years after the volunteer is no longer active. All files related to volunteers should be kept in a secure location such as a locked room or file cabinet.