

Volunteer Policies and Procedure: Effective Program Management for Senior Corps

Welcome

Our objective for this webinar is to help you get ready for new volunteers. To make sure you know the policies and procedures that should be in place concerning volunteer management, including forms you will need to be ready for new volunteers.

This webinar will focus on *volunteer-related* policies/procedures (we will not get into station management). First we will talk about: what we mean by policies and procedures in general and why they are important; then we will talk about FGP and SCP volunteer-related policies and procedures; how you might organize these policies and procedures; developing new policies or adapting your current policies and procedures; and then time for Q&A.

Today we are talking about volunteer-related policies and procedures, but keep in mind that a sponsoring organization has a second set of responsibilities around program administration (e.g., administering the budget in accordance with federal rules and regulations, ensuring staffing requirements are met, etc.). The Sponsor's Responsibilities are explained in the Senior Corps Regulations and Module 2 of the New Project Directors' Orientation on the KN.

After this webinar, we will email you some documents with information about FGP and SCP volunteer policies and procedures.

Before we get started, please tell us where you are with your volunteer policies and procedures.

Let's talk for a minute about policies and procedures in general ... why do we put so much emphasis on this, why are they important? What are the benefits of having well-defined policies and procedures in place?

They contribute to effective program management; policies set the standards for the organization's operations.

They help to clarify responsibilities and expectations – people have something in writing to refer to so everybody knows what they are supposed to be doing.

Written policies help to ensure compliance with laws, regulations and requirements. Program Officers review that regulations are met by looking at documentation like your project's written policies and completed forms.

Procedures that everybody understands and follows help you with recordkeeping which is important for accountability.

They can limit or minimize conflict, loss of trust and resources. There is less potential for misunderstanding when policies are clearly explained up front.

Written policies and procedures provide a resource and continuity for future project staff – consistency in how your program operates.

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Tasks are spelled out, including how and when they should be done and who is responsible.

The description might include an example of how to follow the policy or procedure.

Here is an example using volunteer mileage reimbursement:

“Volunteers are all eligible for reimbursement for travel to and from volunteer stations, as well as travel to program activities including training, recognition events, and in-service meetings. Volunteers who drive their own vehicles will be reimbursed at a rate of \$0.45 per mile not to exceed 30 miles per day. The reimbursement rate and maximum mileage for reimbursement is subject to change based on availability of funds. Volunteers who use the bus or other modes of transportation will be reimbursed for the actual fare paid per trip, or for a weekly/monthly pass, not to exceed the equivalent of \$13.50 per day. Volunteers should attach a receipt for their travel expenses to their timesheets. Volunteers who use multiple forms of transportation are responsible for distinguishing between each type of transportation used on their timesheets, so that they may be reimbursed correctly.”

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Let’s now talk more specifically about FGP and SCP volunteer policies and procedures.

As you know, policies are needed to ensure Federal Regulations are followed, but what policies and procedures do you need to have ready for FGP and SCP volunteers? We will talk in terms of program policies that need to be in place first; then screening procedures you will need to do; and finally, preparing for managing new volunteers.

You will need to develop written program policies around volunteer benefits. Policies are tied to the Federal Regulations but you may also have your own program policies that people need to know about.

Here is some information you should include in policies about volunteer benefits. This information is in the handbooks that are posted at the website and/or in the regulations.

Stipend – Explain that stipends are paid for hourly service. For FGP and SCP, this is time spent with children or clients, but also includes attendance at trainings and recognition events, and travel time between assignments.

Transportation: Explain when volunteers may be reimbursed, e.g. for travel time during assignments, at what rate, and how they should document miles.

Meals: Explain whether meals are considered part of the service schedule (e.g. stipended time) and if they are provided or volunteers are reimbursed.

Insurance: Volunteers must be provided with accident, personal liability and excess automobile liability insurance during service hours. Explain how and when accidents should be reported, and documentation procedures.

Annual Physical – Volunteers are required to pass a physical exam on an annual basis. Explain who they should go to for the exam, documentation they need, and how they will be reimbursed. (Volunteers supported by Medicare have an annual exam available and may be able to access that benefit – they can have their doctor fill out the physical form.)

Uniforms or Smocks – Explain if these are required, who will provide them, and when volunteers should be wearing them.

Recognition – Recognition events are considered stipended time and should be held annually (at least).

Example of policy: If a volunteer is involved in an accident that involves personal injury or damage to property, they should report the incident to the Volunteer Service Coordinator within 24 hours. The coordinator will interview the volunteer and other participants as necessary, and report the incident to the project director...etc

There is more information about program policies in the SCP/FGP Handbooks. The Handbooks are being updated so if you have any questions, check with your Program Officer. Your Program Officer can review any policy or procedure you put together and answer your questions.

Note that even though we are not talking specifically about volunteer station management, everything we cover may also be relevant for volunteer stations. You will need to share your volunteer policies with stations. Sponsors are responsible for volunteers but stations need to follow your volunteer policies.

