

Dear Volunteer,

The staff and board of Vermont Community Garden Network (VCGN) formally welcomes you as a member of our team. Volunteers serve an important role in helping VCGN to fulfill its mission. Your efforts are highly valued and we want to thank you for your time and commitment. This handbook will provide the information necessary to help you get started.

Introduction

VCGN is a nonprofit organization that works with community and school groups all over Vermont to start, sustain, and grow gardens, building strong local food systems and vibrant educational sites. Founded in 2001 as Friends of Burlington Gardens, VCGN provides trainings, technical assistance, resources, and networking opportunities for garden leaders all over the state and hands-on garden education in Burlington through its Community Teaching Garden and other programming for youth and adults.

We envision a vibrant local food system where Vermonters of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities experience the benefits of community, school, and neighborhood gardening and become healthier through improved diets, exercise, and positive social interactions. Our core mission goals are to increase public access to community gardening resources; develop outreach, education, and service-learning programs; ensure that underserved groups have equal opportunities to participate in community gardening; and cultivate political support for gardens through networking, advocacy, and activism.

What Volunteers Can Expect

VCGN commits to:

- Value and recognize our volunteers as a significant resource in achieving the goals of our organization.
- Provide adequate information and training so that volunteers can fulfill their roles as requested.
- Provide volunteers with the proper tools and equipment to complete their task safely.
- Treat volunteers with respect and courtesy at all times.
- Be receptive to any comments or feedback from our volunteers.

What We Expect of Volunteers

As a VCGN volunteer, we ask that you:

- Represent VCGN with enthusiasm, energy, and a positive attitude.
- Are familiar with the mission, programs, and activities of the organization and be able to clearly describe them to the public.
- Fulfill your role as outlined in your volunteer role description.
- Perform your volunteer role to the best of your ability.
- Meet time and task commitments and to provide sufficient notice when not available.
- Act in a way that is in line with the objectives of the organization and that enhances its work.
- Follow the organization's policies and procedures.

Hours and Volunteer Schedules

The main office is generally open for business from 9:00 am to 5:00pm, Monday through Friday.

Volunteers have an appointed staff supervisor who is the main contact for scheduling and questions.

General Volunteer Policies

The following Volunteer Policies have been adapted from the current VCGN Employee Handbook.

VCGN retains the right to modify any of the terms and conditions of volunteerism described herein, and to implement such changes prior to their publication. VCGN also retains the right to interpret and modify these policies as deemed necessary to deal effectively with individual volunteer situations.

If you have any questions or wish to have further information about any particular provisions of these Volunteer Policies, please contact the Executive Director at any time.

A. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

VCGN is committed to providing a workplace that practices non-discrimination and equal opportunity. All qualified persons regardless of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ancestry, place of birth, HIV status, national origin, religion, marital status, age, physical or mental disability, protected veteran status or obligation for service in the armed forces are offered equal employment opportunities. All personnel policies and actions are administered according to this policy.

B. OPEN COMMUNICATION POLICY

VCGN is committed to a respectful and mutually supportive workplace. VCGN encourages volunteers to ask questions and to discuss concerns and suggestions openly and freely with their supervisors. It is our expectation that open communication can usually solve most problems, resolve differences of opinions, and clear up misunderstandings.

When a volunteer has a concern, the first, best, and most direct resource is the volunteer's immediate supervisor. If the supervisor is unavailable, or discussion with the supervisor does not lead to a resolution of the concern, the volunteer may discuss the situation with the Executive Director. The Executive Director is responsible for carrying out the organization's Human Resources function and will provide a timely response.

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the response provided by the Executive Director, is not comfortable approaching the Executive Director, or if the Executive Director is not available, they may contact the Board president, or in turn any member of the board of directors.

The only way that problems and concerns can be addressed is if they are brought forward. No issue is too large or too small if it is of concern.

C. ANTI HARASSMENT POLICY

VCGN actively seeks to provide and maintain a productive workplace free of harassment. VCGN does not accept or condone actions of harassment by management personnel, co-workers, volunteers, or others. All staff have the explicit duty to prevent harassment and foster a productive working atmosphere. Harassing behavior includes illegal harassment as defined under Federal and/or State law and inappropriate harassing behavior that may not be illegal but causes an environment that disrupts or interferes with a productive work environment.

