

Volunteer Handbook



The Nature Connection runs on volunteer power!

NC strives to provide accessible and meaningful volunteer opportunities for a diversity of people to support all aspects of our work. We aim to support volunteers with informative, easy-to-use resources and regularly recognize their service and impact. Through their service, NC volunteers further our mission for individual and community wellbeing, and our vision to expand and professionalize the use of nature as a therapeutic tool.



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Welcome!

We are excited to have you join The Nature Connection team!

Way back, The Nature Connection began as an all-volunteer organization. And today, our volunteers continue to have a profound impact and be essential in the delivery of our mission. As a Nature Connection volunteer, you help provide the one-on-one interactions with participants that build connection, trust, safety, and understanding during our programs.

We are grateful for your dedication and commitment to our participants as you join us on this journey. I hope your volunteer experience provides an opportunity to develop skills, connect, promote personal and professional growth, and bring you joy.

I look forward to meeting & working with you -

Best,

Taylor Eagan, Program Director

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Appendix A – Types of Nature Connection Volunteers

1. Mission, Vision & Values

Mission

To improve the well-being of individuals and communities through the therapeutic use of nature.

Vision

To be a leader in nature-based programming and to strive for a world in which the therapeutic and educational benefits of nature are accessible to all, regardless of location, personal abilities, or socioeconomic status.

Values

Human, Animal, and Environmental Well-being

We are committed to preserving and strengthening the wellbeing of all peoples, their communities, and the environments in which they live.

Growth and Learning

We believe in continuous growth, development, and a willingness to change within our organization and programming to provide more meaningful experiences for our communities, supporters, and partners.

Creative Problem Solving

We embrace the spirit of innovation by facing challenges and barriers as opportunities to grow and learn.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

We are committed to making our communities stronger by bringing together diverse people, perspectives, and experiences. We work to make nature accessible to all people, of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.



2. The Nature Connection Methodology

Safety, Choice, and Respect, along with the other principles of Trauma-Informed Practice/Care are the cornerstones of all Nature Connection approaches and programs. “Questions” is an approach we believe can be most respectful in creating curiosity with the people we serve.

These principles go for our program participants, program animals, Program Volunteers, program site staff, and all Nature Connection personnel (that’s you!).

The Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice



Mulholland & O’Toole (2021), The principles of trauma-informed practice.
Adapted from SAMHSA (2014) and Harris and Fallot (2001).

Safety

1. The Nature Connection staff screen all materials and animals for safety.
2. **Be aware that any object has the potential to become a safety concern if used inappropriately.** Many objects can be considered dangerous when used in a manner that was not intended or by clients who might not have the judgment, impulse control, physical or mental ability to use it safely.
3. Program Volunteers and The Nature Connection staff must remain in control of materials and animals at all times. Never leave participants or animals alone with materials.
 - a. Examples: small objects such as acorns or ornamental corn kernels that have fallen out can be choking hazards. Antlers have pointy tips. Eucalyptus is highly toxic to cats.
4. Always be vigilant. If you see a potential safety concern you are unsure of, alert the Program Coordinator immediately.

The difference between SHARING (1:1, 1:2, 1:3) versus PASSING a material

- The Nature Connection aims for a ratio of 1 NC member:3-4 program participants - this is what allows us to be so hands-on and interactive in our programming. *You* are right there to help mitigate any potential misuse of materials or animals.

Choice/Respect

During Nature Connection programs people and animals always have the choice whether they are going to participant or not.

A simple question, “Would you like to see this flower?” is all that is needed to give someone choice. A ‘no’ response is completely fine. It is possible that we will offer material every time we conduct a program, and they will say no hundreds of times. What is important is that they are present, and that alone makes them a member of the group.

Even if a client chooses to sit very far outside the action, they are still a member of the group. We must respect their choice not to participate. Someday they might join in, or might not, ever. But they are there. They are taking something in. **Our job is to be radically respectful.** Sometimes our respect is plenty for them to take in and learn from.

In this same respectful way, no one has to pet or touch an animal...no matter how amazing you (or anyone else) may think the animal is...even if it's your dog. Some people may never want to meet your dog.

Likewise, no animal has to come out of their carrier or enclosure to be seen or pet...the animals also have a choice. We ‘listen and watch’ the animals and model respect for all our participants. If a rabbit is unsettled this can be an excellent opportunity to talk about nervousness and take a set back and slow down.

- Nature Connection staff have worked with our program animals for years and know their temperaments

Also, you may be surprised at what some people WILL want to see. Offer everyone the choice. Worms/Snakes and snails can sometimes be less threatening than something more typically ‘interesting’.

Some of the slimy, creepy-crawly critters that will join us on programs from time-to-time...

