

**FORMAL SYSTEM FOR RESOLVING
4-H VOLUNTEER PERSONNEL ISSUES**



**Department of 4-H Youth Development
Rutgers Cooperative Extension
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FORMAL SYSTEM FOR RESOLVING 4-H VOLUNTEER PERSONNEL ISSUES

POLICY

On February 4, 1997, the Department of 4-H Youth Development passed a motion to accept the system described in this document for use in resolving issues relating to volunteer personnel issues.

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APPENDIX – Formal System for Resolving 4-H Volunteer Personnel Issues

FORMAL SYSTEM FOR RESOLVING 4-H VOLUNTEER PERSONNEL ISSUES

I. INTRODUCTION

Description and Rationale

The New Jersey 4-H Program policy of volunteer appointment provides a mechanism for the screening, formal appointment and evaluation of 4-H volunteers working with youth in the 4-H Program. When volunteers are performing up to the expectations listed in their volunteer appointment agreements and in accordance with the volunteer standards of behavior, there are few problems. However, when this is not the case, there must be a system in place to enable paid 4-H staff members to try to correct the problems, and, if this does not succeed, to terminate the appointment of the individual as a 4-H volunteer.

The "Formal System for Resolving 4-H Volunteer Personnel Issues" addresses the identification and documentation of issues, methods to resolve issues, a process by which the volunteer may appeal the paid 4-H staff member's decision, and steps to follow to terminate the volunteer's appointment. *This system is designed to address volunteer personnel issues only, not program issues.*

Purpose of the System

The primary purpose of this system is to resolve issues which affect the volunteer's performance in effectively working with youth, other volunteers, and/or the segment of the county 4-H program with which the volunteer is involved. The preferred outcome is the resolution of the problem and retention of the volunteer. When it appears that a resolution cannot be achieved, the system provides a means for termination.

When to Use the System

This system should be used when it first becomes evident that a 4-H volunteer is not performing up to the expectations and standards of behavior listed in the appointment agreement. Examples include:

- ***Unsatisfactory performance:*** Inability or refusal to complete assignments or attend training, disregard for policy, refusal to accept supervision or cooperate with other volunteers or staff, inappropriate, discourteous or unsportsmanlike behavior or language.
- ***Misconduct:*** Physical or verbal abuse of youth or other adults, substance abuse, committing a criminal act, misuse of funds, irresponsible handling of animals, vehicles or machinery.

II. PREVENTION VIA GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The most important step in dealing with volunteer issues may be to prevent them from happening in the first place. Applying the following good volunteer management practices will help you to keep this document on the shelf and out of use:

- **Screen All Volunteers:** Make sure that all volunteers have been fully screened prior to hiring, using standard reference forms.
- **Obtain Signed Volunteer Agreements:** Make sure that all volunteers complete and sign a volunteer appointment agreement prior to working with a 4-H club. Review the form with them in person to ensure that they have a good understanding of each of the items.
- **Provide Position Descriptions:** Develop position descriptions cooperatively with all volunteers; provide training to ensure that they understand each responsibility.
- **Conduct Thorough Orientation and Training:** Provide a thorough orientation to all prospective volunteers. Offer regular training to all volunteers on current topics.
- **Evaluate Performance and Provide Feedback:** Develop a method for regular evaluation of volunteer performance for all of your volunteers. Take the opportunity to observe volunteer performance when possible and provide feedback as appropriate.
- **Resolve Issues Quickly:** Work to resolve issues as soon as you become aware of them. Sitting on a problem only gives it a chance to grow more serious.
- **Provide Adequate Recognition:** Demonstrate your appreciation for the efforts of volunteers. Formal recognition, such as recognition events, awards, news articles and thank you letters may be important for some volunteers, while others appreciate a kind word or a nice compliment about their work.

III. IDENTIFICATION AND DOCUMENTATION OF ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

Identification of the Issue

- **Periodic Evaluation:** Periodic evaluation of all volunteers will assist identifying possible trouble spots in volunteer performance. Maintaining a system of evaluation will also justify conducting an evaluation of an individual you may have reason to believe, but no actual documentation, is having or causing a problem.
- **Observation:** You may have observed a volunteer engaging in inappropriate or disruptive behavior. If possible, gently and privately correct the individual during the "teachable moment" or as soon as possible to keep this behavior from escalating.
- **Third Party Reports:** You may receive reports from other staff, volunteers, or youth regarding the volunteer's behavior. Do not treat these as fact, but try to further investigate and be sure to document all reports (see below).

Documentation

- **Anecdotal Records/Verbatim:** Keep written notes of personal observations, personal conversations with volunteer or person making a complaint about the volunteer (in person or on phone). Date and record time of conversation or observation. Record details. Keep these records and all materials provided by others and the volunteer in the volunteer's folder.

- **Public Record:** Arrests and/or convictions are usually public record. Keep newspaper reports and accounts. If you have definite, verifiable information that a volunteer has been arrested for behavior that would put youth, other adults, and program in jeopardy; you may ask the volunteer to produce proof that all charges were dropped.

