

# ARS □ CSREES □ ERS □ NASS

## *Policies and Procedures*

**Title:** Student and Volunteer Programs

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This P&P describes the procedures and requirements associated with the employment of students, volunteers, unpaid trainees, and REE employee voluntary services to outside organizations.

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# 1. Introduction

Student and volunteer programs are an integral part of sound human resources management. By utilizing these programs effectively, managers can close the skills gap, accomplish succession planning and knowledge management, as well as build a more diverse workforce in accordance with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Human Capital Plans. Civil service regulations allow agencies a great deal of flexibility in employing students and volunteers.

# 2. Student Employment Programs

Two hiring authorities are used to place students -- Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) and Student Career Experience Program (SCEP). All students are appointed using one of these two authorities, regardless of what the student program may informally be titled (e.g., the Summer Intern Program and the Research Apprenticeship Program are STEP, 1890 National Scholars Program, and the Public Service Leaders Program are SCEP).

- **Student Temporary Employment Program** employs students in any occupation on a temporary basis during the school year and/or in the summer.

(Reference: 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Schedule B, 213.3202[a])

- **Student Career Experience Program** employs students in occupations related to their field of study and offers the possibility of noncompetitive conversion to career, career-conditional, or term appointment upon completion of their academic program.

(Reference: 5 CFR, Schedule B, 213.3202 [b])

## Definition of Student

The following requirements pertain to **both** student programs.

- The student must be enrolled or accepted for enrollment in a program of study leading to a degree, diploma, or certificate, at an accredited high school, technical or vocational school, college, university, graduate, or professional school. Home-schooled students may participate provided they are studying in an accredited home-school or a home-school curriculum approved by their state. If the student has been employed with the agency, but has not yet received an acceptance letter from a college or university, it would be acceptable for the student to submit a copy of an application to the college or university or submit a notice of receipt of application from the college or university. The student must follow up with official acceptance.

- The student must be taking at least a half-time course load. The definition of half-time will vary from one institution to another. If there is any doubt about the adequacy of a student's course load (for example, fewer than 8 units or credits per semester), the institution's definition will be accepted. An exception to the course load requirements may be made when the student is nearing graduation and needs only a few courses or a few credit hours to fulfill requirements. Students do not have to be enrolled during the summer.

## **General Provisions**

**Age:** All Federally employed students must be 16 years of age or older (5 CFR 551.601).

**Breaks in Program:** A "break in program" is defined as a period of time when a student appointee is working, but is unable to attend school, or when the student is neither attending classes nor working at the Agency (student will be charged "annual leave" or "leave without pay" during breaks from work). A student may skip a semester without jeopardizing the appointment. Approval or denial of these breaks is left to the supervisor's discretion.

**Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP):** Student employment is exempt from coverage by the Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP). Appointments may be made without soliciting surplus or displaced employees or reemployment priority candidates. The conversion of a SCEP employee to permanent employment is also exempt from CTAP provisions if within the same agency (i.e., with USDA).

**Ceiling:** Student positions count against employment ceilings.

**Citizenship/Homeland Security:** Since student positions are in the excepted service, U.S. citizenship is not required. However, only non-citizens from treaty-allied countries and certain other countries may be employed with proper authorization to work in the United States ([http://www.opm.gov/employ/html/non\\_cit.asp](http://www.opm.gov/employ/html/non_cit.asp)). Students hired under SCEP must be U.S. citizens to be eligible for conversion to career, career-conditional, or term employment. For this reason, non-citizens should not be appointed to SCEP positions unless it is reasonably certain that they will attain U.S. citizenship by the time they graduate (e.g., has already completed residency requirements and has filed an application for citizenship).

Citizens from countries on the Department of State's list of state sponsors of terrorism are prohibited from **working in a USDA facility as a contractor or volunteer or visiting USDA facilities**. The exceptions to this ban are persons from these countries who are permanent residents of the U.S. The listing of countries changes, so it is advisable to check the Department of State Web site to obtain the latest information (<http://www.state.gov>).

All non-citizens who work in USDA facilities must be reported and tracked, including students, regardless of their visa sponsorship, their employer, or how/if they are paid, and whether or not they are employees of USDA. **Completion of the ARS-230, Non-Citizen Data Sheet, for non-citizen workers is always required.**

Clearance from ARS Homeland Security is required prior to the employment and/or visa sponsorship of a non-citizen. This means that the name trace must be satisfactorily completed prior to sponsorship of a non-citizen for a visa or the beginning of employment unless the person is a permanent resident.

**Grades:** Appointments may be made at any grade for which the student qualifies, either General Schedule or Wage Grade.

**Pay:** Students in both programs are paid the same rates as employees in like positions. General Schedule employees are eligible for locality pay and, if applicable, special pay rates.

**Promotion:** Students in both programs are eligible for promotion provided they meet the qualification requirements. Since student appointments are in the excepted service, time in grade restrictions do not apply. For STEP appointees, the action is processed as a conversion to a new appointment at the higher grade. The not to exceed date should not change. For SCEP appointees, the action is processed as a promotion.

