

**University of Washington
School of Medicine
Laboratory Volunteer Policy**

FAQs

Q Why are we required to track hours for volunteers and what is the best mechanism to do so? Can we just provide a work schedule?

A The University's policies, consistent with state law, require tracking actual volunteer hours served in order for the volunteer to be covered by the University's workers compensation insurance policy in case the volunteer is injured while serving in the lab. Documenting a volunteer's planned work schedule is not adequate. Departments have discretion to track volunteer hours in the manner most convenient for the department. Options include: 1) using the same electronic timekeeping system used by employees; 2) requiring the volunteer to manually sign in on an attendance log; 3) requiring the volunteer to manually track hours and email them to the volunteer supervisor; or 4) any other method that accurately documents the actual hours the volunteer works.

Note: UW's Payroll Office is currently developing a standardized system by which departments will be required to report volunteer hours.

Q May volunteers receive a stipend?

A No. Volunteers may not receive a stipend or be reimbursed beyond actual expenses incurred. If a volunteer receives compensation that exceeds expenses, including a stipend, the volunteer is categorized as a covered worker rather than as a volunteer. The covered worker category obligates the University to pay a wider range of benefits if the volunteer is injured while serving rather than only medical expenses authorized for volunteers.

Q The spouse of one of our department's faculty members has an H-4 visa and wants to volunteer in the lab to maintain her research skills since she is an experienced researcher. Is an individual with an H-4 visa authorized to volunteer in a SoM lab?

A No – an individual with an H-4 visa may not volunteer in a SoM lab. Federal immigration laws and federal and state employment laws regulate who may serve as a volunteer in order to protect foreign nationals from abuse by employers, to protect U.S. jobs, and to avoid suppression of wages. Unauthorized work by foreign nationals could subject the University to significant penalties and loss of research funds, and result in unauthorized workers being determined as out-of-visa status, resulting in loss of their ability to remain in the U.S. The SoM's Policy allows foreign nationals to volunteer only if their visa status authorizes work at the UW because federal immigration authorities have interpreted volunteer service as employment in circumstances that are typical of those that would occur in SoM labs.

Q May a family member volunteer in a SoM lab?

A Yes. The University's policies addressing employment of more than one member of a household do not apply to volunteers.

Q Is there a test I can apply to determine whether it is appropriate for an individual to volunteer?

A There is no guaranteed test to determine whether it is appropriate for an individual to volunteer since the determination depends on the specific facts of each case. However, the following list of questions compiles much of the information in the SoM Laboratory Volunteer Policy into question form to consider in determining whether it is appropriate for an individual to volunteer in your department. You should be able to answer "yes" to questions 1 through 3 and "no" to questions 4 through 7 for the individual to appropriately volunteer.

1. Are the services provided entirely as a result of the individual's own volition, with no direct or indirect pressure by the employer, and with no promise of advancement and no penalty for not volunteering?
2. Does the individual genuinely benefit from the volunteer experience rather than only the lab?
3. Is the volunteer time insignificant in relation to standard hours or the hours of lab employees? Note: An individual volunteering full-time would be expected to do so for only a short period of time, such as a few weeks.
4. Does the volunteering activity impact the employment opportunities of others by performing work that would otherwise be performed by regular, paid employees?
5. Is the volunteer's overall activity substantially the same as the work of a paid position?
6. Is there an expectation of compensation or other benefit such as a future job for these services?
7. Is this individual volunteering because the department was unable to hire the individual for a paid position?