

# Volunteer Manual



## Environmental Learning for Kids

Put a Little *Wildlife* in a Child's Life

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# Welcome

Welcome to Environmental Learning for Kids! On behalf of the Board of Directors, staff and ELK youth and families, we are so pleased that you are willing to give your time to help us complete our goals. We have complete faith that your volunteer experience will be rewarding, interesting and educational!

With your acceptance of this position comes great responsibility. As an ELK volunteer, you will constantly be setting examples and influencing the ELK youth with your actions. The impacts that you make will be a determining factor in the success of our operations.

The following manual presents to you the volunteer policies and procedures in effect for all ELK participants. These guidelines, approved by both the ELK staff and Board of Directors, have been set in place to clearly outline the guidelines and requirements of our organization. Due to the high variability of our nature of work, it is impossible for this manual to cover all situations and conditions that may arise during your time as a volunteer. We have however attempted to cover all aspects of voluntarism. In an attempt to keep current with any changes in our organization and or the community in which we serve, these policies will be updated. If and when these changes are made, you will be notified immediately.

This manual has been made for your benefit. Please read it carefully and keep it as a reference. We are very appreciative of your willingness to be a volunteer and interested in your time spent with us, so if at any time you have a question please do not hesitate to ask!

We thank you again for your service!

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Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world.  
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

-Margaret Mead

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## I. Management Philosophy

- We expect honesty, excellence, professionalism and timeliness from all volunteers at all times.
- We strive to communicate honestly and openly with all members of the ELK team, while remaining sensitive to confidential topics.
- We will make informed and ethical decisions putting ELK's sustainability and future as the highest priority.
- We understand that success requires action, and we expect all volunteers to be proactive and strategic.
- We value challenging and interesting work and understand that through the learning process barriers and mistakes will arise, volunteers are expected to communicate issues, problem solves, and self correct.
- We recognize the rights, differences and passions of all volunteers and strive to help them protect and embrace them.
- We support volunteers in developing their skills and join them in active awareness of their personal strengths and areas for development.
- We are sensitive to volunteers' personal motivations at work, in order to create an environment of maximum job satisfaction and engagement.
- We expect ongoing feedback to be two-way, between staff and volunteers. Clarification of expectations will occur as needed, and reversely it is the volunteers' responsibility to ask questions.
- We strive to exemplify our values for life-long learning, diversity and inclusiveness, environmental stewardship and leadership development in our everyday tasks.

## II. Mission of ELK

The mission of ELK is to offer comprehensive environmental education, with consistent long-term mentoring by natural resource professionals to culturally diverse urban youth and their families to ensure they become stewards to the natural resources of the State of Colorado.

Environmental Learning for kids cultivates a passion for science, leadership, and service in a diverse community of learners.

### III. ELK Information

#### a. ELK Facts

ELK was founded in 1996 by two wildlife biologists who saw the need for the underserved youth of Denver to realize their potential in natural resource careers.

ELK provides science education through hands-on field trips with long-term mentoring and leadership development provided by natural resource professionals. Through a strong college prep program and summer employment opportunities youth get real-world experiences and develop the life skills needed to become successful adults. We serve the culturally diverse populations of Denver, Adams, and Arapahoe Counties. The ratio of girls to boys in our programs is 3:2.

Achievements in 2010:

- We enjoyed a 100% percent graduation rate for our high school seniors in the year-round program.
- We served more than 19,849 youth and their families.
- We have raised more than \$423,098 in college scholarships for our students and have had 3 Daniel's Fund recipients.

ELK's Values

We value:

- Diversity and Inclusiveness
- Direct experience in the outdoors
- Development of human potential

Focus Areas:

- ELK introduces underserved youth to Colorado's natural resources
- ELK immerses youth in science education, career development, and mentoring
- ELK invests in developing youth potential – invests in developing stewards, engaged citizens, and cultivating a strong educational value to ensure high school and college graduation

Topic Areas to be evaluated:

- Science – Based on Colorado Science Standards
  - Water
  - Wildlife, i.e habitat, ecosystems, ecology,
  - Botany
  - Geology
  - Biology
  - Conservation
  - Careers
  - History

- Leadership – Empowerment, changes in behavior
  - Positive Risk taking
  - Self confidence/esteem
  - Teamwork
  - Mentoring
  - Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
  
- Service – Investment in something, changes in behavior
  - Awareness
  - Giving back

ELK's evaluation process has three levels with three different objectives; introduce, immerse, and invest.

