



University Volunteers

POLICY STATEMENT

Cornell University depends upon university volunteer support to accomplish its missions of education, research, and public service and wishes to ensure that volunteers' relationships with the university are clearly established and understood by both parties.

REASON FOR POLICY

This policy is designed to reduce volunteer risk and protect the interests of the university, its volunteers, and the community it serves.

ENTITIES AFFECTED BY THIS POLICY

- All units of the university, excluding the Weill Cornell Medical College

WHO SHOULD READ THIS POLICY

- Anyone who engages university volunteers on behalf of the university

WEB ADDRESS FOR THIS POLICY*

www.dfa.cornell.edu/policy/policies/university-volunteers

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RELATED DOCUMENTS

University Policies

[University Policy 3.2, Travel Expenses](#)

[University Policy 3.6, Financial Irregularities](#)

[University Policy 4.6, Standards of Ethical Conduct](#)

[University Policy 4.9, Legal Defense and Indemnification](#)

[University Policy 6.4, Prohibited Bias, Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual and Related Misconduct](#)

[University Policy 6.6.2, Reference Checking and Information Verification](#)

[University Policy 8.6, Environment, Health, and Safety](#)

Other Documents

Board of Trustee Legislation on Volunteers

Board of Trustee Legislation on Indemnification

1997 Volunteer Protection Act

CONTACTS

Direct any general questions about University Policy 6.5, University Volunteers, to your department's administrative office. If you have questions about specific issues, call the following offices:

Subject	Contact	Telephone
Exceptions	Office of Risk Management and Insurance	(607) 254-1575
Policy Clarification		
Risk Assessment of Individual Services		
Who May Volunteer		
Indemnification	University Counsel	(607) 255-5124

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DEFINITIONS

These definitions apply to these terms as they are used in this policy.

Agent of the University	An individual acting on behalf of the university.
Indemnification	Protection by the university in the settlement of demands and expenses incurred in connection with judgments or claims against an individual, provided that the act or omission causing the judgment or claim occurred while the individual was functioning in the performance of authorized duties on behalf of the university.
Stored Energy	Physical energy stored in springs, elevated machine members, rotating flywheels, and hydraulic systems, or as air, gas, steam, or water pressure, etc.
University Volunteer	An individual who performs services for and directly related to the business of the university, without the expectation of compensation.
You	An individual who, on behalf of the university, is engaging or seeking to engage a university volunteer.

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OVERVIEW

Introduction

The university recognizes the need for balance among several factors: the desirability of volunteer service; the need to protect volunteer interests; and the need to minimize risk to the volunteer and the university. This policy addresses the disparate issues you may encounter as you seek to engage university volunteers (see Definitions), and provides uniform procedures for screening and engaging volunteers.

◆**Note:** The responsibility for proper screening and engagement of volunteers rests with departments or units.

Unpaid Academic Appointments

Individuals who have unpaid academic appointments to the university are not considered volunteers when acting in that capacity. They are, however, permitted to volunteer their services according to the terms and conditions set forth in this document.

Defining a University Volunteer

University volunteers are uncompensated individuals who perform services directly related to the business of the university, to support the activities of the university, or to gain experience in specific endeavors. To qualify as a university volunteer, an individual must be willing to provide services according to the procedures in this policy.

An individual who performs volunteer services for an entity that is not directly related to the business of the university (e.g., a government or public agency or an alumni association), **is not** considered a university volunteer for the purposes of this policy. However, an individual who performs volunteer services in the community on behalf of the university when there is no outside agency involved **is** considered a university volunteer.

◆**Caution:** These situations may appear ambiguous. Whenever you are not certain as to whether an individual should be classified as a university volunteer, contact Risk Management and Insurance for assistance.

Responsibilities and Rights of the University Volunteer

A university volunteer is an agent of the university while performing assigned duties. Therefore, university volunteers are expected to abide by university policies and external regulations that govern their actions, including but not limited to those of ethical behavior, confidentiality, financial responsibility, and drug use.

University volunteers are not covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act and are not considered employees for any purpose. Therefore, they are not

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eligible for any university benefits, including Worker's Compensation, as a result of this volunteer association.

Who May Volunteer

Anyone, including current or retired employees, students, alumni, or others may provide volunteer services to the university, with the following restrictions:

- A non-student under the age of eighteen may only become a university volunteer for services for which a Volunteer Agreement is not necessary (see Services Not Requiring a Volunteer Agreement below), and only with parental consent (see Selecting and Engaging a Volunteer below).
- An employee may not become a university volunteer at the university in any capacity in which he or she is employed at the university, or which is essentially similar to the individual's regular work at the university.

◆ **Note:** Services that are not directly related to university business, such as those performed by employees for employee organizations, are generally not covered by this policy. If you have questions about insurance coverage for a particular employee organization, contact Risk Management and Insurance.

Volunteer Agreement

The following segments of this document specify three types of services, based on the varying degrees of risk associated with each: services not requiring a Volunteer Agreement; services requiring a Volunteer Agreement; and prohibited activities (those which a university volunteer must generally never perform). The lists that follow are not exhaustive; they are intended to provide guidelines when considering university volunteer engagement.

