



**Iowa Department  
for the Blind**

# **Volunteer Manual**

Dear Volunteer,

On behalf of the Iowa Department for the Blind staff and commissioners, I want to thank you for your interest in and involvement with the Iowa Department for the Blind.

Reaching our goal of empowering blind Iowans to be gainfully employed and live independently requires a community-wide effort. In addition to the commitment of our counselors, teachers, librarians, administrators and support staff, we must have strong community partnerships. Our volunteers play an important role in our successes.

IDB's volunteers serve blind Iowans in a variety of ways, and are true partners in our services. We could not be successful without you.

Thank you in advance for helping us to increase the quality and effectiveness of services blind Iowans deserve. I look forward to working closely with you as we work together to serve Iowa's blind.

Sincerely,

Emily Wharton

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## **Thank you for volunteering with Iowa Department for the Blind!**

The Iowa Department for the Blind is a small state and federally funded agency that serves the entire state's blind population. Without volunteers, our services could not be delivered as efficiently as they are. Volunteers contribute over 7,000 hours of service every year and play a role in helping us fulfill our mission. As we continue to serve the state with less resources, it is crucial that we continue to promote a favorable and lasting impression of the Department in the minds of those we have contact with, including clients, media, volunteers and the general public. Our volunteers are extremely important to us and we ask for your help to create a safe and meaningful volunteer experience. With that, all volunteers must review and acknowledge receipt of our organization policies and processes. We truly appreciate your service!

### **About the Handbook**

This handbook is designed to introduce you to the Department and to provide a basic overview of the policies and procedures that provide all of us guidance and direction. As a volunteer, you are provided with a safe work environment, necessary job training, supervision, evaluation and recognition.

In return, we expect you to honor your commitment to the Department, respect other staff members and perform your assigned duties to the best of your abilities.

As our agency moves forward, there will be a need to modify policies, practices and other information in this handbook. When such changes occur, you will be notified by an announcement or update. It is your responsibility to keep your handbook current and to be informed about policies and changes that affect you.

If you have any questions or need any clarification of the information contained in this handbook, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Janice Eggers, at 515-380-1944 or [janice.eggers@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:janice.eggers@blind.state.ia.us).

## **Who We Are**

About 54,000 Iowans have experienced vision loss. But that doesn't mean accepting "limitations" that many people think accompany blindness and low vision. The Iowa Department for the Blind believes all Iowans can lead productive, fulfilling lives – including those who happen to be blind or low vision. The Department supports and encourages independent living and full participation in life – at home, at work and in communities. Vision loss knows no boundaries with respect to age, gender or ethnicity. It should not and does not need to limit accomplishment in whatever a person wishes to do.

The Iowa Department for the Blind helps educate, train and empower blind and low vision individuals to pursue lifelong goals, with offices in Des Moines and field staff operating statewide.

The Department is recognized as a leading provider of services in the United States. These services include innovative and effective vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs as well as world-class library services. The benefits to clients are profound in terms of impact on attitudes, confidence and independence. The collective social and economic impact is also significant. Productive citizens pay taxes and contribute to society and Iowa's economy – lessening their reliance on state and federal support.

Much has been done, yet much remains to be accomplished. The Iowa Department for the Blind works to educate and inform businesses, family members, service providers, advocacy groups, businesses, community and service organizations as well as the general public about the true capabilities of people who are blind or low vision. It actively seeks ongoing communication, interaction and collaboration with all constituencies.

Always a ready resource, the Iowa Department for the Blind creates opportunities for independence throughout the state.

**IDB Mission:** Empower blind Iowans to be gainfully employed and live independently.

**Vision Statement:** To be the world's leader in blind rehabilitation services.

**Value Statements:** We value blind Iowans therefore:

- We believe in each individual's ability to be independent
- We act with a sense of urgency and responsiveness in serving every individual
- We support each individual's right to informed choices
- We value engagement and independence for individuals of all ages
- We promote a positive attitude toward blindness
- We expect blind persons to achieve their full potential
- We provide opportunities for blind persons to be fully contributing members of their communities

All staff are valued and expected to demonstrate:

- Passion for what we do everyday
- Commitment to make positive differences in the lives of blind Iowans
- Respect for the contributions of each staff member
- Ethical behavior, honesty, integrity and trustworthiness
- Innovative and proactive approaches in serving each client
- Progressive and professional leadership
- Collaboration and teamwork that benefits each individual we serve
- Collaboration with community, local, state and federal partners

Our Culture: We use a client-centric approach to empower clients to achieve successful outcomes.