Snails
(garden & pond)

Madagascar Hissing
Cockroaches

Worms

Slugs

Tadpoles

Hermit Crabs

Respect

- Respect the participants' engagement/involvement level without excluding/ignoring
- Model respect for people, animals, and natural materials
- Be respectful in your actions, tone, and language towards all participants

3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

The Nature Connection values Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

- We are committed to making our communities stronger by bringing together diverse people, perspectives, and experiences. We work to make nature accessible to all people, of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

Multicultural Sensitivity

Taken from Discover Corps Website: <https://discovercorps.com/blog/cultural-sensitivity-awareness/>

What is Cultural Sensitivity?

- The idea behind cultural sensitivity is very straightforward. *Cultural sensitivity* refers to a set of skills that allows you to learn about and understand people whose cultural background is not the same as yours.
- But what does that really mean? Essentially, it means that, as you go about your daily life, you operate with the awareness that cultural differences between yourself and the people you meet exist without assigning them a value. You see our differences as a positive thing, and don't consider one culture better or worse, right or wrong.
- Of course, this is often easier said than done. With increasingly diverse populations living together in the same communities, it's not always possible to intimately understand the backgrounds of those we're interacting with.
- But having cultural sensitivity doesn't mean that you must be an expert in each culture's values. It simply means that you're **willing to ask honest questions, seek understanding, and demonstrate empathy rather than judging those around you**. It also means that, when you knowingly enter a space in which there will be cultural differences at play, you do a bit of homework beforehand and avoid knee-jerk reactions or jumping to conclusions.

Why is Cultural Sensitivity Important?

- The most important thing when it comes to acting in a culturally sensitive way is that you remember to **ground each interaction you have with others in the understanding that their background, experiences, and values naturally vary from your own**. This will help you to lead with understanding and empathy, rather than judgment, which is an incredibly important shift.

Implicit Bias

Taken from VeryWellMind Website: <https://www.verywellmind.com/implicit-bias-overview-4178401>

An implicit bias is an unconscious association, belief, or attitude toward any social group. Due to implicit biases, people may often attribute certain qualities or characteristics to all members of a particular group, a phenomenon known as stereotyping.

It is important to remember that implicit biases operate almost entirely on an unconscious level. While explicit biases and prejudices are intentional and controllable, implicit biases are less so.

A person may even express explicit disapproval of a certain attitude or belief while still harboring similar biases on a more unconscious level. Such biases do not necessarily align with our own sense of self and personal identity. In many cases, people can hold positive or negative associations with regards to their own race, gender, religion, sexuality, or another personal characteristic.

Causes

While people might like to believe that they are not susceptible to these biases and stereotypes, the reality is that **everyone engages in [biases] whether they like it or not.** This reality, however, does not mean that you are necessarily prejudiced or inclined to discriminate against other people. It simply means that your brain is working in a way that makes associations and generalizations. [Which is normal!]

[But,] you can, however, become more aware of your unconscious thinking and the ways in which society influences you.

How to Reduce Implicit Bias

Implicit biases impact behavior, but there are things that you can do to reduce your own bias:

- **Focus on seeing people as individuals.** Rather than focusing on stereotypes to define people, spend time considering them on a more personal, individual level.
- **Work on consciously changing your stereotypes.** If you do recognize that your response to a person might be rooted in biases or stereotypes, make an effort to consciously adjust your response.
- **Take time to pause and reflect.** In order to reduce reflexive reactions, take time to reflect on potential biases and replace them with positive examples of the stereotyped group.
- **Adjust your perspective.** Try seeing things from another person's point of view. How would you respond if you were in the same position? What factors might contribute to how a person acts in a particular setting or situation?

- **Increase your exposure.** Spend more time with people of different racial backgrounds. Learn about their culture by attending community events or exhibits.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Try meditation, yoga, or focused breathing to increase mindfulness and become more aware of your thoughts and actions.

Cultural Sensitivity & Implicit Bias with Nature

While we often talk of biases in regards to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, we can also hold biases in our views of nature, plants, and animals. Be aware that these exist and that your values towards nature may not match those of our program participants – that is expected in our programs and okay!

4. Volunteer Training & Resources

Training

- **Volunteer Training** – Program Volunteers are required to attend an initial volunteer training and are subject to periodic retraining, as The Nature Connection deems necessary.
- **Program Observation** - during observation we only expect you to observe and see if The Nature Connection is the kind of organization you would like to be involved with. For safety reasons we do not permit untrained volunteers to take part in program delivery.
- **Continued Learning** – Volunteers are welcomed and encouraged to join The Nature Connection staff in attending professional development trainings (referred to as *NC's Seasonal Café*, hosted quarterly/seasonally) to broaden and deepen our understanding of our client populations and knowledge of the natural world.

