



Volunteer Handbook

Updated: February 2020

“I have become part of the Property, and the Property has become part of me.”

~Anne Robinson

Welcome to the Robinson Nature Center!

We are excited that you have decided to become a part of our team and we are eager to work with you. The commitment that you have made represents a willingness to improve your community now and in the future. The time that you have committed represents the belief that volunteering will improve the quality of life in our community.

This handbook is intended to help clarify the policies and procedures for Robinson Nature Center volunteers. Reading this handbook should answer most of the basic questions you have about the Robinson Nature Center.



Howard County

RECREATION & PARKS

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Dear Volunteer:

I would like to welcome you to the volunteer programs of the Department of Recreation and Parks. We have a rich tradition in utilizing Howard County's committed volunteers in a diverse and beneficial way so that your participation will increase the quality of our program offerings and facilities. The opportunities are endless for you to assist us in the delivery of Recreation and Parks programs to all Howard County citizens. The commitment that you have made represents a willingness to improve your community now and in the future. The time that you have committed represents the belief that volunteering will improve the quality of life in our community.

The volunteer program plays a major role in the Recreation and Parks operation. The Department of Recreation and Parks and its staff are eager to begin working with you. I would like to sincerely thank you for your generous donation of your time and experience.

By reading this manual, you will become knowledgeable of the Department of Recreation and Parks system and hopefully the manual will answer most of the questions you may have concerning our department.

Again, I would like to thank you for volunteering your time and experience.

Sincerely,

A. Raul Delerme
Director

Robinson Nature Center Mission Statement:

The mission of the Robinson Nature Center is to facilitate the enjoyment and understanding of our natural resources and to bridge the gap between people and nature. By inspiring sound environmental awareness, we promote responsible stewardship of all our natural resources and strive to connect people of all ages with nature through experience-based education.



Volunteering at the Robinson Nature Center

Introduction

These guidelines are written to provide overall guidance and direction to staff and volunteers engaged in volunteer involvement and management efforts. These guidelines do not constitute, either implicitly or explicitly, a binding contractual or personnel agreement. Robinson Nature Center reserves the exclusive right to change any of these policies at any time and to expect adherence to the changed policy. Changes to or exceptions from these policies may only be granted by the Volunteer Coordinator, and must be obtained in advance and in writing. The Volunteer Coordinator shall determine areas not specifically covered by these policies.

If you have any questions, please ask! You have signed a statement indicating that you understand and accept these guidelines. Robinson Nature Center volunteer documents may be found on our webpage.

Definition of “Volunteer”

A "volunteer" is anyone who, without compensation or expectation of compensation beyond reimbursement, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of Robinson Nature Center. A "volunteer" must be officially accepted and enrolled by Robinson Nature Center prior to performance of any tasks.

Benefits of Volunteering

Volunteering has a meaningful, positive impact on your community; but did you know that it could have many benefits for you too? Here are some reasons to volunteer:

Learn a new skill:

Volunteering is the perfect vehicle to discover something you are really good at or to develop a new skill.

Be part of your community:

Volunteering is ultimately about helping others and having an impact on people's wellbeing. What better way is there to connect with your community and give a little back?

Find a sense of achievement:

Volunteering is about enthusiastically giving your time, energy and skills freely. It may be true that no one person can solve all the world's problems, but what you can do is make that little corner of the world where you live just that little bit better.

Boost your career options:

If you are thinking of a career change, then volunteering is a perfect way to explore new fields.

Discover interests and hobbies:

Finding new interests and hobbies through volunteering can be fun, relaxing and energizing. Sometimes a volunteer experience can lead you to something you never even thought about or help you discover a hobby or interest you would not have considered.

Meet a diverse range of people:

Volunteering brings together a diverse range of people from all backgrounds and walks of life. Not only will you develop lasting personal and professional relationships but it is also a great way to learn about people from all walks of life, different environments, and new industries.

Send a signal to your employer, teachers, friends and family:

Volunteering reflects and supports a complete picture of you, and gives real examples of your commitment, dedication and interests. Show people what you are passionate about and maybe you will inspire them too!

