

Misty M. Cathey

From: Laura A. Huebinger
Sent: Thursday, July 14, 2022 8:55 AM
To: Laura A. Huebinger
Subject: MAJOR CHANGES to the Volunteer Screening process

This message is being sent blind copy to all County Extension Agents, County email accounts, Master Volunteer Program Coordinators, Extension Leadership Team, Associate Department Heads, District Extension Administrators, County Extension Directors, Regional Program Leaders, 4-H Faculty, and 4-H Foundation. If this message does not apply to you, please accept my apologies and simply delete.

Good morning,

We have several significant, upcoming changes to the Volunteer Screening process, and I have provided a list of those details below.

I have a (super-riveting!) video that details this information because it's probably easier to listen to this than read it all! But I wanted you to have it in writing below case you have questions or need to reference it again.

<https://youtu.be/gdwCMuO4xdE>

Changes to Volunteer Screening Processes!

There are several significant changes coming up this fall. More details on each below.

- Rebranding the name of the volunteer screening process
- Changing screening vendors
- Moving to online forms for volunteer background checks
- New database to manage non-4-H volunteer information and lists
- New course for Master Volunteers in AgriLife Learn
- New/updated employee resources

What's Staying the Same

Safe Environment. We are still committed to providing a safe environment for everyone involved, including our clientele, our volunteers, us as employees, and the agency as a whole.

Re-screening. Re-screening of all Extension volunteers is conducted every three years from the volunteer's most recent screening. Please note:

- 4-H Volunteers: Screening is determined on a 4-H year basis. For example, a volunteer screened any time during the 2021-2022 4-H year (between September 1, 2021, and August 31, 2022, also considered "4-H Year 2022") needs to be re-screened at the beginning of 4-H Year 2025 (September 1, 2024 through August 31, 2025).
- Non-4-H Volunteers: Screening is determined on an actual, calendar year basis. Screening is valid from the date of screening for three years.

4HOnline. 4-H volunteers will still utilize 4HOnline for background checks and must re-enroll annually.

Who gets a background check. Remember, all Master Volunteers, direct volunteers, and volunteers who handle Extension support group finances (such as BLT, LAB, PAC, etc.) must complete the criminal background check through the Extension Volunteer Standards program.

- For clarification, this does NOT mean that all of your LAB and PAC members must complete the have a criminal background check.
- This means any volunteers who meet the definition of a direct volunteer (see Extension Volunteer Standards Guidelines) or those who are handling funds should have a criminal background check.

Rebranding: Extension Volunteer Standards

Beginning immediately, we will be rebranding our screening program. The term Youth Protection Standards will now be **Extension Volunteer Standards**. Youth safety still remains a high priority, however our screening process is broader than just youth safety. We include all Extension volunteers, even those who do not work with youth. This rebranding more accurately reflects all AgriLife Extension volunteers.

Sterling Volunteers

Sterling Volunteers. We are updating our background screening vendor to Sterling Volunteers. They're a national leader in background checks for both employment and for volunteer work. This is the same company who we use for employee background checks.

Online process. No more paper forms. Each individual will need a unique email address. No sharing of email addresses between spouses, family members, or friends.

No more paper forms after August 15. Our current vendor contract will expire on August 31. The current Volunteer Application Form (paper form) will be phased out. **The last day for the Volunteer Application Form to be PHYSICALLY RECEIVED in the Extension Volunteer Standards office is Monday, August 15.** After this, all background checks will be conducted with the new vendor and their online form.

Sterling Volunteers & 4HOnline Integration

Sterling Volunteers integrates with 4HOnline. Thankfully, this is the only change with 4HOnline this year, and most won't notice much of a difference. A new internet tab will open directing the volunteer Sterling when he/she reaches the background check (Screening) portion. This is AFTER submitting the payment method. Also, don't forget the Trainings that follow the payment and Screening portion.

Each individual volunteer will need a unique email address. Remember:

- The login email address is the Family email address.
- Once the Family is created, Members (Club Members or Volunteers) are added to the Family.
- Each Member may have a unique Member email address. Each Volunteer will need a unique Member email address.
- Only one Member may use the Family email address as their individual Member email address.
- There is no sharing of Member email addresses between spouses, family members, or friends.

Sterling's online form will collect the private, personal information for the background check. It will not be stored in 4HOnline. Screening will also begin immediately with this online form. We will not have to wait to "batch" a group to send to the screening vendor. This is good news for our safety and security, as well as the ability to get results back more quickly.

Payment is still \$10 annually for 4-H volunteers only. Payment will remain in 4HOnline with a \$10 annual application fee. This \$10 fee is only for 4-H volunteers. (See below regarding non-4-H volunteers.) Trainings will stay on the same two-year cycle and the trainings are the same as last year.

4HOnline rollover dates. 4HOnline will close August 12-14, 2022 to upgrade and rollover to the new 4-H year. It will reopen on Monday, August 15 to begin the new 4-H year. Remember, those enrolling as 3rd graders should wait until September 1.