Resources

- **Volunteer Resource Webpage** – The volunteer resources page on our website (www.nature-connection.org/volunteer-resources/) with information related to volunteering with The Nature Connection! This page has information on natural materials, our client populations, and general NC policies/handbooks (like this one!). The Nature Connection can provide hard copies of information upon request.
- **Monthly Newsletter Email** - Subject Line: **MONTH Nature Notes!** Contains a link to the volunteer Signup Genius page where you can select volunteer opportunities, program stories, organizational happenings, upcoming events/trainings, etc.

- **The Nature Connection Staff –**

- As bubbly, joyful, and rejuvenating as NC programs can be, they can also be heavy. We get real glimpses into the lives of people facing real challenges in their lives – sometimes these glimpses trigger our own memories and emotions. **You are not alone.** Come talk with us, vent, work it out, let us know if there is something we could do that might help – you might not be the only one experiencing a reaction.
- Any member of NC staff would be happy to answer or get you in contact with someone who can answer any questions you have. This applies to questions on natural materials, program animals, Program Volunteer policy, The Nature Connection policies, concerns about a program visit, highlights of a program visit, etc.

5. CORI/SORI Background Check

For any NC member working directly with participants/clients a CORI/SORI background check is required. Passing the background check is at the discretion of The Nature Connection.

CORI/SORI's must be completed every 2 years and are kept on file as required by law at The Nature Connection in a locked cabinet.

6. On a Program – Program Volunteers

Program Volunteers assist the Program Coordinator in setting up, delivering, and breaking down The Nature Connection program. Program Volunteers interact directly with program participants and program animals.

The Nature Connection program is for our participants. Our role during a program, as members of The Nature Connection (staff and volunteers), is to assist and facilitate our participants' interactions with nature in a safe and encouraging environment for the development of trust, self--esteem, and dignity.

- The needs and interests of our program participants come first.
- If you are unsure if an action is in the best interest of program participants during a program, and there is no immediate safety concern, refrain and consult with the Program Coordinator during the debrief period

Volunteering with a Family Member in the Program

We ask that you disclose any familial connections you may have to a participant(s) in The Nature Connection programs where you are/would like to volunteer as this creates a conflict of interest and potential disruption for your family member(s). The Nature Connection handles these situations on a case-by-case basis, there is the potential that you will not be able to volunteer at the site.

Pre-Program

Program Coordinators will communicate with you via email 1-3 days before the program to let you know the program plan/outline, the program animal (if we know who it will be), any particular safety concerns, and any logistical information related to the program site.

Program Outline (2 hours)

Program Volunteers make a 2-hour time commitment to The Nature Connection when they sign up to volunteer at a program. Program Volunteers are expected to be on time and stay for the duration of the program and the post-program debrief.

- A. **Arrival & Set-up** - ½ Hour before the start of the program.
 - a. Volunteers meet at the program site (not the NC office) unless otherwise arranged in advance
 - b. Program Volunteers assist with:
 - i. Unloading the program supplies from the Program Coordinator's car and bring in to program location
 - ii. Setting up the program presentation
 - iii. Name tags for all program participants & NC personnel
 - c. The Program Coordinator is responsible for conveying the program theme, program game plan, and informing Program Volunteers of any potential safety concerns with program materials or program participants.
 - d. Program Animals enter the site in covered carry cases or on short leash.

- B. **During Program** - 1 hour
 - a. Alert the Program Coordinator or a member of The Nature Connection staff of any problems/potential problems that arise during the program.
 - b. Establish an environment of safety, choice and respect, allowing participants to determine their level of engagement.
 - c. Engage participants with the natural materials provided in an open and exploratory manner.
 - d. Monitor animals for signs of stress and alert program coordinator of observations. Check-in with the Program Coordinator before taking an animal around to participants.
 - e. Dispense **hand sanitizer** or hand wipes after an animal has been shared to minimize risk of bacteria and zoonotic disease transmission.

Note: Program Volunteers are **not** authorized to help program participants with any non---Nature Connection related activities (using the restroom, going out to their car, holding a door open, getting water, tissues, etc.). When a program participant asks for help with any activity not directly related to the program, please alert the site staff that a program participant is in need of assistance.

C. Clean-up & Debrief – ½ Hour after the end of the program

- a. Program Volunteers assist with:
 - i. Leaving the room “broom-cleaned”
 - ii. Packing up the program supplies and bringing them out to the program coordinator's car
- b. Program volunteers participate in a post-program *debrief* with the program coordinator
 - i. Debrief occurs after the program materials have been packed up and removed from the program site
 - ii. Debrief location will be picked by the program coordinator to prevent site participants or staff from overhearing so that The Nature Connection team may speak freely about any comments or concerns on the program
 - iii. Debrief is also a time to freely ask questions, relay concerns, and give feedback on the programs

Program Animals

All animals are screened prior to participation in The Nature Connection programming. The Nature Connection maintains appropriate rabies, health certificates, and permits for all program animals.

Many of NC’s program animals are family pets that have been volunteered by their families to participate in The Nature Connection programs.