**Introduce:** To help students to acquire an understanding of ecological concepts, their relationship with the environment and the associated issues and problems within their community.

**Immerse:** To help students acquire and appreciation of their environment and an active concern and motivation to maintain & improve the quality of the environment in their community.

**Invest:** To help students develop thinking and action skills for the prevention and resolution of environmental problems & issues in their community. ELK also strives to build strong leaders in the community and also within the organization.

With a three level process it increases the possibility that one will look at the program from a broader perspective, conduct a greater search for unanticipated outcomes, and be more apt to consider outcomes not easily measured i.e. attitudes and values.

## b. Organizational History

ELK is a Denver-based, 501(c)3 organization established in 1996 by two wildlife biologists, Scott and Stacie Gilmore, who saw a growing need to introduce and educate Colorado's urban youth about science, math, leadership and careers.

More than 15 years ago, former Colorado Senator Ken Salazar, current U.S. Interior Secretary, headed up the Youth in Natural Resources program, when he was Executive Director of Colorado's Department of Natural Resources. Scott, current ELK Advisory Board Member, and his wife Stacie, current ELK Executive Director, were part of that program. ELK was founded because all young people deserve strong educational support, good role models and opportunities for positive community action in order to become engaged, productive and successful members of society.

Since 1996, ELK has successfully achieved its goals by providing both classroom and experiential field activities to more than 70,000 at-risk youth and their families across the

Northeast corridor of Denver. ELK offers a mosaic of programs that serve as stepping-stones for all young people: our future leaders and engaged citizens of tomorrow.

## **IV. Description of Programs**

ELK reaches out to students who have been traditionally overlooked and under-encouraged in science and science-related careers, including youth of color and females.

ELK opens new doors of opportunity by engaging and mentoring youth through science education and leadership development programs that provide a real-life context for learning. In these programs, youth experience Colorado's natural world, increase their academic science skills, become involved in their neighborhoods and get exposure to careers in the field of natural resources.

There are four programs that make up ELK: Denver Youth Naturally, Youth in Natural Resources, School Based Programs & Learning Environmental Activities for Families. These four programs are implemented throughout the Denver area, reaching over 75,000 kids each year.

### **a. DYN - Denver Youth Naturally**

ELK's primary program, Denver Youth Naturally (DYN) is a year-round program that combines environmental science education with overnight wilderness experiences and long-term mentoring by natural resource professionals to encourage and support low-income, culturally diverse youth to pursue their science and natural resource education. Placing emphasis on local issues, ELK inspires in youth a sense of respect for community and the environment. DYN offers 60 scientifically-based, program days annually, including four overnight trips. These activity days educate youth, challenge them to become leaders among their peers, and provide new opportunities to groups who have not traditionally sought careers in science and natural resource fields – specifically females, people of color, and students whose access to the outdoors have been limited.

### **b. YNR – Youth in Natural Resources**

ELK works hard to prepare its youth for college and the workplace through the youth in natural resources (YNR) program. YNR is for youth ages 14–18 that are ready to explore career options and gain work experience in the natural resource and science field. Through partnerships with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Mile High Youth Corps, City of Denver, and the National Park Service, students have opportunities for meaningful summer employment.

### **c. LEAF – Learning Environmental Activities for Families**

Learning Environmental Activities for Families (LEAF) brings families into ELK's community of learning. By participating in LEAF activities, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and extended family learn about Colorado's natural resources and give back to the community through

stewardship projects. LEAF strengthens the support system for youth to succeed by providing a multi-generational mentoring system. Participants take part in healthy outdoor activities and establish strong family bonds while learning about science and community stewardship. Activities include camping, an educational sleep-over at the Denver aquarium, hunting and fishing. Aside from the LEAF program, parents are welcome to join ELK on all activities.

