

Extension Volunteer Background Checks - Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is OSU implementing background checks for Extension Volunteers?

OSU is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for the University community in support of its overall mission. Screening volunteers who deliver programs and conduct activities on behalf of Extension is intended to provide a level of security and safety for our clients, participants, and the communities we serve.

2. Who must complete a background check?

Extension is committed to recruiting the best possible volunteers. The quality of Extension programs and safety of our participants and the people we work with require the selection of volunteers to be taken seriously. Beginning in 2024 all adult Extension volunteers being certified in any program area must complete a background check through Sterling Volunteer® (SV). The OSU Extension Service is committed to regularly screening current and new volunteers on behalf of those we serve.

3. Do current volunteers need a background check?

All volunteers regardless of tenure with OSU Extension or any other organization, employment or military service will receive an initial screening through Sterling Volunteer® and be rescreened every four years unless Extension deems the need to complete an additional background check on a volunteer.

4. Who conducts the background check?

OSU Extension has contracted with a third-party agency, Sterling Volunteers (SV) to conduct all background checks.

5. Who pays the screening fee?

The fee will be paid from “program fees” collected/allocated by the primary Extension program (4-H, FCS, Ag). The volunteer will have the choice to offset the full or a part of the screening fee cost by paying through SV.

6. How long does it take to get the results of a background check?

Most background check results are available within 24 hours or less from the time the volunteer completes the application.

7. Do volunteers have the right to receive a copy of their background check?

Yes. Volunteers are given this right under the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA). Sterling Volunteers (SV) provides one free copy to each individual. The individuals can request additional copies from SV at their personal expense.

8. Are additional background checks required after the initial background check is completed?

A new background check is required every four years unless Extension deems the need to complete an additional background check on a volunteer.

9. What does the background check include?

The background check includes: Social Security Number (SSN) Trace; Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) Watchlist; nationwide Criminal History Search with validation; National Sex Offender Public Registry (NSOPR) Real-time Sex Offender Registry; County/state criminal history based on the jurisdiction revealed in the SSN Trace (past 7 years); Alias/maiden names run at jurisdiction revealed in the SSN Trace (past 7 years); Locator Select; and Monthly updates using the National Criminal Database Search for the first year.

Motor Vehicle Report (MVR) and a Credit History Check are not included.

10. How does the University and OSU Extension protect an individual's right to privacy?

OSU follows state and federal laws that ensure a volunteer's right to privacy, which prohibits employees and others from using or disclosing personal information except within the scope of their assigned duties.

An Adverse Action Policy will be in place as required by the Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA). Adverse Action is a two-step process that organizations are required to follow when a volunteer position is denied as a result of a background check. It starts prior to making a final decision and is a way to protect the volunteer. The two steps consist of a pre-adverse notice, sent prior to making a final decision, followed by a notification of adverse action, sent after a decision is made not to accept application. The volunteer receives a copy of their background check report so that they are able to address inaccuracies. (Source: 2018 Sterling Volunteers)

11. Does a volunteer have to give permission or consent for a check to be conducted?

Yes. If a volunteer does not give permission or neglects to give all the information required to process a background investigation, the background check will not be conducted. However, a person who does not give permission or does not provide all the information needed cannot become a certified volunteer with OSU Extension.

12. If a volunteer has adverse information reported in the background check, is the individual automatically disqualified from being a certified volunteer with OSU Extension?

No. Adverse information is not an automatic disqualification to becoming a certified volunteer. OSU Extension will consider the passage of time, severity, frequency, and nature of a conviction, as well as its relationship to the position in question.

If the background check reveals actions/convictions perceived as unsuitable to the safety of our program or clientele, Extension reserves the right to deny certification or place restrictions on volunteer activities.

The volunteer will receive a written letter from the appropriate state program leader and an "Adverse Action" process will be initiated through Sterling Volunteer. The county director will be CC'ed on the state program leaders written communication.

No details will be shared with the Extension staff to protect the confidentiality of the information obtained.

13. Who makes the decision on what constitutes adverse information?

Each program area will have a committee composed of the State Program Leader, Extension HR and the designated Volunteer Specialist.

14. How will Extension Educators be notified of the background check results?

If the background check comes back with no adverse information, the extension educator will see "Eligible" on the individual's status within SV. The volunteer and county must complete the remaining certification steps.

If SV status is visibly "Ineligible" or "Pending Review" the Extension educator will take no action. The educator will have restricted communication with the volunteer until after the adverse action process has run its course.

15. If a county disagrees with the decision that the volunteer is not eligible, is there an appeal process?

The county may offer any information they feel would be supportive of the volunteer, but no information from SV reports will be shared.

16. Who may volunteers contact if they have additional questions?

Contact the appropriate State Program Leader(s).

- **Agriculture, Natural Resources & Community Economic Development**
Jason Warren – 405-744-9714
Jason.warren@okstate.edu
- **Family & Consumer Sciences**
Gina Peek – 405-744-9521
Gina.peek@okstate.edu
- **4-H Youth Development**
Steve Beck – 405-744-5394