- Program Volunteers should only handle/share animals they are comfortable with.
- Present animals in a way that minimizes safety risks to participants and animals.
 - Program Animals are shared in baskets with program participants to reduce stress of repeated grabbing and lifting.
 - Program participants are reminded before interacting with the program animal to avoid the face, ears, and tail of the program animal, and to use one hand or one finger touch (animal dependent).
 - Program Coordinators will determine when/if Program Animals will need food. Program participants may not feed Program Animals by hand.
- Animals must be attended at all times by The Nature Connection volunteers or staff.

Utilize The Nature Connection principles of Safety, Choice, Respect when interacting with program animals.

Safety

- Our program animals are all screened for temperament and behavior, however *anything with a mouth can bite*. An animal may bite for reasons as simple as thinking a finger is a baby carrot to being stressed and feeling trapped.
- See animal sheets for more species---specific information.
- Always be vigilant. If you see a potential safety concern you are unsure of, ask the Program Coordinator immediately.

Choice

- Animals have good days and bad days just like us. If a program animal is displaying unwilling behavior or signs of stress, that animal will not be forced to participate in the program.

Respect

- Modeling respect for our program animals is an important part of The Nature Connection program.
- We expect Program Volunteers to respect when our program animals are stressed and do not wish to participate in a program
- We expect program volunteers to handle animals in a safe and caring way, and to speak to them in gentle, respectful tones
- We expect that if you are uncomfortable or have little experience handling a particular animal you do not use during a program to try it out! We would be happy to work with you and train you outside of program delivery.

Animal Transport

While unusual, if a program volunteers/intern is assisting in Program Animal transport to and from program sites, the following apply:

- Program Animals are returned directly following the program, and are not to be taken to any other location(s) post program unless directly cleared with the Program Animal's owner *and* Program Coordinator.
- Program Animals must be returned directly to a member of their family, to inside their family's home, or to a staff member of The Nature Connection. Program Animals are not to be left unattended in open locations (ex: outside The Nature Connection office, on a doorstep, in the garage, etc.).
- Do not leave Program Animals unattended in a vehicle.

Natural Materials

The Nature Connection programs are designed to give participants with limited or no access to the natural world a chance to interact with natural materials and animals. The role of The Nature Connection staff and Program Volunteers is to safely facilitate those interactions in order for program participants to have positive interactions with nature.

Natural Materials – If you would like to gather/bring your own natural materials on program visits, you are welcome to do so! (Though it is not at all required or expected) Bringing your own materials gives something personal to share with program participants. However, consider how the client population may act inappropriately with the natural material and plan accordingly. Program Coordinators are available to help you consider safe ways to share natural materials.

- *Bringing Natural Materials to share*
 - The natural materials must then be shown to the Program Coordinator before the start of the program to assess for safety concerns.
 - Program Coordinators may, at any point, deem a natural material unsafe for a program visit and require that the natural material must be set aside or removed from the premises.
- *Gathering Natural Materials to share*
 - Follow the tenants of honorable harvest
 - Always get permission from landowners to walk on their property and to remove natural materials. Leave things as you found them, and be courteous. Show respect by closing gates and observing special requests owners may make.
 - If possible, remove live plants in such a way that they may be returned unharmed to their original location within 24 hours of being gathered.
 - Be familiar with plants!
 - Do not collect anything that is rare or endangered.
 - Do not collect plants that are poisonous either to touch or to ingest (e.g., poison ivy).

Honorable Harvest

Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them.

Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life.

Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer.

Never take the first. Never take the last.

Take only what you need.

Take only that which is given.

Never take more than half. Leave some for others.

Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.

Use the harvest respectfully. Never waste what you have taken.

Share.

Give thanks for what you have been given.

Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.

Sustain the ones who sustain you, and the earth will last forever.

Robin Wall Kimmerer -
Braiding Sweetgrass

Cell phones

Personal cell phone use is not permitted during programs. Please silence your cell phone during program times.

- *In the case of an emergency* – please remove yourself from the program area in order to use your cell phone.

Note: Cell phone policies for the program participants may differ and depend on the program site. Consult with Program Coordinator for site--specific policies

7. Dress Code Policy

Please note: this is the same Dress Code followed by Nature Connection employees
Updated Dec. 2020

Objective

Employee and Volunteer appearance contributes to The Nature Connection's culture and reputation. Employees and Volunteers are expected to present themselves in a professional manner that results in a favorable impression by program sites and participants; volunteers; donors; and other constituents.

Who does this policy apply to?

The Nature Connection's dress code policy applies to all staff, interns, and volunteers.

Expected attire

Casual business attire is expected of all employees and volunteers. Basic elements for appropriate and professional business attire include clothing that is in neat and in clean condition. Appropriate workplace dress does not include clothing that is too tight or revealing; clothing with rips, tears or frays; or any extreme style or fashion in dress, footwear, accessories, fragrances or hair as defined by the Executive Director. Employees are expected to demonstrate good judgment and professional taste.

