

Volunteers and Extension¹

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This is one publication in the series The Cooperative Extension Volunteer Teacher. This volunteer teacher series addresses the need for guidelines to assist Extension county faculty in the important task of preparing the volunteer to teach.

Extension Volunteers

Cooperative Extension programs depend on the utilization of volunteer services. The mission of Extension is education and the roles of volunteers in Extension relate directly to helping people secure information to educate themselves or others. The link that volunteers provide between the Land Grant system and people who need information is a unique role among volunteer agency programs.

Volunteers provide many services with the help of Extension county and state faculty which include:

1. teaching groups and counseling individuals;
2. organizing educational events and projects;
3. assisting with research and demonstrations;
4. providing meeting places and materials;

5. preparing media programs;
6. sharing information informally;
7. serving as officers and on committees;
8. lending a hand as needed.

Volunteers work in all aspects of the Cooperative Extension Service and some have special titles: Home and Community Educator, Master Volunteer, 4-H Leader, and Master Gardener. Others work on committees or projects without specific titles; and still others represent community organizations that seek specific kinds of assistance from Extension.

The role of volunteers will vary by program area and location throughout the state. These volunteers, regardless of title or program affiliation, serve in one or more, of the following roles for the local program. These include:

1. a service role such as answering the telephone or providing some type of assistance to the Extension program;

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2. a community outreach role in which the volunteer becomes involved in community issues or represents Extension programs to other organizations; and
3. a teaching role in which the volunteer works with participants or learners in delivering a lesson or demonstrating a skill.

While each of these roles is important, the teaching role, formal and informal, is one of the most significant contributions that volunteers make to the county and state Extension programs.

The increasing utilization of volunteers to carry out Extension programs requires a system for organizing their involvement and maximizing the results of their work. It is well documented that volunteer success depends on commitment and ability to do the task required. These alone are not sufficient to insure success for the volunteer or the Extension program. A system is needed to bridge the gaps between the goals of the Extension program, the experiences of the volunteer, and the learning needs of the clients. This is especially true when volunteers are asked to teach adults. Frequently the volunteer lacks experience in working with or teaching adults. While they may have good intentions and relevant experiences, their performance may be less rewarding than it could be for both the Extension Program and for the volunteer.

If the volunteer's experiences are to be wisely utilized for the Cooperative Extension Service, the population to be reached, and the personal fulfillment of the volunteer, a training program is needed. Effective volunteer teachers for local Extension programs must know what is expected of them in this important role. The impact of many programs depends on the skill and knowledge of the volunteer teacher and how well he/she represents the Extension program and mission to the client group. County Extension faculty need to be involved in training local volunteers to teach and to represent The University of Florida, The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, and The Cooperative Extension Service as the institutions whose mission they are carrying out in the course of their teaching.

This volunteer teacher series addresses the need for guidelines to assist Extension county faculty in this important task of preparing the volunteer to teach.

The Extension Volunteer Teacher

The responsibility for preparing the volunteer to teach belongs to the county faculty who use their service. The task of teaching is the same whether it is done by a professional or a volunteer and the outcomes are no less important because they are the result of a volunteer teacher's work. Thus the same careful preparation that the Extension faculty makes to teach his/her client group is needed by the volunteer teacher. Teaching volunteers to teach others deals with the same attitudes, skills, and knowledge that are needed by the professional Extension educator. The fact that the teacher is "not paid" does not reduce the importance of the job they perform nor the outcomes they achieve.

This volunteer teacher series is designed for use by Extension professionals who work with volunteers in any context. It provides a systematic approach to prepare the volunteer to teach Extension clientele. It includes seven separate modules that address different but sequential aspects of volunteer training. Module Two deals with recruiting and interviewing the volunteer to insure that they have the appropriate skills and attitudes for being a volunteer teacher. Module Three deals with orienting the volunteer to the institutions they represent, the personnel with whom they will be working, the facilities and other details. An overview of the teaching process is summarized in Module Four. Suggestions on methodology include organizing a lesson, conducting a demonstration, and using questions to stimulate discussion. Evaluating the volunteer teacher is the subject of Module Five. It includes a set of questions for self-assessment and discussion with the supervisor. Recognition is the payment that is given to volunteers for their valuable contributions. Methods for providing recognition are included in Module Six. The last module contains legal implications for the utilization of the volunteer teacher. Aspects of the Florida Statutes are included as well as interpretations.