

Identifying and Selecting Volunteers

This section focuses on the first steps volunteers and staff experience with new volunteers. It contains policies related to identifying and selecting volunteers, as well as examples of position descriptions, applications, and interview questions gathered from existing UNHCE volunteer programs. These are examples only, since programs continuously update these materials. For the most up-to-date examples, consult individual programs or the UNHCE web site.

This section covers:

- Volunteer Service Descriptions
- Recruitment of Volunteers
- Application and Screening Process
- Youth & Special Case Volunteers
- Volunteer Interviews
- Reference Checks
- Volunteer Agreements
- Background Checks

Volunteer Service Descriptions

(See also Developing Service Descriptions [http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001036_Rep1191.pdf] and Middle Manager Service Description Template [http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001035_Rep1190.doc])

Volunteers, as with paid staff, require a clear, complete, and current description of the duties and responsibilities of the position which they are expected to fill. Volunteer position descriptions are critical in order to protect the organization and to limit the scope of the volunteer's responsibilities.

Prior to any volunteer assignment or recruitment effort, a volunteer position description shall be developed for each volunteer program or project. Some volunteer programs that have differing types of volunteer service may need multiple service descriptions. This description will be given to each accepted volunteer and will be used in subsequent management and evaluation efforts. Volunteer service descriptions shall be reviewed and updated at least every two years, or whenever the work involved in the position changes substantially.

All volunteer position descriptions shall include at a minimum:

- Name of the service
- Objectives of the position
- Designated supervisor
- Length of appointment including date(s)
- Listing of qualifications

- Signatures of both the volunteer and Extension staff supervisor
- Extension's affirmative action statement

Other items that may be included on the service descriptions include:

- Qualifications
- Time commitment
- Support provided
- Position benefits
- Method of evaluation

Recruitment of Volunteers

This is the full UNHCE Affirmative Action Statement:

The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension is a public institution with a longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all. It is the policy of UNHCE to abide by all United States and New Hampshire state laws and University System of New Hampshire and University of New Hampshire policies applicable to discrimination and harassment. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, veteran's status, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, or disability in admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its programs, services, or activities.

The shorter version of the UNHCE Affirmative Action Statement is as follows and is used on all letterhead, brochures, videos and fact sheets:

The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. University of New Hampshire, U.S. Department of Agriculture and N.H. counties cooperating.

Inquiries regarding discriminatory harassment should be directed to Donna Marie Sorrentino, Director of Affirmative Action and Equity, Room 305 Thompson Hall, 105 Main Street, Durham, NH 03824, phone (603)862-2930; (Voice/TTY), fax (603)862-2936.

See also "Civil Rights Guide for UNH Cooperative Extension Staff" at http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000677_Rep699.pdf.

The Application and Screening Process

Each prospective volunteer should complete a volunteer program application. Applications allow program staff to learn more about the applicant, and to better match volunteer roles with volunteer interests. They also provide the first part of a volunteer screening process. An application should contain:

- Program title and sponsors
- Applicant's:
 - Name and address information
 - Other volunteer experience
 - Ability to meet volunteer requirements
 - Skills and interests
 - Background information that relates to the position
- Affirmative Action Statement

NOTE: Additional information is required for those volunteers working with youth; see below.

Other information that can be collected in an application:

- Employment information
- Why do they wish to become a volunteer?
- Transportation information including license and insurance

Applications for Those Working Directly with Youth

Any UNHCE volunteer, 18 years and older, who works directly with youth without the presence or direct supervision of paid Extension staff must be screened before they are officially appointed to work with youth. In cooperative efforts, Extension staff will work with cooperating agencies, organizations, and schools to ensure that volunteers are appropriately screened. For more information, see http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000180_Rep198.pdf which is a document on reducing risk for UNHCE volunteers working with youth (4-H fact sheet).

The screening procedure for working directly with youth includes a volunteer application form, a personal interview, three personal letters of reference, a signed volunteer agreement (see below) and may include a criminal background check.