**Qualification Requirements:** The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) qualification standards will be used for STEP and SCEP positions. The alternate qualifications standard described in Appendix D should be utilized if the standard for the target SCEP position does not cover the grade occupied by the student. Students **must** be in good academic standing (2.0 GPA or better).

**Recruitment:** Recruitment for student programs may be conducted informally at the local level. Placement offices at educational institutions are usually the best resource, because their client base includes the diversity of the student body. Supervisors can use the student programs as one aspect of their workforce planning, to set and achieve workforce diversity goals.

While a written announcement or public notice is not required, a student employment opportunity can be advertised if desired. Written tests are waived. Applicants do not have to be ranked or compete for consideration. Students may apply by submitting a resume, curriculum vitae, or an OF-612, Optional Application for Federal Employment. An OF-306, Declaration for Federal Employment, is required for suitability issues before an official job offer can be finalized.

**Relatives:** Relatives of Federal employees may participate in either SCEP or STEP. The only requirement is that there is no direct reporting relationship between the relative and the student, and that the relative does not **advocate** the employment, promotion, or advancement of the student. (5 CFR 310 and 5 CFR 213.3202).

**Tour of Duty:** Students may work full-time, part-time, alternating periods of work and school, or on a seasonal basis. There are no limitations on the number of hours a student can work per week, but the student's work schedule should not interfere with the student's academic schedule. Student employees may work any number of hours acceptable to all parties. It is not appropriate to place a student on an intermittent work schedule. Student employees are eligible for flexible tours of duty the same as other employees. Student employees with alternating periods of work and school should be placed on leave without pay while in school, and a return to duty action should be processed prior to their return to work. Full-time student employees taking classes during working hours must adjust their schedule to accommodate the periods of time away from work. This can be accomplished by changing to a part-time schedule or adjusting the work schedule to reflect hours away from work (i.e., if a student employee has a 10:00 am class and is away from work for 2 hours, the schedule can be changed to add 2 hours to the work day, providing for a later departure time).

**Training:** Students in both programs are eligible for training and reimbursement of educational expenses at management's discretion. An SF-182 , "Request, Authorization, Agreement, and Certification of Training," must be completed for any tuition expenses incurred that the Agency has agreed to pay. A service agreement must be completed (on the back of the SF-182) when the Agency is paying tuition expenses. A student's work schedule must be adjusted when taking classes during working hours.

**Veterans' Preference:** Veterans' preference rules and regulations apply (reference 5 CFR 211, or visit the OPM Vet Guide Web site at (<http://www.opm.gov/veterans/html/vetguide.asp> ).

**Within Grade increases:** All SCEP employees and STEP Wage Grade employees are eligible for Within Grade Increases (WGI). STEP employees in General Schedule positions are **not** eligible for WGI. However, time served under a STEP appointment is creditable towards the WGI waiting period if the employee is converted at the same grade level to an appointment with eligibility for WGI's.

## **Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP)**

This program is open to any student who meets the general requirement for student employment (See Page 4, Definition of Student). There are **no** additional requirements. The student's field of study does not have to be related to the job the student is hired to perform.

Supervisors are responsible for monitoring the status of student employees and should request a copy of their transcripts each semester. It is the student's responsibility to provide transcripts to their supervisor (a student copy or official transcript would be acceptable for this purpose). A copy of the transcript should be forwarded to the servicing human resources specialist in order to update the student's Official Personnel File. If the student drops out of school, or otherwise loses eligibility, the supervisor must initiate an SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, to terminate employment.

**Appointments:** Students are typically given temporary appointments not to exceed 1 year or date of graduation, whichever is sooner (5 CFR 213.3202(a)). Appointments may also be made for shorter periods of time. There are no restrictions on the number of times this authority may be used to fill a position, the number of times a student may be appointed, or the number of days worked in a year. The STEP program is particularly appropriate for meeting seasonal employment needs.

**Benefits:** All STEP employees earn sick leave and those with appointments lasting 90 days or more earn annual leave. When a holiday falls on a regularly scheduled workday, STEP employees will be paid for the hours scheduled to be worked. Student employees with over one year of continuous service are eligible to enroll in the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program at full cost (i.e., there is no Government contribution).

**Classification:** STEP appointments are made to any position in any series for which the student qualifies. Use of standard position descriptions are encouraged (see [www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/classification/index.htm](http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/classification/index.htm)).

**Conversions:** STEP employees may be converted to the SCEP program provided the students are placed in positions related to their field of study and an agreement is executed with the school. STEP employees are **not** eligible for non-competitive conversion to career, career conditional, or term appointments (unless the student is converted to a SCEP appointment and subsequently meets conversion requirements).

