

**Youth Protection Standards**

**Qualifications of Volunteers**

**2008-2009**

**Rules and Guidelines**

**Texas AgriLife Extension Service  
Youth Protection Standards  
Rules and Guidelines**

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## **I. Who is screened through YPS?**

### **A. All direct volunteers**

1. All direct volunteers who work with youth and adults should be screened through the Youth Protection Standards Program. See Attachment A.
2. Initial screening of a volunteer is conducted when he/she applies for a volunteer role with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Volunteers must be screened prior to fulfilling any volunteer roles.
3. Re-screening through the YPS program is conducted every three years from the volunteer's most recent screening.

### **B. Who is a direct volunteer?**

A direct volunteer is any adult who meets the following criteria:

1. Provides unpaid support for Extension through face-to-face contact;
2. Provides a learning experience for adults or youth within Extension;
3. Has an individual volunteer application on file with the appropriate program areas;
4. Has a position description on file; and
5. Has passed a criminal background check within the past three years.

### **C. Are overnight or driving chaperones screened?**

Yes! Individuals who are driving youth or chaperoning youth for overnight events are considered direct volunteers and must be screened and cleared through the Youth Protection Standards Program prior to serving as a volunteer.

***Examples:*** Texas 4-H Roundup Chaperone, a driver to Texas Teen Retreat, helping lead a workshop at Texas 4-H SpecTra, 4-H Club Manager, Livestock Mentor, 4-H project leader, or Master Volunteer, etc.

## **II. Volunteer Forms**

- A. All 4-H volunteers must complete and submit a Texas 4-H Adult Volunteer Application (4-H 2-1.056).
- B. All Master Volunteers must complete and submit a Volunteer Background Check Form (E-446).
- C. All forms are available at: <http://texas4-h.tamu.edu/publications/> or <http://texasvolunteer.tamu.edu/yps.htm> and at the AgriLife Bookstore.

***Note:*** It is important that volunteers are provided with the current year forms in order to complete the criminal background check, as the forms are updated annually.

## **III. Screening**

### **A. What kind of criminal background check is conducted?**

1. A national criminal background check is conducted through the Volunteer Center of North Texas. This is a nonprofit group designated through legislation that all state agencies with volunteers must use to conduct background searches.
2. The criminal background check is a national search of forty-eight (48) jurisdictions and state and national sex offender lists.

**B. What information is required for screening?**

1. Full, legal name (first, middle and last)
2. Address
3. Date of Birth
4. Gender
5. Race/Ethnicity (Although optional, this helps affirm the volunteer's identity.)
6. First five digits of social security number
7. Driver's License number (Although optional, this helps affirm the volunteer's identity.)

**Note:** All information is a determining factor that helps confirm the volunteer's identity when a background check is completed.

**C. How much does the screening cost?**

1. The cost of screening is \$10.00 per volunteer.
2. One check per county submission is required from the appropriate volunteer group or association.
3. Checks should be made payable to Extension Account #255003.
4. Each county, club and/or association is responsible for determining how to cover the cost associated with screening volunteers.
5. Screening of volunteers is not conducted until payment is received in the Office of Volunteer Development.

**D. When is screening conducted?**

1. Initial screening of a volunteer is conducted when he/she applies for a volunteer role with Extension.

**Note:** Volunteers must be screened prior to fulfilling any volunteer roles.

2. Re-screening through the YPS program is conducted every three years from the volunteer's most recent screening.
3. No grand fathering of volunteers is allowed in the YPS program.
4. Volunteer applications are processed for screening on a bi-weekly basis in the Office of Volunteer Development.

**E. Is screening conducted by other entities accepted by Extension?**

1. Volunteers may document a prior criminal background check from another entity on the volunteer application.
2. Extension will only accept screenings performed by entities on the approved list. See Attachment B. The minimum requirement is a criminal background check conducted through DPS or a national criminal search entity.
3. Documentation of screening by other entities is required.
  - a. Documentation may include a letter of acceptance from the employee or volunteer group, a letter written to Extension stating the volunteer has been screened and passed, or a copy of the volunteer card or credentials.

- b. A copy of the letter stating the volunteer has been screened by another approved entity should be forwarded to the Office of Volunteer Development, along with the volunteer application, with copies also maintained in the county office. These files will be permanently maintained in the Office of Volunteer Development.
  - c. A volunteer who completes a volunteer application and submits a letter of screening from an approved entity and, therefore, does not need to be screened through YPS, does not need to submit \$10.
  - d. If a volunteer claims prior screening, but it is not from an approved entity, he/she must be screened through the Youth Protection Standards Program.
4. Although volunteers may have been screened and passed a criminal background check through an approved entity, it is Extension's policy that volunteers be screened every three years, no matter the entity.

