



Keeping Volunteers Safe & Healthy

Your volunteers are important members of your community and workforce. You need them to stay safe and healthy. Just as there are rules governing workplace safety for paid employees, volunteer labor is regulated by occupational safety and health code.

This guide is designed to help nonprofits know the rules to follow to keep volunteers safe. It was written for Executive Directors and volunteer coordinators, even if these roles are filled by volunteers. There are three categories of information to know.

1. Safety and health law
2. How to keep volunteers safe
3. How to insure volunteers through Washington State's Workers' Compensation program



**Washington
Food Coalition**

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We recommend that you print this document and have a pen or pencil handy. We've provided exercises where you can reflect on your situation and make plans.

Definitions: What is a volunteer?

A **volunteer** is a worker who is not provided meaningful compensation for their work. By compensation, we mean payment through cash or check or anything of value, such as gift cards, food, lodging, counseling, or other services.

“Meaningful” is open to interpretation, so it is important to have a clear policy and shared understanding about what this means. A volunteer who is compensated through any of these forms could be considered an employee with regards to rules falling under the jurisdiction of Labor & Industries Division of Occupational Safety & Health (DOSH).

Coming in 2023 from Volunteer Safety Hero:

Free resources will be available to help keep your volunteers safe and healthy. These include:

- Printed safety reference cards for your volunteers
- Quick reference safety videos for your volunteers
- A website with volunteer safety information and downloadable versions of the cards and videos (<https://nonprofitsafetyhero.com/volunteer>)

1. Safety and health law

What to know

Volunteers are covered by Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA). All of the laws that cover employees also cover volunteers.

WISHA regulations apply to Washington state. They are a more specific and detailed set of rules than federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) laws.

Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) requires that nonprofits keep a safe workplace for all people who work there. This includes employees, volunteers, contractors, and vendors who come on-site. Accident prevention and workplace health and safety training programs are required by the Act.

Nonprofits should provide volunteers with the same basic safety training they provide to employees. This includes:

- Your **Accident Prevention Program**, which outlines important information for everyone who works within your organization. This includes the locations of exits, first aid kits, and fire extinguishers, safe use of equipment and supplies, what to do in emergencies, etc.
- Volunteers must be provided with the same appropriate **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** as you would provide paid employees doing that same activity. You are required to do a hazard assessment to know what PPE to use.

From WAC 296-800-100

"Does WISHA apply to you?"

WISHA applies to almost every employer and employee in Washington. WISHA applies to you if:

You volunteer your personal labor, or you have volunteers working for you who receive any benefit or compensation."

<https://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=296-800-100>

Your Turn: How do you demonstrate your commitment to following safety and health law within your organization?



For more information about the safety and health rules for all nonprofits, visit <https://nonprofitsafetyhero.com>. Here you'll find on-demand learning on accident prevention and an Accident Prevention Program document generator.

2. How to keep volunteers safe

What to know

Keeping volunteers safe takes a little extra effort. Volunteers are not exposed to the same level of communication as employees, and they are not around your workspace as much to be reminded how to stay safe and healthy. It is your job to provide the communication and reminders volunteers need.

You keep your volunteers safe in all the same ways you keep your employees safe—by having a pro-active safety program that you communicate regularly. Here are three specific ways to focus attention on safety and health in your volunteer program.

A. Require a safety orientation

You probably already offer an orientation for your volunteers. Here is a checklist of what you might cover related to safety and health:

- Your Accident Prevention Program
- Common tools and how to use them safely
- Safety challenges and how a volunteer should manage them to stay safe and healthy
- How and when to report on-the-job injuries or unsafe conditions
- How to use and care for personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Where the safety bulletin board is located and what information you can find there
- Where the first-aid kit is kept
- Where the fire extinguishers are kept
- What to do in an emergency, including how to exit the space
- How to identify hazardous gases, chemicals, or materials used on-the-job and instruction about the safe use and emergency action to take after accidental exposure



For more information about the safety and health rules for all nonprofits, visit <https://nonprofitsafetyhero.com>. The **Safety Leadership course** reviews the core safety rules that all organizations must follow, including what to keep on your bulletin board and how to create an Accident Prevention Program.

B. Communicate about safety regularly

Volunteers are in your space only a limited number of hours per week or month. They can't be expected to remember the details of their work from shift to shift. And it is human to forget—our brains retain information better if we are reminded about it spaced over time.

Plan on regular communication about safety and health topics with your volunteers. This can happen in the following ways:

- Monthly reminder about how to use key tools
- Spot checking volunteers to make sure they are following safety protocols

- ❑ Regular learning sessions on safety and health topics. Use the tools provided through the Nonprofit Safety Hero series to help.
- ❑ Celebrate safe practice by highlighting the actions of specific volunteers
- ❑ Invite your Executive Director, a board member, or volunteer coordinator to talk about safety and health and how it aligns with the values of the organization

Remember, you are required to have **safety meetings** if you have more than 10 employees or volunteers. You can include safety in a regular meeting if you have 10 or fewer employees.

