

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AGRICULTURAL CENTER

Policy Number: AgCenter PS-56

Effective Date: July 1, 2024

Revision Date: N/A

Version: 0

Responsible Office: Director, La. Cooperative Extension Service

Category: Research, Extension & Academics

VOLUNTEERS

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework and direction to staff and volunteers engaged in volunteerism within the educational extension and research programs conducted by the LSU Agricultural Center through the La. Cooperative Extension Service, the La. Agricultural Experiments Stations, and other entities of the agricultural enterprise. These guidelines apply to local, parish, regional, and state level volunteer committees and boards which are working on behalf of the LSU AgCenter. The policy is designed to reduce volunteer risk and protect the interests of the LSU Agricultural Center (LSU AgCenter), its volunteers and the communities it serves.

Certain LSU AgCenter programs have procedures and guidelines created specifically for their volunteer organizations (e.g., the LSU AgCenter 4-H Youth Development Program, the LSU AgCenter Master Gardener Program, etc.). Those procedures and guidelines should be consulted for program-specific information on volunteers.

II. POLICY

The LSU AgCenter highly values the contribution that volunteers make and recognizes the impact they have on clientele and the programs provided by the LSU AgCenter. The LSU AgCenter is committed to assuring that volunteer conduct exemplifies LSU's core values and is congruent with all applicable LSU and LSU AgCenter policies. This policy is intended to help promote a productive, safe, and mutually beneficial environment for volunteers and for LSU AgCenter by setting appropriate expectations and clarifying roles and responsibilities for both volunteers and their sponsoring unit.

III. DEFINITIONS

Volunteer: an individual who contributes time of their own free will, without compensation or expectation of compensation beyond reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses and performs tasks at the direction of and on behalf of the LSU AgCenter. Depending on the type of volunteer, a volunteer will be officially enrolled in LSU AgCenter management systems

such as 4-H online or have been documented through written correspondence or phone records prior to the performance of the task. Volunteers are not employees of the LSU AgCenter.

The LSU AgCenter utilizes volunteers in various manners throughout our programs, those recognized volunteer types are:

- **Long-term Volunteer** – any person engaged in specific volunteer program on an on-going basis.
- **Episodic Volunteer** – any person who provides one-time or infrequent assistance.
- **Master Volunteer** – any person who has completed advanced training in accordance with a specific educational program area and agreed to a voluntary long-term commitment to LSU AgCenter.
- **Overnight Chaperone** – any person who provides guidance and support to youth in an overnight situation who has received training and passed a screening process.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteers will be actively recruited by the LSU AgCenter personnel and when appropriate by LSU AgCenter volunteer staff. Volunteers may be recruited through an interest in a specific role or may be recruited on a general interest and then matched to a specific role.

Persons interested in volunteering will complete an enrollment/registration form, application and/or interview as determined by their specific program area. When appropriate, background and references may be checked, and personal interview(s) may be conducted.

In cases of collaboration, an agreement or memorandum of understanding will be obtained. In cases of episodic volunteer opportunities, the volunteer should be documented through such means as a sign-in sheet, letter of invitation, volunteer work schedule, etc. LSU AgCenter volunteers will be reviewed and may be continued on a periodic basis or as needed. If the service of the volunteer is no longer needed or desired, the AgCenter may elect not to continue the volunteer's appointment. There is no right to be a volunteer and no guarantee that an applicant will be selected as a volunteer.

Volunteers other than episodic ones should have a volunteer service description that includes program name, a location, the duties, basic qualifications, and terms of the commitment. The description should be reviewed, and updated as needed, annually. Both the volunteer and AgCenter employee working with that volunteer should sign the description.

B. Volunteer Screening/Background Check

Volunteers serving with 4-H as club leaders, project leaders, and overnight chaperones will all be subject to a criminal background check prior to being allowed to volunteer for the 4-H program. Volunteers working with school gardens and programs such as Junior Master Gardener may also undergo a background check based on the requirements of the parish

and/or school/organization. The LSU AgCenter reserves the right to expand background checks at any time in an effort to be consistent and protect those in the program.

Volunteers will be subject to a background check every four (4) years, or at any time the AgCenter has been made aware of potential criminal charges. Volunteers are required to disclose and report any arrests or convictions, as well as any traffic violations. While disclosure/reporting of such will not automatically ban the volunteer from serving as a volunteer, it will help the AgCenter make decisions on volunteer duty assignments.