**Example:** A volunteer who passed a criminal background check when he/she was hired by a school district in 2000, but has not been re-screened by the school district since the initial screening, must be re-screened through the YPS Program.

#### **F. What is the process for submitting volunteer applications for screening?**

1. Applications for YPS screening are sent through the county Extension office in which the volunteer resides.
2. The volunteer applications are then forwarded to the Texas 4-H Office of Volunteer Development with a transmittal form and a check for \$10 per volunteer being screened. The transmittal form is included in Attachment C.
3. Counties are asked to send volunteer applications on a monthly basis and not hold volunteer applications for extended periods of time. Volunteer applications are processed for screening on a bi-weekly basis in the Office of Volunteer Development.

**Note:** A volunteer may not fulfill any volunteer role until he/she has been screened and cleared through the YPS program or qualified through screening from another approved entity.

#### **G. How are volunteer applications processed?**

1. Volunteer applications and information are reviewed and processed by two employees who oversee the YPS program and complete the data entry.
2. These individuals have been screened for security sensitive purposes and to handle confidential information.
3. Only individuals who have been trained and certified through the Volunteer Center of North Texas may review the criminal history results. Copies of the results cannot be shared with anyone including the volunteer being screened.
4. County Extension Agents are not informed of the details of the criminal history record. Information obtained through the volunteer application and screening is held in the highest confidence.
5. All forms are kept under double lock and key. All electronic files are password protected at multiple levels.

## H. How are screening results reviewed?

1. Criminal records are reviewed for “red flags.” A red flag is a charge or conviction on a criminal history record.
2. All official criminal history records are shredded and not kept on file.

## I. How is the status of volunteers determined?

1. A volunteer’s status is based on the charge or conviction, frequency of offense, and the amount of time passed since the occurrence of the offense.
2. All volunteer records are reviewed and handled on an individual basis.
3. Although criminal records are comprehensive over an individual’s lifetime, the YPS program focuses on the most recent ten (10) years of the summary. Convictions in the dismissed section below are the exception to the 10-year focus.
4. Volunteer applicants are identified with one of the following status categories:
  - a. Cleared: Approved to fulfill all duties of the volunteer role for which the volunteer is applying.
  - b. Restricted: Restrictions may be imposed based on the charges or conviction records.

***Example:*** A conviction of numerous hot checks would result in a restriction of not handling or managing any group funds.

***Example:*** A DWI conviction in the last ten years would result in a restriction of not driving youth other than the volunteer’s own legal children.
  - c. Pending: This determination is based on an incomplete criminal history report, no disposition of a case or a question related to a charge. Additional information may be requested from a volunteer. Any follow-up information is sent to the Office of Volunteer Development. Details regarding records are not shared with county or other program faculty.
  - d. Dismissed: A volunteer is dismissed based on certain convictions of the Texas Penal Code. Automatic dismissals result from indecency with a child, injury to a child, sexual assault, murder or felony drug convictions.

***Example:*** A conviction of embezzlement or mishandling Extension group funds would result in dismissal.
  - e. Denied: A volunteer applicant is denied based on certain convictions of the Texas Penal Code.

***Example:*** A registered sex offender would result in a denial.

Additional disqualifying offenses that can result in denial or dismissal are:

- A felony or misdemeanor classified as an offense against a person or family.
- A felony or misdemeanor classified as an offense against public order or indecency.
- A felony or misdemeanor violation of any law intended to control the possession or distribution of any substance included as a controlled substance in the Texas Controlled Substances Act.

#### **IV. Follow-up to Screening**

##### **A. Screening Summary Spreadsheets**

1. Upon completion of screening, counties will receive an updated screening summary spreadsheet via e-mail, with the names of volunteers screened and the volunteers' status (cleared, restricted, dismissed).
2. Counties should use the screening summary spreadsheet to determine volunteers that are due for another screening.
3. County spreadsheets are divided by the following program areas/volunteer type:
  - 4-H Volunteers
  - Master Gardener Volunteers
  - Master Naturalist Volunteers
  - Master Wellness Volunteers
4. Any time county faculty needs an updated copy of the screening summary spreadsheet, a request can be made with the Office of Volunteer Development and the spreadsheet will be sent to the county Extension agent via e-mail.

##### **B. What correspondence is sent to volunteers regarding their status?**

1. When a volunteer is cleared through YPS a volunteer certification card is sent to the county Extension office.
2. A letter is sent from the county Extension office to the volunteer notifying them of their "cleared" screening status, along with the volunteer certification card. A sample letter is included in Attachment D.
3. When a volunteer is pending, restricted or dismissed, letters are sent from the Office of Volunteer Development directly to the volunteer, with a carbon copy sent to the county Extension agent.

