

NJLA



New Jersey Library Association
The voice of New Jersey libraries and librarians

Volunteer Library Staff: Talking Points

Volunteers, like paid staff, must be recruited, supervised, and trained. Unlike paid staff, however, volunteers can, and do, leave at any time without warning, causing the process to begin anew. Thus, managing volunteers can be more problematic than managing paid staff. It is essential that a clearly defined process be in place to facilitate the selection of volunteers and that the jobs they may be asked to undertake are clearly delineated and mutually understood.

- Volunteers who do not have the same level of professional training and expertise as degreed and licensed professionals cannot be expected to provide the same specialized level of service.
- Volunteers will generally offer no more than four or five hours of volunteer time per week, which prohibits their effectively managing even the simplest automated circulation system.
- Volunteers will sign on only for those time slots that do not conflict with their own employment, family, and other obligations. Times that are optimal for volunteers are not necessarily times that are most useful to the library.
- Volunteers cannot be placed in positions that could jeopardize the library's efficiency if they fail to appear.
- Volunteers cannot expect to select which tasks they will perform, although effort should be made to match volunteer and task appropriately.
- Volunteers interested in working with children might, at the request of a library's board, be asked to undergo background and drug checks. It is unlikely that members of the community seeking volunteer opportunities would be willing to subject themselves to these measures.
- Volunteers are not covered under Workers' Compensation; libraries will thus need to assume additional coverage so that volunteers are insured for injuries related to their volunteer work and for any additional liability issues.
- Volunteers should never be placed in a position of responsibility for library safety issues.

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