

Volunteer Screening Process



Volunteers can be a tremendous help to the 4-H Youth Development Program! This lesson will describe the steps we take to bring these volunteers into the program. Here are some questions to ponder as we move through this lesson:

Can we accept any person as an adult in our program?

What obligation do we have to ensure the safety of our students in the program?

What do we do when someone we don't know offers to volunteer?

What do we do when someone we know well offers to volunteer?

Is there ever a time when we can say we don't have a position available for you to volunteer in our program at this time?

Introduction

Volunteers are a crucial part of youth-serving organizations. Volunteers enable the paid staff to reach a wider audience, and to share a greater variety of skills and expertise with that audience. Unfortunately, today's society is not as safe as in past years. Reports of adults taking advantage of children are too often in the headlines. In an attempt to maintain a safe learning environment, the 4-H Youth Development Program institutes a screening process for all adults who volunteer for the program. The procedures described in this lesson are followed for all adult volunteers who work with youth in our program.

Objectives

1. Explain the importance of following a screening process for 4-H Youth Development Program Volunteers.
2. Identify individuals who should complete the screening process.
3. List behaviors addressed in the volunteer screening process.
4. Follow appropriate procedures to screen and approve new 4-H Volunteers.
5. Explain the 4-H advisory board's role in the volunteer screening process.
6. Identify confidentiality issues related to the volunteer screening process.



Here are the objectives we will cover in this lesson.

Objective #1

Explain the importance of following a screening process for 4-H Youth Development Program volunteers.



Why is a 4-H Volunteer screening process important?

- Ensures youth receive a high-quality education in a safe environment
- Clarifies volunteer expectations within the 4-H Youth Development Program
- Helps parents confidently trust their children to our care
- Allows volunteers to reaffirm their commitment and dedication to the well-being of youth
- Documents volunteer excellence
- Provides volunteers with support if accusations are made against them while they are acting within the scope of their duties



In today's society we all too frequently see and read reports of adults who have taken advantage of youth. Several youth organizations have suffered through the experience of having a volunteer or paid staff member be accused of improper contact or conduct with youth who participate in their programs. The screening process we are discussing is an attempt to be proactive and to prevent this type of behavior from occurring in the 4-H Youth Development Program. No policy can completely guarantee that it will eliminate all unacceptable behavior, but it can alert all who participate in our program that we are taking a reasonable and prudent approach to the well-being of our youth participants.

Further, the screening process...

Ensures that youth in the 4-H Youth Development Program receive a high-quality education in a safe environment.

Clearly identifies the expectations that the 4-H Youth Development Program has of its volunteers.

Helps parents to confidently trust their children to our care.

Allows all volunteers to reaffirm their commitment and dedication to the well-being of youth as they provide them with positive growth experiences.

Documents volunteer excellence.

Provides volunteers with support if accusations are made against them (as long as the volunteers are acting within the scope of their duties).

Now that we know the reasons behind a volunteer screening process, let's take a look at who should be involved.

Objective #2

Identify individuals who should complete the screening process.



Who should complete screening process?

- All individuals who wish to volunteer for the 4-H Youth Development Program
- Including...
 - 4-H Club leaders
 - Project leaders
 - Committee members
 - 4-H Advisory Board members
 - Others who volunteer on a regular basis



All individuals who wish to volunteer in any way with the 4-H Youth Development Program are included in and should complete the screening process. These include club leaders, project leaders, committee members, advisory board members, and any others who volunteer on a regular basis with the program. Over time, individuals may assume different roles in the 4-H Youth Development Program. Asking the individual to complete the screening process in the beginning will allow them to move among roles more freely and without delay. 4-H Youth Development staff members are also encouraged to complete the screening process to show the volunteers that they support the procedures.

So, we've learned that all who are interested in serving as volunteers should complete the screening process. What does this screening process address?

Objective #3

List behaviors addressed in the
volunteer screening process.



What behaviors does the screening process address?

- Follow rules and guidelines established by the 4-H Youth Development Program, including those related to child abuse/neglect.
- Be a positive role model for youth.
- Be courteous, be respectful, exhibit good sportsmanship, handle conflict reasonably, and be truthful.
- Represent the 4-H Youth Development Program with dignity and pride; accept supervision and support from others; participate in orientation and training; and work to create an effective 4-H Youth Development Program.