##### **C. What warrants a volunteer to be re-screened or his/her status reviewed?**

1. The following conditions may warrant review of a volunteer's status or re-screening:
  - Questionable situation
  - A written complaint against a volunteer
  - Knowledge of a volunteer being charged or arrested
  - Knowledge of a volunteer making an improper advancement toward a youth
2. County Extension Agents should communicate with their respective District Extension Administrator immediately upon learning of an incident or questionable situation.
3. Copies of correspondence sent to the volunteer (i.e. dismissal letter) should be sent to the Office of Volunteer Development so it may be filed with the volunteer's record.

##### **D. What steps need to be taken if a volunteer withdraws from service with Extension?**

1. County Extension Agents should notify the Office of Volunteer Development of any volunteers who have withdrawn from volunteer service. The volunteer's status will be changed on the county summary spreadsheet to "withdrawn" so records are kept up-to-date and accurate.
2. Volunteers may withdraw as a volunteer with Extension due to an incident in which they were involved or due to no longer being interested in serving as a volunteer, among other reasons.

## **V. Grievance Procedure**

The following is the procedure if a volunteer chooses to dispute a decision made during the application process or at any time during the volunteer's appointment with Extension.

- A. Volunteer submits concern in writing to the Office of Volunteer Development, with a copy to the District Extension Administrator and county Extension agent. Letters should be sent to the following address:

Courtney Dodd  
Extension Program Specialist  
7607 Eastmark Drive, Suite 101  
College Station, TX 77840

- B. The appeal is reviewed and the volunteer receives a written statement from the Office of Volunteer Development regarding the decision made within a reasonable amount of time.
- C. This grievance procedure pertains only to decision(s) made by Extension personnel. If a concern is raised about the information obtained through a criminal background check, the volunteer should be given the following information.

If an applicant disputes information that is on the criminal history record transcript, he/she must follow the procedure to review personal criminal history record, which includes getting fingerprints and sending the prints to DPS along with the appropriate form. If it is determined that the record is indeed the applicant's own record and the applicant feels that there is a mistake in the criminal record, a letter should be written specifying the area of concern. An investigation will be conducted to determine whether or not an error has been made. Any costs associated with the process will be the responsibility of the volunteer.

The letter should be addressed to: Texas Department of Public Safety  
Error Resolution Department  
P.O. Box 15999  
Austin, TX 78761-5999  
512/424-2151

**Youth Protection Standards  
Who should be screened?**

<b>Volunteer Type</b>	<b>Screened?</b>
Volunteers driving youth to 4-H events	Yes
Livestock Board Member/Committee Chair	No
Teach implementing 4-H enrichment curriculum	Yes
Overnight chaperone	Yes
Master Volunteer	Yes
Livestock Mentor	Yes
4-H Club Manager	Yes
Day Camp Volunteer	Yes
Treasurer/Signer on a 4-H affiliated account	Yes
Judging Team Coach	Yes
Project Leader	Yes
Assistant at Ag Day/Farm Safety Day	No
Assistant at 4-H contest	No
Driving/chaperoning youth for Texas 4-H Roundup	Yes
Accompanying youth to event at 4-H Conference Center	Yes
Scholarship Donor	No
LAB/Program Area Committee Member	No
Accompanying own child to event, but not serving in volunteer role	No

## **Youth Protection Standards Approved Prior Screening Entities**

School Districts

Churches

Youth Groups/Associations

Little League, Sports Association, etc.

Youth Agencies/Organizations

Big Brother/Big Sister, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, After School/Extended Care Programs, etc.

Law Enforcement

County, State or Federal law enforcement\*

Prison system

Texas Youth Commission

Department of Defense - Child and Youth Services

Department of Defense - Family Programs

Concealed Handgun License

Licensed Day Care Workers

Volunteers may document a prior criminal background check from another entity on the volunteer application. The Texas AgriLife Extension Service will only accept screenings performed by entities on the approved list. The minimum requirement is a criminal background check conducted through DPS or a national criminal search entity.

Documentation may include a letter of acceptance from the employee or volunteer group, a letter written to the Texas AgriLife Extension Service stating the volunteer has been screened and passed, or a copy of the volunteer card or credentials (*Example*: copy of concealed handgun license).

If a volunteer claims prior screening, but it is not from an approved entity, he/she must be screened through the Youth Protection Standards Program.

