



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

[As amended by Memorandum dated March 3, 2025]

DIRECTOR'S ORDER #7: VOLUNTEERS-IN-PARKS

Approved: 
Director

Date of this revision: March 15, 2016

Duration: Until revised or rescinded.

This Director's Order, together with Reference Manual 7 (RM-7), supersedes and replaces the June 13, 2005 edition, and any other conflicting guidance.

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1. Background and Purpose

Volunteering is an American tradition that over the years has made an immeasurable contribution to communities, organizations, and individuals throughout the country. Volunteers are vital to the success of the National Park Service (NPS). The Volunteers-In-Parks (VIP) program can accept and use voluntary help and services from the public in a way that is mutually beneficial to the NPS and the volunteer. In 2015, more than 400,000 volunteers donated over 7 million hours of service to the national parks and NPS national programs, such as the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) and National Heritage Areas (NHAs). They come from every State and many different countries to help preserve and protect America's natural and cultural heritage for the enjoyment of this and future generations.

The purpose of this Director's Order is to provide direction to NPS personnel who are responsible for, and/or involved in, implementing the VIP program locally, regionally and nationally in units and with partners.

(See RM-7, section 1)

2. Authorities

Authority to issue this Director's Order is contained in the National Park Service Organic Act ([54 USC 100101\(a\) et seq.](#)) and delegations of authority found in [Part 245](#) of the Department of the Interior (DOI) Manual.

The NPS VIP program is authorized by the Volunteers in the Parks Act of 1969 ([54 USC 102301](#)).

This Director's Order is intended only to improve the internal management of the NPS, and is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, instrumentalities or entities, its officers or employees, or any other person.

(See RM-7, section 2)

3. Program Administration

3.1 The Associate Director, Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers (IE&V), Washington Office (WASO), will oversee the NPS VIP program and develop necessary standards and procedures in collaboration with the Associate Director, Workforce and Inclusion and the Associate Director, Information Resources, who have oversight of volunteers' records management, security reviews, and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) processes. The Associate Director, IE&V will issue, review, and revise as appropriate, RM-7, which will provide more detailed procedural guidance on administering the VIP program.

3.2 The Associate Director for Information Resources has the responsibility for ensuring volunteer Personally Identifiable Information (PII) data is collected and managed in compliance with requirements for data security and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) information clearance process.

3.3 The Service-wide VIP Program Manager will oversee the NPS VIP program, and is responsible for its day-to-day administration.

3.4 The National Council for Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers (NCfIEV) will serve as an advisory group to address pertinent VIP program issues in consultation with the Associate and Deputy Associate Directors, IE&V, and the Service-wide VIP Program Manager.

3.5 Each region will designate a Regional VIP Manager whose duties will be assigned by the Regional Director, and included in the incumbent's position description. Such duties will include, but not be limited to: (1) monitoring the region's VIP program and providing assistance as requested; (2) serving as liaison between the region's parks/areas and WASO; (3) answering all public inquiries regarding the regional program; (4) compiling reports and ensuring proper PII

data education is provided to parks regarding VIP data; (5) managing and distributing funds; (6) providing volunteer program management training to parks; and (7) other duties specified in RM-7.

3.6 The Superintendent/Manager of each park unit or program office that uses VIPs will designate a VIP Coordinator/Program Manager, who will be responsible for administering the VIP program at the park/office level. The Park VIP Program Manager's duties will be reflected in the incumbent's position description and will include: (1) developing program funding requests and program reports, and submission of same to the Regional VIP Manager; (2) monitoring and recording use of park VIP funds; (3) providing guidance and assistance to park staff supervising VIPs; (4) leading/mentoring volunteers; and (5) ensuring that electronic and paper records containing PII data is secured and managed in accordance with requirements in NPS approved systems; and (6) such other duties as are specified in RM-7.

3.7 VIP Program Coordinators and Managers will provide technical assistance to the Service and ensure that all volunteer-related activities communicate the NPS mission and invite the public to participate in that mission. Applicable policy elements should be incorporated into training and development programs. Paid and non-paid staff are actively encouraged to integrate the principles of civic engagement into their regular work activities. See [Director's Order #75A](#): Civic Engagement and Public Involvement.