What behaviors should be addressed in the screening process?

Volunteers should be expected to follow the rules and guidelines established by the 4-H Youth Development Program, including those related to child abuse/neglect.

Volunteers are expected to be a positive role model for youth.

They should be courteous, be respectful, exhibit good sportsmanship, handle conflict reasonably, and be truthful.

Volunteers will represent the 4-H Youth Development Program with dignity and pride, accept supervision and support from others, participate in orientation and training, and work to create an effective 4-H Youth Development Program.

What behaviors does the screening process address?

- Ensure equal access to programs.
- Understand that physical and verbal abuse of others and criminal acts are not a part of the 4-H Youth Development Program.
- Do not allow, consume, or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs at 4-H Youth Development events. Limit tobacco use to times when youth participants are not present.
- Operate machinery and equipment in a responsible manner; treat animals humanely; and use technology appropriately.



Additional behaviors included in the screening process include:

Volunteers will ensure equal access to programs.

They will understand that physical and verbal abuse of others and criminal acts are not a part of the 4-H Youth Development Program.

Volunteers will not allow, consume, or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs at 4-H Youth Development events. Tobacco use will be limited to times when the volunteers are away from youth participants.

Machinery and equipment will be operated in a responsible manner; animals will be treated humanely; and technology will be used appropriately.

These behaviors are ones that most reasonable adults should be able to follow without questions and they are the ones that we hope to instill in our youth. What procedures are we going to take to help ensure that we have volunteers who are willing to follow these procedures?

Objective #4

Follow appropriate procedures to screen
and approve new 4-H Volunteers.



How are adult volunteers screened & selected?

- Applicant states a desire to volunteer for 4-H.
- Applicant is sent a cover letter and copies of:
 - “Information and Instruction for Staff and Volunteers Who Work with 4-H Youth Development Programs”
 - “Adult Volunteer Application”
- Staff member starts a file for the applicant.
- Applicant completes Adult Volunteer Application and returns it to the 4-H Youth Development staff member.



What are the procedures for screening and selecting adult volunteers?

Applicant states a desire to volunteer in the program.

Applicant is sent a cover letter and provided with copies of:

“Information and Instruction for Staff and Volunteers Who Work with 4-H Youth Development Programs”

“Adult Volunteer Application”

Staff member starts a file for the volunteer applicant, including “Volunteer Application Checklist”.

Applicant completes Adult Volunteer Application and returns it to the 4-H Youth Development staff member.

Procedures continued...

- Staff member completes reference checks provided by applicant.
- Staff member conducts Web search of sex/violent offender registry database.
- Staff member places successfully screened applicant in an appropriate volunteer position.
- Staff member presents a list of the successfully screened applicants to the 4-H Advisory Board for approval.



Staff member completes written or verbal reference checks provided by applicant using appropriate form.

Staff member conducts a web search of a statewide sex/violent offender registry database using the applicant's name, birth date, and social security number (if provided).

Staff member places the successfully-screened applicant in a volunteer position that is appropriate for his/her abilities and experiences.

Once the screening process is completed, the staff member presents a list of the successfully-screened applicants to the advisory board for approval.

Procedures continued...

- Staff member sends applicant an acceptance letter, a copy of “Adult Behavioral Expectations” and a locally produced volunteer position description.
- Applicant is recognized as an official 4-H Volunteer upon receipt of signed behavioral expectations form.
- Volunteer receives information about future meetings and training opportunities.
- Applicant rejected as a volunteer receives a letter of notification from the staff member.



Staff member sends the applicant an acceptance letter, a copy of “Adult Behavioral Expectations” or “Youth Behavioral Expectations” and a locally-produced volunteer position description.

Once the volunteer applicant returns the signed behavioral expectations form, he/she is recognized as an official 4-H Volunteer.

The new volunteer is then sent information about future meetings and training opportunities. An orientation meeting with the staff member or designee and volunteer is also suggested.

If the applicant is rejected as a volunteer, the staff member sends a letter of notification to the applicant.

Procedures continued...

- Staff member maintains an updated list of volunteers in the 4-H Youth Development office.
- Volunteers having difficulty fulfilling their obligations should be contacted throughout the year to assist them with their difficulties.
 - Reassign, retrain, revitalize, or refer before dismissing a volunteer.
 - Dismissal of volunteers should be a last resort and must follow specific guidelines.