Volunteer Opportunities

Robinson Nature Center offers a variety of volunteer positions. You can choose from a one-day special event to a continuing program such as trail maintenance. Opportunities are available working with pre-school children up to senior adults. Below are examples of volunteer opportunities available:

- Trail work
- Children's programs
- Programs
- Planetarium usher
- Special events
- Craft preparation
- Invasive species removal
- Gardening
- Nature Place Play Naturalist
- Animal care
- Photography
- Children's garden
- Touch Tank docent
- Discovery Cart Docent
- Discovery Room attendant
- Representing the Nature Center at outreach events
- Live Animal Discovery Cart
- Other

Rights and Responsibilities

It is your right:

- To find meaningful volunteer work that matches your skills and interests, when possible;
- To receive the orientation, training, and supervision necessary to do the work;
- To be treated with respect and as a valued co-worker;
- To have safe, healthy working conditions;
- To be asked for permission before any references or background checks are performed;
- To be kept informed of matters within the organization that may impact your work;
- To be respected and receive feedback on the work you perform;
- To be given the opportunity to provide feedback and input;
- To expect that your time will be used effectively.
- To be provided a welcoming environment in which you can work
- To be provided resources and tools for the projects you are working on

It is your responsibility:

- To be honest about your background, skills, goals, limitations and motivations;
- To accept the guidance and decisions of the staff member that you report to;
- To perform the work assigned to you to the best of your ability;
- To be respectful and to maintain confidentiality;
- To follow organizational guidelines and procedures;
- To use any resources provided by the organization solely for the purposes of accomplishing your volunteer work, not for personal use or the use of others;
- To notify Robinson Nature Center if you choose to terminate your volunteer relationship;
- To be a good representative of Robinson Nature Center and our message while volunteering;
- To educate yourself about the facility and the issues we are working on;
- To work with us to find volunteer opportunities that fit your interests and skills;
- To utilize Better Impact (or other Nature Center selected tools) to manage your volunteer assignments;
- To let us know in advance if you cannot show up for a volunteer opportunity.

Attendance

Robinson Nature Center's hours are 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., Wednesday – Saturday and noon – 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. In addition, we do have programs/events outside this schedule. In the event of sickness or a schedule change that prohibits your attendance at a scheduled assignment, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator and/or Direct Supervisor of the program at 410-313-0400, or utilize Better Impact to cancel your assignment. Give as much notice as possible. If you need to cancel within 48 hours of the event, please call our Front Deck and leave a message at 410-313-0400.

Conduct

As a Robinson Nature Center volunteer, the lasting impression you make on those you serve reflects directly on all of us. Please be sure your words and deeds will help build our department and its reputation for quality. Your assignments may

be outdoors, in an office or a school setting. Be sure your attire and actions are appropriate to your assignment and workplace. If you are volunteering, you must wear your Nature Center Volunteer T-Shirt and a name badge. If you have not received one of these T-Shirts, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, Program Leader, or Front Desk Staff. Your name badge is stored in the Volunteer Lounge. In dealing with Howard County citizens and program participants, you must be unfailingly polite and mannerly. It is not your role or responsibility to handle unhappy participants. Should you find yourself in a situation where courtesy is becoming difficult, please refer the matter to the nearest responsible Robinson Nature Center employee. Howard County complies with all laws about race, creed and religion. Just remember, in your interactions with others, to treat them as you would want to be treated.

The following will not be tolerated in any Robinson Nature Center program:

- Food and beverage in unauthorized areas; glass containers are prohibited.
- Inappropriate touching or violation of others' personal space.
- Smoking in building or on property.
- Soliciting or loitering.
- Interference with employee or volunteer duties.
- Harassment and/or inappropriate or indecent conduct or language.
- Use of illegal drugs, intoxicants and weapons.
- Parking in unauthorized areas; driving or parking in field areas.
- Alteration or installation of equipment.
- Defacing property (indoors or outdoors).
- Conduct that may jeopardize the safety of others.

Ethics Code

Effective January 2012, Howard County Government's new Public Ethics law went into effect. In general, this law is a guideline for volunteers. Employees are prohibited from soliciting and accepting any gift or compensation from a person whose interests are different from the public interest that could be affected by the employee's actions. Unsolicited gifts of nominal value that do not exceed \$20 in cost or trivial items of informational value are permitted. See www.howardcountymd.gov to review the law.

Customer Service

While on duty you are representing the Robinson Nature Center. Treat the public with courtesy. Listen to requests, questions or complaints with interest and either respond to them or report them to your immediate supervisor. Your conduct with the public can make or break our reputation. If you offer interesting and reliable facts, a quality program and personal interest in participants' questions in a kind fashion, word will spread about the many reasons to visit the Robinson Nature Center.

Five points to ensure good public relations:

- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Develop the best programs possible so that participants go home satisfied.
- Use every opportunity to share highlights of your program with others.
- Use every medium of communication to convey your message.
- Think positive! Think success!

Visitor/Participant Behavior

Program expectations will be conveyed to the participants at the beginning of the program. Staff and volunteers will work cooperatively to create a positive climate, which minimizes the potential for inappropriate behavior. When misbehavior occurs, modification techniques will be administered. However, under no circumstances are participants to be subjected to verbal or physical abuse by staff or volunteers.