Although volunteers may have been screened and passed a criminal background check through an approved entity, it is Extension's policy that volunteers be screened every three years, no matter the entity.

\*Counties should not have county law enforcement (sheriff's department) screen volunteers for free or a minimal fee. This screening is a local, county search and does not search all records that the YPS search does. However, if a volunteer was screened through the county law enforcement for county employment purposes, that screening is accepted by Extension. Proof of screening within the past three years must be provided.



*Improving Lives. Improving Texas.*

**Transmittal Form  
For Volunteer Applications and  
Background Check Forms**

District \_\_\_\_\_ County \_\_\_\_\_

Program Area \_\_\_\_\_  
(4-H, Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, Master Wellness, TEEA, ENP, etc.)

Attached is:

\_\_\_\_\_ Volunteer Applications or Volunteer Background Check Forms (in alphabetical order by last name)

One check in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_ (\$10.00 per volunteer screening) made payable to **Extension Account #255003.**

Send confirmation of screening results to the following e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

*Note: If an e-mail address is not listed, results will be sent to the county Extension office box.*

Mail one (1) copy of this form, along with applications to:  
 Texas 4-H Office of Volunteer Development  
 Youth Protection Standards  
 7607 Eastmark Drive, Suite 101  
 College Station, TX 77840

Mail one copy of this form to the District Extension Administrator.  
 Keep one copy of this form in county files.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (County Extension Agent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Sample Letter  
Volunteer Acceptance  
Screened Through YPS**

We are pleased to welcome you as a Texas AgriLife Extension Service \_\_\_\_\_  
(*program area*) program volunteer in \_\_\_\_\_ County. We believe that you will  
be a valuable addition to the \_\_\_\_\_ (*county or Extension*) program.

This letter is to notify you that you have been screened through the Youth Protection Standards  
Program with the Volunteer Center of North Texas (the Texas Legislature required vendor) and  
passed. You are fully qualified to serve in the volunteer position for  
which you applied, including working with and supervising youth.

As a new Extension program volunteer you will have the opportunity to participate in many  
training programs on the county, district, regional and state levels that are designed to strengthen  
your subject matter skills, provide organizational and management ideas and support you in your  
volunteer role. These trainings are scheduled throughout the year and you will be notified by  
(*the*  
*county newsletter, a personal letter, a phone call, at leaders meetings, etc.*).

Once again, welcome to the Extension Program. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have  
any  
questions. Thank you for your interest in Extension.

Sincerely,

(*Name*)

(*Title*)

(*Program Area*)

## **Sample Letter Time for Re-Screening**

Thank you for your interest in serving as a Texas AgriLife Extension Service \_\_\_\_\_  
(*program area*) program volunteer in \_\_\_\_\_ County. We believe that you will  
be a valuable addition to the \_\_\_\_\_ (*county or Extension*) program.

This letter is to notify you that you need to be screened through the Youth Protection Standards Program. The volunteer background checks are conducted through the Volunteer Center of North Texas (the Texas Legislature required vendor).

If you have been screened and passed a criminal background check through another entity within the past three years, please let me know. The Texas AgriLife Extension Service accepts previous screenings from certain entities; however, proof of screening must be provided. A list of these entities may be obtained from the county Extension office.

In order to begin the screening process, please complete the volunteer application enclosed and return to the county Extension office by \_\_\_\_\_ (*date*). Please note that volunteers may not fulfill their duties until the criminal background check has been conducted and you have been approved as an Extension volunteer.

Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions. Thank you for your interest in Extension.

Sincerely,

(*Name*)

(*Title*)

(*Program Area*)

**Sample Letter  
Volunteer Acceptance  
Screened Through Extension-Approved Entities**

We are pleased to welcome you as a Texas AgriLife Extension Service \_\_\_\_\_  
(*program area*) program volunteer in \_\_\_\_\_ County. We believe that you will  
be a valuable addition to the \_\_\_\_\_ (*county or Extension*) program.

This letter is to notify you that your previous screening conducted by another, approved entity  
has been accepted. You are fully qualified to serve in the volunteer position for which you  
applied, including working with and supervising youth.

As a new Extension program volunteer you will have the opportunity to participate in many  
training programs on the county, district, regional and state levels that are designed to strengthen  
your subject matter skills, provide organizational and management ideas and support you in your  
volunteer role. These trainings are scheduled throughout the year and you will be notified by  
(*the*  
*county newsletter, a personal letter, a phone call, at leaders meetings, etc.*).

Once again, welcome to the Extension Program. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have  
any  
questions. Thank you for your interest in Extension.

Sincerely,

(*Name*)

(*Title*)

(*Program Area*)

