



NMSU COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, CONSUMER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

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Dear 4-H Leaders, Volunteers & Parents,

It has been brought to my attention that there is some misconception with Adult Volunteer Screening/Enrollments and many of our leaders are violating or have violated this major 4-H Policy and it needs to be corrected. As you enroll 4-H'ers and yourself, please review the following policy as it applies to everyone.

**New Mexico 4-H Volunteer Screening Procedures
Effective October 1, 2006**

Philosophy

The mission of New Mexico 4-H is to create self directing, productive, contributing members of society; 4-H, the youth development program of New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service, provides youth the opportunities to acquire leadership, citizenship, and life skills. This is accomplished through educational programs for New Mexico youth of diverse backgrounds.

According to the New Mexico 4-H Youth Development Policies and Procedures, an adult volunteer must be at least 19 years of age by January 1 of the current 4-H program year and not enrolled as a 4-H member. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer to insure a safe environment for all youth. One way to better evaluate risk and safety concerns is through screening volunteers that have direct contact with our youth.

Policy

Under the newest policies of New Mexico State University Employment Background Review Policy, all new employees and all volunteers are required to go through a background check and screening process if they carry out "Sensitive Duties" including:

- Care, safety and security of people or property – this would include anyone with direct supervision of youth, transporting youth, chaperoning youth overnight, etc
- Direct access to, or control over cash, checks or credit account information – this would include handling the bank account (being a signer), collecting cash for fundraisers, etc
- Access to detailed personally identifiable information about individuals or organizations associated with NMSU – information related to youth, other volunteers, parents, etc.

The above three items relate directly to 4-H Adult Volunteers. This means that all enrolled volunteers need to be screened, including but not limited to:

- Organizational Leaders, Project Leaders, Activity Leaders, Event Chaperones
 - Exchange Program Host Families
 - All Adults with signing privileges on 4-H accounts
 - Adults with direct supervision of youth
 - Adults transporting youth (other than personal child(ren) to and from 4-H events
 - Special Interest volunteers not already screened by the employing agency
- Volunteers serving on a temporary basis (guest speakers, judges, etc) that do not have sole responsibility of youth and are under the supervision of a screened volunteer or staff member are not subject to screening.

New Mexico State University is an equal opportunity employer. All programs are available to everyone regardless of age, color, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation or veteran status. NMSU and the USDA cooperating.

- Once a volunteer has successfully completed the screening process, they will be considered an eligible volunteer as long as no break in service occurs, however, this policy is subject to change at any time and Counties may choose to re-screen volunteers at a more frequent interval. If a volunteer sits out a year or more, they will be required to complete the screening process again.
- In order to insure a fair and equitable procedure related to all volunteers and facilitate a safe environment for 4-H Youth, no volunteers will be grandfathered in – all current volunteers must be screened in order to remain a recognized 4-H Volunteer.
- If a volunteer who has successfully completed the screening process moves from one county to another within New Mexico, as long as there is no break in service, the volunteer enrollment may be transferred without an additional screening. Transfer will not be complete until the County Extension Office receives a copy of the Volunteer Acceptance Letter provided by the County Extension Office that conducted the initial screening and an updated enrollment form.

Procedure

- When a volunteer applies, they fill out a form giving the New Mexico Department of Public Safety permission to release background information to the New Mexico State 4-H Office. The Department of Public Safety then provides New Mexico 4-H with a report on each applicant.
- From there, any arrest reports are reviewed by the 4-H Contact person and the NMSU Human Resources Department. Each applicant is determined to be eligible to volunteer, non-eligible to volunteer, or in need of further information.
- The status of each applicant is communicated to the appropriate County Agent. Eligible volunteers will then be enrolled. Non-eligible volunteers will receive a letter from their Agent stating that they have not been accepted as a volunteer and have 15 days to dispute the findings. Those that require more information will receive a letter from their Agent stating the need for further investigation and they will have the option of filing for the intensive background check offered by NMSU at the cost of \$35.
- The initial screening cost will be \$7 per person through the New Mexico Department of Public Safety.

Screening Club Volunteers

- All applicants wishing to be enrolled volunteers in the New Mexico
- 4-H Club Program must successfully complete the screening process as outlined in the Procedure Section above, regardless of screening or status through employers or other organizations.

Screening Special Interest Volunteers

- In working with agencies that screen volunteers and staff, where the screening process is at least as rigorous as that of New Mexico 4-H, employee/volunteers who have been screened do not need to be screened a second time. The County Agent must receive printed documentation (a copy of procedures/a list of screened individuals) be sent to the County Extension Office. When working with agencies that do not screen or have screening procedures not as rigorous, each individual working directly with 4-H youth must successfully complete the screening process as outlined

Screening School Enrichment Volunteers

- When working in the schools, New Mexico 4-H is providing a service to the individual school or district. It is the responsibility of the employing school district to conduct background checks and certify their employee in good standing according to state law. No additional check is required.

Leaders, Volunteers and Parents: if after reading this you still have questions regarding this policy, please contact me at the Extension Office. Remember, this policy has been put in place for the safety of not only our children, but us as well!

Sincerely,

Vera Gibson