#### d. School & Community Based Programs

ELK offers a wide selection of science and natural resource programs to public and private schools and community groups in metro Denver from grades K-12. All programs are correlated to the Colorado Model Content Standards and model effective teaching. An education plan is available with each program to help teachers integrate the learning with current topics. ELK also provides a wide range of after-school programs for Denver Parks and Recreation, Denver Public Schools, and Adams 14 Public Schools.

### V. Volunteer Program

#### a. Roles of Volunteers

The main role of a volunteer with ELK is to enhance the participant's experience, support the ELK staff in work projects, and continue their own education and interests in the natural sciences.

#### Volunteer Skill Sets

- Physical Fitness
- Wildlife management, training & knowledge
- Overnight availability
- Teaching experience
- Science proficiency
- Computer literacy (IT)
- Administrative experience
- Database maintenance & updates
- Website updates & design
- Social Media maintenance
- Daytime Availability
- Personal Transportation
- Financial Literacy - Financial Aid
- Financial Literacy - FASFA
- Grant Writing
- CPR & First Aid
- Astronomy
- Natural Resource Careers
- Science Based Careers
- Outdoor activity proficiency - snowshoeing

- Outdoor activity proficiency – skiing
- Outdoor activity proficiency – bird watching
- Outdoor activity proficiency – ice fishing
- Outdoor activity proficiency – swimming
- Outdoor activity proficiency - Hiking
- Outdoor activity proficiency - Camping
- Outdoor activity proficiency – Outdoor Skills
- Other

All volunteers are expected to act in a professional manner at all times. A volunteer should seek and accept positive feedback on his or her performance. If a volunteer’s behavior or performance is deemed unacceptable in any fashion, a written warning for dismissal will be issued. We are authorized to ask an individual to immediately relinquish his/her volunteer status for any behavior deemed unprofessional or in violation of ELK policies. Any concerns pertaining to the administration of the volunteer program should be brought to the attention of the Executive Director.

## b. Volunteer Requirements

Before a volunteer can become part of ELK, he/she must complete all required paperwork, including a Colorado Bureau of Investigation criminal background check. Once the initial paperwork is completed, the volunteer must attend a volunteer orientation/training. Additional training may be required to attend specific volunteer opportunities. Volunteers will be informed of upcoming opportunities through electronic and/or postal mail. We ask that volunteers report for the day’s duties on time and to inform their ELK staff contact if unable to attend. All volunteers are expected to enjoy being outdoors, learning about nature, and have the ability to communicate and connect with children.

## VI. Volunteer Policies & Procedures

### Definition of a Volunteer

A "volunteer" is anyone who chooses to perform hours of services for Environmental Learning for Kids without promise, receipt or expectation of compensation, (beyond reimbursement for pre-approved specified expenses) and, who performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of this organization. A "volunteer" must be officially accepted and enrolled by ELK prior to performance of the task. Volunteers are not ELK employees.

### Volunteer Rights & Responsibilities

Volunteers are viewed as a valuable resource to this organization, its staff, and the participants you will be serving. Volunteers therefore have the right to be given meaningful & rewarding assignments based on their specific skill sets, the right to be treated as respected equals, the

right to full involvement and participation in designated aspects of ELK, and the right to recognition for work done.

In return, volunteers shall agree to actively perform their assigned duties to the best of their abilities and to remain loyal to the goals and mission of ELK.

## Disputes

Disputes may arise whenever people work together. Conflicts can result from differences of understanding, whether between supervisors and volunteers, or among others. We prefer that disputes be resolved informally in the immediate work area. However, some conflicts cannot be resolved easily or without assistance.

Below are some options to handle a dispute:

- Try to work things out directly with the person involved. Perhaps have an outside person participate while you do this
- Contact the project supervisor and let them know what the problem is.
- Contact your Coordinator who will work with you and the other involved party(s) to reach a solution

## Dress Code

Volunteers will abide to a pre-determined dress code determined for the volunteer opportunity to which they have been assigned.