3.8 All national programs with volunteers (e.g., International Affairs, NHAs, RTCA, etc.) will assign liaisons to collaborate with the Service-wide VIP Program Manager to provide metrics and outcomes for reporting. The Service-wide, Regional, Park and Program VIP Managers will be responsible for volunteerism, civic engagement, service learning, and/or public involvement strategies relevant to program mission and management. Managers have a civic responsibility to reach out to the public in a way that revitalizes the NPS mission.

(See RM-7, section 3)

4. Definition

VIP. An individual or group who performs work for the NPS under a current, signed individual or group volunteer agreement, as evidenced by [Optional Form 301a](#), without promise, expectation, or receipt of pay for services rendered, is considered to be a VIP provided such service is within the scope of a statute authorizing the Service's use of volunteers. Volunteers are not subject to the wage, hour, and compensation provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 ([29 USC 201 through 219](#)).

A VIP's completed Optional Form 301a must include an accurate job description and designate a supervisor. This information may be included on the form or in an attachment. A group volunteer agreement will be accompanied by the Optional Form 301b which provides a complete listing of group volunteer participants covered under that agreement.

NPS programs, whether national or regional, which manage volunteer events and projects must use volunteer agreements for those volunteers doing service projects within NPS units.

(See RM-7, section 4)

5. VIP Qualifications

5.1 VIPs will be selected without regard to race, creed, religion, age, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, national origin, or disability.

5.2 Individuals convicted of minor crimes who are participating in court-approved probation, work release, or alternative sentencing programs, may serve as VIPs at the discretion of the Superintendent. Generally, a person who has been convicted of a felony, violent crime, crime against persons, or crime involving use of a weapon will not be utilized in the NPS VIP program; however, the Superintendent may permit the person to volunteer based on an analysis of the nature of the crime, the date of conviction, evidence of rehabilitation, etc.

5.3 Appropriate background investigations will be conducted for VIPs. See RM-7, section 5.

Volunteers requiring regular, non-supervised access to federally controlled spaces and/or network access will require a background investigation and a DOI Access card. See RM-7, section 5, specifically “Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12).”

5.4 As explicitly stated in the Volunteers in the Parks Act of 1969, specifically 54 USC 102301(a), VIPs will not displace NPS employees.

5.5 VIPs under the age of 18 must have a signed Parental Approval provided on Optional Form 301a.

5.6 Cooperating Association employees may serve as VIPs when performing tasks normally done by NPS employees. Such volunteers’ time will not be counted as VIP hours when their salary costs are reported as aid to the Service on NPS Form 10-40. The volunteer time of NPS interns whose reimbursements are supported by cooperating associations may be counted as VIP hours.

5.7 NPS employees and family members may serve as VIPs so long as the duties performed are not in violation of approved [DOI ethical standards](#) and/or the Fair Labor Standards Act.

5.8 Any non-U.S. citizens with legal permanent resident status in the United States may be accepted as VIPs upon providing proof of resident status. All other non-U.S. citizens must meet Department of State and Department of Homeland Security requirements before participating as a VIP. All non-resident non-U.S. citizens who wish to volunteer for the NPS must enter the country pursuant to a J-1 or other approved visa. United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) considers any type of reimbursement, whether it be for housing, meals, or other types of compensation (e.g., for training), as a form of payment. It is illegal for a person traveling under a normal tourist visa to work for compensation. The J-1 visa allows non-U.S. citizens to train/study in the United States for a limited time while receiving compensation. The J-1 visa application, Form DS-2019, will be issued by the NPS Office of International Affairs.

Any individual traveling on a tourist visa may volunteer provided there is absolutely no remuneration whatsoever, including, but not limited to, uniforms, meals, housing, or transportation.

(See RM-7, section 5)

6. VIP Activities

6.1 A VIP may sell permits and collect recreation fees authorized by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act ([16 USC 6801 through 6814](#)). However, the VIP must be bonded under a surety bond and undergo a background investigation (MBI) for any volunteer position where he/she will be handling Government funds. The VIP must be adequately trained in the sale of permits and collection of fees, as per guidelines set forth in [Director's Order #22: Recreation Fees](#).

