



# Volunteer Risk Management Myths and Truths

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# #1

Telling volunteers what to do may increase an organization's exposure to liability.



## Risk Tips:

- Set clear expectations
- Train volunteers
- Use volunteer position descriptions
- Provide regular feedback
- Never assume volunteers know what to do (or what to do according to your rules)



## #2

**1. It's perfectly legal to pay volunteers a fair wage.**



**2. Never, ever pay your volunteers!**

## Risk Tips:

- **Best bet:** In most cases, volunteers serve without any expectation of pay.
- **Stipends:** economic realities & 20% rule – “if no more than 20%... It would appear permissible” – (See FLSA2005-51)
- **Same role or coercion:** don't do it
- Payment or promise to pay could **change status:**
  - Volunteer Protection Act (immunity for simple negligence)
  - Protection under anti-discrimination statutes



## #3

**Your brother's best friend comes to volunteer. He doesn't need to be screened because you know him.**



## Risk Tips:

- Screen ALL volunteers, whether or not you THINK you know them.
- Your screening process will vary by position. It should be based on the RISKS of the role.
- A basic screening process may include:
  - An application
  - Verification of any required credentials or experience
  - Reference checking
  - Interviews
  - More, depending on the role: background check, home visit



#4

**Asking your volunteers to use common sense is the best advice you can give.**



## Risk Tips:

- There really is no such thing as common sense!
- Never make assumptions about what volunteers think or would do in situations that require good judgment
- Don't give volunteers a pass on training because they have served elsewhere
- Be explicit about expectations
- Remember: ongoing training is always important; things change



## #5

**If you set the bar too high, no one will want to volunteer.**



## Risk Tips:

- **Self-screening:** a valuable tool
- Ask: how important is your mission?
- Conduct **Exit Interviews** to collect information to help strengthen your program in the future



## #6



**Volunteers hate being told how to do their jobs.**

## Risk Tips:

- Put a premium on communication
- Many workplace complaints stem from a lack of clear communication!
- Volunteers want to know how they can help & what they need to do



# #7



**Volunteers from different generations have completely different expectations.**

## Risk Tips:

- Shared expectations:
  - To work on challenging projects
  - To learn
  - To make a contribution
  - To be fairly treated
  - Work-life balance



SOURCE: Ben Rosen, PhD., from the Kenan Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

## Remember:

- Think broadly about the harm a volunteer could cause or suffer.
- Scrutinize assumptions about volunteers and the work they do...
- Strive for clarity, consistency and fairness: your three-point shield against discontent and liability claims
- Invite complaints!
- Communicate generously
  
- Reach out for help!







# Risk Resources:

Employee or Volunteer: What's the difference?

[www.nonprofitrisk.org/library/articles/employee\\_or\\_volunteer.shtml](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/library/articles/employee_or_volunteer.shtml)

Fair Labor Standards Act: Volunteers

[www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/flsa/docs/volunteers.asp](http://www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/flsa/docs/volunteers.asp)

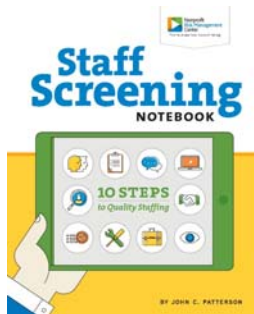
Department of Labor: "economic realities" – 20%

[www.dol.gov/whd/opinion/FLSA/2005/2005\\_11\\_10\\_51\\_FLSA.htm](http://www.dol.gov/whd/opinion/FLSA/2005/2005_11_10_51_FLSA.htm)

My Generation: Reaping the Rewards of an Intergenerational Workforce

[www.nonprofitrisk.org/library/articles/My\\_Generation\\_Reaping\\_the\\_Rewards\\_of\\_a\\_Multigenerational\\_Workforce.shtml](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/library/articles/My_Generation_Reaping_the_Rewards_of_a_Multigenerational_Workforce.shtml)

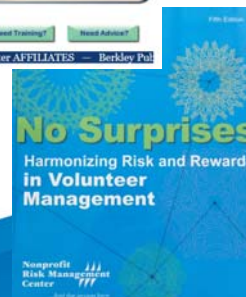
# Other Resources:



[www.nonprofitrisk.org/store/pub\\_detail.asp?id=120](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/store/pub_detail.asp?id=120)



[www.nonprofitrisk.org/store/pub\\_detail.asp?id=226](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/store/pub_detail.asp?id=226)



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[www.nonprofitrisk.org/affiliates/risk\\_help.asp](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/affiliates/risk_help.asp)

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