**Documentation:** The following documents are needed to process a STEP appointment:

1. SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, indicating STEP appointment “not to exceed” date.
2. The student’s resume, curriculum vitae, or OF-612, Optional Application for Federal Employment.
3. OF-306, Declaration for Federal Employment.
4. Work permit (if the student is a minor under age 18 and a permit is required by State or local law).
5. Evidence that the student is enrolled at least half-time at an accredited institution. This may be an official transcript or other official documentation (e.g., Letter of Acceptance) from the institution. The student’s field of study does not have to be related to the position.
6. Form AD-332, Position Description Cover Sheet, and a position description.



7. Student Temporary Employment Program Agreement signed by the student (see Appendix A).
8. ARS-230, Non-Citizen Data Sheet, for non-citizens.
9. DD-214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active duty, if eligible for veterans' preference.

ARS locations making appointments under delegated authority must follow the procedures in the Letter of Authorization/Student Temporary Employee Program (LA/STEP) Handbook ([http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/staffing\\_recruit/lastep/lastep.htm](http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/staffing_recruit/lastep/lastep.htm)).

It is recommended that a mentor be assigned to assist the STEP employee in the workplace to provide advice and assistance to the student.

**Extensions:** Appointments under this authority may be extended in one-year increments as long as the individual meets the definition of a student (current transcripts must be provided).

**Performance:** STEP employees are not required to receive performance standards.

**Tenure:** STEP employees with less than one year of continuous service are placed in Tenure Group 0. STEP employees with one year or more of continuous service are placed in Tenure Group 3.

**Terminations:** If it becomes necessary to terminate a STEP employee due to performance, or misconduct, the supervisor should contact the Servicing Employee Relations Specialist, HRD, to ensure proper procedures are followed. If the reason for termination is lack of work, budget constraints, or the employee's failure to meet program requirements, contact your Human Resources Specialist, HRD. A STEP employee who is no longer eligible for the program, should be terminated without delay (in most cases, the end of the pay period).

## **Student Career Experience Program (SCEP)**

This program provides supervisors with a recruitment tool to meet future workforce needs of the Mission Area. SCEP provides employment directly related to the student's academic/career goals and eligibility for non-competitive conversion to career, career-conditional, or term employment within 120 days after completion of degree requirements (not date of graduation ceremony) and SCEP program requirements. This program should be used for: 1) positions that provide meaningful work experience, and, 2) reasonable prospects of permanent Federal employment after completion of degree requirements. SCEP appointments should **only** be used when the Agency anticipates a future vacancy that could likely be filled by the SCEP student. A target permanent/term position **must** be identified prior to the student being hired. This target position would be used for non-competitive conversion after the student completes all program requirements.

**Agreements:** Prior to appointment, a written agreement must be executed and signed by the student, an official at the educational institution, and the selecting official. It is particularly important for the student to understand the terms and conditions of employment as described in the agreement and to realize that every effort will be made to convert the student to a permanent position, if all program requirements have been fulfilled and performance is fully successful (see Appendix B).

**Appointments:** Students receive an excepted appointment under 5 CFR 213.3202(b). They may serve under this appointment for up to 120 days following completion of degree, diploma, or certificate requirements.

**Benefits:** SCEP students are eligible for retirement, life insurance, health insurance, and thrift savings benefits. Students also accrue leave on the same basis as permanent employees with comparable tours of duty.

**Classification:** All positions under SCEP are classified as student trainees (i.e., -99 series in the General Schedule or -01 in the Federal Wage System). Standard position descriptions may be used; however, a statement identifying the position as a student trainee and the target position must be included in the introduction (see Appendix C). A parenthetical title will be used to denote the field of study. For example, for positions with a target of Biological/Agricultural Technician, the parenthetical should be “Biological Science.” For positions with a target of Support or Research Scientist, the parenthetical should identify the specific area of study (e.g., “Microbiology”, “Agronomy”, “Economist”, etc.). Appropriate OPM standards must be used.

**Conversion upon Graduation:** It is the intent of REE management that a SCEP employee be non-competitively converted to the target career, career-conditional, or term position within 120 days following completion of all course requirements for graduation.

- term appointment - an appointment to a competitive service position intended to last more than 1 year, but less than 4
- career - if the student has more than 3 years of substantially continuous service under a SCEP appointment
- career-conditional - if the student has less than 3 years of service
- **no** entitlement to continued employment once the academic program has been completed.
- decision **not** to convert the SCEP student - approval from an Administrative Representative (Division/Area/Staff Directors in ARS and ERS, or Division Directors or Associate/Deputy Administrators in NASS and CSREES), must be obtained and submitted to HRD with the termination SF-52 package
- agency designated official (a mentor or Supervisor) will monitor the student and counsel

him/her as graduation approaches regarding placement

- student may be converted to any permanent or term position related to the student's field of study and for which the student is qualified (see Appendix D)
- students may **not** be converted to a temporary position – limited to one year or less
- students being converted must be U.S. citizens
- SCEP students are eligible for non-competitive conversion at the current location, elsewhere in the same agency, Mission Area, USDA, or in another Federal agency
- if a vacancy is not available at the location at the time of graduation, the Supervisor will assist the student in locating an appropriate vacant position and assist in the application process

If the student is converted to a term position with a not to exceed date of less than 4 years, the appointment may be extended without competition up to a maximum of 4 years. While serving on a term basis, the employee may be converted without competition to a career or career-conditional appointment at any time before the term appointment expires. When converting a SCEP student to a term position, use the position category code which has been assigned to the new position (regardless of temporary or permanent status).