**Iowa Department for the Blind Commission Board Members:**

Michael Hoenig, Member

Amy Salger, Member

**Agency Managers:**

Emily Wharton, Director

Sarah Willeford, Library Program Administrator

Kim Barber, Independent Living Program Administrator

Karly Prinds, Orientation Center Program Administrator

Cheri Myers, Chief Financial Officer

Keri Osterhaus, Vocational Rehabilitation Program Administrator

Ambrose Fowler-Harney, Education and Training Program Administrator

Connie Mendenhall, Chief Information Officer

**Attendance and Absenteeism:**

You are a volunteer staff member and we depend on you to complete your scheduled shifts. We do understand that, from time to time, certain situations may arise that prevent you from doing so. Please alert the Volunteer Coordinator of any scheduled absences—such as vacation—as far in advance as possible so that an appropriate substitute may be found. In the event of an unscheduled absence—illness or emergency—please alert the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible.

Punctual and regular attendance is an essential responsibility of each volunteer at the Department. Tardiness and absences may cause problems for fellow volunteers and clients. When a volunteer is absent, others must perform his or her work. No matter how skilled a volunteer, if they do not have a good attendance record, their contributions to the Department are diminished. The purpose of this policy is to promote the efficient operation of the Department.

Any volunteer who fails to report to the Department without notification to the Volunteer Coordinator three shifts or more will be considered to have voluntarily terminated their position.

Volunteers must sign in at the beginning of their shift and sign out at the end of their shift. We ask you to take breaks when you need them.



**Dress Code:**

Dress appropriately for your duties. We ask that a business casual dress code be observed for those who will be visible to the public. Those who will be working in the library stacks area or in other, less public areas may wear jeans. Clothes that reveal cleavage, midriff or buttock are not allowed. If working in the stacks, shop, or maintenance areas, closed toe shoes must be worn, no heels or open toe shoes are allowed in these areas.

**Volunteer Personnel Files:**

Your personnel file is confidential and consists of written documents retained by the Volunteer Coordinator. Your file can only be viewed by yourself, the Volunteer Coordinator, and the Director.

This file contains basic contact information and records about your volunteer service with the Department, including reviews, notes from staff, and any disciplinary communication.

**Ending Your Volunteer Service:**

You may resign from your volunteer service with the agency at any time, for any reason. We request that you notify the Volunteer Coordinator ideally two weeks prior to your departure and request that you complete an Exit Survey.

**Problem-Solving Procedure:**

When a group of people work and volunteer together, problems may arise. It is important to all of us that such problems are solved as quickly as possible. Occasionally, however, it may be necessary to investigate certain problems in greater detail. Our problem-solving procedure provides you with the opportunity to have a review of any problem, dispute or misunderstanding that arises during the course of your volunteering.

- In situations where differences arise between volunteers or staff and volunteers, it is advised to first try to resolve these differences amongst the parties involved.
- If a third party is needed, the Volunteer Coordinator is to be informed and involved. Under no circumstances shall differences be made public or involve other members of the organization.
- If the grievance is in regard to the Volunteer Coordinator, the Director of the agency should be contacted.

### **Disciplinary Practices:**

The following guidelines may be used in some instances at the sole discretion of the Department:

Step 1: Oral warning with documentation in the personnel file

Step 2: Written warning to individual and copy to the personnel file

Step 3: Termination/Dismissal

These guidelines are based on cumulative infractions, regardless of whether the infraction is of the same general nature as a previous warning. The use of these disciplinary practices in no way alters the fact that your volunteering with the Department is “at-will.”