IV. STEPS FOR RESOLVING THE ISSUE

Step 1: Consulting with Regional 4-H Agent

During or upon completion of documentation of a problem with a volunteer, consult with the Regional 4-H Agent to discuss the situation and a range of possible solutions (see below). The regional agent may, in turn, consult with the Department Chair for advice and guidance in how to proceed.

Step 2: Meeting with the Volunteer to Cooperatively Design a Plan for Resolving Issue

Arrange to meet with the volunteer in a formal setting (4-H Office or a neutral location) to discuss the issues and to cooperatively work out a solution. If you feel that the situation demands a third party to be present to objectively record notes or for personal safety, let the volunteer know ahead of time that this individual will be involved. The third party should be a non-4-H Extension staff person from your county or a 4-H staff person from another county. This person should not be a volunteer.

At the meeting, describe the issue clearly, providing the volunteer with documentation as needed and/or appropriate (be sure not to breach confidentiality of discussions with others in providing this information). Refer to volunteer's 4-H Volunteer Appointment Agreement to explain how the problem behavior is in conflict with the agreement and how the volunteer is not meeting expectations outlined.

Review possible solutions with the volunteer, including the following actions you may wish to take:

- **Re-supervise the volunteer.** Volunteer may simply need to be reminded of rules/procedures and why they must be followed.
- **Re-train the volunteer.** Some performance problems may be the result of ignorance. Volunteer may just need reminding or may need more extensive training.
- **Re-motivate the volunteer.** The volunteer may be suffering from boredom or loss of enthusiasm. Re-interest volunteers by giving them a new challenge or suggest a sabbatical during which they can refresh their outlook.
- **Re-assign the volunteer.** This could be a case of mismatched personalities, or the wrong person in the wrong volunteer position. Consider moving the volunteer to a new position for which there is a more suitable match in skills, interests, and needs. Consider moving the volunteer or others concerned when it is a matter of mismatched personalities.
- **Refer the volunteer to another agency.** Perhaps there is a more suitable placement for the volunteer at another agency, where their talents and interests can more productively be utilized.
- **Retire the volunteer with honor.** Arrange for special recognition, honoring the contribution they have given. This formal, but honorable, separation allows the volunteer to leave without guilt.

- ***Suspend the volunteer.*** If the case involves a criminal charge or behavior which may threaten the safety and well-being of others, you may need to suspend the volunteer from all 4-H activities and volunteer roles until the issue is resolved.

Once you and the volunteer have agreed on the step or steps to be taken, at the end of the individual's 4-H Volunteer Appointment Agreement or on a separate page attached to the agreement, write or type in any actions required on the part of the volunteer, and your part if applicable, to resolve the problem. This statement should include a time frame by which improvement should be made and a tentative date for evaluation of progress. This should be dated and signed by both you and the volunteer. Except in the case of suspension, the volunteer is considered to be on probation until the evaluation meeting is held.

If an agreement cannot be reached at this time, inform the volunteer that they may choose to resign from the position; if not, they will be suspended from all volunteer activities, and steps may be taken to terminate the volunteer appointment (see Section IV). Also inform the volunteer that they may appeal this decision by contacting the 4-H Department Chair by letter (see Section V).

Step 3: Evaluating Volunteer Progress

On the appointed date of the evaluation, meet face to face in a formal situation to review the progress made. Possible outcomes include:

- ***Expectations Met.*** The volunteer has met all expectations and is re-instated completely.
- ***Expectations Partially Met.*** The volunteer has partially met expectations and agrees to continue to try to meet expectations, while remaining on probation. Another date for a meeting to evaluate progress is set.
- ***Expectations Not Met.*** The volunteer has not and/or does not intend to meet expectations. Inform the volunteer that they may choose to resign from the position; if not, they will be suspended from all volunteer activities, and steps may be taken to terminate the volunteer appointment. Also, inform the volunteer that they may appeal this decision by contacting the 4-H Department Chair by letter.

Following the evaluation meeting, write a letter to the volunteer confirming the outcomes discussed at the meeting.

V. VOLUNTEER APPEAL PROCESS

At any stage of the process to address an issue, a volunteer may wish to file an appeal. This appeal shall be resolved as soon as possible, with all efforts made to complete the process within one month of its initiation by the volunteer. The 4-H staff member's decision regarding the volunteer will hold until the appeal process is completed.

Regional Volunteer Personnel Committees

Two Regional Volunteer Personnel Committees, North and South, will be formed. The duties of the committee will include reviewing appeals presented by volunteers and reviewing any related situation brought to them by the 4-H Department Chair.

Each committee will consist of three faculty or staff from the region and the Regional 4-H Agent, who will be responsible for convening and chairing the committee. Committee members will be assigned on a rotating basis by county, for a two-year term, with overlapping terms. Alternates will be assigned as needed from remaining counties.

Step 1: Initiation of an Appeal

The volunteer desiring an appeal must submit a request in writing to the 4-H Department Chair.