Harassment based on race, religion, color, national origin, age, disability, ancestry, place of birth, sexual orientation or gender is a violation of VCGN policy and is prohibited by State and Federal anti-discrimination laws.

Sexual harassment is a form of sexual discrimination. This includes sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to the conduct is made a term or condition of an individual's employment, it is used as a component of the basis for employment decisions or has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

Any VCGN employee or volunteer who feels that he or she has been subject to illegal harassment is encouraged to directly inform the offending person that such conduct is offensive or not welcome and must stop. If the employee does not wish to communicate directly with the alleged harasser or the communication has been ineffective that person is encouraged to report any such incident to the Executive Director if appropriate, or the employee may appeal to any member of the Board of Directors. A prompt investigation will follow.

External Assistance for Illegal Harassment

While employees are strongly encouraged to file their complaints of illegal harassment through their supervisor, other State and federal agencies, listed below, are also available to respond to employee concerns of illegal harassment:

- Vermont Attorney General's Office, Civil Rights Unit, 109 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05602. Phone 802/828-3171 (voice/TDD)
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, One Congress Street, Boston, MA 02114. Phone 617/565-3200 (voice) or 617/565-3204 (TDD)

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

VCGN recognizes and supports the standards set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and similar state laws, which are designed to eliminate discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. VCGN does not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities in any aspect of the employment relationship, and does provide reasonable accommodations as required by law to otherwise qualified employees or applicants with disabilities. Employment opportunities or privileges will not be denied to an otherwise qualified employee or applicant because of the need for reasonable accommodation of the individual's disability. Discrimination based on an employee's or applicant's association with a disabled individual is also forbidden. Employees with ADA-related concerns should contact the Executive Director.

D. CLEAR VOLUNTEER DESCRIPTIONS & WORKPLANS

Every VCGN volunteer has the right to a clear understanding of the position they fill. Supervisors are responsible for helping volunteers understand and develop work plans that are related to their volunteer work as appropriate.

E. ATTENDANCE

If a volunteer knows in advance that he/she will be absent or late, it is their responsibility to discuss this with their supervisor. When the absence is unforeseen, the volunteer is expected to notify their supervisor as early as possible but no later than the normal start time of work.

F. LIABILITY

Volunteers are not covered by VCGN's workman's compensation insurance. Volunteers are responsible for their own actions while working with VCGN. VCGN is not responsible for any injuries, illness, death, or damage to personal property resulting from volunteering.

G. PHOTOGRAPHIC RELEASE

Volunteers are often photographed in the course of their service. VCGN retains the right to use photos, images, videos and audio connected to volunteer service, unless the volunteer declines release in writing to the Executive Director.

H. ORGANIZATION-WIDE SAFETY RULES

The personal safety of employees and volunteers is of primary importance to the organization. Every employee and volunteer is expected to maintain a safe and healthy environment. All supervisors are expected to support this policy and are responsible for making sure that volunteers receive proper safety training to ensure that established safety procedures are observed for expected job tasks. Please report all accidents, no matter how small, to your supervisor immediately after they occur.

All volunteers should become familiar with the following list of safety guidelines:

General Safety

- Don't leave valuables in your car—if you have to, please do not leave them visible.
- Always check in with your supervisor before you go out to work and when you come back in.
- Try to avoid working alone. Have a cell phone with you if you have to work alone in case of emergency.
- Mobile first aid or field kits are available. VCGN staff and interns should always have a field kit with them when off-site.

Tool Safety

- Hoes: Always carry with the sharp tip to the ground. Never swing above your knees. Do not leave them face up on the ground.
- Knives: Be aware of the blade! When carrying, place blade under arm. Always cut away from yourself, but be careful of the plants.

Ergonomics

- Always lift from the legs, not from the back.
- Be aware of repetitive motions.
- Work smarter not harder!