C. Volunteer Placement

Volunteers will be placed in positions, based on their qualifications and the needs of the LSU AgCenter, without regard to race, sex, age, disability, religion, and other protected categories under Louisiana and Federal Law, LSU System PM-55, and AgCenter PS-23. Major volunteer duties will be determined, and training needs assessed.

D. Volunteers Working/Interacting with Youth

Volunteers who serve in a role that's primary duty is to work with youth must review and complete Risk Management training and will be screened and assessed in accordance with applicable laws and/or regulations.

E. Chaperoning Youth

A person must be at least 21 years of age at the time of a 4-H event to serve as an adult overnight chaperone in state. For any out-of-state chaperone responsibility, the person must be a minimum of 25 years of age. **Exception:** If a volunteer is 19 years of age, and one year removed from high school, they may serve as an overnight chaperone at Camp Grant Walker for summer camp under the supervision of an Extension Agent on premises.

F. Orientation

Volunteers, except episodic volunteers, will receive a general orientation to the LSU AgCenter, mission, volunteer guidelines, risk management guidelines, code of ethics and EEO/AA/CR, ADA, and AgCenter PS-15 Workplace Violence, PS-19 Title IX and Sexual Misconduct, and PS-23 Equal Opportunity. All AgCenter policies can be found online at www.lsuagcenter.com/policies. Volunteers will also be asked to complete online orientation and Civil Rights training through <https://learn.lsuagcenter.com> as required by USDA-NIFA. All volunteers will receive an orientation as appropriate for the volunteer task/position and the purposes and requirements of their volunteer service.

G. Code of Conduct

Volunteers are expected to uphold high standards that ensure the safety and well-being of the LSU AgCenter, its staff, volunteers, and clients. Volunteers will uphold all individuals' rights to dignity, self-development, and self-direction.

Volunteers will accept supervision and support from Extension professionals while involved in the program. Volunteers will accept the responsibility to positively represent the LSU AgCenter during the tenure and duration of their volunteer engagement.

Volunteers will conduct themselves in a courteous, caring, responsible manner with a focus on respect, trustworthiness, fairness, and good citizenship. Volunteers are expected to respect, adhere to, and enforce the rules, policies and guidelines set forth by the LSU AgCenter and any programs that they are specifically assigned to. Volunteers shall comply with all applicable laws and ordinances and are expected to comply with equal opportunity and antidiscrimination laws. Volunteers may be asked to operate machinery, vehicles, and other equipment, when applicable and if qualified, in a responsible and safe manner. Volunteers are charged with performing their duties in a responsible and timely manner.

Both a youth and adult code of conduct will be provided to those volunteers serving with the 4-H Youth Development Program.

H. Supervision & Training

Each volunteer shall have an identified supervisor. The supervisor shall be responsible for on-going guidance and assistance. A volunteer may act as a supervisor of other volunteers, provided that the supervising volunteer is under the supervision of a salaried staff member of the LSU AgCenter (or SU agent in a joint LSU/SU extension office).

Volunteers shall receive specific training to provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary to perform their volunteer assignment. The time, delivery methods and content of this training will be consistent with the demands of the volunteer position and the experience of the volunteer. A record of training received including the training title and date, should be kept on the volunteer by the LSU AgCenter through methods such as attendance lists, in an enrollment program, etc.

LSU AgCenter staff and volunteers are expected to review, recognize, and assess volunteer contributions and impact to the accomplishment of the program goals. Staff should document volunteer involvement in annual reports and other documents. Volunteers may be recognized, as appropriate, for their contributions throughout their tenure with LSU AgCenter.

I. Access to LSU AgCenter Property and Materials

When appropriate, LSU AgCenter volunteers may have access to LSU AgCenter property and materials necessary to fulfill their duties and shall receive training in the use of any equipment. AgCenter property and other resources may only be used for official AgCenter business.

J. Contracts

Volunteers are not authorized to sign any contract and/or make any representation on behalf of the LSU AgCenter which obligates the University.

K. Fundraising

Fundraising programs led by LSU AgCenter volunteers or non-incorporated informal volunteer groups must obtain written permission of the appropriate Cooperative Extension office. Approval of the Parish Extension office is required if the fundraising program is confined to a parish.

