

# Frequently Asked Questions Regarding University Volunteers

## 1. What is a volunteer?

The Use of Volunteers policy defines a volunteer as “an individual who performs work or provides services in support of University activities without the expectation of compensation. Volunteers may perform a variety of functions, however the University does not intend for volunteers to perform or displace work that is presently being performed by University employees.

## 2. Who is responsible for selecting volunteers?

Pursuant to the Use of Volunteers Policy, the department is responsible for properly screening, engaging, and terminating a volunteer. The department is also responsible for ensuring an individual has appropriate experience, qualifications, and training for the tasks to be performed.

## 3. What forms are needed for volunteers?

Every volunteer must complete a **Volunteer Profile, Disclosure, and Consent Form**, which will be kept on file in the department for one year post assignment completion. In addition, if the volunteer assignment requires a criminal background check then the volunteer must complete the **Authorization of Release of Information** form.

## 4. Can volunteers be reimbursed for expenses?

Yes, the appropriate department has the authority to decide whether to reimburse a University volunteer for actual and reasonable expenses so long as the expenses fall under the University’s reimbursement guidelines located on the [Business and Finance website](#). Reimbursement cannot be used as a substitute for compensation nor can it get linked to the volunteer’s productivity.

## 5. What if a volunteer fails to complete the forms?

The volunteer then risks not being formally recognized as a University volunteer and possibly not covered for liability.

## 6. What are volunteers prohibited from doing?

Pursuant to the Use of Volunteer Policy, volunteers are prohibited from performing the following activities:

- working in any capacity in which he/she is employed by the University, or which is essentially similar to the individual's regular work at the University, or under circumstances that suggest the decision to volunteer is not made freely
- operating heavy equipment (e.g. forklift, hi-lo, backhoe, etc.);
- working with highly hazardous or toxic chemicals or agents and/or dangerous equipment or environments (i.e.: anything that could cause severe injury or death).
- any activity considered inappropriate for an employee;
- entering into any contract on behalf of the University;
- rendering professional services without possessing the required credentials;
- Volunteers cannot render legal advice on behalf of the University. The [University Counsel Office](#) provides legal counsel and assistance exclusively to Grand Valley State University representatives regarding University matters. All requests for legal services on behalf of the University must be directed to the University Counsel Office.

## 7. What is the minimum age for University volunteers?

There is no minimum age but volunteers who are younger than 18 must have parental consent before they can serve as a University volunteer.

**8. Are volunteers covered for liability (property damage and personal injury)?**

GVSU indemnifies volunteers acting in the scope of their volunteer duties and the University provides insurance coverage for liability.

**9. Are volunteers agents of the University?**

If and only if that authority has been delegated to them by an authorized University Official. Pursuant to the Use of Volunteers policy.

**10. Are volunteers entitled to Workers Compensation?**

No, University volunteers are not covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act and are not considered employees for any purpose. Therefore, they are not eligible for any university benefits, including Worker's Compensation, as a result of this volunteer association.

**11. Can volunteers receive a charitable contribution receipt for their service?**

Yes, the IRS allows departments to reimburse and/or provide charitable tax receipts to volunteers for expenses such as parking or reward the volunteers at an appreciation event. Upon the request of the volunteer, the supervisor may provide him/her with documentation acknowledging time spent without placing any numerical value on that amount of time.

**12. What privileges and benefits are extended to volunteers?**

Free access to events if the event is related to their volunteer duty but no extra tickets are allowed. Usage of other benefits such as special uniforms, parking permits, food vouchers are allowed at the discretion of the supervisor and only at the time of their volunteer assignment.

**13. Can GVSU employees volunteer?**

Yes, Per Section 551.103 of the Fair Labor Standards Act as amended, employees may volunteer hours of service to their public employer or agency provided, “such services are not the same type of services which the individual is employed to perform for such public agency.”

**14. Can volunteers drive University vehicles?**

Yes, departments are to conduct a driving history check on their volunteers and make sure the volunteer has a valid, restriction free driver license or else they are not allowed to drive a University vehicle under any circumstances. Departments are to maintain documentation along with the volunteer application.

**15. When is training, credentialing and/or licensure required for volunteers?**

GVSU volunteers must have the necessary training and/or supervision to safely carry out the volunteer work and, depending on the function performed, must meet the appropriate licensing requirements and GVSU program specific requirements.

An individual who volunteers services in a field which requires a license or certificate must satisfy that requirement prior to performance of those duties. For example, a medical doctor volunteering services must have a current license to practice medicine before volunteering. Volunteers in professions that require licensure must have a current license in their field of service, and a liability coverage clearance from the [Director of Risk Management](#).

**16. Does GVSU track its volunteers?**

Yes, departments must maintain a completed and signed copy of the **Volunteer Profile and Information Form** along with any other associated documents for a period of one year following the end of the volunteer assignment.

**17. Can volunteers receive academic credit?**

Yes, if the volunteer is a GVSU student seeking an educational experience, then the student can apply for service learning credit. No academic credit is awarded as a condition of completing volunteer assignments. Students from other higher learning institutions are welcome to apply for a volunteer opportunity at GVSU; in these cases the supervisor does not have the authority to give the student any transfer credits but can provide the student documentation that acknowledges time spent at their volunteer assignment.

**18. Can volunteers use institutional marketing tools?**

No, volunteers should not receive any institutional marketing materials reflecting their volunteer position and University logos such as: business cards, letterhead, unless approved by institutional marketing.

**19. Can volunteers bring their own equipment, vehicle, tools, and personal items on campus?**

Yes, volunteers may use their own equipment while fulfilling their volunteer duties at their own risk. The University will not cover any damages or reimburse volunteers in the event that their items are harmed.

PLEASE NOTE: Regarding the use of personal vehicles, the University's auto insurance will not cover personal vehicles. The owner's auto insurance will be the primary coverage for liability and collision damage.

**20. Can volunteers be assigned a gvsu.edu email account?**

The Electronic Mail Policy in the Grand Valley Manual states, "Grand Valley State University provides its faculty, staff and students with electronic mail intended for University-related purposes including direct and indirect support of the University's instructions, research, and service missions." Therefore, volunteers are not to receive their own personal email addresses. Instead, departments may permit them to access departmental email accounts for the sake of completing their volunteer duties.

**21. Can volunteers have access to GVSU systems (i.e. Banner)?**

Yes, volunteers may have limited access to Banner; volunteers should only have access to the fields in Banner that is required for them to complete their assignment(s).

**22. Can volunteers assist with research (not as participants)?**

Yes, volunteers are allowed to help coordinate and/or analyze research but if they are enrolled in a class under that professor; their participation might qualify as service learning.

**23. Can a group volunteer?**

Yes, the group must complete individual Volunteer Information and Consent forms for each participant in the group.

**24. Can volunteers have access to financial, private and confidential information?**

Yes, so long as the volunteers with access to sensitive information are required by to abide by privacy laws that govern the University, such as FERPA, HIPPA and may be required to complete a background check.

**25. When is a criminal background check required?**

Depending on the type of work the volunteer is to perform such as assisting with minor children, working unsupervised, handling cash, or handling private and confidential information) a criminal background check must be conducted before granting the volunteer permission to serve. Forms are located on the Risk Management Department and University Counsel Office website.