An employee/volunteer who is unsure of what is appropriate should check with his or her manager or supervisor.

Any staff member or volunteer who does not meet the attire or grooming standards set by his or her department will be subject to corrective action and may be asked to leave the premises to change clothing. Hourly paid staff members will not be compensated for any work time missed because of failure to comply with designated workplace attire and grooming standards.

The following articles of clothing are examples of casual business attire:

- Long or short sleeved dress shirt, collared shirt, business casual crew-neck or V-neck shirts
- Tank top with thick straps
- Sweater, cardigan, blouse
- Appropriate length dress or skirt
- Shorts longer than mid-thigh
- Khakis, dress pants, plain jeans
- Clothing produced by NC containing the NC logo
- Appropriate footwear for the situation

The following articles of clothing are examples that do NOT apply to casual business attire:

- Shorts, dress, or skirt above mid-thigh
- Jeans or pants/shorts with rips or bleached design
- Leggings or yoga pants
- Clothing with obvious designs/graphics such as tie dye, camouflage, slogans, etc.
- Clothing featuring non-NC logos, profanity, or inappropriate subjects
- Clothing that shows undergarments or inappropriate body parts

Safety Considerations on Programs

Refrain from wearing anything that may dangle, hang, or get caught up on the natural materials and/or program animals. This safety consideration is in mind for not only the staff member/volunteer, but also for the program participant and/or program animals. This includes, but is not limited to, long necklaces/jewelry, decorative hanging cloth on clothing, and lanyards.

Refrain from wearing perfumes/colognes. This safety consideration is in mind for the program participants and/or program animals that may have a sensitivity or allergy to perfumes/colognes.

Reasonable accommodation of religious beliefs

The Nature Connection recognizes the importance of individually held religious beliefs to persons within its workforce. The Nature Connection will reasonably accommodate a staff member's/volunteer's religious beliefs in terms of workplace attire unless the accommodation creates an undue hardship or creates a safety issue. Those requesting a workplace attire accommodation based on religious beliefs should be referred to your supervisor, Executive Director, or human resource services.

Addressing workplace attire and hygiene problems

Violations of the policy can range from inappropriate clothing items to offensive perfumes and body odor. If a staff member comes to work in inappropriate dress, he or she will be required to go home, change into conforming attire or properly groom, and return to work. If a staff member's poor hygiene or use of too much perfume/cologne is an issue, the supervisor should discuss the problem with the staff member in private and should point out the specific areas to be corrected. If attire or hygiene problems persists, supervisors should follow the normal corrective action process, and could lead to termination at the discretion of the Executive Director.

8. Attendance & Cancellations

Attendance

Volunteers are expected to:

- Arrive at the program site on time and ready to go!
- Let us know if you are unable to make the time you are scheduled for
 - If you have your direct supervisors phone number or email, you can let them know directly OR you can always call the office (and leave a message if necessary) or email volunteer@nature-connection.org

If you do not show up for a time you are scheduled for, and have not communicated your absence in advance, you will meet with a supervisor to review expectations. If this happens 3 times within a year of the first offense, you will be asked to stop signing up to volunteer with The Nature Connection.

Cancellations

- *By the Program Volunteer:* We understand life happens, but we do ask that you let us know as soon as possible if you are unable to make your commitment so Program Coordinators can plan accordingly.
- *By The Nature Connection:* We give you (and our sites) as much notice as possible, via phone call and email, when programs are cancelled (due to snow/weather, lack of volunteers, etc.).

9. Problem Solving Procedure (Grievances)

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.

Step 1: You may submit a problem in writing to the Volunteer Coordinator and/or Program Director within three (3) working days after the problem becomes known to you, they are interested in the solution of any problem you, as a member of the team, may have.

They will attempt to resolve your problem at this initial meeting. If unable to reach a mutually agreed upon settlement, the Volunteer Coordinator/Program Director will investigate the situation further, and within three (3) working days, meet you to give their final answer in writing. If you are still not satisfied, then you may request a Step 2 meeting.

Step 2: This step consists of submitting, in writing, the problem to the Executive Director within three (3) working days of receiving the Step One response. The Executive Director will schedule a meeting with you and the Volunteer Coordinator/Program Director as soon as practicable. At this meeting the Executive Director will attempt to resolve the problem, if they are unable to do so, they will provide you with a written resolution within three (3) working days. This will be the final determination.

10. Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policy

In the following section employees refers to both paid staff as well as volunteer positions held with The Nature Connection.

It is the policy of The Nature Connection, Inc. that employees (volunteers included) should be able to enjoy a work environment free of discrimination and harassment.