## Logging Volunteer Hours

It is important that proper records of volunteer time be kept, so please log all volunteer hours into the ELK database at [elk.civicore.com](http://elk.civicore.com) on ELK functions. This database time sheet should be logged in regularly. Volunteers should also fill out the volunteer documentation provided by the presiding ELK staff member at each event.

## How to access [elk.civicore.com](http://elk.civicore.com) to log your volunteer hours

To submit volunteer hours follow the steps below:

1. Go to [elk.civicore.com](http://elk.civicore.com)
2. Click on the link that asks "Are you a volunteer looking to enter hours"
3. Enter Username (Email Address)
4. Enter Password (First Name with the first letter of your name capitalized)

5. Troubleshooting:
  - a. If you are having log in problems please contact the following people:
    - i. First Contact: Chiquita Cole, [ccole@elkkids.org](mailto:ccole@elkkids.org), 303-291-7693
    - ii. If Chiquita is unavailable please contact Cindy Chang, [cchang@elkkids.org](mailto:cchang@elkkids.org), 303-291-7503 OR Kim Glatz, [kglatz@elkkids.org](mailto:kglatz@elkkids.org), 303-291-7554
6. After you are logged in, in the upper right hand corner click 'Add Time'
7. Fill out all fields as complete as possible
  - a. Date you volunteered
  - b. Type of volunteering
    - i. Which category do you fall under?
      1. School program- Did you volunteer for the ELK afterschool program?
      2. Year-Round Activities- Did you go on a one day adventure with ELK or a Camping Trip?
      3. Office Help- Did you come in the office and help with Filing, mailings, etc?
      4. Special Events- Did you help with an event such as Cast-a-Line or ELK N' Eggs?
      5. Ambassador Program- Did u participate in the ELK Ambassador program?
  - c. Hours for that activity/program
  - d. Any comments that you have (how you like it, what can be changed, any new ideas, etc.)

\*Meetings/Trainings/Orientations count as volunteer hours.

If you have any question please contact Chiquita Cole at [ccole@elkkids.org](mailto:ccole@elkkids.org), 303-291-7693

## Discipline Process

Environmental Learning for Kids greatly appreciates the service of its volunteers. Their service allows the program to undertake many projects for the benefit of wildlife resources it could not otherwise pursue. Nonetheless, participation in the Volunteer Program is a privilege and not a right.

If there is a discipline issue, depending on the severity of conduct involved and reserving to the right to summarily dismiss or otherwise take appropriate action in response to any undesirable behavior of its volunteers, it is the intent of ELK to normally offer the following opportunities for dealing with volunteer behavior/action that is considered undesirable:

#### 1<sup>st</sup> occurrence

- Warning: Supervisor or coordinator will discuss the problem with volunteer in person or by phone
- Written documentation will be placed in the volunteers file

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> occurrence

- Volunteer will participate in a meeting to discuss the behavior/action and how it is to be avoided in the future
- A letter will be sent to the volunteer concerning the situation and what the next disciplinary step will be. Written documentation will be placed in the volunteer's file.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> occurrence

- Volunteer will be contacted in writing, by the coordinator or supervisor, that they will be dismissed from the project and possibly the program

### Dismissal

Environmental Learning for Kids has the right in its sole discretion to terminate a volunteer without cause or for its convenience, but will always endeavor in good faith to consider the circumstances leading to the termination

Environmental Learning for Kids has the right to ask a volunteer to leave the project immediately. Grounds for dismissal include, but are not limited to:

- Failure to adhere to the policies of the state of Colorado and procedures outlined in this volunteer program handbook
- Gross misconduct or insubordination
- Reporting for a volunteer assignment under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Theft of property or misuse of agency funds, equipment or materials
- Falsifying statements on your application or during a screening or interview process or at any time during volunteer activities with ELK
- Illegal, violent, unsafe disruptive behavior
- Abuse or mistreatment of the public, staff or other volunteers
- Releasing confidential information
- Unwillingness to support and further the mission of the program
- Discontinuation of a project or reduced need for volunteer work

If a volunteer's actions are grounds for dismissal, the volunteer will be notified in writing as soon as practicable after the Volunteer Program representatives become aware of the circumstances.