Approval of the Regional Office is required if the fundraising is multi-parish.

Approval of the LSU AgCenter Department or Unit is required if the fundraising is multi-parish or statewide. State-incorporated volunteer organizations shall get written permission from the appropriate LSU AgCenter unit if their fundraising uses an AgCenter name and/or 4-H name/emblem or implies that the funds are being raised for an AgCenter related project.

L. Review of Volunteer Activities

LSU AgCenter Staff members are encouraged and expected to provide formal and informal feedback regarding a volunteer's performance on a periodic basis. Evaluative comments should be focused on supporting the growth and development of the volunteer and the LSU AgCenter program.

M. Termination of a Volunteer's Service

A volunteer may need to be relieved of specific duties due to changes in volunteer staffing needs or when the volunteer's activities are not consistent with the LSU AgCenter mission, do not follow LSU AgCenter program policies or do not otherwise meet AgCenter needs.

Volunteers serve at the sole discretion of the LSU AgCenter. The LSU AgCenter may at any time, and/or for any reason, decide to terminate a volunteer's relationship with the organization or to make changes in their volunteer assignment.

Before discontinuing an individual's volunteer status altogether, the responsible employee shall notify and/or obtain approval from his/her supervisor, and in most cases, notify the volunteer in writing. The decision regarding the volunteer's participation will be final.

In cases of allegations of illegal or criminal acts by a volunteer, the volunteer's supervisor should notify the AgCenter Human Resource Management (HRM) Office or, in the case of a volunteer in the 4-H area, the LCES Associate Director for Youth Development or their designee. These offices will help in determining the next step, which may include internal investigation or notification of appropriate legal authorities. (An exception is when there is an immediate threat where a delay in notification of authorities might cause further threat to health, welfare, or property.) If this occurs, the administration must be informed and shall determine whether the volunteer's service should be suspended temporarily until the allegations have been proved or disproved.

N. Immediate Removal of an Adult from an Event

Any adult may be required to immediately leave any 4-H function for using abusive language, threatening any individual, becoming violent, causing, or threatening bodily harm to any minor (including their own child) or adult or exhibiting signs of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

O. Confidentiality

Staff shall retain all volunteer records in a confidential manner. Volunteers shall be responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all privileged information to which they are

exposed while serving as an AgCenter volunteer in accordance with laws and regulations. This information may include health conditions, child/sexual abuse, and legal issues.

P. Liability issues

Records shall be maintained on each LSU AgCenter volunteer by the department with whom they are working for purposes of liability, insurance, reporting, in-kind documentation and/or volunteer management tracking. Suggested records include the application/ enrollment, documentation in support of these forms such as dates of service, training and duties performed. Screening records (not including criminal background checks), Code of Conduct Forms, volunteer service descriptions, vehicle records and other program requirements will be included as appropriate. Records shall be maintained for as long as the volunteer is active with the LSU AgCenter and at least 5 years after disassociation with the LSU AgCenter.

All authorized LSU AgCenter volunteers are covered by liability insurance when working on AgCenter property and in the course and scope of their duties as a volunteer. Liability insurance is subject to the applicable policy provisions and exclusions. Volunteers are expected to complete the LSU AgCenter Annual Hold Harmless Agreement (Appendix A) and submit it to their supervisor prior to performing the volunteer duties each year.

Volunteers shall submit to the appropriate office (prior to the event) a summary of their planned activities. This information needs to include A) Name of the event; B) Date of the Event; C) Club or Group Name; D) Name of Volunteers/ Coordinators; E) Location of the Event and F) Estimated Number of Participants.

Volunteers who meet the requirements of this policy are not considered employees for any purpose other than general liability protection. They are not eligible for retirement nor health benefits.

Volunteer workers may be covered for medical expenses related to injuries that occur during approved volunteer activities. Departments or units engaging volunteers are responsible for maintaining the names of all volunteers, their dates, locations, and hours worked and description of volunteer responsibility.

Volunteers are required to report any work-related illness or injury to their supervisor immediately. Final determination of coverage is made by the State Office of Risk Management on a case-by-case basis.

A volunteer is expected to provide non-biased, research-based information consistent with LSU AgCenter recommendations to the public with no intended endorsements of specific products, companies, or services.