Under Massachusetts law, employers are prohibited from discriminating against employees based on race, color, religious creed, national origin, ancestry, sex, gender identity, age, criminal record (inquiries only), handicap (disability), mental illness, retaliation, sexual harassment, sexual orientation, active military personnel, and genetics. Harassment refers to behavior that is personally offensive, impairs morale and interferes with the work effectiveness of employees. Any harassment or discrimination of employees by other employees will not be permitted. Any employee who believes that they have been harassed or discriminated against should bring their concerns to the attention of the Executive Director or the President of the Board of Directors.

In providing its programs, activities and services, The Nature Connection, Inc. includes individuals without regard to their race, creed, color, gender, sexual preference, religion, physical disability, age or national origin.

Sexual Harassment (Sexual Harassment Policy Approved by NC Board in March 2020): It is the goal of The Nature Connection to promote a workplace that is free of sexual harassment. The NC's commitment begins with the recognition and acknowledgment that such harassment is, of course, unlawful. Therefore, NC has developed a policy against sexual harassment and a reporting procedure for employees who have been subjected to or witnessed sexual harassment. This policy applies to all work-related settings and activities, whether inside or outside the workplace, and includes business trips and business-related social events. NC property (e.g., telephones, copy machines, computers and computer applications such as e-mail and Internet access) may not be used to engage in conduct which violates this policy. The NC's policy against sexual harassment covers employees and other individuals who have a relationship with the NC which enables the NC to exercise some control over the individuals conduct in places and activities that relate to the NC's work (e.g. contractors, vendors etc.).

Sexual harassment means sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- (1) Submission to or rejection of such advances, requests or conduct is made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of employment or a basis for decisions regarding an individual's employment status such as continued employment, favorable reviews, promotions, increased salary, or benefits.

OR

- (2) Such advances, requests or conduct have the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or sexually offensive work environment.

While it is not possible to list all the circumstances that may constitute sexual harassment, the following are some examples of conduct, which, if unwelcome, may constitute sexual harassment depending upon the totality of the circumstances including the severity and persuasiveness of the conduct:

- Unwelcome sexual advances, whether they involve physical touching or not;
- Sexual epithets, jokes, written or oral references to sexual gossip regarding one's sex life, comments on an individual's body or sexual activity, deficiencies or prowess;
- Displaying sexually suggestive objects, pictures, cartoons;
- Unwelcome leering, whistling, brushing against the body, sexual gestures, suggestive or insulting comments;
- Inquiries into one's sexual experiences; and,
- Discussions of one's sexual activities.

If you believe you have experienced sexual harassment, you should contact NC's executive director. If you are not comfortable contacting the executive director, you should contact the president of The Nature Connection's Board of Directors.

11. Health & Safety

Hand sanitizer or antibacterial wipes **MUST** be provided to participants at the end of every program to prevent the transmission of zoonotic diseases (i.e.. Salmonella)

The Nature Connection follows local ordinances and Center for Disease Control recommendations in regards to communicable diseases. The Nature Connection may choose to require additional health and safety measures within reason given the populations we work with and the nature of a traveling program as defined by organizational leadership.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your supervisor or the Executive Director.

12. Ending your Volunteer Service

Termination procedures are only guidelines and do not constitute a legal contract between The Nature Connection and the volunteer, as arrangement is by mutual consent.

At--will termination – A Program Volunteer may terminate their services at any time by providing The Nature Connection 30 days advance written notice.

You may resign from your volunteer service with the Organization at any time. We request that you notify your supervisor ideally two weeks prior to your departure and request that you complete the Exit Interview process.

Dismissal

Dismissal of a volunteer is a serious consideration. Before a volunteer is dismissed attempts to reconcile the solution will be made including a meeting between staff and volunteer(s) involved, the Program Director, and, if appropriate, the Executive 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 Nature Connection.

- The Nature Connection maintains the right to terminate a Program Volunteer with or without advance notice if the Program Volunteer has violated The Nature Connection's policies OR if The Nature Connection staff deems that the Program Volunteer has not/is not acting in the best interest of The Nature Connection's clients.
- The Nature Connection will provide the Program Volunteer in question with a written explanation for the cause of termination upon request.

Exit Interview and Exit Checklist Process

We encourage all volunteers to participate in an exit interview before leaving the Organization, regardless of your reason for leaving. You may also request a letter of reference or referral at this time.

The exit interview is your opportunity to communicate your views about the position, your department, management, the operations of the company, and any other relevant information you feel it is important for us to know.

The appropriate persons will contact you to arrange an exit interview.

13. Confidentiality

The Nature Connection works with vulnerable populations (at-risk youth, people with disabilities, elders with dementia). While volunteering with The Nature Connection, you may over hear or have participants relay details regarding their personal/medical history. The privacy of an individual's medical records and other personal health information are protected under The HIPAA Privacy Rule. Such information is not under your discretion to divulge. Additionally, members of our clientele have the potential to face negative consequences if their identities and/or locations are revealed. All members of our clientele are afforded the same respect in maintaining their privacy, and therefore; maintaining confidentiality of all individual clients is a priority for us.

