



Volunteer Screening Guidelines

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Why Volunteer Screening?

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) provides resources, programs, and services that are research-proven, accessible, and contain actionable information that supports success and resilience of individuals and communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia and beyond. As part of that work, VCE relies on dedicated volunteers to carry out our land-grant mission.

Our volunteers provide thousands of hours of service to the state and its people. Whether it is volunteering for a specific event or outreach project or taking on a leadership role in one of our volunteer organizations, there are opportunities for everyone. Volunteers are often required to work with sensitive data, vulnerable populations, and organizational resources, so screening is imperative to ensure volunteers are capable, willing, and motivated to handle a specific challenge or responsibility of volunteering for Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Volunteer screening supports the process of educating volunteer applicants about Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and creates the opportunity to allow faculty and staff to learn more about the interests of the volunteer applicant. The screening process also helps to protect the fidelity of Virginia Cooperative Extension programs, its participants, and volunteers.

Screening Categories

Screening categories are based on the level of risk associated with the volunteer position and the potential for loss. VCE has two standards of volunteer screening, high and low.

High-Category Screening Volunteer Positions

- 4-H Volunteers that provide direct supervision to 4-H youth programs, handle 4-H club funds or transport youth
- 4-H Camp Volunteers 18 years of age or older (annual screening)
- Master Volunteers
- Extension Leadership Council Members
- Volunteers in positions of trust (working with youth, seniors, those with disabilities, handling funds, or unsupervised access to VCE equipment/facilities)

Low-Category Screening Volunteer Positions

- Collaborative/occasional/one-time volunteers

Low-category screening volunteer positions are under constant and direct supervision of a VCE faculty or staff member or designated volunteer, or any person, as a part of their normal compensated employment, assists VCE in the accomplishment of a shared goal (Examples may include teachers, partner agency staff, parks and recreation employees, etc.) no interview, reference check or criminal background screening is required.

Screening Process

There are four parts to complete the volunteer screening process for Virginia Cooperative Extension high-category screening volunteer positions.

Every volunteer applicant must complete these steps to be considered a VCE/4-H volunteer.

The four parts are:

- Application/Enrollment
- Interview

- Reference Check
- Background Check/Screening

Application/Enrollment

The application and enrollment are done simultaneously through either 4-H Online* (4-H Volunteers) or Better Impact (all other volunteers). The local office may conduct an interview prior to asking you to enroll.

Interview

A faculty/staff member or currently enrolled volunteer will make personal contact with the applicant to explore interests, skills, and to determine the suitability of the applicant with the volunteer position.

Reference Checks

In the application/enrollment form you will be asked to provide three references. Some or all of the references may be contacted by phone, email, or mail to provide information about the applicant's professional, personal, and community experience.

Background Screening

The background screening is essentially a Criminal Background Check. It includes a Criminal Background Screening**– National Criminal Index Search, National Sex Offender Registry Search, Name, Social Security Number, and Date of Birth validation with address history verification, County or Statewide Level Criminal Search. After enrolling in either Better Impact or 4-H Online, volunteers will be prompted to go to Sterling Volunteers and complete the background screening form.

*4-H Online has levels of volunteer within the online system, follow your local offices instructions as to which level you should enroll in **Repeated every three years (annually for 4-H camp volunteers)

Sterling Volunteers/First Advantage Volunteers

A global background screening company with 40+ years of expertise, Sterling Volunteers under the umbrella of First Advantage Volunteers offers background checks of the highest quality and accuracy. This company uses proprietary technology

and a set of unique criminal locators to find more criminal records at America's local and state courthouses and to deliver the most accurate information available. Sterling Volunteers ensures compliance with all applicable background screening laws. They are the experts in local, state, and federal legislation. Their background checks are housed in a completely secure environment and are fully FCRA compliant.

Cost

All background screening is billed to the local VCE office. It is up to the local office to determine what funds are used to pay for the screening. Funds could be covered out of local office funding, 4-H club funds, association funds, they may charge the volunteer or other source. Each situation is unique, you can check with the local office to see what the agreed payment procedure is.

\$12.50 – Initial Screening

\$7.50 – Re-checks for Returning Volunteers

Recommended Criteria for Exclusion

Virginia Cooperative Extension will utilize the best practices and guidelines from the National Recreation and Park Association publication, Recommended Guidelines for Credentialing Volunteers, to determine a volunteer applicant's eligibility to serve. Many public and private organizations have adopted these guidelines.

A person should be disqualified and prohibited from serving as a volunteer if the person has been found guilty of the following crimes within the specified time.

Sex Offenses

- **All Sex Offenses** – Regardless of the amount of time since offense. Examples include child molestation, rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, sodomy, prostitution, solicitation, indecent exposure, etc.

Felonies

- **All Felony Violence** – Regardless of the amount of time since offense. Examples include murder, manslaughter, aggravated assault, kidnapping, robbery, aggravated burglary, etc.
- **All Felony offenses** other than violence or sex within the past 10 years. Examples include drug offenses, theft, embezzlement, fraud, child endangerment, etc.

Misdemeanors

- **All Misdemeanor** Violence offenses within the past seven years. Examples include simple assault, battery, domestic violence, hit and run, etc.
- **All misdemeanor drug and alcohol** offenses within the past five years or multiple offenses in the past 10 years. Examples include driving under the influence, simple drug possession, drunk and disorderly, public intoxication, possession of drug paraphernalia, etc.
- **Any other misdemeanor** within the past five years that would be considered a potential danger to children or is directly related to the functions of that volunteer. Examples include contributing to the delinquency of a minor, providing alcohol to a minor, theft if the person is handling money, etc.

This recommendation does not apply if criminal charges resulted in acquittal, Nolle Prose, or dismissal. It is recommended that anyone who has been charged for any of the disqualifying offenses or cases pending in court should not be permitted to volunteer until the official adjudication of the case.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will you accept Outside Criminal Background Screening?

No, Virginia Cooperative Extension no longer accepts screening results from other companies than Sterling Volunteers.

Can I fill out a paper application for my criminal background screening?

No, Sterling Volunteers no longer accepts paper applications.

Who sees the results of the background screening?

Results of the screening are only visible to select VCE State Administrators and are not shared with the local unit office to protect the volunteer applicant's confidentiality. The local faculty/staff are only told if the volunteer is eligible or not to volunteer with VCE.

What if a volunteer volunteers for more than one VCE program area? For Example, Master Naturalist and 4-H, do they have to get two background screenings?

When a volunteer has had a background screening done through Sterling Volunteers they can use the first screening for both volunteer programs. The same is true if the volunteer has had a background check run for another volunteer organization done through Sterling Volunteers.

Additional Resources

<https://www.sterlingvolunteers.com/>

[Visit Virginia Cooperative Extension](#): ext.vt.edu

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