The student's service in the SCEP appointment will count toward the completion of the required 1-year probationary period if served within USDA. Please consult your servicing Employee Relations Specialist for all other situations.

To be eligible for conversion, the student must have completed 640 hours of career-related work, which equates to 16 weeks of full-time work. Any work performed **after** completing course work requirements is **not** creditable. If the student served on a student temporary appointment prior to entering the SCEP program, the prior service may be counted toward the 640-hour requirement **provided** it was in a career-related position. Prior temporary service under a non-student authority cannot be credited.

**Documentation:** The following documents are needed to process a SCEP appointment (or to convert a STEP employee to a SCEP employee):

- a. SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, indicating excepted appointment, Student Career Experience Program, and anticipated date of completion of studies.
- b. The student's resume, curriculum vitae, or OF-612, Optional Application for Federal Employment.
- c. OF-306, Declaration for Federal Employment.

- d. Work permit (if student is a minor under the age of 18 and a permit is required by State or local law).
- e. Evidence that the student is enrolled at least half-time (as defined by the school) at an accredited institution and is pursuing a course of study related to the position. This may be an official copy of the student's transcript or other official documentation such as a letter of acceptance from the institution. The documentation must show the current course load.
- f. AD-332, Position Description Cover Sheet, and a position description for a student trainee as well as an AD-332 and position description for the target position.
- g. A copy of the signed agreement.
- h. ARS-230, Non-Citizen Data Sheet, for non-citizens, if applicable.
- i. Official semester transcripts are to be submitted to the supervisor in order to monitor progress and program eligibility. Copies of these forms are to be forwarded to the servicing human resources specialist for filing in the student's Official Personnel Folder (HRD should remove previous transcript and replace with current transcript).

The following documents are required to process a conversion of a SCEP employee after graduation:

- a. SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, indicating conversion to a career, career-conditional, or term appointment;
- b. AD-332, Position Description Cover Sheet, and a position description (with any target position descriptions);
- c. a copy of the student's final official transcript; and,
- d. verification of 640 hours worked.

**Performance:** SCEP students receive performance standards, a mid-year review, and must be evaluated annually. It is recommended that an Individual Development Plan (IDP) be established and reviewed annually. A grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 must be maintained by the student.

**Target Positions:** A "target" position must be identified and included in the "Introductory Statement" of the position description before the student is appointed. Target positions must relate to the student's academic pursuits and must be in line with student's degree aspirations.

For example:

- (1) An appropriate target position for a Ph.D. candidate would be a Research Scientist or Economist position at the grade GS-11/12 level. (It would be inappropriate to target a Technician position for a Ph.D. candidate.)
- (2) An appropriate target position for a Master's student may be a GS-9 level Support Scientist or Program Specialist position.
- (3) An appropriate target position for a student pursuing a Bachelor's degree may be Statistician or Human Resources Specialist at the GS-5/7 level.

**Tenure:** SCEP employees are placed in Tenure Group 2.

**Terminations:** The first year of service under SCEP is a trial period; however, prior service on other than a temporary not-to-exceed one year appointment may count towards the one year trial period. An employee who does not meet the performance or conduct requirements during the trial period may be terminated on the same basis as a probationary employee. Periods of leave without pay in excess of 22 work days will extend the trial period. **If it becomes necessary to terminate a SCEP employee due to poor performance or misconduct, contact your servicing Employee Relations Specialist, HRD, to ensure proper procedures are followed.**

Separations due to lack of funds or work are covered by Reduction-In-Force (RIF) procedures. However, SCEP employees will compete **only** with other SCEP employees and have no placement rights to competitive positions.

A SCEP employee may be terminated without regard to adverse action procedures during the 120 day period following completion of course work requirements, or whenever the employee ceases to be a student. In these cases, the employee is no longer eligible for a SCEP appointment.

Supervisors are responsible for monitoring the status of student employees and should request an official transcript each semester. It is the student's responsibility to provide official transcripts to their supervisor. A copy of the transcript should be forwarded to the servicing Human Resources Specialist in order to update student's Official Personnel Folder. If the student drops out of school (or is attending less than half-time), changes degree program to one that does not support the REE mission, or otherwise loses eligibility, the supervisor will initiate an SF-52 to terminate employment.

