

# Office of Strategic Planning

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## ENHANCING VOLUNTEERISM IN TENNESSEE EXTENSION

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In 2010, Tennessee Extension launched a strategic planning process to honor the past and look to the future. The strategic plan provided a roadmap to guide Extension in achieving excellence in the future and focus attention on what matters most: advancing Extension in Tennessee. The plan resulted in five overarching goals that included strategies and action steps to achieve each goal. One strategy was to develop a world-class Extension team of staff and volunteers, with several action steps related to enhancing volunteers in Extension. Throughout the planning process, volunteerism was mentioned as an important component to achieving Extension's mission in the future. The importance was stressed by employees, stakeholders, partners, and current volunteers during the strategic planning process.

### Background

Volunteers have been an integral part of Extension's programs from the early days. However, the large number of volunteers involved in UT Extension programs (more than 5,000) and the diverse roles performed by volunteers make volunteer management complex. Challenges faced by agents included: resources for volunteers were not readily available; training was not consistent across the state; expectations were not clearly defined; and professional

development opportunities were limited. In addition, new state regulations and UT policies necessitated the development of requirements for child protection and liability for volunteers.

### OUR VOLUNTEERS AT A GLANCE

5,264 Active Volunteers

754,312 Educational Contacts  
made by volunteers annually

159,616 Hours of volunteer  
service annually

### Purpose and Objectives

The strategic planning process resulted in the formation of initiative teams to implement the plan. One team was charged with expanding and strengthening Extension volunteers. Specific objectives included:

- Facilitate recruitment and retention of a culturally diverse, active volunteer workforce.
- Create expectations for staff and volunteers.
- Encourage teamwork between volunteers and staff, demonstrating mutual respect.
- Enable learning and growth of volunteers.

## Methodology

The team charged to address these objectives was composed of nine members who were nominated by their supervisors and selected because they had demonstrated an interest in enhancing volunteerism, had experience in working with volunteers, or had an educational background related to working with volunteers. The team was diverse, representing all Extension program areas, each region of the state, and varying years of experience.

The team conducted an environmental scan of other organizations with volunteer programs as background for their work. The team also conducted a needs assessment by surveying Extension personnel to discover ways they utilize volunteers and what kinds of support and resources are needed for their work with volunteers.

## Major Outcomes



### The Volunteer Model

As a foundation for their work, a volunteer model was developed to illustrate the philosophy, components and process for how Tennessee Extension works with volunteers.



### Website

A website was designed to house internal resources for staff working with volunteers. The website follows the UT Extension Volunteerism Model.

*volunteerism.tennessee.edu*



### Online Training

Online trainings were produced for volunteers. An online orientation module introduces new volunteers to Tennessee Extension. An online learning module for Level 3 volunteers covers additional topics, such as communication, transporting clientele and risk management.



### Application and Decision Tree

The screening process for volunteers was updated to establish consistency and to adhere to updated policies for the protection of minors. A decision tree offers guidance for classifying volunteers into three levels, depending on their roles and contact with minors. A five-part application was developed, including an optional interest inventory for potential volunteers to indicate their interest in volunteering with certain programs.



### Resources

Resources such as training outlines, a recruiting brochure, templates and a competency self-assessment were created to help agents recruit and develop volunteers.



### Handbooks

Two handbooks were written: one for volunteers and one for staff. The volunteer handbook introduces volunteers to Tennessee Extension and important policies

and procedures for serving as a volunteer. The staff handbook covers procedures for working with volunteers and provides resources for recruiting, training and recognizing volunteers.

## Vision and Mission for Volunteerism

### Vision

Tennessee Extension provides a climate that fosters mutual respect and positive working relationships between volunteers and staff.

### Mission

Tennessee Extension actively recruits and retains a culturally diverse volunteer workforce and enables learning and growth of volunteers to advance the mission of UT Extension.

### Core Values

Tennessee Extension holds the following core values about volunteerism.

- Tennessee Extension volunteers are a key component of our organization and the value of volunteers is in extending the reach of Extension

throughout the communities in Tennessee.

- Volunteers have the opportunity to positively impact the lives of youth, the local community and the environment in which they serve.
- Extension volunteers contribute time, talent and knowledge, which represents Extension's roots in our community.
- Trained volunteers bring knowledge and a diverse skill-set to Extension programs and extend our programming efforts.
- Volunteers help identify needs in communities and work with agents by implementing programs that address those needs and are making a difference in their communities.
- Volunteers are recognized as an asset to our programs, and our organizational structure reflects that belief.

## Sustainability Plan

Responsibility for sustaining the outcomes and deliverables from the Enhancing Volunteerism initiative resides in the department of Extension Evaluation and Staff Development. Volunteer application and screening procedures are processed and stored in SUPER, and the department is responsible for supporting and enforcing procedures in compliance with the Programs for Minors policies. The department is also responsible for the maintenance of volunteerism resources and the website.

## Initiative Team

### Leadership

*2017-2018*

Shirley Hastings, Director, Strategic Planning

Brandi Berven, Extension Specialist, Extension Evaluation and Staff Development

*2014-2016*

Tomi Rogers, Extension Specialist, Extension Evaluation and Staff Development

### Team Members

Tom Broyles, Associate Professor and State Program Leader, TSU

Carmen Burgos, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development

Janie Burney, Professor, Family and Consumer Sciences

Chris Cooper, Extension Agent, Shelby County

Kathy Finley, Extension Agent, Robertson County

Frank Hale, Professor, Entomology and Plant Pathology

Jamie Harris, Extension Area Specialist, Central Region

Martha Pile, Extension Agent, Montgomery County

June Puett, Extension Agent, Hamilton County



**AG.TENNESSEE.EDU**

D 72 07/19 20-0006 Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and resource development. University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating. UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.