

Volunteer Fact Sheet – For Departments and Volunteers

Appropriate Responsibilities for Volunteers

A department should not rely on volunteers to perform duties that are typically performed by permanent employees – other than on a short-term basis. Volunteers should be supplementing the work done by employees, not replacing the need for paid staff.

Letter to the Volunteer

To avoid any confusion about the terms of the relationship, the department should send a letter to the volunteer spelling out the begin date, end date (if any), time commitment, responsibilities, whom to contact with questions and information about insurance coverage and ID cards.

Insurance Issues

Liability protection is provided to all officers, employees and agents of the University under Wisconsin Statute, Section 895.46(1). Volunteers acting under the direction and control of the University and for its benefit are considered agents and thus covered. This statute authorizes the State to pay claims based on the negligent acts of employees or agents or to defend employees or agents against allegations of negligence, which may have caused injury or property damage to others provided the employee or agent was acting within the scope of his/her responsibilities to the University. It is important that volunteers acknowledge mistakes that could lead to potential liability claims and that such incidents be reported promptly by the department to the UW-Madison Risk Management Office.

Volunteers are not covered by worker's compensation, however. If injured during the course of their volunteer work, they would have the same legal rights as any visitor to the campus to seek compensation if the injury resulted from University negligence.

ID Cards

Retirees of the University are eligible to retain a valid ID card. Those retirees granted emeritus status will have their ID card validated automatically. For other UW retirees who held a UW-Madison ID card before retirement, the last employing department must recommend continuation of the ID card. Volunteers who are not UW retirees can only obtain an ID card if they are given a zero-dollar appointment.