

# Earth Team Guide For

# New

# Volunteer Coordinators

USDA  NRCS

Natural Resources Conservation Service

# Congratulations!

## You have just become an "Earth Team (ET) Volunteer Coordinator."

- F You may have applied for the job or were assigned the responsibility.
- F You may be the ET Coordinator at the state, area, regional or "other" level.
- F You apparently have a supervisor or mentor who has enough confidence in you to assign the ET responsibility.
- F You should also have a lot of questions about how to be successful as an ET volunteer coordinator.

**N**o matter what circumstances transpired to place you as "Earth Team Coordinator" you are in for a rewarding experience. Most of your fellow coordinators are creative, outgoing, positive people. It's contagious!

The volunteers you will associate with will also enrich your life - that's a guarantee! You will extend your network and meet new people from top managers in NRCS to others who will contribute to your skills and knowledge. Take advantage of the unique opportunity now before you.

**S**o lets get started... the information included in this document, and how you use it, can provide you with a "jump start" to success. It can provide you with some directions to follow and it should answer several questions you may already have.

## Good luck!

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# The Earth Team -



## What's it all about?

Volunteers help to support and accomplish the mission, vision, goals, and daily workload of NRCS (and sometimes the work of partners and sister agencies)

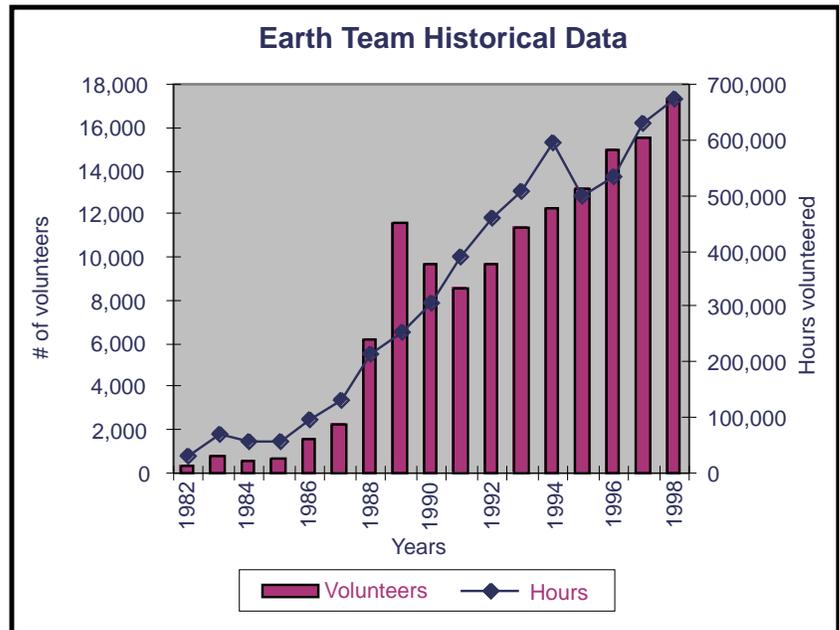
**T**o understand how volunteers can become an integral part of NRCS operations, it is important to have a working knowledge of NRCS programs, priorities and workload.



It is a big job and NRCS can't do it alone - no matter how large the staff or budget. We must employ the special skills and talents of other individuals and groups to provide quality service to our growing customer base.

**O** rigin:  
Volunteering has always been a cornerstone of the soil and water conservation movement. It began with the organization of conservation districts in 1937. In recognition of the interest and skills many Americans have in conservation, Congress passed legislation - Section 1526 of PL 97-98, Food and Agriculture Act - in 1981 permitting the Soil Conservation Service, now Natural Resources Conservation Service, to use volunteers in its programs. This is how the Earth Team, the volunteer arm of the NRCS was initiated.

# Growth



## Purpose:

The primary purpose of the Earth Team is to expand NRCS services by using volunteer time, talent and energy to help accomplish the NRCS mission.

To better understand how the volunteer fits into the structure of NRCS, let's look at the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the Earth Team.