The Department Chair will notify the appropriate Regional 4-H Agent, who will convene a meeting of Regional Volunteer Personnel Committee and gather all documentation from the volunteer and county 4-H staff involved. The chair will also write a letter to the volunteer confirming receipt of the letter and providing an outline of the process.

Step 2: Regional Volunteer Personnel Committee Review

The Regional Volunteer Personnel Committee will review all documentation. The review process may consist of any of the following actions:

- *The committee meets once and makes a decision based on information presented.*
- *The committee meets once and decides that more information is needed. The committee will then schedule a second meeting, at which time they will meet separately with the volunteer and the staff member. The committee makes a decision at the end of second meeting.*
- *The committee holds two meetings (including meeting with the volunteer and staff member) and decides more information is still needed. Following appropriate information-gathering, a third meeting is scheduled when the decision is made.*
- *The committee holds two meetings (including meeting with the volunteer and staff member) and agrees to forward the information to the 4-H Department Chair, who will make the decision.*

Step 3: Follow Up by Regional Agent

Following the committee's decision, the Regional 4-H Agent will contact each party involved by phone or in person to inform them of the decision. The Regional 4-H Agent will then follow up with a letter confirming the decision in writing to both parties, with a copy to the 4-H Department Chair. If the volunteer wishes to appeal, he/she proceeds to Step 4 (see below).

If the 4-H staff member's original decision is reversed or changed in any way, the Regional 4-H Agent will schedule a face-to-face meeting with both parties together. The primary purpose is to clear the air, repair the relationship, and discuss recommendations of the regional committee and ways to improve the staff/volunteer working relationship.

Step 4: Appeal to Department Chair

If the volunteer wishes to appeal the regional committee's decision, they must contact the 4-H Department Chair in writing. Within two weeks of receiving this request, the chair will make a decision using methods he or she deems appropriate. The chair will contact both parties by phone or in person with the

decision and will follow up with a letter confirming the decision in writing (copy to the regional agent). If the 4-H staff member's original decision is reversed or changed in any way, the 4-H Department Chair will instruct the Regional 4-H Agent to meet with both parties together (see above).

VI. TERMINATION OF VOLUNTEER APPOINTMENT

Step 1: Consultation with Department Chair

After following the procedures for resolving the issue, if the staff member wishes to terminate the volunteer's appointment, he or she should consult with the 4-H Department Chair to provide documentation and to decide the best way to proceed.

Step 2: Department Chair Action

The 4-H Department Chair will review all information, resulting in one of the following outcomes:

- ***Refer back to Regional Agent or Committee.*** The chair may refer the problem back to the Regional 4-H Agent or Regional Volunteer Personnel Committee to review the information and determine if all steps have been taken to resolve the problem. If it is decided that more steps toward resolution can be made, the regional agent will work with the 4-H staff member toward that end.
- ***Decision to Terminate.*** The chair may decide that termination is appropriate and consult with Risk Management to confirm that termination is justified. The chair will work with the 4-H staff member and Risk Management to compose appropriate letters, etc.

Step 3: Meeting and Follow Up with Volunteer

The 4-H staff member will arrange to meet with the volunteer in a formal setting (4-H Office or a neutral location) to discuss the issues and to cooperatively work out a solution. If it is felt that the situation demands a third party to be present to objectively record notes or for personal safety, the staff member should make the arrangements and let the volunteer know ahead of time that this individual will be involved. The third party should be a non-4-H Extension staff person from that county or a 4-H staff person from another county. This person should not be a volunteer.

At the meeting, the 4-H staff member will review the steps that have been taken to resolve the issue and will inform the volunteer that, since the issue cannot be resolved to both parties' satisfaction, the volunteer appointment must be terminated. In the discussion, the 4-H staff member should follow these principles:

- ***Be quick, direct and absolute.***
- ***Announce, don't argue.*** If the above steps have been followed, all the necessary discussion has been had and all the necessary facts have been learned. At this point, the staff member is terminating, not fact finding or problem solving.
- ***Do not attempt to counsel or give advice.*** Counseling has already occurred in the steps above. The volunteer will not accept advice from the staff member, as the relationship has now been damaged.

The 4-H staff member will confirm the termination in writing in a letter. This letter should have been prepared and reviewed by the 4-H Department Chair in advance of the meeting. It is important to quickly settle unfinished logistical items to end volunteer's relationship – collect leader's guides, keys, bank accounts, etc.

If the individual will not accept the termination and/or continues to participate in the 4-H program as a "volunteer," the staff member should contact the 4-H Department Chair who will determine appropriate action. At this point, the termination should not be reversed, as approval to proceed should have already been given by the chair and Risk Management.

Policy adopted by the Department of 4-H Youth Development, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, on February 4, 1997. Process developed by a sub-committee of the Adult Volunteer Training & Support Committee, Department of 4-H Youth Development: Rita Natale Saathoff, Betty Ann Smith, Annette Devitt, Ginny Powell, and Karen Mansue. Handbook prepared by Rita Natale Saathoff, Regional 4-H Agent, South. March 1997 – Rev. May 2002. Parts adapted from Dealing With Difficult Volunteers, by Pat Fultz, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Program, Kansas State University, 1994.

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