Parents/guardians will be contacted if inappropriate behavior persists. The Robinson Nature Center reserves the right to limit, deny or expel a participant

when the health and/or safety of the individual, other participants, staff, volunteers and/or the public are threatened. These decisions are made by the Program Manager or Supervisor and may be made based on the following situations:

- Repeated and unresolved disciplinary problems that require excessive staff intervention. (Actions that persist after a behavior modification plan and agreement have been implemented.)
- Involvement in any activity that is contraindicated for medical reasons.
- Behavior that hinders the safe operation of a vehicle.
- Behavior that presents danger for the participant, other participants or the staff.

Dealing with Issues/Concerns

When you have an issue or concern that you feel needs to be addressed, please follow the chain of command. For instance, if you are having a problem with another volunteer in a program, direct your concerns to the Volunteer Coordinator. If your issue cannot be resolved at that level, contact the Nature Center Director for assistance in resolving your issue/concern.

Teen Volunteers

Volunteers must be at least 14 years of age. Potential volunteers between the ages of 14 and 17 must fill out a volunteer application and participate in an interview. They will not have a background check performed; however, their parents do need to sign the Volunteer Application. Those under the age of 18 must have a parent/guardian on-site at Robinson Nature Center while volunteering.

Service Hours

The Robinson Nature Center also accepts as volunteers those participating in student community service activities, student intern projects, corporate volunteer programs and other volunteer referral programs. In each of these cases, however, a written agreement must be in effect with the organization, school or program which outlines responsibility for management and care of the volunteers. This agreement must be secured in writing before the volunteer begins an assignment. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to secure such an agreement. Volunteer

hours with the Robinson Nature center can be included in the service hours needed by high school students as a requirement to graduate. Please discuss accruing these hours with the Volunteer Coordinator.

Supervision

Volunteers must sign in and out in the Volunteer Logbook located in the Nature Center Volunteer Lounge at the beginning and end of the program/assignment so that the Volunteer Coordinator can keep a record of volunteer time. If your assignment is offsite or you are performing tasks at home, please put your hours in the log as soon as possible after your assignment.

Paperwork

Certain paperwork is required to be on file. For example:

- Application Form - Must be completed for each new volunteer. Go to: <https://app.betterimpact.com/Application?OrganizationGuid=6cc1075c-f3cb-48a3-af9c-f61d1b903710&ApplicationFormNumber=1> This link can be found on Robinson Nature Center's Website under "get involved"
- Background check must be completed if volunteer is age 18 or older. Background checks are required to be updated every year. Your expiration date can be found on Better Impact under Qualifications. Apply through: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/rnc/getinvolved#Volunteer>
- Volunteer Log Book - You must fill out a record of your hours and projects in the book located in the volunteer lounge.
- Evaluation - At the conclusion of your volunteer assignment, an evaluation may be sent to you for completion. This provides us with information on your volunteer experience and will allow us to continue to improve our programs and services.
- Background Check Form or Fingerprinting Must be completed if volunteer is age 18 or older. Background checks are required to be updated every year. Your expiration date can be found on Better Impact under Qualifications.

Dismissal/Suspension

Volunteers serve at the pleasure of the appointing authority or designee and may be dismissed from volunteer duties at any time, with or without cause. A

volunteer may not be selected for volunteer service. This determination may be made with or without cause.

Criminal Background Information

It is the policy of Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks that all volunteers who provide direct service undergo a background check. Direct service is defined as leading activity programs, providing instruction, supporting special events, leading trips and tours and/or facilitating the involvement of participants with disabilities. A volunteer will undergo a background check. A satisfactory result is required before the volunteer can begin an assignment. Background Checks must be completed every year.

Drugs and Alcohol

The County is committed to maintaining a work environment free of the taint of substance abuse, and requires all volunteers to not report to their work site while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. All volunteers should not purchase or consume alcohol while on-duty or in any attire which displays an insignia of the County. Any such behavior will result in immediate removal from a volunteer position. If you observe another volunteer doing so, you should report this immediately to the volunteer coordinator.

Income Taxes

As a volunteer, you may be eligible to claim your volunteer mileage to and from your volunteer site at the rate stated in the current tax law.

Liability

Liability protection with respect to damages to third parties is available to you to the same extent as County employees under State Law (as long as you are acting within the scope of your duties as a volunteer.) Howard County assumes no liability for personal injury or damage to personal property unless caused by the sole negligence of the county.

Workplace Harassment

The County is committed to maintaining a work environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. Volunteers have the right to

work in an atmosphere which promotes equal opportunities and prohibits discriminatory practices, including harassment. Harassment, whether verbal, physical, non-verbal, or visual, arising in County owned facilities, at work assignments outside County owned facilities, or at County sponsored or endorsed functions, including social functions, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Such harassment is also illegal. Normal, courteous, mutually respectful, non-coercive interaction acceptable to and welcomed by both parties, however, is not considered harassment under the terms of the County policy.

The County encourages volunteers to promptly report all information concerning workplace harassment without regard to the identity of the harasser or victim.