## Mission

The mission of the Earth Team is to provide leadership and administer volunteer services to help people conserve, improve and sustain our natural resources and environment.

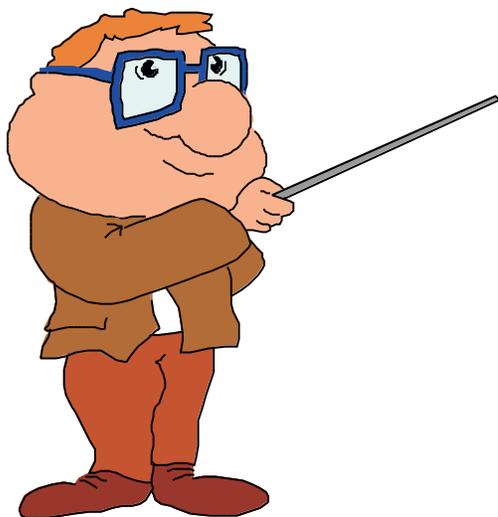
## Vision

Productive partnerships with volunteers to achieve a quality environment.

## Goals:

- 20,000 Earth Team volunteers by the year 2000.
- A volunteer in every office (100% office participation)
- Increased use of the Earth Team to reach under-represented groups and to insure the volunteer workforce is representative of its customer base.

## Objectives:



- ✓ To increase "conservation on the land" by using volunteers to assist with the technical aspects of applying conservation practices.
- ✓ To increase the level of support services available for conservation related activities by utilizing volunteers in NRCS offices.
- ✓ Work with volunteers to increase public awareness through information and education.
- ✓ To identify potential career employees.
- ✓ To use volunteer contacts to improve networking with other agencies and organizations in support of soil and water conservation objectives.
- ✓ To increase land user interest in, and acceptance of, resource management systems that conserve soil, water and related natural resources.
- ✓ To establish a successful, long-range volunteer program.
- ✓ To utilize the Earth Team as an outreach effort to diversify the workforce.

## **B**enefits (to you) of being an Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator

After seeing the mission, vision, goals, and objectives associated with the Earth Team - you may be overwhelmed. It can be a lot of work! But what about you?

***What can be the results of being an Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator?***

Your first reward should be the realization that you are helping to get conservation on the land. Your contribution is a direct link in the volunteer process that helps NRCS get its work done.

You will also meet and be exposed to new people (volunteers, partners, NRCS staff) who bring some unique talents and skills to our agency. Many of your experiences will lead to life long friendships. Many of your Earth

Team experiences will enrich your life, and usually the experience for volunteers will be positive and beneficial. Often, association with NRCS and people like you, has changed the direction of a volunteers life. It is generally a "win-win" affair. Volunteers benefit, you benefit, our agency benefits.

A final benefit for you is the association with a unique group of NRCS professionals - your fellow Earth Team Volunteer Coordinators. They will help you and add new dimensions to your career and personal growth.

# Who cares



(about you and the Earth Team)



**Management** - at all levels certainly cares about your success and the role of the Earth Team - see Appendix A for a letter from top management.



Oh - don't forget about the **ET volunteers**, they care too. They sincerely want to help, and when a volunteer says "thank you," they really mean it.



**Your fellow Earth Team Volunteer Coordinators** care, understand and are willing to share their skills and experiences to help you.



One final note: Your **fellow Americans** care too. Over 80% of adults volunteer in the United States and "conservation" and "environment" are popular subjects. The vast majority of Americans support our efforts to sustain natural resources on private lands.

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## Ways to Succeed as an Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator

**a.** As mentioned earlier, you should know the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the Earth Team and the agency it supports (NRCS). An understanding of the ET purpose and how it is an integral part of daily operations is essential.

**b.** You must be a subject matter expert. You must know the "nuts and bolts" of the Earth Team such as:



1 - Develop a budget - see "sample budget" Appendix B



4 - Needs Inventory - Sample located in the ET Handbook (pages 4-6)



2 - Awards and recognition process GM 360, Part 411.



