



County Extension and Outreach Staff and Volunteer Background Screening

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, County Extension Districts, and the Iowa Extension Council Association (IECA) continue to work together to implement the background screenings required by the Memorandum of Understanding. IECA has negotiated a reduced rate for its members with background screening provider First Advantage. Because of this relationship, IECA facilitates providing forms and guidance when using First Advantage's services.

Purpose of Employee and Volunteer Background Screening

- Screening creates and maintains the best possible environment for clients and program participants, including vulnerable persons, of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This is one step in selecting and placing qualified employees and volunteers in appropriate positions.
- Screening employees and volunteers also reduces exposure to risk, allowing a reduction in insurance rates.

What is a Vulnerable Person?

- A person under 18 years of age
- An adult whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation or improper sexual contact is impaired on a short term or long-term basis due to a mental, emotional, physical or developmental disability or dysfunction, brain damage, or the infirmities of aging
- A person who is in circumstances such as socioeconomic status but not limited to that place that person at risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation or improper sexual contact

Who needs to be screened?

- All volunteers
- All county staff
- Prospective hires – before they sign a contract

The following categories of people do not need to be screened:

- Independent contractors (ex: fair judges)
- Invited speakers/presenters
- Extension Council members (unless they are also volunteering)

County Extension Staff

- All county staff must be background screened every three years.
- When hiring new staff, the hiring process is not yet complete until after the approved candidate receives a favorable background screening report. Employment contracts should not be signed prior to receiving the results of the screening.
- The background screening must include: social security number verification, motor vehicle records (unless the potential employee does not have a driver's license), county seat felony and misdemeanor search, national criminal records (including state and federal sex offender registries). Councils may also choose to perform an education verification search to confirm the qualifications of the candidate.

Extension Authorized Volunteers

- All authorized volunteers must be background screened every three years.
- An authorized volunteer is an individual who performs services in furtherance of the humanitarian, educational, or service mission of Iowa State Extension and Outreach.
- Prior to being authorized, all volunteer candidates must successfully pass a background screening.
- The background screening must include: social security number verification, motor vehicle records (unless the potential employee does not have a driver's license), county seat felony and misdemeanor search, national criminal records (including state and federal sex offender registries).
- The County Extension Council must approve and authorize all volunteers before they begin serving as a

volunteer.

- All approved volunteers have received training for the responsibilities required of the volunteer position and have demonstrated the abilities necessary to successfully meet the duties of the volunteer position.
- Approved volunteers will be covered by the county's liability insurance coverage through LMC Insurance and Risk Management and American Income Life. Failure to screen and approve volunteers according to criteria outlined above may jeopardize this insurance coverage.
- An authorized volunteer performs services without promise, expectation or receipt of compensation, benefits or consideration for the services provided. Although compensation for authorized volunteer services is not allowed, county authorized volunteers who have received prior council approval may be reimbursed for actual and reasonable expenses following county fiscal policy reimbursement guidelines.

Frequency of Screening Volunteers and Employees

- All authorized volunteers are to be screened regardless of duration and frequency of times that they volunteer for any extension programs.
- All new volunteers including Master Gardener Program applicants, regardless of program area or level of risk, are initially background screened.
- All authorized volunteers and employees are to be rescreened every three years.

Background Screening Results: Decision-making for both staff and volunteer candidates

The process for decision-making adopts the standards, procedures and business protocol of the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA). The FCRA basically requires:

1. Disclosure must be given to individuals that a consumer report may be obtained from a consumer reporting agency.
2. Written authorization must be obtained from all individuals who will be background screened.
3. Those ordering the background screening must certify to the consumer reporting agency that they took the steps and obtained a report for a permissible purpose (employment and volunteer screening is a permissible purpose).
4. A "pre-adverse action" notice must be sent to consumers before any adverse action is taken based, at least in part, on the information obtained. That notice should contain a copy of the report you received from the consumer reporting agency or information about how to obtain that information. At the same time, you should provide a summary of rights under the FCRA to the individual.
5. The individual must be provided an opportunity to challenge the information contained in the background screening report.
6. Once an adverse decision is made, an "adverse action notice" is sent to the individual to inform them that information from the background screening process impacted your decision to either not hire as a staff member or not accept a volunteer.

To comply with these standards, following the procedures below for data input and report actions.

1. Complete the correct Authorization and Disclosure forms (employee or volunteer). This may be done through electronic means if a county chooses to use the Direct Advantage system (which allows the person being screened to enter their own data). If staff members are doing the data entry, then paper forms should be used.
2. Input data into the First Advantage background screening system.
3. A report is received by county designee.
4. The county contact will meet with individual at their request. Upon completion of the questions, the county contact will share the pre-adverse process, provide the summary of the rights under FCRA, and will recommend action to the council.

If an adverse decision is made, an adverse action notice must be sent to the individual informing them that information from the background screening process impacted the decision to either not hire as staff or approve as a volunteer.

Record Keeping

The signed and dated Volunteer and Employee Background Screening Authorization and Disclosure forms are to be kept in a secure file and retained for 7 years after the volunteer's service has ended.