



Volunteer Administration in the 21st Century:

Roles Volunteers Play in Texas Extension

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Volunteers are one of Texas Extension's most valuable assets. Volunteers help us

- reach more people in Texas;
- ensure that our programs are relevant;
- deliver Extension education; and
- interpret the value of Extension to others.

Ellis (1996) identified seven ways volunteers support the organizations they serve.

- **Volunteers extend your sphere of influence and access.**

Volunteers have a ripple effect by extending our services to more people, helping Extension achieve its goals, and multiplying the effect of Extension programs.

- **Receiving assistance from a volunteer makes a difference to the recipient.**

Sometimes participants in educational programs feel more comfortable learning from volunteers than from staff members because volunteers are more like them. Thus, there may be a more direct connection between the volunteer and the learner.

- **Volunteers are both insiders and outsiders.**

While volunteers understand the internal functions of the organization very well, they do not have to be as concerned as staff members are with the daily functioning of the organization. This allows volunteers to be more creative in generating new ideas and approaches.

- **Volunteers bring the luxury of focus.**

Most staff members must tend to a variety of responsibilities. A volunteer can focus on a specific task for an extended period of time.

- **Volunteers have less pressure and stress because they are not dependent upon the organization for their livelihood.**

Volunteers can do the work that is of interest to them and devote the amount of time they choose to their volunteer work.

- **Volunteers have credibility because they are unsalaried.**

Paid staff members quite naturally have a vested interest in the organization's success and, there-

fore, are sometimes perceived to be less than objective about the organization. Volunteers sometimes have more credibility with legislatures and stakeholders because they receive no monetary reward from the organization.

- **Volunteers can experiment with new ideas and take more risk.**

Volunteers often help organizations by pioneering new services and programs because they can be creative without the fear of trying ideas that may fail.

Volunteerism in Extension

Mobilizing and organizing a strong volunteer base is essential to the mission of Texas Extension, which has the largest volunteer program of any agency in Texas. With increasing competition for resources, it is even more important that we recruit and supervise volunteers wisely so that we can sustain current programs and partnerships and develop new opportunities. Our future success will depend on our ability to expand our outreach and our programming. Volunteers are the resource that will help us do that. In fact, volunteers are the real heart and hands of many different Extension programs. They are already extending the reach of Extension into many communities and neighborhoods in Texas.

Extension volunteers help people gain knowledge and skills that will benefit them for life. In return, volunteers have the satisfaction of knowing they are making a difference for their friends and neighbors. Much of the work Extension volunteers do grows out of the interests and experiences they bring to the task, but they also receive training from experts in various disciplines. Thus, volunteers improve their own skills while helping others.

Defining the volunteer administrator

All of us are somehow connected to volunteers. In Extension, volunteers help provide vision for our work, assist with fund raising, help plan and implement educational programs, serve as advocates for Extension, chaperone events, and assist in many other ways. But are we properly preparing volunteers to support the vision and mission of Texas Cooperative Extension?

It is the responsibility of the volunteer administrator to make sure volunteers will be successful. Each of us who works with volunteers is a volunteer ad-

ministrator. According to Fisher and Cole (1993), a volunteer administrator leads and manages individuals who are providing a service of their own free will. A volunteer administrator decides what needs to be done, creates networks of people and relationships that can accomplish a task, and then tries to ensure that those people actually get the job done. (Kotter,1990).

Being an effective volunteer administrator

There are four main competencies required of volunteer administrators. (These are the basis of certification by the American Volunteer Association.)

- Program Planning and Organization
- Staffing and Directing
- Controlling and Maintenance
- Agency, Community and Professional Relations

When a volunteer administrator has these competencies, he or she can help each individual volunteer have a successful experience. Communication between the volunteer administrator and the volunteer is essential. The volunteer administrator must be sure the volunteer understands the work he or she is being asked to do, the supervision he or she will receive, and the way the work will be evaluated. *The Volunteer Administrator Checklist with Individual Volunteer*, page 5, can help you ensure that volunteers understand their roles and the expectations involved in their service to Texas Extension.

Program Planning and Organization. As the volunteer administrator, you must first be able to clearly define the mission and vision of the agency for the volunteer. This helps the volunteer understand how he or she fits into the whole. Once the vision and mission are clear, you must define the goals of the volunteer group and explain the steps to take in reaching the goals.