C. Provide easy-to-access safety information

Coming in 2023: *Volunteer Safety Hero* will publish a set of free **safety reference cards** on common volunteer tasks. Volunteers can learn what they need to know from the safety reference card, which can be available directly or through a supervisor.

A QR code on the card provides a **quick reference video** that goes over safety procedures and can be easily accessed from any cellphone, tablet, or PC.



Your turn

- ❑ Learning tools when you need them
- ❑ Orientation
- ❑ Regular communication



Which of these ideas will you implement within your organization? When and how?

3. How to insure volunteers through Washington State's Workers' Compensation

What to know

Washington State's Workers' Compensation program is an **OPTIONAL** way that you can insure your volunteers. With respect to volunteers, workers' compensation covers medical costs only.

Workers' Compensation is an insurance program to help your employees heal and return to work should an accident happen. Like any insurance, you pay for coverage. The rate is calculated through a formula that starts with a base rate that includes an accident fund, medical aid fund, and stay at work costs.

There are five things to know about workers' compensation about volunteers.

A. What is covered

Because volunteers do not earn a wage, workers' compensation only covers medical costs, not wage replacement and vocational services. This means that an injured volunteer who is covered through your nonprofit would have their medical expenses paid for, but not any missed wages from their paid employment if they are an employee somewhere else.

501(c)(3)s can cover volunteers

"Private nonprofit charities that are able to demonstrate they qualify under Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rules as a 501(c)(3) exempt organization. Under IRS rules, churches automatically qualify. All other non-profit charities should have a letter from the IRS saying they qualify."

<https://lni.wa.gov/insurance/insurance-requirements/volunteers/#who-can-cover-volunteers>

B. Who is covered

△ You must cover all or none of your volunteers. You cannot select one type of volunteer. For example, a food bank that chooses to cover its volunteers would be covering those volunteers working on the floor of the food bank as well as its volunteer board members.

C. What it costs

The 2022 base rate for volunteers is \$0.067 per hour. This reflects the base rate for *risk class 6901*, which covers volunteers. The base rate would then be modified by the organization's experience factor, which for most nonprofits is a modest adjustment.

<https://lni.wa.gov/insurance/rates-risk-classes/risk-classes-for-workers-compensation/risk-class-lookup#/details?code=6901>


D. How to cover volunteers

There are three main steps to covering volunteers: electing coverage, maintaining accurate records, and reporting on a quarterly basis.

1. Elect coverage

To elect volunteer coverage, submit an “Application for Elective Coverage of Excluded Employment” (F213-112-000), found here:

<https://lni.wa.gov/insurance/insurance-requirements/volunteers/#who-can-cover-volunteers>

 When you elect coverage for volunteers, you can decide whether to cover them for their actual hours worked or for a general option of 100 hours per year per volunteer.

<https://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=296-17-930>

2. Volunteer recordkeeping

It is important that you keep current and accurate records. This includes:

- Name of volunteer
- Written documentation stating that the volunteer understands they will not be compensated
- Written documentation stating that the employer accepts the volunteer to work on behalf of the organization
- Social security number
- Beginning and, if applicable, end date of volunteer engagement
- A summary time record showing the days and actual number of hours worked on each workday*
- Total number of hours worked*

* Only necessary if you select to cover volunteers for the actual number of hours worked. If you select the 100 hours option, you do not need to count the exact number of hours.

(More information: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=296-17-35201> and <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=296-17-930>)

3. Reporting

If you have employees, you are already in a rhythm of reporting to L&I on a quarterly basis. Reports and premiums for employees and volunteers are due four times per year:

- By April 30 for January 1-March 31
- By July 31 for April 1-June 30
- By October 31 for July 1-September 30
- By January 31 for October 1-December 31

<https://www.lni.wa.gov/insurance/quarterly-reports/file-quarterly-reports/>

Your turn

Do you plan to provide workers' compensation coverage for your volunteers?
(Remember, you must cover *all* volunteers if you decide to cover *any* of them.)



- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- I need more information (consider an L&I Consultation to get your questions answered:
<https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/preventing-injuries-illnesses/request-consultation/>)

If yes, how do you plan to keep records, or will you cover them for the general 100 hours/year?

E. What to do if an injury happens

If a volunteer covered by Workers' Compensation gets injured, this is the claim process they will follow:

1. Volunteer seeks medical attention from the medical provider of the volunteer's choice within one year of accident or two years of recognition of workplace disease
2. Medical provider or volunteer completes "Report of Accident"
3. Medical provider submits report to L&I
4. L&I notifies employer of claim
5. Employer fills out "Employer Report of Accident" (optional)

The employer role during a claim:

- Communicate with the volunteer.
- Communicate with medical provider. (Employers are entitled to all medical records related to a claim.)
- Communicate with L&I claim manager.

Note: If you have not chosen to cover your volunteers with Workers' Compensation, then this process does not apply, and Workers' Compensation is not an available resource for their medical expenses. You may want to check with your private insurance carrier to see if you have any coverage for the situation.

Remember to integrate whatever lessons you can glean from the injury into your workplace safety program.