### **Dismissal:**

Dismissal of a volunteer is a serious consideration. Before a volunteer is dismissed, attempts to reconcile the situation will be made including a meeting between staff and volunteer involved, the Volunteer Coordinator and, if appropriate, the Director. Dismissal of a volunteer may take place if a volunteer is unreliable, irresponsible, disruptive, demonstrates inappropriate behavior, or fails to adhere to the policies and procedures of the Department.

### **Driver Safety Policy:**

The safety and well-being of our clients and volunteers is of critical importance to the Department. We therefore each have a responsibility to not only protect ourselves

when on the road, but also do our part to protect those around us. Volunteers who are required to drive on company business at any time will be expected to consistently follow all the procedures below.

- All volunteers are expected to follow Iowa driving laws at all times.
- Use of handheld cell phones while behind the wheel of a moving vehicle being used on Department business is strictly prohibited.
- Although use of cell phones under any circumstances is strongly discouraged while driving, the use of hands-free technology may be warranted in unusual or emergency circumstances.
- Engaging in other distracting activities including, but not limited to, eating, putting on makeup, reading or changing radio stations or music, is also strongly discouraged while driving, even when in slow-moving traffic.
- Use of alcohol, drugs or other substances, including certain over-the-counter cold or allergy medications that in any way impair driving ability, is prohibited.
- Volunteers should never allow anyone to ride in any part of the vehicle not specifically intended for passenger use and/or any seat that does not include a working seat belt.
- Volunteers must promptly report any accidents to local law enforcement as well as to the Volunteer Coordinator.
- Volunteers are also expected to report any moving or parking violations received while driving on Department business.
- Failure to adhere to these procedures may result in disciplinary action.

**Confidentiality Agreement:**

Client information is confidential. No client information will be shared outside of the Department. Each volunteer is expected to follow the same confidentiality policy as staff. A copy of the confidentiality policy will be given to each volunteer. You will be asked to sign a Confidentiality Agreement. By signing this document you acknowledge that you agree to refrain from the unauthorized use or disclosure of any client information.

### **Emergency Evacuation:**

In the event of a fire, volunteers should exit the building using the 4<sup>th</sup> Street entrance and crossing 4<sup>th</sup> Street to congregate by the building directly across from the Department. In the event of a tornado warning, volunteers shall report to the gym in the basement of the building. The Volunteer Coordinator will account for all volunteers and will give them further instructions.

### **Policy Against Harassment:**

The Department is committed to maintaining a work environment free of unlawful harassment. The Department prohibits harassment based on sex (including sexual harassment, gender harassment and harassment due to pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions) and harassment based on race, religion, creed, color, national origin or ancestry, physical or mental disability, medical condition, marital status, age, sexual orientation or any other status protected under federal or state law or local ordinance or regulation. All such harassment is unlawful. The Department policy applies to all persons involved and prohibits unlawful harassment by any volunteer/employee of the Department including supervisors and co-workers. Volunteers will be required to follow the same policy as staff at the Department and a copy of this policy will be given to all volunteers.

### **Policy Against Sexual Harassment:**

Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual attention of a persistent or offensive nature made by a person who knows, or reasonably should know, that such attention is unwanted. Sexual harassment includes sexually oriented conduct that is sufficiently pervasive or severe to unreasonably interfere with an employee's job performance or create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

If a volunteer believes he/she has been subject to sexual harassment or any unwanted sexual attention, he or she should:

- Make their unease and/or disapproval directly and immediately known to the harasser;

- Make a written record of the date, time and nature of the incident(s) and the names of any witnesses; and
- Report the incident to the Volunteer Coordinator or Director.
- All incidents of sexual harassment or inappropriate sexual conduct must be reported regardless of their seriousness.

**Smoking:**

In response to state and local laws, smoking is not permitted on the premises.

**Solicitation:**

Solicitation by non-staff or staff members for any reason on company property is not allowed.

**Substance Abuse:**

The possession, use or sale of illegal drugs is never acceptable in our business environment. Also, the abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs and alcohol can compromise your job performance and conduct.