Staffing and Directing. This could be the most important of the four competencies because it deals specifically with personnel. It includes critical functions such as writing volunteer position descriptions, recruiting and screening prospective volunteers, training volunteers for their assignments, and supervising their work.

Controlling and Maintenance. In this context, the word “controlling” does NOT have a negative connotation. It simply means that the volunteer administrator must monitor the performance of volunteers and ensure that high-quality work is be-

ing done. Two major functions included here are evaluation and responding to the results of evaluation. For most of us, the evaluation component is not difficult. We can design evaluation methods for measuring the effectiveness of the volunteer's work. However, communicating the results to the volunteer can be difficult. We may be reluctant to criticize the work of someone who is offering a service for free. Yet we must think about the end user or recipient of the service. If a volunteer is not carrying out the responsibilities outlined in the position description, we owe it to the end user to correct the situation.

Agency, Community and Professional Relations. As volunteer administrators we wear several hats. We are employees of Texas Extension and should represent the agency in an effective and professional manner. We are also representatives of our communities and of our professions. We must use good interpersonal skills, communicate effectively, and develop relationships and partnerships that can help us achieve the mission of Extension. Some of the skills we need are the ability to solve problems, manage conflict, listen actively, and give constructive feedback.

It is important that we evaluate ourselves and then work to develop the competencies we need to be effective volunteer administrators.

Roles for Extension volunteers

Volunteers are a tremendous resource. Their skills and experiences can contribute significantly to the success of Extension programs and activities. Volunteers may come from student groups, businesses, and civic organizations. They may be referred by the courts for community service. Or, they may be individuals who offer technical assistance in a particular field.

There are six major volunteer categories in Extension:

- Leadership Advisory Boards
- Program Area Committees and Youth Boards
- Associations and groups
- Master volunteers
- Random volunteers
- Youth volunteers

Leadership Advisory Boards are diverse groups of volunteers who are responsible for the overall Extension programs in their counties. They provide the vision and long-term planning for Extension activities, serve as advocates for the county pro-

gram, help interpret the program throughout the county, and help develop resources to support Extension programs.

Program Area Committees advise the county agents who plan, implement and evaluate educational programs in specific program areas. These areas are agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and community development. **Youth Boards** advise the county agents who work in the area of 4-H and youth development.

Associations and groups are networks of volunteers with similar interests and skills who come together for a common cause. It is important that these groups receive training and support, and that their service be directed to areas where their skills can be best used.

Master volunteers may be organized into associations or chapters. These are individuals who have met the criteria for certification as master volunteers in Texas Extension. Master volunteers

- have completed at least 20 hours of specialized training in a particular subject,
- are able to lead educational programs in the subject,
- commit to giving at least 50 hours of service in the specific subject (or a combined total of 80 hours with training), and
- have a position description on file.

Random volunteers are individuals who help with a single activity, event or program, or who volunteer for a limited time. Examples include fair judges, workshop presenters, or helpers at educational events.

Youth volunteers are persons under the age of 18 who serve as volunteers in any of the other categories.

To gather information about prospective volunteers and their interests, use the *Volunteer Interest Form* on page 6.

When defining the roles of volunteers, it is also helpful to distinguish between direct and indirect volunteers.

A direct volunteer

- has face-to-face contact with an Extension audience;
- provides direct education for adults or youth;
- has an individual application on file with the appropriate program area; and
- has a position description on file.

Examples are club managers, project leaders, camp counselors, teachers, coaches and master volunteers.

An indirect volunteer

- does not have face-to-face contact with an Extension audience;
- does not provide direct education for youth or adults;
- has an individual application on file with the appropriate program area; and
- has a position description on file.

Examples are youth and adult board members, committee members, livestock show board members and donors.

Summary

It is important that each of us become a good volunteer administrator so that Extension volunteers can be successful in their important roles. Volunteers will help Extension grow and provide essential programs for the people of Texas.

Additional reading

Ellis, S. (1996). *From the Top Down*. Philadelphia, PA: Energize, Inc.