**Timeframes:** For position planning purposes a reasonable time frame for completion of a Bachelor's Degree would be 3 - 5 years, a Master's would involve an additional 2 - 3 years, and a Ph.D. 2 - 3 years after the Master's. An unusually long period of time to complete all requirements will result in termination from the program. For example, if a SCEP employee has completed all coursework for a Ph.D. but hasn't written/defended dissertation after more than a year and there is no more coursework to be taken, then employee hasn't completed all requirements for degree resulting in termination.

### 3. Volunteers and Unpaid Trainees

Section 2272, Title 7 U.S. Code, authorizes USDA agencies to accept voluntary services from the general public, including students, to assist in carrying out Federal programs. Additionally, Section 3111, Title 5 U.S. Code, authorizes the use of student volunteers.

Agencies may also host “unpaid trainees” in rehabilitation or training programs. These trainees are placed through a sponsor, which may be a community organization or a local government agency. Sponsors will sometimes pay the trainees a small stipend as a measure of additional support.

Aside from the nature of the respective service agreements (see Appendices E and F), there is little difference in how volunteers and trainees are handled. Volunteers and unpaid trainees are not considered Federal employees for any purpose except liability (see below for details). As a result, there are few hiring restrictions. In effecting these types of appointments, the Agency is not required to complete a personnel action, no form SF-52 is needed, nor are any documents submitted to HRD. Neither volunteers nor unpaid trainees will be used to displace Federal employees. The following general provisions apply:

**Age:** Participation in volunteer programs must conform to age limitations contained in Federal, State, and local laws. For volunteers under the age of 16, a more detailed agreement must be completed (Appendix E).

**Agreements:** Volunteers must sign a “Volunteer Service Agreement” (Appendix F) clearly describing the terms and conditions of service. Due to liability considerations, an agreement must be signed for all volunteer service, however brief in duration that service may be.

If the participant is an unpaid trainee, the sponsoring organization must sign a master agreement covering all of the trainees assigned to REE. Appendix F is a sample agreement for use with a community organization (the organization may have an equivalent form for its own use). If the trainee is planning to work in one of the location offices or facilities, the Location Administrative Officer (or equivalent position) may sign an agreement on behalf of the Agency, provided the agreement does not require any form of compensation or reimbursement, or imply an obligation to employ the individual at the completion of training, or impose any unreasonable restrictions on the trainee’s termination.

**Duties:** Volunteers/trainees may be assigned any duties commensurate with their abilities. Supervisors must bear safety in mind when assigning duties. The well-being and security of the individual volunteer/trainee, co-workers, the general public, and Federal property must not be jeopardized.

Volunteers/trainees are not legally prohibited from operating motor vehicles, although the operation of such vehicles may be authorized **only** when no other practical option exists. The supervisor **must** verify that the participant has an appropriate, valid driver's license, and remind the volunteer that the vehicle may only be used for official purposes. Since the Agency will be responsible for any mishap that may occur while volunteers are performing their duties, the prudent use of this authority is advised.

**Homeland Security:** Citizens from countries on the Department of State's list of state sponsors of terrorism are prohibited from working in or visiting USDA facilities. The exceptions to this ban are persons from these countries who are permanent residents of the U.S. The listing of countries changes, so it is advisable to check the Department of State website for current information ([www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)).

All non-citizens who work in USDA facilities must be reported and tracked, including volunteers, regardless of their visa sponsorship, their employer, or how/if they are paid. These non-citizen workers may or may not be employees of USDA. **Completion of the ARS-230 for non-citizen workers is always required for tracking purposes.** A successful name trace must be completed before work can begin.

**Liability:** Volunteers are covered by the Tort Claims Act and the Federal Employees Compensation Act. The Agency is responsible for their actions while on duty, the manner in which they perform, and any injuries they may incur. Liability for unpaid trainees is similar, but the sponsor generally covers worker's compensation (coverage may vary, however, depending on the provisions of the training agreement).

**Records:** In the event that a claim is made at a later date and the nature of service would have to be verified, it is suggested that the following records be maintained at least seven years at the location where the volunteer or trainee is assigned.

1. For volunteers, a copy of the signed "Statement of Understanding: Student Volunteers Under Age 16 (Appendix E, if applicable)

or "Volunteer Service Agreement" (Appendix F) signed by the volunteer.

For unpaid trainees, a copy of the training agreement signed by the sponsoring organization's representative (Appendix G).

2. The time and attendance record (Appendix H).

**Time sheets:** Accurate records of time and attendance must be kept for all volunteers and unpaid trainees. A sample sign-in sheet is provided in Appendix H. For unpaid trainees, the sponsoring organization may have an attendance form of its own which may be used instead of

the sample form.

**Tour of duty:** Volunteers or unpaid trainees may be given any tour of duty that falls within the regular duty hours at the location. They should not be allowed to work without supervision.

