



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION



Best Practices for Young Adult Volunteers

Young adults who are no longer eligible for 4-H activities, but may not have reached 21 years of age, often are seeking opportunities to serve in volunteer roles with 4-H. These young people bring youthful enthusiasm, can relate more directly with younger 4-H'ers, and are seen as mentors and role models. While this partnership can be a winning combination for 4-H staff and program participants, questions arise concerning critical thinking and decision-making skills and the appropriateness of having youth who recently served side-by-side as co-participants now serving as chaperones and disciplinarians of youth.

The following best practices are provided to assist Extension staff in determining roles and responsibilities for young adults under age 21 serving in Georgia 4-H activities, programs, or events.

- Volunteers should be at least 3 years older than the oldest eligible 4-H participant in the activity, program, or event. For example, if the young adult volunteers are serving as chaperones at Fall Forum, they should be at least 21 years of age.
- Staff should recognize that all young people are not equal in experience and maturity and should use their professional judgement in assigning responsibilities to young adult volunteers.
- Staff should determine the specific role of the volunteer in making a decision about their eligibility to serve. For example, a judging team coach that prepares content and information for practice may be just a year older than the 4-H'ers if there is another individual (over 21 years of age) serving as disciplinarian and/or chaperone for the event.
- Volunteers under the age of 21 should not count toward the required ratio of adults to youth in an activity, program, or event (e.g., 1:5 ratio for shotgun team).

- In cases where the volunteer is not 3 years older than the participants, the young adult volunteer should not be responsible for:
 - Serving as the sole chaperone
 - Serving in the role of head coach
 - Transporting youth
 - Working in any situation where the individual might be alone with 4-H'ers
 - Disciplining youth
 - Assessing safety and appropriateness of an activity, program, or event
 - Working primarily on their own
- Staff are encouraged to seek input from their 4-H Program Development Coordinator and/or the State 4-H Specialist coordinating the event in determining if someone is "old enough" to serve as chaperone, leader, mentor, or coach.
- In some cases, the young adults may be employees of the University of Georgia and, by virtue of their employment, are assigned to work an event. The 3 years' age difference recommendation applies to employees as well.
- Young adult volunteers under age 18 and still enrolled in Georgia 4-H are considered to be "Teen Leaders" and must follow the protocols established by the Georgia 4-H Teen Leader Program. The Georgia 4-H Teen Leader Program also recommends that teen leaders be at least 3 years older than the oldest eligible participant at the activity, program, or event. When Teen Leaders turn 18 years old, they must complete the requirements for adult volunteers.

While this document is not all inclusive, these best practices are designed to help ensure that those volunteering with 4-H are given skills and knowledge, experience appropriate roles, are prepared to handle the tasks assigned with limited and no supervision, and are able to provide for the safety of youth in the program.