5 - Policy and procedure guidance GM 360, Part 428.



3 - Promotional materials - various samples - Appendix C



6 - Recruitment - ET Handbook (pages 7 to 11).

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**C. You should build an Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator "support system." Three important cornerstones to this system include: (1) networking, (2) keeping management informed, (3) building program identity/visibility.**

Lets look at these three in detail:

### **1 - Networking -**

Camaraderie among Earth Team Volunteer Coordinators is excellent. Take advantage of this situation. Get to know other coordinators at all levels.

They generally are helpful, sharing and caring people. Don't go at it alone - get to know the Regional Volunteer Coordinator, the National Volunteer Coordinator, and other state/area volunteer coordinators.

In addition, it is important to develop volunteer contacts other than NRCS. Volunteering is big business - it is organized, financed, and supported in the public and private sector. Seek the advice of other volunteer management professionals, attend outside meetings, and ask a lot of questions.

### **2 - Management support for the Earth Team is essential.**

Managers who realize Earth Team volunteers can help them attain their goals will be your biggest supporters. Attend staff meetings and share volunteer success stories, and share facts and data that will sell volunteers. Get others to share success stories - there is nothing like having a manager or leader stand up and attest to the successful association with Earth Team volunteers.

Always keep top management informed about your progress and accomplishments, and if possible, let your states senators and representatives know what volunteers are doing to help NRCS.

### **3 - No matter how "good" it is, maintaining the strength, and integrity of the Earth Team requires a continual effort to promote an awareness of its existence.**

Several different communication and marketing tools and methods will be needed to create an awareness and understanding of ET by our employees, partners, and volunteers. One of the best but often overlooked tools is to share success stories - in staff meetings, through e-mail, in newsletters. The "Volunteer Voice" is an Earth Team newsletter distributed nationally to all employees. Don't overlook this outlet to share ideas and stories. (Appendix C)

There are also brochures, fact sheets, displays and other promotional items available for your use. Appendix C contains samples, but contact your regional volunteer coordinator or the national volunteer coordinator for the latest material.



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# More on Being a Successful Earth Team Coordinator

Your enthusiasm for the Earth Team is mandatory. It is contagious and is the first symptom to be recognized by others. It can make up for shortcomings (like experience) - practice this characteristic - you'll be pleased at the results.

You must also exhibit a personal commitment to the ET. Volunteer yourself - as an ET volunteer or for other causes. Employ a volunteer to help you. Help others with needs inventories and recruiting and managing volunteers.

Talk "Earth Team volunteers" every chance you can. Don't feel shy. Keep an Earth Team presence alive at staff meetings and casual encounters as often as possible.

Attend as many volunteer meetings and events as you can. NRCS ET volunteer coordinators usually have multi-state, regional and national meetings. Your attendance will be rewarded.

As mentioned earlier, learn as much as you can about the Earth Team. You are the source of information about policy, procedure, and the details about this activity. Keep a set of references handy and always answer any questions that may arise.

Becoming a successful ET manager takes time. Keep looking for the positive, successful contribution you can make. Be patient - the road to success is often in small, "baby steps."

## CAUTION

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### Potholes, roadblocks, pitfalls and other obstacles to avoid (or at least be aware!)

Will there be any "bumps" in the road?

You bet - Here are a few:

- 1 - Lack of imagination (how do I use volunteers)
- 2 - Resistance to change (never done this before)
- 3 - Afraid to ask for help
- 4 - People "think" they...
  - Don't have time to train
  - Don't have space for another person
  - Don't have trainer skills
  - Can't get quality help without paying for it

- 5 - Don't trust "outsiders" (not operating outside the box)
- 6 - Do not recognize volunteers as resource tools
- 7 - Perception that management doesn't care
- 8 - Only assigning small/"busy" work not complicated/abstract tasks
- 9 - Can't recruit in rural areas
- 10 - Don't need more work

Remember, most of the obstacles in your road to success are internal in nature... the positive attitude of most volunteers is easier to deal with.