Volunteers Under Age 18

Volunteers who have not reached age 18 need to have written consent of a parent or guardian prior to volunteering with Extension. Youth under age 18 enrolled in UNHCE youth programs, with written permission of a parent or guardian, may volunteer as a component of their UNHCE learning experience. The volunteer position assigned to a minor shall be performed in a non-hazardous environment and should comply with all appropriate requirements of child labor laws. For more information about youth as volunteers, see the following page on the UNH Human Resources website: <http://www.unh.edu/hr/youthemp.htm>.

Special Case Volunteers

UNHCE also accepts volunteers who are participating in student community service activities, student projects, alternative sentencing or diversion programs, corporate volunteer programs, and other volunteer referral programs. In each of these cases,

however, a special agreement must be in effect with the organization, school, or program from which the special case volunteers originate and must identify responsibility for the management and care of the volunteers.

Interviewing Volunteers

Prior to being assigned to a position, all volunteers should be interviewed to ascertain their suitability for and interest in that position. The interview shall determine the qualifications of the volunteer, their commitment to fulfill the requirements of the position, and shall answer any questions that the volunteer might have about the position. Interviews shall be conducted either in person or by other means. If by phone it is essential to take thorough notes throughout the interview. It is helpful to have an additional person help with the interview to get more than one perspective on the applicant. Other volunteers in a program can make some of the best interviewers for prospective new volunteers.

Each volunteer program should come up with its own set of interview questions. It is good practice to ask each applicant the same set of questions for a specific position. The interviewer(s) should capture answers on paper.

The 4-H Youth Development program has devised a set of interview questions and a rating sheet for the interviewer to use, which could be adapted to other program areas. This form is available at: http://extension.unh.edu/resources/resource/1086/4-H_Volunteer_Interview_Questions, as well as a list of examples of the kinds of questions NOT to ask: http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001087_Rep1357.pdf.

The following list, from Herman and Jackson (*No Surprises*, 2004), includes a series of considerations useful during the screening process:

- What will make a candidate ineligible for consideration, before reference and/or background checks? (It is possible that not all applicants will be accepted as volunteers for UNHCE.)
- Gather all relevant data before making a judgment. Give the candidate an opportunity to explain any “red flags”.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences.
- Ask the same question in different ways or use several strategies to confirm key information.
- If a background check uncovers information that will disqualify the candidate for a position, provide the candidate with an opportunity to ‘correct the record.’

Reference Checks

Reference checks are important when selecting volunteers. They can be done by phone, mail, or in person. Phrase open-ended questions so that the references are providing answers phrased in their own words. See the information on reference check questions at <http://www.unh.edu/hr/interv.htm>.

Letters of Appointment and/or Volunteer Agreement

After a volunteer has successfully completed the recruitment process, (or at the point when they become an official volunteer which may occur after a training session), the new volunteer will be notified through a letter of appointment or a volunteer agreement form. A letter of appointment is usually signed by staff only, while a volunteer agreement is signed by both staff and volunteer. To be considered a UNH Cooperative Extension volunteer, all volunteers must be officially accepted and enrolled by Extension prior to beginning the volunteer position. A signed agreement form by both parties is evidence of acceptance.

Letters of appointment and volunteer agreements should both contain the following sentences, which refer to RSA 508: 17 covering liability limitation of volunteers and non-profit organizations:

“You are hereby recognized as a volunteer of UNH Cooperative Extension. Your tenure will continue until your resignation or until your termination by the organization. The purpose of this letter is to comply with the provisions of RSA 508:17, the volunteer immunity law, as that law may be amended from time to time.”

Competency Screening

If there are physical or competency (e.g., tools or equipment) requirements necessary for performance of a volunteer task, a screening or testing procedure shall be required to ascertain the ability of the volunteer to safely perform the task.

Advisory Council Nominating Process

When a UNH Cooperative Extension County Advisory Council position becomes vacant, the chair will appoint a nominating committee of three (3) other members of the council. The nominating committee will then solicit nominations through other council members, the UNH Cooperative Extension professional staff, the county Extension newsletter or some other form of mass media. Within a two-month period or less, a slate of potential candidates will be developed and an election held. For the complete operating procedure for Advisory Councils, see: <http://extension.unh.edu/Counties/CACMH/CtyOps.pdf>.