Extension Volunteer Standards Database

Extension Volunteer Standards Database. We are in development of a new database for Extension Volunteer Standards in partnership with the Office of Data & Accountability. This database will be for non-4-H volunteers. Volunteers will begin the screening process with the county. We'll provide you with the link you can use once it is available. Volunteers will submit their beginning interest information into the database.

The county will then approve or deny applications to move onto the next step: AgriLife Learn course and background check online form. (More details about that below.)

Agents will have immediate access to volunteer lists and screening status in real-time. Reports will be available.

The database is in development and should be available soon. As soon as I can share that link (and training resources) with you, I will absolutely get it out as soon as possible!

AgriLife Learn Course

New online course for Master Volunteers! We are finalizing a new course in AgriLife Learn for Master Volunteers. It is a Welcome & Orientation course for these volunteers to get started on the right path as an AgriLife Extension volunteer covering topics such as the history of Extension; Master Volunteer expectations; management of risk, finances, and conflict, inclusion; how to teach youth and adult audiences. This course is tentatively scheduled to launch in December 2022/January 2023.

The background check form will be linked through the AgriLife Learn course. The link to Sterling's background check form will be available after the completion of the educational content.

Non-Master Volunteers background check. There will also be another course in AgriLife Learn for our non-Master volunteers who are not Master Volunteers who may need the background check such as treasurers of Program Area Committees.

Fee. The fee will increase to \$12 for non-4-H volunteers once the course is launched. This payment will only be required once every three years or each time you sign up for the AgriLife Learn course.

Payment methods. There will be a credit card option for payment in AgriLife Learn for the volunteer to pay individually. If the county would still like to pay with a check, an invoice may be generated, but will slow down the process.

Benefits

Security and modernization. These changes will significantly modernize our processes to make things more efficient and more secure. We, as an agency, will no longer handle private personal information. The volunteer completes the online form directly with the screening vendor. This will involve less risk for the volunteer, for us as employees, and for the agency. This is a big win! This is what Sterling does all day, every day!

Faster results. This process should also be more efficient in that background checks will begin immediately, and we won't have to type up all the information from the paper forms (with common problems such as data entry errors, missing information, illegible handwriting, time delay to enter information, etc.) and/or wait to "batch" 4-H volunteers lists.

County access to database. Counties will be able to log into the database to have real-time access of volunteer lists and screening status. We will also have a report (and hopefully automatic email reminders) of those whose screening status is about to expire.

Employee Resources

The Volunteer Steering Committee has been working hard on providing feedback and input on these changes and resources. More resources are coming to you soon!

- Return on Investments spreadsheet and interpretation template/example to be shared at fall district meetings (or other scheduled times with your DEA/CEA/RPL)
- Tip sheets for employees on working with volunteers
- Webpage to host all resources related to volunteerism
- Trainings and more details with the above changes

Timeline

August 12-14, 2022	<p>4HOnline will be offline August 12-14 for system updates as planned.</p> <p>The new 4-H year does not officially begin until September 1, but the system will open on August 15 ready to begin new year enrollment. Youth that are 8 years old and in the 3rd grade should not enroll until September 1.</p>
August 15, 2022	<p>Last day for the Volunteer Application Forms to be <u>PHYSICALLY RECEIVED</u> in the Extension Volunteer Standards office for processing.</p>
August 15, 2022	<p>4HOnline reopens for the 2022-2023 4-H year. Club Members and Volunteers may begin to re-enroll. 4-H Volunteers needing a background check will see the new link to Sterling Volunteers open in a new internet tab. Payment and Training are still within 4HOnline.</p>
August 16, 2022 and forward	<p>For non-4-H volunteers: The AgriLife Learn course will not be available just yet. The course is tentatively set to launch in December 2022/January 2023.</p> <p>The database will be close to launching. As soon as I can launch it, I will absolutely do so! If your county needs background checks processed after this date, please reach out to Laura Huebinger, or her assistant, Connor Cook to get the details to complete that process. (Connor is part-time, so leave a message or send an email if one of us does not answer the phone.)</p> <p>Payment will still be processed via checks until the AgriLife Learn course is launched.</p>

As always, please don't hesitate to reach out with questions! I know this is A LOT of information! I realize it might seem overwhelming at the moment, but I promise you I will do my best to make this transition as smooth as I can. I sincerely appreciate your patience and understanding as we make these significant changes to better our volunteer screening program to help protect our clientele, our volunteers, us as employees, and our agency as a whole!

I am out of the office today and tomorrow, so please be patient if I am slow to respond to any questions the remainder of this week. I will do my best to get back with you as quickly as possible.

I truly appreciate all that you do in your communities to make a difference!

Laura

Laura A. Huebinger, Ed.D.

Extension Program Specialist | Volunteer Development

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

1229 N US Hwy 281 | Stephenville, TX 76401

1470 William D. Fitch Parkway | 2473 TAMU | College Station, TX 77843

Youth Protection Standards: 979-213-5539

Direct Line: 254-974-9027

lhuebinger@ag.tamu.edu | <https://texas4-h.tamu.edu/>

<http://AgriLifeExtension.tamu.edu> | <http://stephenville.tamu.edu>