6.2 At the Superintendent's discretion, a VIP may operate a Government vehicle if he/she possesses a valid State driver's license or international driver's document for the class of vehicle being operated, and the operation of the vehicle is required, in writing, as part of the volunteer agreement. See [Director's Order #44: Personal Property Management](#), in particular section 3.15, and DOI Motor Vehicle Management Handbook.

Drivers of Government vehicles must be at least 18 years of age and have a safe driving record. See [RM-50B](#), section 6, Motor Vehicle Safety.

Each park permitting international volunteers to operate Government vehicles for official purposes should contact the Department of Motor Vehicle Administration for the State in which the volunteer will be residing and/or operating the vehicle to determine what is recognized as a valid operator's license.

6.3 A volunteer may apply pesticides in the course of his/her duties provided he/she is at least 18 years of age, is willing, and has the proper training, certification, and supervision. See Director's Order #77-7: Integrated Pest Management.

6.4 If an NPS unit or program accepts a VIP's offer to use his/her own personal property or equipment for official purposes, and that property is lost, damaged, or destroyed, the VIP may be reimbursed for the loss. See section 8, below. A statement that the VIP offers to provide and use such equipment as part of his/her official duties must be included on Optional Form 301a. Moreover, the form must specifically identify and describe the personal property being used.

6.5 Possession of firearms by volunteers will be in accordance with [43 CFR 20.511](#), which provides as follows:

Employees, except those specifically designated to perform enforcement, police or other official duties requiring the use of firearms, are prohibited from carrying or having in their possession firearms on property under the control of the Secretary [of the Interior].

Employees who are officially stationed in parks . . . or other wilderness areas which are

known to be inhabited by wild animals, are permitted, when on those lands, to carry and use firearms for personal protection as permitted by existing policy or as authorized by the park . . . or area supervisor. Notwithstanding this paragraph, employees who are not on official duty may carry firearms on Departmental lands under the same conditions and in accordance with procedures and authorizations established for members of the general public.

(See RM-7, section 6)

7. Funding and Reimbursements

7.1 Permanent authority to use any appropriated funds to defray costs incidental to utilization of VIP services is found in [43 USC 1473c](#). Appropriated VIP funds may be used only in support of the VIP program.

7.2 VIP funds are specifically permitted to be used to reimburse volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses incurred as a direct result of their volunteer activities. Thus, a VIP's out-of-pocket expenditures for transportation, meals, and non-NPS lodging, may be reimbursed at the discretion of the Superintendent provided they are allowable under the reimbursement guidelines. See section 11, below, for NPS housing for VIPs.

7.3 Parks and offices may reimburse volunteers for fully documented incidental expenses (which may include transportation, supplies, lodging, and subsistence) to the extent authorized by statute, under the terms specified in Optional Form 301a, and at the discretion of the Superintendent or Program Manager.

7.4 Parks and offices must exercise care not to reimburse volunteers for more than their fully documented incidental expenses. Payments not properly documented, and/or exceeding the amount allowable by law for tax-free reimbursement (amounts above actual expenses resulting in a profit), may be considered by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to be taxable income of the volunteer, and thus create a tax liability. It is the policy of the Department of the Interior to avoid such circumstances. For more information, see [Internal Revenue Service \(IRS\) Taxable Fringe Benefit Guide for Federal, State, and Local Governments](#); [IRS Publication 525: Taxable and Nontaxable Income](#); and [IRS Publication 526: Charitable Contributions](#).

7.5 Volunteers may be reimbursed \$0.14 per mile for local commuting costs. See IRS [Bulletin Rev. Proc. 2010-51](#), section 7, "Mileage." See also [26 USC 170\(i\)](#). Volunteers traveling away from home or duty station or overnight may be reimbursed for meals, lodging, and other business-related travel expenses. See [26 USC 162\(a\)\(2\)](#) and Chapter 301 of the Federal Travel Regulation (Temporary Duty (TDY) Travel Allowances).

7.6 A VIP's long-distance travel expenses may be paid at the discretion of the Superintendent or Program Manager. VIPs traveling away from home or duty station, or overnight in a park or other location as part of their duties may be reimbursed through one of two methods: (1) by creating a user profile in the official Government travel system for invitational travel, with reimbursement through the voucher process, or (2) reimbursement through the process of completing Form 10-67 and requiring all receipts and documentation, with no flat-rate

reimbursement, except for the option of determining a not-to-exceed amount at or below the per diem rate. See Director's Order #31: Travel Procedures.