1. If/When you share stories of volunteering outside of speaking with The Nature Connection staff, we expect you to refrain from identifying program participants by name and/or other identifying factors.
2. Program Volunteers are not authorized to take any photographs, videos, or images in any form on program visits unless explicitly permitted by The Nature Connection staff. Photos of program participants are expressly forbidden.
3. The privacy and confidentiality of our volunteers and staff at The Nature Connection is also important. In order to maintain appropriate boundaries with clients of The Nature Connection, we expect our volunteers and staff to used discretion in sharing personal details of yourself or others.



Appendix A

The Nature Connection Volunteer Positions

Therapeutic Nature Program Volunteers

- Requirements:
 - 18+ years of age
 - Transportation to and from program sites
 - Volunteer training (2 ½ hours) and program observation before volunteering
 - CORI/SORI check
 - Strong appreciation for nature and animals
 - Ability to communicate and engage with program participants that may have communication challenges
- Key Responsibilities: Help our Program Coordinators deliver our nature-based programs on-site to youth, elders, and individuals with disabilities.
- Onboarding/Training: Must attend a 2.5 hour training session at the NC office and observe at least one program onsite prior to volunteering
- Time commitment:
 - Ongoing
 - 2 hours per month throughout the year.
 - Programs occur during the week on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays during the day, usually between 10:00am and 6:00pm.
- Where: Meet us at our program sites throughout Middlesex County
- Impact: Witness joy, connection, and curiosity through participants' connection with you - the volunteer, natural materials, and live animals. Improve participants' well-being through sensory stimulation, mindful engagement, social connection, taking healthy risks, and hands-on engagement through interacting with the natural world.
- Resources/Equipment: NC provides all natural materials and animals, as well as transports them to the program site. Any necessary PPE will also be provided.

Office Volunteers

- Requirements:
 - 18+ years of age
 - Transportation to and from the NC office
- Key Responsibilities: Help NC prepare program materials, create educational material, and with general operations
- Onboarding/Training: Training is received as needed for office tasks, it is not required though office volunteers committed to an ongoing schedule are encouraged to attend volunteer training to learn more about the organization
- Time Commitment:
 - One time or ongoing
 - 1+ hours during office hours: Monday – Friday 8AM – 4PM.
- Where: Nature Connection office in Concord, MA
- Impact: Help the NC carry out its mission of offering high-quality therapeutic nature programs through assisting with behind-the-scenes, preparatory work.
- Resources/Equipment: Necessary office supplies will be provided.

Event Volunteers

- Requirements:
 - 18+ years of age
 - Transportation to and from NC office or event site

- Key Responsibilities: Help with set-up and various needs at NC events
- Onboarding/Training: Arrive a few minutes early at events to get instructions specific to helping at event
- Time Commitment:
 - One-time
 - 1+ hours at various events throughout the year
- Where: Nature Connection office and various event sites around Metrowest Boston
- Impact: Help the NC to grow its reach and impact through helping at various cultivation and fundraising events throughout the year.
- Resources/Equipment: Any necessary supplies for the event will be provided.

Program Animal Families

- Requirements:
 - Phone screening about animal and in-person meeting with animal at NC office
 - Health certificate from veterinarian (health certificate must be updated annually for mammals)
 - Dogs must be certified therapy dog; cats & dogs require proof of vaccinations
- Key Responsibilities: Individuals or families who live in Concord, Lincoln, Lexington, Bedford, or Carlisle, Massachusetts (or nearby any of our partner sites) and have an animal with therapeutic/educational potential can share their animals for our therapeutic nature-based programs.
- Onboarding/Training: During phone screening and in-person meeting NC staff will answer any questions and provide info on logistics & communication
 - Time Commitment: have animals available for programing 2-3 times per month.
 - Ongoing
 - You or a member of your household must be available for animal pickups (no earlier than 9am) and drop-offs (no later than 7pm) on agreed upon days, Tuesday through Friday.
- Where: Animals are picked up from and dropped off to your home or The Nature Connection office.
- Impact: Therapeutic animals model strength, dignity, and survival skills for at-risk individuals. Your animals will also provide an opportunity for program participants to increase connection, empathy, sensory stimulation, mindfulness, and healthy-risk taking.
- Resources/Equipment: NC can provide animal carriers, if needed. NC provides water, baskets, and plexi enclosures for the animals' use during programs.