## **4. Hosting Students**

Agencies may allow students to visit REE facilities to learn about our work. For example, some organizations arrange for young people to shadow Federal employees for a day or week (e.g., Take Your Child to Work Day), or a school may want to organize an orientation or field trip. These types of activities may play an important part in a young person's academic development and choice of career. Due to the work environment in some REE laboratories and locations, age restrictions will be determined by location management.

Students of any age or grade level may be "hosted." As this is an informal arrangement and no work is being performed by the participants, no paperwork is required.

The Agency is legally responsible for the safety and well-being of these students while they are on the premises. Consequently, managers need to be alert to any potentially hazardous situations.

These students cannot be given any work to do.

Non-citizen visitors to USDA facilities must sign a log and be escorted while on Federal property. Non-citizen visitors must be from a country listed on the approved country listing ([www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)).

## **5. Employee Voluntary Services to Outside Organizations**

Federal employees are encouraged to offer volunteer services to schools or other non-profit public service community organizations. The use of administrative leave or excused absence is permitted, with certain restrictions, when the activity is deemed to be consistent with the Agency's mission. Voluntary activities may be considered mission-related if they promote knowledge and interest in agriculture, conservation, the physical and life sciences, food science, youth development, statistics, economics, and mathematics. The volunteer work would also be mission-related if it encouraged young people to seek careers in USDA, or increased their basic academic skills, thereby enabling them to successfully pursue careers in agriculture, science, statistics, or economics. Volunteers typically serve as tutors or mentors, assist with science fairs or extracurricular activities, perform library or clerical work, make presentations, or otherwise assist in the classroom.

A Partnership Agreement must be executed before an employee may be permitted to use administrative leave for voluntary activity. A sample agreement is provided in Appendix I. The agreement serves to document the fact that the work is mission-related.



Supervisors may, at their discretion, authorize up to 2 hours of administrative leave or excused absence per week or up to 8 hours per month for mission-related volunteer service, subject to the needs of the organization.

## **6. Summary of Responsibilities**

### **Agency Heads**

- Support the employment of students, volunteers, and unpaid trainees in Agency programs.

### **Supervisors**

- Explore the option of filling vacancies (in appropriate situations) through student appointments.
- Monitor student progress and offer counsel regarding future employment.
- Ensure that volunteers/unpaid trainees are assigned work commensurate with their abilities taking all necessary measures to safeguard human life and Federal equipment.
- Ensure that all Federal employees are granted administrative leave to support community organizations are engaged in mission-related activities.
- Ensure that a permanent or term position will be available to SCEP students upon graduation.

### **Mission Area Student Employment Officer, HRD, AFM**

- Provide policy advice and information concerning student programs and the use of volunteers/unpaid trainees.
- Assist in drafting service agreements required for student/volunteer appointments.

### **Servicing Human Resources Specialists, Operating Branches, HRD, AFM**

- Ensure managers/supervisors are aware of student employment programs and present them as a viable option in filling certain positions.
- Monitor the flow of paperwork.

- Track the 640-hour work requirement.

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**James H. Bradley**  
**Deputy Administrator**  
**Administrative and Financial Management**

Appendix A:

**Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) Agreement**

Students hired under this program receive a temporary appointment limited to one year or less. An SF-50, Notification of Personnel Action, will be issued showing the not to exceed (expiration) date of the appointment.

This program requires that the student carry at least a half-time course load at an accredited institution. The student must provide academic records each semester and will notify the Agency of any changes in status.

This appointment may be extended at management’s discretion, provided eligibility requirements continue to be met.

A temporary appointment does not confer eligibility for benefits such as retirement or health or life insurance. However, employees with over one year of continuous service may enroll in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program at full cost (i.e., pay both employee and government costs).

Temporary employees earn sick leave. Temporary employees whose appointment lasts longer than 90 days will also earn annual leave (i.e., vacation time).

A temporary appointment does not confer civil service status, nor does it provide eligibility for permanent employment, transfer, or reinstatement.

Temporary appointments may be terminated at any time without advance notice and without regard to adverse action or reduction in force procedures.

Student's name (printed or typed) \_\_\_\_\_

Student's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B:

**Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) Agreement**

This agreement outlines the responsibilities and conditions associated with employment under the Student Career Experience Program.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Research, Education and Economics (the employer) will provide work experience related to the student’s course of study. Compensation will be in accordance with Federal pay schedules. Work schedules will be established by the employer with due regard to the needs of the student. The student will be eligible for benefits, including paid leave, retirement, and health and life insurance. The employer will consider eligible students for conversion to permanent positions upon completion of their studies. However, no assurance of permanent employment can be made and none is implied. The employer will consider students for appointment, employment, and advancement in accordance with Federal laws pertaining to equal employment opportunity.

The educational institution may request and receive information concerning the student’s work experience and progress on the job.

The student agrees to provide academic records to the employer each semester and inform the employer of any change in his/her status or field of study.