Body awareness

- Watch where you are stepping! Plants get crushed easily.
- Never sit on your bottom when weeding. Kneel or stand- it is much more efficient.

Clothing

- Wear appropriate clothing for the season and the job to be done.
- Closed toe and closed-heel shoes are required at all times for outside work.

I. VOLUNTEER PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Volunteers will have regular opportunities to engage in mutual feedback with their supervisor. Volunteers should feel free at any point to seek additional guidance, evaluation, or support from their supervisor.

J. TERMINATION OF SERVICE

VCGN retains the right to terminate volunteer service at any time, for any reason. VCGN reserves the right to dismiss a volunteer from service immediately for any of the following reasons:

- Continued or gross neglect of duty
- Excessive absenteeism
- Incompetence or unwillingness to render satisfactory service
- Falsification of work related information
- Intentionally giving false or misleading information to obtain service opportunity
- Disrespectful interactions with employees, youth, other volunteers, or community members
- Personal conduct that prejudices the reputation or effectiveness of VCGN
- Willful violations of policies, rules or regulations
- Negligent or willful damage to organization property
- Theft
- Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol while on duty
- Repeated violations of the standards of conduct of the organization as described herein
- Improper use of electronic mail system/internet, or
- Sexual Harassment

K. DRUG AND ALCOHOL-FREE WORKPLACE POLICY

VCGN maintains a policy that alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs, and firearms are not allowed at any time in our office, our building, or at our program sites. It may be necessary for VCGN employees or volunteers to remind members of the public who interact with VCGN that use of these items is not permitted at our program sites.

L. PETS

In compliance with insurance regulations and for the safety of co-workers/volunteers and community members, pets are not allowed unless expressly approved by the Executive Director.

M. VISITORS

Community members often drop in out of interest, to learn more about VCGN, or to visit a staff member. We ask volunteers to be helpful and courteous to all visitors.

Volunteers must supervise all dependents who accompany them.

N. ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT POLICY

All telephone, computer and messaging equipment, including all hardware and software, as well as any of the data contained therein, are the exclusive property of VCGN. Volunteers must be specifically assigned to and supervised by an VCGN employee if they are going to use any electronic equipment. All use of electronic equipment must be directly related to a specific volunteer project.

O. TRAVEL, VEHICLES & PARKING

VCGN volunteers will not be reimbursed for mileage that is related to their volunteer work unless pre-approved by their staff supervisor or the Executive Director.

P. SMOKING

VCGN maintains a work environment free of cigarette and tobacco smoke. This policy applies to any and all sites where volunteers may work including the organization office and school and community gardens. The “Tobacco on School Grounds Law” specifically protects students, teachers and the public by prohibiting the use of tobacco on public school grounds.

Q. PERSONNEL RECORDS

The Administrative Assistant is responsible for maintaining personnel files for each VCGN volunteer. Volunteers may review the information in their files by appointment; however, files may not leave the premises. All records are treated with appropriate discretion. It is important that you promptly advise the Administrative Assistant of any changes pertinent to your records such as:

- Person(s) to notify in case of accident or illness
- Address and telephone number
- Legal name

R. TRACKING VOLUNTEER HOURS

All volunteers should check in with their supervisor upon arriving, and notify their supervisor when they are leaving. This is important for your safety as a volunteer and for reporting purposes. All volunteers are asked to track and record their hours of service.

S. EMPLOYMENT REFERENCES

If information is requested by prospective employers regarding your volunteer work with VCGN, we will verify the nature and dates of your service. The volunteer supervisor may provide a formal reference upon request.

T. EXIT INTERVIEW

When a volunteer completes their service with VCGN, they may request to meet with the Executive Director or Board Chair for an exit interview. This is an opportunity to discuss the volunteer position, offer constructive feedback, or convey thoughts and ideas. Volunteer feedback is valuable and helps build a positive professional culture.