We recognize that substance abuse can be successfully treated. Seeking help or assistance is not considered grounds for discipline, but refusal to get help in certain circumstances may be. It is your responsibility to get professional help to improve your performance or conduct.

**Volunteers as Clients:**

We welcome clients as volunteers, but clients who volunteer will not receive special treatment in the delivery of any services from the Department.

### **Volunteer's Code of Conduct:**

- All staff, clients, volunteers, and members of the public must be treated with patience and respect.
- Be courteous, friendly and cooperative.
- Any injury, accident, or incident where you might have experienced harm while volunteering must be reported to the Volunteer Coordinator.
- It is your responsibility to let the Department know if you have any restrictions that would prevent you from lifting or if you are unable to perform duties assigned to you.
- If you are asked to perform a task or have a volunteer situation that is uncomfortable for you, please talk with the Volunteer Coordinator or the Director.

The following behaviors are not permitted. Individuals who exhibit any of these behaviors will be asked to leave and will not be allowed to volunteer in the future.

- Offensive or derogatory comments or jokes, including epithets or slurs
- Yelling, intimidation or threats
- Pushing, hitting or any physical contact with a client, staff or other volunteer
- Questioning a client's right to services or preventing a client from receiving services of any kind

### **Iowa Department for the Blind's Commitment to Our Volunteers:**

- We are committed to equal opportunity volunteerism. We coordinate a diverse community of volunteers from varied backgrounds and social identities, including, but not limited to: people of color, immigrant communities, people of all faiths and spirituality, people living with all disabilities, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender communities, and people of diverse ages.
- We are committed to working together towards creating a safe, supportive, and caring volunteer experience where we can learn from each other and grow in service to our state.
- The Department will provide a document confirming volunteer hours as needed for community service.

# Iowa Department for the Blind Volunteer Policy

Approved 03/24

IDB is committed to creating and growing volunteer opportunities within all of our programs and services. In order to facilitate this, we have established the following Volunteer Policy.

We welcome clients as volunteers, but clients who volunteer will not receive special treatment in the delivery of any services from the Department.

## **Guest Speakers**

Guest speakers provide volunteer service to IDB by giving presentations about their careers, hobbies, life experiences, areas of expertise, or organizational membership to groups of clients or patrons. Guest speakers do not need to complete a volunteer application to serve as a guest speaker. Selection of guest speakers is at the discretion of the supervisor in charge of the program. Guest speakers are directly supervised by the program facilitator and are accompanied by staff while in IDB facilities.

## **Ongoing Volunteering**

Anyone wishing to participate in ongoing volunteering in support of IDB services (more than one event each year) must complete a volunteer application. The application helps IDB staff understand how the volunteer wishes to serve and helps to find the best fit for the individual within the agency. Selection of ongoing volunteers for particular projects or roles is at the discretion of the supervisor in charge of the program.

All volunteer applicants must provide two-character references from individuals who are not family members.

Volunteers must sign a confidentiality agreement form.

It is the policy of the Iowa Department for the Blind to provide a safe environment, both in our facility and in our outreach programs. Therefore, we require background checks on volunteer positions that involve client contact, money handling, or driving.

Former State of Iowa employees with a history of discipline, termination, or resignation in lieu of termination may not volunteer with IDB. [IDB reserves the right to search State of Iowa employment records to verify statements regarding former state employment.]

# **VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

**I, \_\_\_\_\_ have received and read the Iowa Department for the Blind Volunteer Handbook. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I have regarding the contents of the handbook.**

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**Signature of Volunteer**

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**Date**



## **VOLUNTEER CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT**

### **Confidentiality**

I agree to hold in confidence all information I become privy to regarding clients, staff and volunteers of the Iowa Department for the Blind. I will not remove from the office of the Iowa Department of the Blind any electronic or written records, or copies thereof, of any client of the Iowa Department for the Blind. I will abide by the confidentiality policy of the Iowa Department for the Blind as laid out in the employee manual. I accept full responsibility for maintaining the confidential nature of all records, client contacts and information marked as confidential.

I understand that I am personally responsible and fully liable for any violation of this agreement.

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Volunteer Signature

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Date