Advancement is based on performance and consistent with Office of Personnel Management requirements. Employment under this program may not extend beyond 120 days from the completion of the requirements for degree, diploma, or certificate. Conversion to a permanent position will be at the discretion of management and subject to meeting the legal and regulatory requirements (including U.S. citizenship and having 640 hours of service - or current OPM requirement). Employment may be terminated upon graduation, or for conduct or performance reasons, reduction in force, or when the employee ceases to be a student or ceases to carry an acceptable course load.

Signatures:

Selecting

Official: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Educational Institution

Official: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

—

Student Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C:

**Student Trainee**  
**Standard Job #GS-XX99**  
**GS-XX99**

**A. Introduction**

The incumbent is a Student Trainee enrolled in the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) that provides for employment related to the student's academic program. Upon graduation, the student may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to a full-time permanent position as a \_\_\_\_\_ . This position is designed to serve as a developmental experience and in conjunction with formal education to provide the incumbent with the knowledge, skills, and/or abilities necessary to meet the qualification requirements of the target position.

Attached is the position description describing the specific duties and responsibilities assigned to the Student Trainee.

Appendix D:

**Alternate Qualification Standard**

(For use with Student Career Experience Program **only**)

Office of Personnel Management regulations allow an Agency to develop a qualification standard for student trainee positions or to utilize the published standard for the target position. Whenever possible, the standard for the target position should be used. If the standard for the target position does not cover the grade occupied by the student, as is the case with professional positions below GS-5, the following alternative standard may be used:

**GS-1** No particular experience or education required

**GS-2** High school graduation or equivalent, or 3 months of general experience

**GS-3** 1 academic year of education above the high school level or 6 months of general experience, or an equivalent combination of both

**GS-4** 2 academic years of education above the high school level; or

(A) 6 months of general experience and 6 months of specialized experience; or if the student's target position is professional, scientific, or technical in nature, an equivalent combination of experience and education; or

(B) 1 year of general experience; or if the student's target position is managerial or administrative, an equivalent combination of experience and education

**GS-5 and above:** Use the regular qualification standard for the target position as described in OPM's "Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions."

**General experience** is work that demonstrates the applicant's ability to do the job or a familiarity with the subject matter or basic processes of the broad subject area of the occupation.

**Specialized experience** is work that has equipped the individual with the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform successfully the duties of the position and that is typically in or related to the work of the position being filled.

**Education** is creditable if it is related to the position and provides the knowledge and skills needed for successful performance. As a general rule, 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours equal 1 year of undergraduate education.

Appendix D (continued):

For positions with typing or office automation in parentheses in the title, the applicant must certify the ability to type 40 words per minute.

Appendix E:

**Statement of Understanding: Student Volunteers Under Age 16**

This agreement covers the acceptance of voluntary service under Title 5, U.S. Code, Section 3111.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Social Security # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

U.S. Citizen: Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_  
(U.S. citizenship is required to participate in this program)

**Summary of Duties Performed:**

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I understand that my services are on a voluntary basis without compensation or reimbursement for any incidental expenses. I am permitted access to the work site only during my approved duty hours. I am not considered a Federal employee except for the purposes of the Federal Employees Compensation Act and the Federal Tort Claims Act. I am not eligible for health insurance, life insurance, retirement, or any other benefits. If I am later employed by the Federal Government, my volunteer service will **not** be credited for civil service retirement purposes, although the experience I gain may be credited to meet qualification requirements for employment.

In accordance with Department of Labor guidelines, teens under the age of 16 cannot perform the functions listed in this agreement. In addition to the DOL guidelines, the volunteer will not be permitted to operate any vehicle. Further, the volunteer will not be provided access to a work area where pathogenic agents are present or access to laboratories using chemical carcinogens,

Appendix E (continued):



teratogens, or mutagens. The volunteer is also prohibited from working in an ionizing radiation environment as defined in Title 10 Code of Federal Regulations 20.104 and cannot be exposed to radiation levels which could lead to their receiving a dose in excess of 100 mRem per year.

**Hour Limitations**

Youth 14 and 15 years old may work outside school hours in various non-manufacturing, non-mining, non-hazardous jobs up to:

- 3 hours on a school day
- 18 hours in a school week
- 8 hours on a non-school day
- 40 hours in a non-school week

**Work Permit**

A work permit certified by the appropriate school official is required. In addition to the “Hour Limitations” listed above, volunteers must adhere to the legal hours of employment provisions contained in the work permit.

The volunteer is not authorized to represent the Agency on any matter or proceeding and cannot expend any Government funds. Rights to any inventions developed or discoveries made during the assignment will be determined by the Agency. Prior approval must be obtained before publishing the results of any work, study, or research.

The volunteer will serve under the supervision of a Federal official and the volunteer’s services may be terminated at any time.