7.7 Food for volunteers may not be purchased with ONPS funds unless it is at the convenience of the NPS.

7.8 Guidance regarding the use of ONPS funds for the provision of light refreshments at awards ceremonies may be found in RM-7.

7.9 On occasion, a philanthropic donor may make a philanthropic gift to support volunteerism in parks or within programs. Parks, programs, and partners should develop a system to document the use of these funds and properly track the number of volunteer hours and impact of volunteering. This information will be helpful in reporting back to the donor in the donor stewardship and donor recognition processes. See Director's Order #21: Donations and Philanthropic Partnerships, section 4.7, "Accountability and Recordkeeping Requirements for Donations."

(See RM-7, section 7)

8. Benefits and Protection/Risk Management

8.1 The NPS must provide adequate training and supervision for individuals and/or groups enrolled as Volunteers-In-Parks. Ultimate responsibility for this rests with the appropriate NPS management official, i.e., Superintendent or Program Manager.

8.2 Parks and programs must also safeguard VIP records and always ensure that only privileged users have access to volunteers' PII data to reduce the risk of data loss.

8.3 VIPs will be treated as Federal employees for the purposes of (1) compensation for work-related injuries (see [5 USC 8101\(1\)\(B\)](#) and [54 USC 102301\(c\)\(3\)](#)); (2) immunity from liability pursuant to the Federal Tort Claims Act (see [28 USC 2671](#) and 54 USC 102301(c)(2)); and (3) claims for damage to or loss of personal property incident to service (see [31 USC 3721](#) and 54 USC 102301(c)(4)).

In order to receive the benefits and protections outlined above, VIPs must accurately complete Optional Form 301a.

8.4 A VIP must not engage in any work which he/she:

- is not qualified to perform;
- has not been adequately trained to do;
- does not feel comfortable doing; and/or
- does not willingly agree to do.

8.5 VIPs must be provided with all personal protective equipment and training required by (1) Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations, and/or (2) any park-specific safety rules and procedures.

8.6 The Volunteers in the Parks Act of 1969, in particular [54 USC 102301\(a\)](#), states that the Secretary of the Interior “shall not permit the use of volunteers in hazardous duty or law enforcement work or in policymaking processes The services of individuals whom the Secretary determines are skilled in performing hazardous activities may be accepted.”

(See RM-7, section 8)

9. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)

9.1 Because VIPs are neither employees of nor applicants for employment with the NPS, they do not have access to the employment discrimination complaint process established by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. However, VIPs may contact their park’s EEO counselors for assistance in resolving potential complaints based on section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ([29 USC 794](#)) and [Executive Order 13160](#). Section 504 prohibits discrimination based on disability in any federally conducted program, and Executive Order 13160 bars discrimination based on race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, and status as a parent, in federally conducted education and training programs. The protection afforded by section 504 and Executive Order 13160 applies to all individuals, not just employees and applicants. VIPs who have spoken to an EEO counselor and intend to file a formal complaint of discrimination in connection with section 504 or Executive Order 13160 should contact the NPS’s EEO Program Manager in WASO to initiate such complaint.

9.2 VIPs will be informed of their EEO rights and responsibilities by the Park VIP Program Manager during orientation and training.

(See RM-7, section 9. Also see Director’s Order #93: Conflict Resolution)

10. Uniforms

10.1 VIPs should be readily identifiable as such, in a manner appropriate for their duties. VIP uniform items include the official VIP patch (shoulder or cap) and nametag. VIPs must not wear any part of the official NPS uniform or be dressed in a manner that attempts to duplicate its appearance. See [Director’s Order #43](#): Uniform Program, sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.3.

10.2 Pursuant to notice published in the *Federal Register* at [69 Fed. Reg. 60182](#), on October 7, 2004, the NPS adopted new official volunteer insignia. NPS sites are required to use the new insignia on volunteer uniforms, publications, and any other displays.

(See RM-7, section 10)

11. VIP Housing

11.1 VIPs may be lodged in Government housing as authorized by the Volunteers in the Parks Act of 1969, when such housing is not needed for paid employees.

