

# VOLUNTEERS

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Agricultural societies rely on volunteers to put on a successful fair and other events. However, managing volunteers involves a number of factors from deciding what they should do to dealing with injuries. Answering the following questions assists an organization in identifying some of the issues:

- What do volunteers do: grounds patrol, service projects, work at events, adopt-a-garden, coordinate events, something else?
- What is required of volunteers?
- Who provides training?





- Who supervises volunteers and how: direct actions, register volunteers, more?
- Who is liable for the actions of volunteers and takes on liability for what they create?
- Who pays should a volunteer be injured?

- Whose insurance responds to claims?
- What happens with personal belongings of volunteers (there may not be coverage for this through MCIT)?

## WHO ARE VOLUNTEERS?

People volunteer for many different reasons. They volunteer on an individual basis and as a part of a group. They may also be a volunteer to the agricultural society itself or to another organization that assists with the fair. Because of this, agricultural societies should consider a number of factors related to its volunteers:

- Age of volunteers
- Health conditions of volunteers
- Driving for the organization:
  - Use of personal cars for fair business
  - Appropriate licensing of volunteer drivers and vehicles
  - Appropriate insurance on volunteers' vehicles
  - Liability of the organization when a volunteer drives
- Dealing with injuries on site, off site or previous injury



*Fairs and other events depend on a variety of volunteers with diverse experiences.*

Depending on how many volunteers an agricultural society uses, managing them may also be a serious issue. Organizations should think about expectations, evaluations, deficiencies, dealing with minors, dealing with retirees, etc. related to volunteers.

## WHOSE VOLUNTEER ARE THEY?

Three of the most common ways to classify volunteers are that they are the agricultural society's volunteer, volunteers of some other organization or are informal volunteers. The agricultural society's volunteers are the easiest to classify and the kind that usually come to mind first. These are the fair's guides, patrol, event, garden or other volunteers.

The second group are associated with a local organization, such as a church, school or community action group. Often these volunteers are working on specific projects, for example for scouting.

The last group is the person who works voluntarily for the agricultural society and never reports the activity: the citizen who weeds a garden each week, picks up trash on a daily walk, or any number of other actions.



*Volunteers can come from many different organizations besides the agricultural society.*

It is important to understand who is volunteering, when they are on the grounds and what they are doing because each of the situations listed presents different risks. In all of these situations, the more information a agricultural society has, the better it can deal with the exposures.

MCIT recommends registering volunteers according to criteria set up by the agricultural society. With the first group of volunteers, the ones who volunteer directly for the fair, this is the most easily accomplished once procedures are established.

With the second group, volunteers of another organization, this is slightly more difficult, but still achievable. It would be prudent to consider establishing the parameters of any volunteer organization up front. It is also a good idea to put agreements in writing between the agricultural society and the organization that is coming to work on the fairgrounds.

Agreements should include hold harmless and indemnification language, as well as insurance coverage from the organization for volunteer activities on the fairgrounds. The agricultural society should be an additional insured on the other organization's insurance policy. If stipends are involved, pay them to the sponsoring organization, not to any individual volunteer.

For the last group, registration is highly unlikely. In fact, you may never determine how many tasks are done by unknown volunteers.

## EXPOSURES

Before choosing roles for volunteers, consider that the unknown factor in using volunteers can present the organization with a number of new exposures. Some of those are the volunteer's:

- Lack of experience
- Lack of training and orientation
- Lack of proper equipment

In addition, volunteers are not protected by the bond coverage; do not have volunteers handle money. And they are generally not protected by workers' compensation coverage.

Also remember that personal property is only covered if used for the benefit of the member.



*Take into consideration the unknown factors a diverse set of volunteers can present.*

## RISK MANAGEMENT

### GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a process for registering all volunteers.
- Maintain a file for each volunteer that includes essential information including name, address, telephone numbers, emergency contacts, etc.
- Create job descriptions for volunteer positions.
- Consider not allowing volunteers to have access to money (mysterious disappearance of money may not be covered by MCIT).



*Establish rules and procedures for volunteer positions.*



- Determine if a Tennesen warning is necessary.
- Address requirements of the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act in the agricultural society’s discussions with legal counsel.
- Conduct reference checks on volunteers.
- Invite volunteers to training sessions, such as safety meetings, and courses for first aid, CPR and automated external defibrillators.
- Conduct accident investigations when a volunteer is involved.
- Do not make payments to volunteers to avoid having them deemed an employee by the workers’ compensation courts system.
- Maintain written agreements with groups that provide volunteers, e.g. Lions Club, Civil Air Patrol, Boys and Girls Scouts, Jaycees. Stipends must go to the organization, not to individuals.
- Provide proper training and orientation for all volunteers.
- Provide proper safety gear.
- Provide proper supervision of volunteers, especially minors.
- Conduct post-event debriefing with volunteers for their perspective on the experience.

## VOLUNTEER DRIVING AND RISK MANAGEMENT ADVICE

- Develop volunteer driver qualifications and apply them consistently.
- Obtain a copy of each volunteer’s driver’s license (if he or she is driving for the agricultural society’s benefit).
- Obtain proof of auto insurance (if volunteers are driving their vehicles for the agricultural society’s benefit).
- Check all vehicles for safety.
- Advise volunteers that they are responsible for physical damage and liability losses resulting from the use of their personal vehicles.
- Offer defensive driving courses to volunteers. (MCIT offers a no-cost option to its members. Contact MCIT at [info@mcit.org](mailto:info@mcit.org) or 1.866.547.6516.)
- Inform drivers that wearing seat belts is mandatory.
- Remind drivers to follow the law while driving, including the hands-free cell phone law.

## Resources

The following articles are available at [MCIT.org](http://MCIT.org) and provide additional information:

- “Volunteer Drivers and Personal Auto Coverage”
- “Volunteer Exposures and Coverage”
- “Volunteers and Interns: Keys to Managing Them”
- “Workers’ Compensation Coverage for Volunteers”
- “Managing Risks of Volunteers and Interns”
- “Volunteer Drivers Using Personal Vehicles for Member’s Business”