Fisher, J. C. and K. M. Cole. (1993). *Leadership and Management of Volunteer Programs: A Guide for Volunteer Administrators*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Kotter, J. P. (1990). *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Other publications in this series on volunteer administration:

D-1452, *Leadership Advisory Boards*

D-1453, *Program Area Committees and Youth Boards*

D-1454, *Volunteer Associations and Groups*

D-1455, *Understanding and Managing Direct and Episodic Volunteers*

D-1456, *Managing the Risk Associated with Volunteer Service*



Cooperative Extension Program
Prairie View A&M University

Volunteer Administrator Checklist with Individual Volunteer

Research has indicated that if volunteer administrators understand and have these four competencies—Program Planning and Organization; Staffing and Directing; Controlling and Maintenance; and Agency, Community and Professional Relations—they will be able to work more effectively with volunteers. Clearly defined expectations are important to a volunteer’s success. This checklist will help the volunteer administrator connect the four competencies with the individual expectations of volunteers.

Volunteer’s name: _____

Type of volunteer: (circle one)

- Leadership Advisory Board
- Program Area Committee/Youth Board
- Association/Chapter
- Master Volunteer
- Random Volunteer
- Youth Volunteer

What is the volunteer’s role? _____

Questions	Yes	No
Program Planning and Organization Can this volunteer clearly define the mission and vision of Texas Extension?		
Staffing and Directing Does this volunteer understand the position description?		
Staffing and Directing Does the job assignment require screening to satisfy the Youth Protection Standards?		
Staffing and Directing Has this volunteer been adequately trained to carry out the volunteer assignment?		
Staffing and Directing Is there proper supervision to meet this volunteer’s needs?		
Controlling Is there an evaluation process in place to measure the effect of this volunteer?		
Controlling Is this volunteer aware of the evaluation process?		
Agency, Community and Professional Relations Does this volunteer have the necessary skills to solve problems when conflict arises.		
Agency, Community and Professional Relations Does this volunteer demonstrate effective interpersonal skills?		
Agency, Community and Professional Relations Does this volunteer have the skills to offer feedback to other volunteers?		

These questions are designed to help the volunteer administrator think through the four competencies with each individual volunteer so that the volunteer has a solid foundation for his or her work on behalf of Texas Extension.



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Volunteer Interest Form

Thanks for your interest in helping others by being a Texas Extension volunteer. Completing this form is the first step.

Name (First/Middle/Last)	Date:
Street address:	Evening phone number:
City/State/Zip	Daytime phone number:
Texas driver's license	Date of birth:

Availability (Circle one)

Long term (More than one year)

Short term (Less than one year)

Special project

Skills and Interest

Current/Previous work or occupation	
Previous volunteer experience	What?
	Where?
Hobbies, interests, skills	
Special training, certification	
Who or what prompted you to volunteer?	

Categories of Volunteers in Texas Extension (Check the box for the category that interests you.)

- Leadership Advisory Board** – A volunteer group that advises Extension faculty in planning the county Extension program.
- Program Area Committee / Youth Board** – Volunteer groups that assist county Extension agents with programs in specific areas. The four program areas are agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth development, and community development.
- Associations and Chapter Groups** – Networks of volunteers with similar interests and education who come together for a common cause.
- Master Volunteers** – Volunteers who meet the following criteria: 1) complete 20 or more hours of specialized training in a subject; 2) are able to help lead educational activities in the subject; 3) commit to return 50 or more hours of service in that area (or a combined total of 80 hours with training).
- Random Volunteer** – One who volunteers for a single activity, event or program or for a limited time.
- Youth Volunteer** – A person under the age of 18 who assumes the responsibilities of one of the volunteer categories.

Please return this form to the county Extension office.

This material was developed by the Texas Cooperative Extension Volunteer Steering Committee, chaired by Chris Boleman and Angela Burkham. Extension faculty who serve on the committee are Dirk Aaron, Michelle Allen, Joyce Cavanagh, Nelson Daniels, Darrell Dromgoole, Linda Lynch Evans, Alma Fonseca, Pam Foster, Elaine Fries, Richie Griffin, Rick Hirsch, Kit Horne, Shirley Long, Rick Machen, Linda Mock, Carolyn Nobles, Susan Richey, Bob Robinson, Renee Sanders, Robert Scott, Doug Welsh, Neal Wilkins and Ron Woolley. Administrative advisors are Kyle Smith, Associate Director for County Programs, and Martha Couch, Associate Director for 4-H and Youth Development.

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