11.2 A VIP must work *at least* 30 hours per week (as specified in RM 36, section 3.3.2.1) to be *eligible* for park housing or trailer pads and campsites. A Superintendent may, however, require a greater number of hours for eligibility. Housing or trailer pads and campsites will be assigned in such fashion as will best meet the needs of the park. Volunteers will not be charged rent or utility costs for such housing. The Superintendent will determine which park office or benefiting account will pay for quarter operations and maintenance, including utilities, to substitute for rent not received while quarters are being used by volunteers.

11.3 Any excessive cleaning costs and/or damages resulting from a VIP's tenancy will be billed directly to the VIP on a bill of collection. If the VIP is non-compliant, such costs or damages will be charged to the benefiting account. Any destruction or loss of, or injury to, a park system resource resulting from a VIP's tenancy of NPS housing may be actionable pursuant to the National Park System Resource Protection Act ([54 USC 100721 through 100725](#)).

(See RM-7, section 11)

12. Reports and Records

12.1 The following official VIP forms will be kept on file for a minimum of three years after the volunteer's termination date.

- Optional Form 301a
- Optional Form 301b (groups)
- Form 10-67 (Claim for Reimbursement for Volunteer Expenses) if the VIP claimed reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses; and
- VIP Position Description.

12.2 The Service-wide, Regional and Park VIP Program Managers will use the Web-based VIP Reporting System to submit their quarterly and annual VIP statistics to WASO.

12.3 The Service-wide, Regional, and Park VIP Program Managers will maintain an accurate and current records system in accordance with Office of Personnel Management standards and [Director's Order #11D](#): Records and Electronic Information Management.

12.4 The Service-wide VIP Program Manager will produce an Annual VIP Report based on the information submitted by all Park and Regional VIP Program Managers and any program liaisons (see section 3.8, above).

12.5 When working with partners:

A. Efforts should be made to translate the number of volunteer hours into a quantifiable dollar figure that can be captured as a philanthropic donation to the NPS and its partners. See Director's Order #21: Donations and Philanthropic Partnerships, section 4.4, "Volunteers and In-kind Donations."

B. Given the necessary due diligence required by the NPS to enroll a volunteer, the duty of signing up a volunteer and verifying their eligibility to volunteer should remain the duty of an NPS staff member. Equally, an NPS staff member should provide final verification of hours served as these hours are counted as in-kind contributions (same as cash) to the NPS and may be matched by donors. See Director's Order #21: Donations and Philanthropic Partnerships, section 4.7, "Accountability and Recordkeeping Requirements for Donations."

(See RM-7, section 12)

13. Recruitment

13.1 The Service-wide VIP Program Manager will help maintain a national VIP recruitment program on the Internet at <http://www.volunteer.gov/>. Individual parks, offices, and program areas will be responsible for posting VIP positions on that site.

13.2 Each Superintendent will ensure that public inquiries regarding volunteer opportunities and information are responded to in a timely manner.

(See RM-7, section 13)

14. VIP Orientation and Training

Each VIP will receive appropriate orientation and job training. See section 8.3, above.

(See RM-7, section 14)

15. Supervisory Training

15.1 Volunteer program management training will be provided in each region annually.

15.2 Anyone supervising VIPs is eligible for supervisory training. Such training is mandatory for those supervising VIPs (any number) whose combined hours of service equal or exceed 6,261 hours per year (i.e., those of three full time employees).

(See RM-7, section 15)

16. Recognition and Awards

16.1 All VIPs should be recognized for their service in an appropriate and timely manner.

16.2 Permanent authority to use appropriated funds for non-monetary awards of nominal value to volunteers as tokens of appreciation for their contributions to DOI programs is found in [43 USC 1473b](#).

The definition of “nominal” is that awards should not exceed \$50 in value. This does not mean that a volunteer who contributes an unusual number of hours and/or substantially benefits the Service may not be given something of greater value. Using good judgment and providing proper justification and documentation should allow for the flexibility needed to ensure an effective and successful volunteer program.

(See RM-7, section 16)

17. Termination of Volunteer Agreement

A VIP or the NPS may terminate a volunteer agreement at any time, without cause, by so notifying the other party. The VIP Program Manager will note such termination on Optional Form 301a.

(See RM-7, section 17)

---- End of Director's Order ----