**I understand and agree to the conditions of my service described above:**

Signature of Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent/guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Educational Institution Approval**

Institution’s Representative (name and title) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Educational Institution \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E (continued):

**To be completed by Administrative Representative**

Location\_\_\_\_\_

Effective Date\_\_\_\_\_ Hours/week\_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

**Prohibited Jobs**

Seventeen hazardous non-farm jobs, as determined by the Secretary of Labor, are out of bounds for teens below the age of 16. They may not work at jobs that involve:

1. Manufacturing or storing explosives
2. Driving a motor vehicle and being an outside helper on a motor vehicle
3. Coal mining
4. Logging and sawmilling
5. Power-driven wood-working machines
6. Exposure to radioactive substances and to ionizing radiations
7. Power-driven hoisting equipment
8. Power-driven metal-forming, punching, and shearing machines
9. Mining, other than coal mining
10. Meat packing or processing (including power-driven meat slicing machines)
11. Power-driven bakery machines
12. Power-driven paper-producers machines
13. Manufacturing brick, tile, and related products
14. Power-driven circular saws, band saws, and guillotine shears
15. Wrecking, demolition, and ship-breaking operations
16. Roofing operations
17. Excavation operations

Appendix F:

**Volunteer Service Agreement**

This agreement covers the acceptance of voluntary service under Civil Service Regulation 308.103, 5 Code of Federal Regulations, (student volunteers) or Title 7, U.S. Code, Section 2272.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Social Security # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that my services are on a voluntary basis without compensation or reimbursement for any incidental expenses. I am permitted access to the work site only during my approved duty hours. I am not considered a Federal employee except for the purposes of the Federal Employees Compensation Act and the Federal Tort Claims Act. I am not eligible for health insurance, life insurance, retirement, or any other benefits. If I am later employed by the Federal Government, my volunteer service will **not** be credited for civil service retirement purposes, although the experience I gain may be credited to meet qualification requirements for employment.

I understand that I must receive my supervisor's permission before operating any Government equipment or motor vehicle, that the operation of such equipment will be for official purposes only, and that I may be held responsible for any damage. I am not authorized to represent the Agency on any matter or proceeding, nor expend any Government funds. Rights to any inventions developed or discoveries made during the assignment will be determined by the Agency. Prior approval must be obtained before publishing the results of any work, study, or research.

I understand that I serve under the supervision of a Federal official and that my services may be terminated at any time.

**I understand and agree to the conditions of my service described above:**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

If under 18 years of age, signature of parent/guardian \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix F (continued):

**To be completed by responsible official:**

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Duties \_\_\_\_\_

Effective date \_\_\_\_\_ Hours/week \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

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Appendix G:

**Training and Work Experience Agreement (Unpaid Trainees)**

The Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area of the Department of Agriculture (host agency) agrees to serve as a work site for training and work experience purposes. The host will provide supplies and equipment for the unpaid trainee's use and assumes responsibility for supervision. Neither the unpaid trainee nor the sponsoring organization will be compensated by the host agency nor will they be reimbursed in any way for services or expenses.

Unpaid trainees in this program are not considered Federal employees and are not entitled to benefits. However, they are covered by the Federal Employees Compensation Act and the Tort Claims Act. The experience and training they receive may be creditable for qualification purposes if they are later employed, or considered for employment by the Federal Government.

This agreement and the services of an unpaid trainee may be terminated by either party.

The sponsoring organization agrees that no claims for salaries or expenses will be made.

It is also understood that the unpaid trainee may apply for Federal employment, subject to civil service procedures and regulations, but no offer of employment is made or implied by this agreement.

REE Agency representative\* (signature) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsoring organization \_\_\_\_\_

Organization's representative (signature) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Trainee's name \_\_\_\_\_

Trainee's signature\*\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* Location Administrative Officer or comparable official.

\*\*If available, trainee should sign a copy of the agreement.



Appendix I:

**Partnership Agreement**

Partnerships in Education Program

This agreement with \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Educational Institution) describes the nature and extent of the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area's participation in the school volunteer and community service program.

The REE agencies participate in this program in order to promote knowledge of and interest in agriculture, conservation, the physical and life sciences, food science, economics, youth development, statistics, and library science. REE hopes to encourage young people to increase their basic academic skills to enable them to pursue careers in these disciplines and perhaps in the future seek employment with USDA. Participation in this program is consistent with REE's mission.

Activities may include classroom presentations and demonstrations, assistance with science fairs and extracurricular activities, library work, clerical assignments, and individual tutoring and mentoring. REE may also invite students to visit REE agency facilities for an on-site orientation or to shadow staff members.

The educational institution will manage the program, arrange assignments, make supplies and facilities available, and provide training and guidance to volunteers as needed. Volunteers serve at the discretion of the educational institution.

REE employees may be excused from their regular duties to participate in this program, subject to supervisory approval and the needs of the Agency. Employee participation in this program is limited to 2 hours per week or a total of 8 hours per month.

Nothing in this agreement shall be construed as requiring the expenditure of funds by either REE or the educational institution.

REE Representative (Supervisor) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Educational Institution Official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Employee Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_