No dismissal, disciplinary or any other adverse action will be taken against any volunteer on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, age (other than minor), sex, marital status, religion, ancestry, or disability.

## Political Activity

Rules applying to state employees regarding political activity while on duty also apply to volunteers with ELK. Volunteers may not wear campaign items or promote political positions when on duty.

## Harassment/Discrimination

Because we are all different in our values and backgrounds, some of us may find it difficult to readily recognize whether our own behavior constitutes harassment, or whether the actions of another do. At the same time, those being harassed may not understand or appreciate their right to be protected from such behavior

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of service
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis of service decisions affecting such individuals
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment
- Submission to, or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for delivery of, or withholding service.

## Sexual Harassment

The Sexual Harassment of ELK states that "sexual harassment is unlawful and unacceptable conduct which undermines the integrity of the employment relationship, and will not be tolerated whether it is directed toward coworkers or the public."

Sexual harassment may include such actions as:

- Persistent, verbal sexually oriented disturbing, pestering, teasing or abuse.
- Subtle pressure for sexual activity
- Physical contact, such as patting, pinching or persistent brushing against another's body.
- Outright demand for sexual favors, accompanied by implied or overt promises of preferential treatment or threats relating to an individual's status

Sexual harassment is prohibited in the workplace by federal and state law on any DOW property/facility and in any ELK programs and activities. ELK is committed to taking appropriate action against those who violate the Sexual Harassment Policy.

A good rule of thumb is, "If in doubt, don't."

Contact your volunteer coordinator if you have any questions regarding the Sexual Harassment Policy.

## Volunteer Status

Volunteers may be in either ACTIVE or INACTIVE status. At the time of the initial application, all volunteers are placed in an ACTIVE status. An active volunteer will receive the newsletters, be considered for project work assignments, and be invited to trainings, banquets and get-togethers, when eligible, and special events and programs.

At the beginning of each year, we review and update our database of volunteers. Many volunteers are placed into an inactive status at this time. Below is a checklist used to determine volunteer status:

### *ACTIVE status:*

A volunteer will remain ACTIVE if, during the preceding calendar year, one or more of these criteria has been met:

- Submitted hours of volunteer time
- Become a new volunteer
- Updated information, such as address/phone changes
- Request received from volunteer to remain in an active status

### *INACTIVE status:*

A volunteer will automatically be transferred to INACTIVE if one or more of the following occurs during the preceding calendar year.

- No hours submitted
- Mail returned
- No request received from volunteer to remain in an active status

A volunteer in an inactive status will not receive newsletters, nor be contacted by a coordinator for volunteer opportunities

If you no longer receive volunteer information by either electronic and/or postal mail and wish to continue being an ELK volunteer, simply contact the Executive Director to reactivate your status. You may be requested to submit an updated application.

## VII. Volunteer Code of Conduct

Volunteers agree to:

1. Work to achieve the mission of ELK
2. Work to fulfill the roles of a volunteer
3. Report for duties on time. Notify the proper staff member if problems arise
4. Perform duties to the best of his/her abilities. Seek & accept constructive feedback
5. Complete training requirements
6. Adhere to all ELK Volunteer Policies & Procedures
7. Maintain a professional demeanor and appropriate attitude on all activities

ELK agrees to:

1. Provide training, ongoing supervision, learning opportunities, support, recognition, and evaluation.
2. Treat volunteers respectfully and fairly
3. Provide a fair and safe work environment
4. Provide prompt communication to volunteers.

*I have read and agreed to the above guidelines and I hereby acknowledge that I have received and read a copy of ELK's Volunteer Manual and have had an opportunity to ask questions about its content. If any part of this agreement is not being met, I understand that my supervisor or I may terminate this agreement. I further understand that this is only intended to provide an overview of ELK's policies and does not create a contract for continued volunteer placement. At any time, this information is subject to be adjusted and updated.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Volunteer name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Volunteer Coordinator    Date

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature for Minor