Animal Care Volunteers

- Requirements:
 - Age 14 - 18 (in high school)
 - Transportation to and from the NC office
 - Parental Consent form (for any volunteer between the ages of 14 - 18)
 - Experience and willingness to work with all kinds of animals (including small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects, etc.)
- Key Responsibilities: Assist in the care and socialization of our program animals that are housed in our office. We have two chinchillas, a corn snake, and some tank pets (snails and Madagascar cockroaches). Volunteers are responsible for socializing with the chinchillas, feeding some of the animals, and cleaning the enclosures/tanks.
- Onboarding/Training: 1st visit you will go around with an NC staff member and they will walk through the care and safety for each animal with you.

- Time Commitment:
 - Ongoing
 - 1-2 hours per week for 3+ months
- Where: The Nature Connection office in Concord, MA
- Impact: Your care will keep our office animals clean, fed, and well-cared for. Your volunteering allows our office critters to have focused care and socialization that helps them to thrive.
- Resources/Equipment: NC provides food, cleaning materials, and any other materials necessary in order to care for the office animals.

Board Member

- Requirements:
 - 18+ years of age
 - Experience in financial management, education, environmental issues, and/or development.
- Key Responsibilities: Provide leadership, expertise, and networking to The Nature Connection.
- Onboarding/Training: Program observation and information packet on NC provided, attending the volunteer training in not required but is encouraged
- Time Commitment:
 - Ongoing
 - 2-4 hours per month for a minimum of 12 months
- Attendance of at least 80% of monthly Board meetings (included in 2-4 hour commitment)
- Where: Remote via Zoom with occasional in-person requirements
- Impact: Your advocacy, networking, and financial contributions will allow the NC to therapeutically support a growing community of programs sites throughout Middlesex County whose clientele are often socially isolated and/or have limited access to nature.
- Resources/Equipment: NC provides info pages and templates for outreach

Development Committee

- Requirements:
 - 18+ years of age
 - Experience with networking, fundraising, and/or non-profit finances
- Key Responsibilities: Responsible for facilitating the achievement of all of NC's philanthropic/fundraising efforts to ensure sustainability and growth in alignment with NC's Strategic Plan.
- Onboarding/Training: Information on the organization is provided, attending the volunteer training in not required but is encouraged
- Time Commitment:
 - Ongoing
 - 1-2 hours per month for a minimum of 12 months
- Attendance of at least 80% of monthly Development Commitment meetings (included in 1-2 hour commitment)
- Where: Remote via Zoom with occasional in-person requirements
- Impact: Help the NC to effectively raise funds in order to ensure it can continue to improve the wellbeing of others through nature as well as grow its overall impact.
- Resources/Equipment: NC provides info pages and templates for outreach

Events Committee

- Requirements:
 - 18+ years of age
- Key Responsibilities: Responsible for planning and supporting several events throughout the year, as well as obtaining auction items, food donations, and assisting in outreach efforts.
- Onboarding/Training: Information on the organization is provided, attending the volunteer training is not required but is encouraged
- Time Commitment:
 - Ongoing
 - 1-2 hours per month for a minimum of 12 months with a greater time commitment near major events
- Attendance of at least 80% of monthly Events Commitment meetings (included in 1-2 hour commitment)
- Where: Remote via Zoom with in-person requirements (the events)
- Impact: Help the NC to grow its reach and impact through planning and supporting various cultivation and fundraising events throughout the year.
- Resources/Equipment: NC provides info pages and templates for outreach

Interns

- Requirements:
 - 18+ years of age
 - Transportation to and from NC office and program sites
 - CORI/SORI background check
- Key Responsibilities: Assist in program delivery alongside NC staff and volunteers, complete program development projects that further organizational goals, support general administration, and learn the inner workings of a non-profit. Ideal candidates have interests in fields such as environmental education, alternative therapies, and/or social work.
- Types of Undergraduate and Graduate Internships:
 - Program Interns (Spring, Summer, and Fall)
 - Research and Data Collection Interns (Spring only)
 - Marketing and Development Interns (Spring and Fall)
- Onboarding/Training: Must attend a 2.5 hour training session at the NC office and observe at least one program onsite prior to engaging with participants during programs
- Time Commitment:
 - Ongoing
 - Flexible scheduling based on college's requirements (minimum of 8 hrs./wk., max of 20 hrs./wk.)
 - Programs occur during the week on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays (AM only) during the day, usually between 10:00am and 6:00pm.
- Where: At NC office in Concord, MA and program sites throughout Middlesex County
- Impact: Make a positive difference in the lives of elders, youth-at-risk, and adults with disabilities. Program interns help our program participants gain well-being, social engagement, self-knowledge, and emotional intelligence through the therapeutic use of nature. Research and Data Collection interns participate in the crucial understanding and documentation of benefits from nature-based therapeutic programming. Marketing and Development interns will build bridges between people and nature through helping with behind-the-scenes support critical to the NC's mission.
- Resources/Equipment: NC provides all natural materials and animals, as well as transports them to the program site. Any necessary PPE will also be provided. Workspace/computer provided to interns working in the NC office.