The staff member maintains an updated list of volunteers in the 4-H Youth Development office.

Dismissal of volunteers should be a last resort. If the process is working correctly, those volunteers having difficulty fulfilling their obligations should be contacted throughout the year to attempt to help them through difficulties they are having. If possible, consider reassignment, retraining, revitalizing, or referring before dismissal. Specific guidelines have been set for dismissing a volunteer that must be closely followed.

While the staff member is primarily responsible for the completion of the screening process, the Advisory Board can also have an important role. Let's look at this role in a little more detail.

Objective #5

Explain the 4-H advisory board's role in the volunteer screening process.



What is the 4-H advisory board's role?

- Assist staff member by encouraging all current volunteers to sign the Adult Behavioral Expectations (ABE) form.
- Establish a policy to support the volunteer screening process for all new applicants.
- Document and alert the staff member of any incidents brought to your attention regarding volunteer performance.
- Establish a fair procedure to follow when the behavioral expectations are not followed.



What is the local 4-H Youth Development Advisory Board's role in enforcing the Adult Behavioral Expectations?

Assist staff member with encouraging all current volunteers to sign the Adult Behavioral Expectations (ABE) form.

Establish a policy to support the volunteer screening process for all new applicants.

Document to the staff member any incidents brought to your attention regarding volunteer performance.

Establish a procedure to follow when the behavioral expectations are not followed that is fair to all parties involved (consider grievance/appeal procedures).

By involving others beyond the staff with the screening process, there becomes a need to address confidentiality of information that is submitted during the screening process.

Objective #6

Identify confidentiality issues related to the volunteer screening process.



What confidentiality issues should be considered?

- Inform everyone involved in the volunteer screening process of the importance of confidentiality.
- Keep all forms, applications, notes on references, background checks, and interviews in a file accessible only to 4-H Youth Development personnel or their designees. Volunteers should **not** have access to these files.
- Treat information about why volunteer applicants are accepted or rejected as confidential.
- Permit an applicant to have access only to the materials he/she has completed. Materials provided by others are **not** shared with the applicant/volunteer.



What confidentiality issues should be considered?

All persons involved in the volunteer screening process should be informed of the importance of confidentiality.

All forms, applications, notes on references, background checks and interviews must be kept in a file which can be accessed only by 4-H Youth Development personnel or their designees. Volunteers should **not** have access to these files.

All information about applicants and why they are accepted or rejected as a volunteer must be treated in a confidential manner. Only authorized persons should be involved in discussing questionable applicants. Discretion and privacy must be used when screening and discussing applicants.

An applicant may have access only to the materials he/she has completed. Materials provided by others, including references, committee reports and interview notes, are **not** shared with the applicant/volunteer.

Any person who permits or encourages unauthorized disclosure of confidential information obtained from background checks can be charged with a class misdemeanor.

The important thing to remember is that volunteer files are very similar to personnel files that are kept on employees. Confidentiality of this information is crucial to the credibility of the program.

Volunteer Screening Process Scenarios



Scenarios related to the Volunteer Screening Process

(Each printed on an index card without the explanation/solution)

Directions for Instructor:

Divide the group into small groups of 2-3 and distribute a volunteer screening process scenario card to each small group.

Allow time for each group to discuss its scenario and identify steps they would take if they were in this situation.

Invite each small group to share their scenario and the solution they identified. Allow other small groups to also provide their input.

Summarize the recommended procedure for each of the scenarios before moving to the next one.

Conclude the lesson with a time for questions from the participants.

Refer to lesson plan for individual scenarios and recommended responses to each.

These scenarios with volunteers are ones that may be fairly common in 4-H Youth Development Programs. It is important to be consistent in the implementation of the policies related to volunteer application and screening to maintain the integrity of the program. The guidelines and policies presented in this lesson are designed to protect the well-being of both the 4-H members and the adults who work with them (paid staff and volunteers).

Conclusion and Quiz



This lesson has provided information to staff and volunteers related to the application and screening procedures utilized for volunteers in the 4-H Youth Development Program. Following these procedures will help to ensure that the youth in our programs are well cared for as they participate in 4-H Youth Development activities and events.

Thank the volunteers for their participation.

Sources

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