

Earth Team Volunteer Management Questions and Answers

- 1. Q:** What is the minimum age requirement for Earth Team (ET) volunteers?
A: 14
- 2. Q:** I am a Boy Scout, age 12, working on a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) group project. Can I be an ET volunteer?
A: No—there are no exceptions to the age requirement. All ET volunteers must be at least 14 years of age.
- 3. Q:** Can ET student volunteers receive course credit for their volunteer time through their school?
A: Yes—NRCS must enter into a written agreement with the school that outlines the conditions and limitations of the volunteer assignment.
- 4. Q:** Can ET volunteers be authorized travel expenses?
A: Yes—normal travel expenses are payable to volunteers when authorized by NRCS to conduct official NRCS business. Prior approval must be obtained from management to incur such expenses.
- 5. Q:** Can ET volunteers drive government vehicles?
A: Yes—ET volunteers can drive government vehicles with the following provisions:
 - a.** Volunteers must have a valid driver's license.
 - b.** Supervisors must complete Form KS-PER-37, Authorization for Earth Team Volunteer to Drive Government Vehicle.
 - c.** Volunteers must have a volunteer ID card with them at all times.
 - d.** Volunteers have no indications of health problems that will interfere with their driving.
 - e.** Volunteers may only drive vehicles when performing official NRCS duties.
- 6. Q:** I have not signed a volunteer application, but I am volunteering on an NRCS project. Can I be reimbursed for my incidental expenses such as parking and transportation?
A: No—an individual volunteer application must be completed and signed before any incidental expenses can be reimbursed. Once the volunteer and NRCS representative have completed and signed the form, incidental expenses can be authorized and paid with management approval.
- 7. Q:** Do ET volunteers need to be citizens of the United States?
A: No—but ET volunteers must be members of an allied country. International volunteers must provide additional information to the International Program Division before they can be authorized to volunteer.
- 8. Q:** Can family members of NRCS employees serve as ET volunteers?
A: Yes—good judgment and discretion should be used when having family members of NRCS employees serve as ET volunteers to avoid a conflict of interest and public perception of such.

9. **Q:** Does Kansas use area coordinators to manage the program?
A: Yes—the current list of coordinators can be found at:
www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ks/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2_033361
10. **Q:** Are ET volunteers considered federal employees?
A: No—volunteers are not considered federal employees except for the purpose of Workers’ Compensation and/or Tort Claims Act.
11. **Q:** Does a case file have to be established for each volunteer?
A: Yes—in Kansas, an established volunteer case file is kept in the local office. The case file is sent to Human Resources ONLY if the volunteer has filed a Workers’ Compensation or Tort Claim.
12. **Q:** Will a volunteer’s case file be transferred to Human Resources upon termination?
A: No—volunteer case files will be transferred to an Official Personnel Folder only in the event that a volunteer seeks coverage under either Workers’ Compensation or Tort Claims Act.
13. **Q:** Does a volunteer have to have a position description?
A: Yes—the volunteer’s position description can be an attachment to the application or it can be inserted on the application.
14. **Q:** Is a prospective volunteer eligible to begin service as soon as the volunteer application is completed and signed by both the volunteer and NRCS representative?
A: Yes—prospective volunteers are eligible to begin service immediately upon completing paperwork unless they are an international volunteer. An international volunteer must wait until approval from the International Program Division is received before beginning service.
15. **Q:** Do all volunteers have to complete the Volunteer Interest and Placement Summary?
A: No—the Volunteer Interest and Placement Summary form is optional.
16. **Q:** Do all group members have to sign the group form?
A: No—only two signatures are required on the group form: the group leader and the NRCS representative (usually the district conservationist or volunteer’s supervisor).
For recurring groups, you need the group leader’s name and email address **plus** each volunteer’s name and email address. That information will be entered into the volunteer database.
For one-time groups, you need only the group leader’s name and email address and the total number of volunteers and total number of hours worked by the group for that project. However, you must keep a list of the names of the volunteers in the “group” file folder.
17. **Q:** Do all members of the group have to meet the minimum age requirements?
A: Yes—all group members must be at least 14 years old.

- 18. Q:** Do all volunteers under 18 years of age need parental consent to participate in volunteer activities?
A: Yes—if the volunteer is under 18, the parent or guardian must sign the parental approval portion of the OF 301A, Volunteer Services Agreement for Natural Resource Agencies for both individuals and group members.
- 19. Q:** Does NRCS assume all responsibility for ET volunteers, including Workers' Compensation and Tort Claims coverage?
A: Yes—NRCS assumes all responsibility for ET volunteers to include Workers' Compensation and Tort Claims Act coverage once an ET volunteer assignment has been made.
- 20. Q:** Can ET volunteers receive cash awards or gift certificates?
A: No—federal regulations prohibit non-federal employees from receiving cash or gift certificates.
- 21. Q:** Are national awards given every other year to outstanding volunteers?
A: No—national awards are given every year!
- 22. Q:** Are nominations for the national awards due each year in October?
A: Yes—nominations for national awards are due in October each year.
- 23. Q:** Can the same individual, group, office, or state receive an Earth Team award two years in a row?
A: Yes—there are no limits so an individual, group, office, or state can win ET awards multiple times.
- 24. Q:** Can ET volunteers perform duties that NRCS employees cannot?
A: No—volunteers are permitted to perform most activities/duties that an NRCS employee would do.
- 25. Q:** Do all ET volunteers have to be issued an ID card?
A: No—only ET volunteers operating government-owned or -leased vehicles are issued an ID card.
- 26. Q:** Are the panel of judges who select the regional/national award winners NRCS employees?
A: No—all judges are from outside the NRCS (keep that in mind when you write your award nominations).
- 27. Q:** Are volunteer hours pulled from the tracking system by the National ET office each month?
A: No—Hours are pulled from the tracking system twice a year—April 15 and around October 1.
- 28. Q:** Does the National ET office want to hear success stories about ET volunteers?
A: Yes—success stories are encouraged for both the state and national websites.

- 29. Q:** Are there computer security policies for volunteers having access to NRCS computers?
A: Yes—in order for volunteers to have access to NRCS computers, the volunteer’s supervisor must contact their area office, who will provide them with access to all the forms required for a background investigation and computer security training.
- 30. Q:** Can ET volunteers be hosted?
A: Yes—a hosted volunteer is someone who is paid by another entity while they are volunteering. Examples include, but are not limited to, Senior Community Service Employment Program Employees, job training programs, and other partner employees that volunteer their time working on a project that is not something expected to do as part of their job such as a group of bankers that volunteer to cook a meal at a field day.
- 31. Q:** Do ET volunteers have to keep timesheets?
A: Yes—ET volunteers keep timesheets to help managers evaluate program effectiveness. Timesheets also support a volunteer’s claim for work related injuries, while protecting NRCS against fraudulent claims.