In making diagnosis and recommendations, including those which include pesticides and fertilizers, food preparation and preservation, and health and nutrition, volunteers shall follow published LSU AgCenter recommendations and manufacturers labels. Use of other recommendations is not approved unless permission is granted by a qualified Extension faculty member. When reading a recommendation to a client, one shall read it in its entirety.

No omissions are allowed under any circumstances. Handwritten recommendations are not approved. All commercial, production and business questions are to be referred to a qualified Extension faculty member.

Volunteers should not be expected to and are not permitted to answer questions outside their area of expertise or training. This normally would include not answering questions concerning medical or legal questions, determining if a questionable food or plant is edible, hazardous tree evaluation, household and structural pests, any questions not specifically covered by LSU AgCenter recommendations, and all questions initiated by any commercial concern.

V. EXCEPTIONS

There are no exceptions to this policy.

VI. VIOLATIONS

Any AgCenter volunteer or employee who is determined to have violated this policy is subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination. LSU AgCenter supports an environment free from retaliation. Retaliation against any employee who brings forth a good faith concern, asks a clarifying question, or participates in an investigation is prohibited.

VII. RESOURCES

- LSU 4-H Youth and Development Program (Volunteer Resources)
https://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/kids_teens
- LSU AgCenter Master Volunteer Programs
<https://www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/extension/master-volunteer-programs>



Appendix A

ANNUAL HOLD HARMLESS WAIVER & RELEASE FORM

I understand that I hold the LSU Agricultural Center (AgCenter), the LSU College of Agriculture, the Board of Supervisors of Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, State of Louisiana, State Department, Agency, Board or Commission or authorized driver thereof, and any affiliated entity, their officers, agents, employees and volunteers (collectively referred to as "Released Parties") harmless from any and all liability or claims, which may arise out of or in connection with participation in any sale, activity, contest, event or trip. I release from all liability for damages arising out of personal injury to participant (including death) or any damage to property whether from anyone's negligence or not, or any other cause arising out of my participation in any and all LSU AgCenter Activities. I will keep the Released Parties by this agreement free of any damages or costs, including but not limited to attorney's fees that may arise from any claims.

I fully understand that participants are to abide by all rules and regulations, INCLUDING WEARING ANY NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE SAFETY EQUIPMENT, governing conduct during the sale, activity, contest, event or trip. Any violation of these rules and regulations may result in that individual being sent home at their personal expense or the expense of his/her parent/guardian. Misconduct, which includes but is not limited to any drug or alcohol use at the sale, activity, contest, event, or trip, during competition or in activities or locations related to or surrounding the event, may disqualify a volunteer from further participation. Should any misconduct come to AgCenter's attention, the matter will be investigated as the AgCenter deems appropriate. Any decision and sanction as to appropriate action due to misconduct is at the sole discretion of the LSU AgCenter and is final. The participant/volunteer accepts this requirement as well as all other conditions of the program.

I acknowledge that I may be a passenger in a state-owned vehicle or a vehicle rented (including travel by air), leased or otherwise made available to the Released Parties. I acknowledge being transported in a vehicle or by airplane is a potentially dangerous activity. I fully realize the physical risks involved, and further acknowledge that this risk, and the danger associated with this activity, is obvious to all persons. I nevertheless willingly and voluntarily be transported in said vehicle or airplane and expressly accept the risks inherent therein.

I state further that I have read the above authorization and release, prior to its execution, and that I am fully familiar with the contents thereof. This form must be completed and signed before volunteers are eligible to assist or work at any LSU AgCenter sponsored sale, activity, contest, event, or trip. I have read, understand, and agree to comply with the information in this document. (Parent or guardian must sign for those under the age of 18.) Hold Harmless Participant Waiver & Release Form shall be considered valid for a period of one (1) year from the date of signature.

_____ Participant Name	_____ Parent/Guardian Name
_____ Participant Signature (if participant is age 18 or above)	_____ Parent/Guardian Signature* (if participant under 18)
_____ Home Address	_____ Parish/Program
_____ City, State, Zip	_____ Phone Number

***I am fully authorized and empowered to sign this agreement.**

The LSU AgCenter strives to be an open and inclusive program. If specific accommodations are needed for a volunteer with physical, learning, or psychological needs under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), please visit www.LSUAgCenter.com/ADA for more information.

The LSU AgCenter provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.