



Resolving 4-H Volunteer Performance Concerns

I. INTRODUCTION

Volunteers are expected to work effectively with youth, cooperate with other volunteers, and support the county 4-H program. These expectations are listed in the *Volunteer Appointment Agreement* that the volunteer received and signed when they were appointed. If concerns arise about the way the volunteer is performing their role or neglecting to meet expectations, use this process to resolve the concern and improve volunteer performance and retention. If the concern is a more serious issue of non-compliance with the New Jersey 4-H Code of Conduct, use the **New Jersey 4-H Discipline Policy and Procedure** to address the issue.

II. PREVENTION VIA GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The 4-H Department volunteer management policies are designed to prevent problems or concerns with volunteer performance.

- **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 all volunteers complete and sign a volunteer appointment agreement prior to working with a 4-H club and/or an advisory council. **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 periodic training to all volunteers on current topics.
- **Evaluate or Review Performance and Provide Feedback:** Develop a method for regular evaluation or review of volunteer performance for all of your volunteers. Take the opportunity to observe volunteer performance when possible and provide feedback as appropriate. The *New Jersey 4-H Volunteer Review Process* may be used as a method to review volunteer performance.
- **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. If possible, gently and privately correct the individual during the *teachable moment* or as soon as possible.
- **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 compliment about their work.

III. IDENTIFICATION AND DOCUMENTATION OF PERFORMANCE CONCERNS

Performance concerns may be identified through various methods including the following:

- **Periodic Informal Conversations:** Maintaining regular contact with all volunteers may identify possible trouble spots in volunteer performance. Positive working relationships may prevent issues from arising.
- **Observation:** You may observe a volunteer who is not meeting their role expectations.
- **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.

Documentation

Keep written notes of personal observations, personal conversations with volunteer or person making a complaint about the volunteer (in person or on phone). Use the *Incident Report Form* to document information. Keep these records and all materials provided by the volunteer and others in the volunteer's confidential file. If it is clearly a Code of Conduct issue, proceed using the 4-H Discipline Policy & Procedure.

IV. RESOLVING THE PERFORMANCE CONCERN (If not a Code of Conduct issue.)

Meet with the Volunteer

Arrange a meeting to discuss the performance concern. If necessary, send a letter placing the volunteer on "inactive status" pending a meeting. Resolution may include any of the following actions:

- **Remind the volunteer.** Volunteer may simply need to be reminded of expectations and why their role is important.
- **Re-train the volunteer.** Some performance problems may be due to incomplete understanding or a lack of correct information. The volunteer may just need updated information or may need more extensive training. Different learning styles of volunteers may require a variety of training styles and communication techniques.
- **Re-motivate the volunteer.** The volunteer may be suffering from boredom or loss of enthusiasm. Introduce a new challenge or suggest a temporary break in service to re-energize.
- **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 other volunteers involved when it is a matter of mismatched personalities.

Suggestions for Conducting a Face-to-Face Meeting to Address Concerns

1. 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.
2. Begin the meeting with a positive outlook describing what the volunteer does well or what it is that you most appreciate about them.
3. Then discuss your performance concern. Avoid arguing by being direct and transparent.
4. 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). Explain to the volunteer how their performance has limited their ability to effectively work with youth, other volunteers, or 4-H staff.
5. Refer to the *4-H Volunteer Appointment Agreement* as a guide to explain your expectation for change in how the volunteer performs their role.
6. Present your resolution to address the performance concern.
7. Request the volunteer's input and agreement to follow up in meeting your expectation.
8. Note any actions required on the part of the volunteer, and your part if applicable, to resolve the concern.
9. Conclude the meeting by expressing your commitment to support the volunteer in their effort to alleviate current performance concerns.

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