The Forms section of this policy includes a sample Volunteer Agreement; containing the minimum information necessary for those individuals performing duties that require an agreement. Individual departments or units may use this document; however, they may opt to design one of their own, provided it contains all of the information in the sample.

◆ **Note:** For some university volunteers, the following categories may not be appropriate (e.g., advisory council members, trustees, reunion chairs). If you believe such an exception to these categories exists, contact Risk Management and Insurance for guidance.

Services Not Requiring a Volunteer Agreement

The following activities are generally considered low-risk, and do not require a completed Volunteer Agreement:

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- Advisory council participation
- Clerical work
- Commencement volunteer
- Gallery/program guide
- Museum docent (provided there is no travel requirement)
- Phone-a-thon volunteer
- Public speaker

Services Requiring a Volunteer Agreement

For the following activities, volunteers are generally required to complete a Volunteer Agreement (see Forms).

- Laboratory work
 - Professional services, such as those performed by accountants, architects, doctors, engineers, etc.
 - Travel of any kind
 - Work with animals
 - Work with confidential information
 - Work with minors, other than Cornell students or applicants to Cornell
- ◆**Caution:** For individuals under the age of eighteen, parental consent is required.

Prohibited Activities

University volunteers are generally prohibited from performing the following activities:

- Operation of heavy equipment
- Work with hazardous materials
- Work with stored energy
- Any activity considered inappropriate for an employee
- Entering into any contract on behalf of the university

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PROCEDURES

Selecting and Engaging a University Volunteer

When engaging a university volunteer, it is the unit's responsibility to be certain the individual has adequate experience, qualifications, and training for the task he or she will be required to perform. The following procedures are suggested, to ensure that your selection process is satisfactory.

1. Complete a Description of Volunteer Service for your university volunteer position **before** recruitment (see Forms).
2. Determine if a volunteer agreement is necessary (see the Services Not Requiring a Volunteer Agreement, Services Requiring a Volunteer Agreement, and the Prohibited Activities segments of this document).
3. If an agreement is necessary, ask each potential university volunteer to complete a Volunteer Profile (see Forms).
4. At your discretion, you may ask the individual to complete a Volunteer Profile even if no agreement is necessary.
5. Ascertain whether the individual is at least eighteen years of age. If so, continue to step 7.
6. If the individual is between fifteen and eighteen years of age, he or she may only become a university volunteer for services that **do not** require a Volunteer Agreement (individuals under fifteen may not volunteer for services). In these cases a Parental Consent Form must also be completed (see Forms).
7. When your unit accepts an individual as a university volunteer, explain the description of duties and, if appropriate, the Volunteer Agreement. Fill in your unit's name on the agreement (see Forms).
8. When an agreement is warranted, have the individual sign it, and provide a copy, with the Description of Volunteer Service attached.
9. Forward a copy of the signed Volunteer Agreement, with the Description of Volunteer Services attached, to Risk Management and Insurance.
10. Retain any forms completed during the above procedures, as well as copies of any attachments, for a period of three years from the date of the university volunteer's separation.

◆**Note:** For some university volunteers, it may not be appropriate to follow some of the steps above (e.g., advisory council members, trustees, reunion chairs). If you believe such a case exists, contact Risk Management and Insurance for guidance.

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PROCEDURES, CONTINUED

Dismissal

You may end a university volunteer's term of service at any time and without prior warning.

University Volunteer Indemnification

Indemnification is provided to university volunteers in the same manner as is applicable to employees, that is: for acts or omissions arising within the scope of the volunteer's performance of specifically authorized duties or assignments on behalf of the university. In order to ensure adequate documentation, it is important that the department or unit engaging the university volunteer provide a copy of the Volunteer Agreement (with the Description of Volunteer Services attached) to Risk Management and Insurance.

Payments to University Volunteers

Payment for volunteer services is not allowed. However, the university will reimburse university volunteers for actual and reasonable expenses, following standard university reimbursement guidelines.

The university also allows an honorarium to be awarded to a university volunteer. An honorarium is not a payment for services or fee charged, but an award primarily intended to confer distinction or to symbolize respect, esteem, or admiration. The value of the honorarium must not be related to the performance of services.

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RESPONSIBILITIES

The major responsibilities each party has in connection with University Policy 6.5, University Volunteers, are as follows:

You	Recruit, screen, and engage university volunteers using the procedures specified in the University Policy 6.5, University Volunteers.
Office of Risk Management and Insurance	Determine when exceptions to this policy exist. Provide policy clarification. Consult with departments and units regarding application of this policy.
University Volunteer	Refrain from engaging in activities that are not specified in your Cornell University Volunteer Duty Description, if provided. As an agent of the university, abide by all university policies and external regulations that govern your actions.

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FORMS

A variety of forms may need to be completed when selecting and engaging university volunteers. The forms included here are samples that contain the minimum information needed to comply with this policy; you may use them, or you may design your own.

Table 1
Forms

Form	Use
Volunteer Profile	Provides necessary information to individuals who wish to engage university volunteers.
Description of Volunteer Services	Specifies duties that will be allowed and expected from university volunteers.
Volunteer Agreement	Ratifies the engagement of certain university volunteers.
Parental Consent Form	Establishes parental permission for university volunteers between the ages of fifteen and eighteen years.

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