Terms of Service

By terms of service, we mean the time volunteers serve and what is considered stipended time. Spell out what is stipended time in your policy. Volunteers must have a service schedule and understand what that means.

That is, FGPs/SCPs must serve at least 15 hours per week, up to 40 hours per week. They may not serve more than a total of 2088 hours per year.

Travel time between the volunteer's home and place of assignment may not be considered part of the service schedule and is not stipended. However, travel time between individual assignments is part of the service schedule (e.g., a Senior Companion visits with one client and then drives to the home of a second client to visit).

Meal time may also be part of the service schedule if meals are part of the volunteer assignment plan, are taken with the clients served, and are deemed by the sponsor and the volunteer station to be beneficial to the assigned clients (e.g., a Foster Grandparent has lunch with a child at school).

Additionally, attendance at pre-service orientation, in-service training, Community Advisory Group meetings, and recognition events is also considered as part of the service schedule.

Service Separation

You will need policies on service termination as well as procedures for appeal – if a volunteer feels they were wrongly let go, what should they do about it? Who should they talk to and what is the process?

Your separation policies could include a policy on transfers and resignation, but you will need a policy on why a volunteer would be asked to leave. From the regulations: 'A sponsor may remove a SCP/FGP from service for cause. Grounds for removal include but are not limited to: extensive and unauthorized absences; misconduct; inability to perform assignments; and failure to accept supervision.' A volunteer may also be removed from service if it turns out they have income over the eligibility limit.

You should make sure volunteers understand the rules including prohibited activities. For example, often programs develop a confidentiality policy and even have volunteers sign a statement saying they understand. (FGPs/SCPs may have access to personal information about the children or elders they serve; they need to know that this information is confidential and not to be divulged to others.)

Let's now talk about the screening procedures that need to be in place when you start recruiting volunteers, but first...Where are you with FGP/SCP volunteer recruitment?

Let's talk about the main screening procedures that need to be in place to ensure a FGP/SCP candidate is eligible. (You can also find the eligibility requirements clearly spelled out in the Senior Corps Eligibility Requirements Workbook posted on the website as well as in the regulations.)

Age eligibility – a new volunteer must be age 55 or older. (This used to be 60 or older but has changed.)

Commitment- the volunteer must be willing and able to serve 15-40 hours per week. You can determine the best service schedule with them.

You will need to verify income eligibility -In order to receive a stipend, the volunteer must meet income eligibility requirements. The person's maximum income from all sources must not exceed 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines applicable to their family size and location. Because grant funds go directly to pay stipends, you need to maintain records to demonstrate that the volunteer is eligible to receive a stipend and must document that the information is verified each year that the volunteer serves.

Physical exam – the person must be willing to go to a medical provider and complete a physical, and give you documentation that they "passed" the physical. You need to know that they are physically capable of conducting the service activity without harm to themselves or the people they work with - children,

elders, or people with disabilities. This is determined by an annual physical examination conducted by a qualified medical professional.

Criminal history check (CHC) – the person must be willing to undergo a criminal background check. For new volunteers, you will need to be ready to initiate 3 checks: National Sex Offender Public Website search; state check; and the FBI check. This can take some time and you need to document what you do. We won't go into details today but there are a lot of resources on the CNCS website to help you do this including a very helpful checklist. The most current information regarding background checks is on the National Service Criminal Background Check resource page on the CNCS website. CNCS will also hold a refresher on CHC in February – it is the next call in the series of “Third Thursdays” webinars planned for this year.

Keep in mind: If you want the volunteer to start service with a child or elder before CHC results come back, you need to figure out who can accompany that person while you are waiting. The person has to be someone who has passed the background check, such as an established volunteer or staff person and you need to document that they were there with the volunteer during service hours. Once either the state or FBI check clears the volunteer, they can serve independently.

Let's talk about some things to prepare for your new volunteers.

Assignment/Care Plans

Assignment plans or care plans are required for every child (for FGP) and client or elder (for SCP) that a volunteer serves. Plans should be completed when the volunteer is assigned to a new child or client and updated every year as needed.

There are specific requirements about what needs to be on the plan and who needs to sign it. If you are adapting a plan, please run it by your Program Officer.

If you have questions about what is an appropriate assignment for a FGP or SCP, please talk to your Program Officer or check the resources at the CNCS website.

You will also need a letter of agreement if the volunteer will be going into a home, which Senior Companions typically do. Like the assignment/care plans, there is a sample on the website with the SCP handbook.

Plan for volunteer orientation and training in advance.

Volunteers must receive 40 hours of orientation. 20 hours of that time should consist of pre-service training where you can go over policies and procedures; you may include station orientation, and ongoing in-service trainings that should average 4-hours per month. This is stipended time.

Make sure a pre-service plan is developed before you bring on volunteers. Besides thinking about who will do it and when, you may need to present and translate handouts in Native language.

We recommend developing an annual training plan so you don't have to figure it out month-to-month.

You don't need to deliver all the content yourself-others can help. For example, you can invite guest speakers to talk about something you know is important to your volunteers, e.g. related to health,

health care benefits, finances, fraud that targets elders, etc., or information that will help them in their service (e.g. tips for helping children learn and retain native language).