The County is committed to the prompt investigation of all complaints of harassment and prompt and effective remedial action to stop such conduct from occurring.

Child Abuse: Guidelines for Volunteers

The crimes of child sexual and physical abuse are issues of great importance to the Robinson Nature Center and the protection of children we serve is a high priority. Under no circumstances may a volunteer take participants on an overnight trip without the consent of their immediate supervisor.

Listen to children who complain to you about another child “bothering them” or touching them. Determine the nature of this contact and report suspicious or irregular behavior to the Volunteer Coordinator. If you feel a child has been a victim of sexual or physical abuse at the site or elsewhere, including their home, it is recommended that you first contact the Volunteer Coordinator or Nature Center Director. However, any suspicions of child abuse may be reported directly by staff to Child Protective Services on 410-872-4204, ext 357.

NEVER PUT YOURSELF INTO A SITUATION WHERE YOUR BEHAVIOR COULD BE QUESTIONED

Behavior concerning child abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect:

- Children are not permitted to sit in any leader or volunteer’s lap.
- Carrying a child is not permitted, except in an emergency.
- Inappropriate displays of affection are not allowed.

- Touching of personal/private areas is not allowed.
- Be respectful of children's personal space and do not touch them unless it is an emergency situation.
- Verbal comments/teasing is prohibited.
- No abusive or cruel language should ever be used.
- Forcing children into seats, shaking, grabbing and /or corporal punishment can be considered abusive.

Two Adult Rule: As a volunteer with the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks you must adhere always to the department's Two Adult Rule policy. As a volunteer, you should never be alone with a child; always make sure another adult is present. This rule is to protect volunteers from any allegations that may arise from being left alone with a child. If you are in a situation where a child is waiting to be picked up after an activity, ensure that another adult is present until the child is picked up. Any questions or concerns please contact your immediate supervisor.

Weather Emergency Plan

In the case of inclement weather, please call our front desk at 410-313-0400 to find out if we are open, opening late, closing early, or closed before coming to Robinson for your shift. Please do not come earlier than we are open as we need the parking lot empty in order to clear it of snow/ice.

Safety Procedures

Making Robinson Nature Center facilities and programs as safe as possible is a primary responsibility of every volunteer leader. Working conditions will be the same for volunteers as for staff. The Center will do its best to provide safe conditions and safety directions necessary to complete your assignment. In your position description, you will be informed of any attire and equipment required for your assignment. Always be aware of where you are and what you are doing and the person, if any, next to you. We count on you to be the best protector of your personal safety. Please let your supervisor or the Volunteer Coordinator know of any safety concerns that you may have. In this handbook, there are additional safety guidelines to follow when volunteering in a program with participants.

The following guidelines are not all-inclusive; you must constantly work at insuring the safety of all participants.

Rules of Safety:

- Organize and lead activities that suit the ability of the participants, as well as the facility area.
- Provide adequate supervision for all activities at all times.
- Restrict activities to assigned areas.
- Use only facilities and equipment that has been previously checked and cleared of hazards.
- Know the proper use of all equipment.
- Try to anticipate and avoid any dangerous situations before beginning your program.
- YOU must deal with safety problems immediately. If the problem is one you cannot take care of personally, report it as soon as possible to your supervisor.
- EMPHASIZE rules and procedures with all children on a daily basis. Good communication is essential to a safe situation.

Blood Borne Pathogens

When cleaning up blood or other body fluids after an accident, specific care and procedures must be followed at all times! In the event of a bio-hazard situation, please alert a member of the Robinson Nature Center staff. Staff will be responsible for the clean-up of the bio-hazard.

Emergency Policies

1. In an emergency: Dial 911 (from nature center phones, dial 9 +911)
2. Without delay, contact your immediate supervisor and/or notify staff at the front desk of the Nature Center. First Aid kits are located at the front desk, under the sinks in each classroom and kitchen areas, and also in the staff office area on the administrative floor of the nature center.

Do's and Don'ts

- Please sign up for an opportunity when you are sure you can attend.

- Please make sure you can stay for the entire time that you are needed.
- Please give us as much time as possible if you need to cancel. It is hard to get a replacement volunteer if it is last minute and we really need the help of our volunteers.
- If the opportunity is less than 48 hours away and you need to cancel because of illness for example, please call the front desk at 410-313-0400.
- Please only come in to volunteer if you are signed up. We need to know who is in the building in case of an emergency. You will sign up through Better Impact. Email and internet are required to use Better Impact. You may use a computer or the app on a smartphone.
- If you have any questions feel free to reach out to the Volunteer Coordinator (Brian Campbell at 410-313-0406 or bcampbell@howardcountymd.gov) or Assistant Volunteer Coordinator (Monica Horan at 410-313-0674 or mhoran@howardcountymd.gov)