U. YOUTH SPECIFIC POLICIES

When working with youth, volunteers must:

- Use positive techniques of guidance, including positive reinforcement and encouragement rather than competition, comparison, or criticism.
- Portray a positive role model for youth by maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, integrity, courtesy, tact, and maturity.
- Treat children of all races, religions, and cultures with respect.
- Wear appropriate clothing without profanity or references to drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol.
- Not use profanity.
- Refrain from intimate displays of affection and not fraternize with youth participants outside of their volunteer duties.
- Do everything within their power to avoid being put in a situation where they are alone with youth.
- Not abuse children in any way including physically, verbally, sexually, or mentally.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information about youth (including contact information, medical information, photographs, etc.) which is obtained by virtue of volunteer service with VCGN must be held in strictest confidence, unless release of such information is authorized by a youth's parent/guardian through a signed permission form on file with VCGN. Release of information about youth or community members (including names, photographs, contact information, etc.) must be cleared by the Executive Director. No sensitive organizational information or information about individual youth/community members should ever be revealed to unauthorized individuals or released without a signed permission form and/or authorization from the Executive Director.

MANDATORY REPORTING

The purpose of this policy is to protect children and youth whose health and welfare may be jeopardized by abuse and neglect, and to make sure employees meet their legal reporting obligations under the Vermont Statutes Annotated (33VSA § 4913).

All employees and volunteers share in the responsibility to protect Vermont's children and youth and will take appropriate action to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect.

EXPECTATIONS

All employees and volunteers are to be considered Mandatory Reporters and shall report suspected child abuse and neglect to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) field office in Burlington within 24 hours. The employee or volunteer should also immediately bring it to the attention of her or his supervisor. Reporting to a supervisor does not relieve one of the legal responsibility of making a report to DCF within 24 hours.

MAKING A REPORT

If you believe a child/youth is in immediate danger, call the police department or dial 911. Follow up by making a report to DCF.

To report suspected child abuse or neglect call the local DCF district office weekdays between 7:45 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. After hours, on weekends, and on state holidays, the DCF Emergency Services Program (ESP) can take your calls at 1-800-649-5285 from Vermont or (802) 863-7533 from outside the state.

Depending on the nature of your relationship with the family, you may feel that it would be helpful to inform the parents that you are making a report. We strongly advise that you contact DCF before taking this step. While it may help to protect children in some cases, informing the parents could endanger the child and hinder the investigation. When you make your report, DCF can advise you whether to take this step.

When you call DCF to make a report, try to have as much information on hand as possible. If known, provide the child's name, date of birth, name of school or other important location; name, address, and phone number of the parents or other person legally responsible for the youth; names and ages of siblings or other children living in the home; answers to the questions "Who, What, Where, and When" regarding the situation you are reporting; a description of any physical and/or behavioral symptoms of abuse or neglect you observed; and names and addresses of extended family members and close family friends.

The DCF supervisor will review the information and decide whether to accept your report for investigation based on whether there is sufficient information to indicate that child abuse or neglect has occurred as defined in state law. DCF will not divulge your identity unless you give them your permission to do so; your identity could be disclosed however, if a judge orders it to be released. DCF will notify you whether your report was accepted for investigation; or you can call DCF to find this out. Vermont law provides you with immunity from civil or criminal liability as long as your report was made in good faith.

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT REPORTING

A mandatory reporter who fails to report suspected abuse or neglect may be fined up to \$500. A mandatory reporter who knowingly fails to report with the intent to conceal suspected abuse or neglect may be imprisoned for up to 6 months and fined up to \$1,000, or both.

VCGN employees may be subject to disciplinary action for failing to report the suspected abuse or neglect of a child or youth as directed in this policy. Actions could include corrective action as outlined in VCGN's personnel policies up to and including probation or termination.

DEFINITIONS

An abused or neglected child: means an individual under age 18, whose physical health, psychological growth and development, or welfare is harmed or is a substantial risk of harm by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare. It also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person (including another child). Harm can occur by 1) abandonment; 2) emotional maltreatment, physical injury, or sexual abuse; or 3) failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or health care.

Emotional maltreatment means a pattern of malicious behavior that results in impaired psychological growth and development.

Physical injury means death, or permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.

Sexual abuse consists of any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including, but not limited to, incest, rape, prostitution, sodomy, child pornography, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child.

Risk of harm means a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means.