People often say they volunteer to learn new things. You can use training topics in your recruitment materials as a benefit of volunteering with your program.

There are optional resources on the CNCS website to help you think about what you want to do for training. Pre-service and orientation goals and training suggestions are in the handbooks (Chapter 8); and there are other training materials on the website for in-service.

Also, speaking directly to other project directors is a great way to get ideas for training. You can talk with folks on these calls, others in your state, or at regional training conferences.

Time Tracking (timesheets)

Tracking hours is important because grant funds go directly to pay stipends, you need to maintain records to show time served.

Ideally you want the timesheet to track meal and mileage for reimbursements as well— documenting everything on the same form is easiest. Also be aware of everyone who needs to sign off or validate that the hours have been served. Time tracking should include verification by the volunteer, the site supervisor, and the project director.

Program Officers will have sample timesheets if you need one.

Be prepared to do these things annually: Annual appraisal of the volunteer's service, like a performance review; annual income eligibility review to make sure volunteer still qualifies to receive a stipend; annual physical exam to make sure the volunteer is healthy enough to continue serving; and assignment plans should be reviewed and updated at least annually.

Question for group: What questions do you have so far?

We talked about policies and procedures you need to have ready for volunteers. Let's talk briefly about a way to organize all of this.

Volunteer Policy Handbook

Some of you may already have a Volunteer Policy Handbook or a work station handbook or some type of operations manual that lays out the policies we talked about, like who is eligible to serve as a FGP or SCP. The purpose is to provide written instructions for the project and station staff- what people serving in the program or working with the program need to know.

The handbook should include policies and procedures that are necessary to comply with the Federal Regulations, and policies you develop, like paid leave time, but it can be also used to manage volunteers and outline expectations –you may want to include rules and guidelines for appearance, code of conduct, best practices for the volunteer.

Here is an example of sections that might make up a Volunteer Policy Handbook.

Purpose and goals refers to the FGP or SCP program broadly and the sponsoring organization. You may want to include this as background information for project staff, stations or volunteers.

Eligibility Requirement refers to the requirements a person needs to meet to be an FGP or SCP that we talked about.

Volunteer Role and Assignment would describe the type of service volunteers provide and who they serve.

Terms of Service describes the schedule expectation, 15-40 hours a week, and what counts as stipended time.

Volunteer Training describes the training volunteers need before and during service.

Program Benefits would include things like paid leave, mileage reimbursement, recognition, etc.

Program Policies would include rules, separation policies, etc.

Volunteer File

Keep a file for each volunteer to maintain all the required documentation. Ongoing recruitment is recommended, and having a system in place for organizing each volunteer's paperwork will make life easier.

This includes forms volunteers complete or provide right away (like an application); documentation that shows you initiated the criminal history checks; results of the checks; information you had to verify (such as income eligibility); forms you collect regularly like timesheets; and forms that need to be updated annually (like the physical exam).

You should also document when the volunteer completes orientation and that they received a volunteer handbook or some written information on policies and rules.

When you start putting together policies and procedures, start by reviewing the Federal Regulations, and then review your organization's current policies and procedures (e.g. you may have these for staff or other volunteers): What do you have that can be adapted and what new policies do you need to develop (e.g. mileage reimbursement, paid leave)?

Consider if your current policies fit with what is allowed within regulations.

There may be adaptations you can make, for example: you can develop a leave policy that explicitly states how volunteers can use accrued leave time to cover tribal nation holidays.

Example of specific thing to be aware of: the grant budget period and volunteer leave policies. Accrued leave cannot carry over from one budget period to the next. The sponsoring organization may develop a leave policy that requires volunteers to use accrued leave prior to the end of the budget period. Organizations can also include a pay-out as recognition for accrued leave at the end of a budget period.

Who should be involved/consulted as you adapt or develop new policies?

First ask your Program Officer to review a draft policy for you to make sure it meets regulations.

Then go through the tribal council, advisory committee, etc. with final draft policies. Remember, the sponsoring organization is responsible for successful administration of the grants and the proper protocol for clearing the tribe's policies with respect to the FGP or SCP programs should be followed.

There are resources to help you put together policies and procedures.

CNCS website has the regulations, handbooks, samples, and other resources (The checklists we will email you have specific links to resources).

Program Officers may have documents you can adapt or know how to get them.

Peers/other grantees may have policies they have written that they can share with you to adapt.

Question for group: Where have you found helpful resources and support? What tips would you have for someone new to this?

Today we talked about volunteer-related policies/procedures; however, keep in mind that sponsoring organization has a second set of responsibilities around program administration (e.g., administering the budget in accordance with federal rules and regulations, ensuring staffing requirements are met, etc.).

Post work: We will email you the 3 documents after this webinar. Please complete two of them - the "Volunteer Policy Handbook Checklist" and "New Volunteer Documentation Checklist" - and send it to your Program Officer, cc'ing Jill Sears at jsears@cns.gov, to review if you haven't already. (I will put all this in the email.)