

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS IN RESEARCH LABORATORIES

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide guidance to researchers and department administrators pertaining to volunteers in research labs situated within the Tupper building, CRC and LSRI, and lab spaces in other Dalhousie University buildings where the PI holds a primary appointment in the Faculty of Medicine.

Definition and Principles

Dalhousie's definition of a volunteer is someone who will be performing a maximum of 5 hours of work per week, and who will not be materially contributing to the project (e.g., running experiments, performing data analysis, etc.). This can include students, Dalhousie employees (including research staff), and members of the external community, who will not be financially compensated for the work to be performed.

There are different reasons why individuals may wish to volunteer in research groups. In some cases, registered students may be able to volunteer by enrolling in an experiential learning or independent study classes hosted by departments within the Faculty of Medicine (see departmental websites for more information) or other faculties. In other circumstances, a volunteer may wish to explore an area of future study or paid employment.

There are several important principles that should be considered to determine if a volunteer position is appropriate. There should be clarity of the purpose of volunteering agreed upon by all parties involved in writing and on record by the principal investigator's department. The roles, expectations and status of the volunteer should be established prior to the commencement of the volunteering opportunity. Insurance coverage should be confirmed, and a liability waiver form signed as appropriate. The length of time for the experience, and the number of hours per week or term should be detailed. Any volunteer experience should be time-limited such that it either ends after a defined period of time, or transitions into student status or a paid employment opportunity.

Procedure¹

1. **Insurance** – The departmental administrator or the PI must determine if the volunteer will be covered under the University's insurance policy (please see notes below and contact insurance@dal.ca if needed).
 - Individuals who volunteer their services to outside entities are not covered, unless, for students, it is part of their course requirements.

¹ For international visiting co-op students or interns and visiting student researchers, contact: international.centre@dal.ca. For visiting graduate and postgraduate students, contact: graduate.studies@dal.ca. For other international visitors, including visiting professors, see the [International Visitors](#) section of the HR website.

- Students who volunteer for their own benefit (e.g., to explore a potential future field of study or to apply for work or study in your lab) fall outside the intent of the volunteer status in the Dalhousie insurance policy. Only activities that are part of their course requirements related are covered.
 - If no liability insurance is in place through Dalhousie's policy, the administrator or the PI must inform the volunteer that the opportunity will not be possible unless a liability waiver form is signed.
2. **Letter of agreement and liability waiver form** – Using the template provided as a guide, prepare a letter of agreement which will clarify the role of the volunteer and the length of time of the opportunity in writing.
 - Students with current registration in experiential learning or independent study classes are exempt from this process if the volunteer opportunity is part of the course requirements for that experiential learning or independent study class. See item #1 for more information.
 - Obtain appropriate signatures. If the volunteer will not be covered under the Dalhousie insurance policy, ensure that a waiver of liability form is also signed.
 3. **Copies** – Once the letter of agreement and waiver form (if applicable) are signed, give a copy to the volunteer, and send a copy to the administrator of the department where the volunteer will be located. If this location is in a different department than the PI's primary appointment, also send a copy to the administrator of the PI's primary department.
 4. **Courtesy Access** – Once all the steps above been completed, the department administrator may submit a courtesy access form (if needed) to allow appropriate building access for the period that corresponds to the volunteer agreement.
 - The courtesy access form can be found on Dalhousie's internal HR site, [here](#) (on the 'Payroll Administration' page, under 'Profiles'). This form does not require the Dean's Office approval; it is signed by the Department Head and sent directly to payforms@dal.ca.

Questions?

Contact the Faculty of Medicine's Medical Research Development Office
(Sara.Lavender@Dal.ca, Director, or Eileen.Denovan-Wright@Dal.ca, Associate Dean)

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