# So...what should I do next?

By now you should have a few answers and some questions. Many new Earth Team Volunteer Coordinators have been successful by outlining a plan or "roadmap" to guide them. *The following is one sample:*

## SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

### 1-2 Months

- ◆ Meet with the state conservationist and/or others to discuss program direction, guidelines, supervision, etc.
- ◆ Review previous status reports to see who is using the volunteer program; trends, statistics, etc.
- ◆ Received and reviewed the "New" ET Coordinator Guide (You're reading it now!)
- ◆ Be able to discuss policy and procedures mission vision goals
- ◆ Display the ET mission and vision in your work area (review with managers and others)
- ◆ Contact one other experienced rvc/svc coordinator for training (find out what they are doing)
- ◆ Begin using ET database system
- ◆ Call your regional

volunteer coordinator or national volunteer coordinator if you haven't heard from them already.

- ◆ Learn about agency outreach and how the volunteer program can help maintain diversity.

### 3-5 Months

- ◆ Contact another volunteer coordinator of equal responsibility to find out what they're doing
- ◆ Develop a list of external resources (volunteer pools, other agencies, etc.) and begin using them.
- ◆ Complete needs inventory, if not done in the last 12 months.
- ◆ Give keystaff an ET update by attending a meeting once a quarter.
- ◆ Find out when the next state/regional/national ET meeting will be held and make plans to attend.

- ◆ Consider attending National Points of Light Foundation Annual Conference, Association for Volunteer Administration, etc.

- ◆ Assess status of promotional materials and include needs in budget.

### State or Regional Coordinators

#### 3-5 Months

- ◆ Develop a business plan in cooperation with volunteer coordinators (state, area, field).
- ◆ Review business plan with key staff and have it approved by STC/RC
- ◆ Develop a budget in cooperation with STC/RC
- ◆ Hold a meeting with district conservationists in a state to evaluate their programs.  
Address:
  - 1) Where they are
  - 2) Where they can go
  - 3) Where do you see the Earth Team Program fitting into field operations
  - 4) Recruitment successes and needs
  - 5) Business plan items

### 6-8 Months

- ◆ Promote program through face-to-face contacts with field personnel
- ◆ Recruit a volunteer if you don't already have one.

### State or Regional Coordinators

#### 6-8 Months

Meet with state conservationist or regional conservationist (face-to-face)

- 1) where we've been
- 2) where we can go
- 3) where do you see the ET program in the state/region

Meet with volunteer coordinators in states to evaluate

- 1) where we've been
- 2) where we can go
- 3) where you see ET program going in the area/field/states

### 9-12 Months

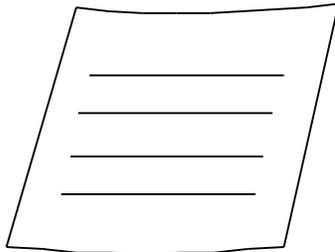
- ◆ Develop promotional factsheet/brochure and circulate it to the field
- ◆ Reproduce existing support materials as needed
- ◆ Communicate availability of new promotional items (displays, publications, brochures, flyers, etc.) to field coordinators.
- ◆ Use photos of volunteers at work to update current displays.
- ◆ Send "VolunteerVoice" articles to the National Volunteer Coordinator
- ◆ Develop an awards program within your area of responsibility, i.e. state, area, regional, etc.
- ◆ Participate in national ET awards process

#### *Note:*

From your first month on the job - use every opportunity to enlighten others about the value of using Earth Team volunteers.

A sample presentation that contains several good talking points is included for your use (See Appendix C "Talking Points.") You can tailor the presentation to fit your needs and circumstances.

# REPORT CARD



## How do I measure the success of the Earth Team?

To develop any system to "measure" ET success, it gets down to a balance of "quality vs. quantity."

...or how many do we have (ET volunteers) and what are they doing.

Neither number nor detailed success stories can be a true measure. Both are needed.

Lets look at some indicators:

- Volunteers are contributing more to agency goals and priorities (i.e. success stories)
- Number of volunteers and hours increase
- Earth Team has greater visibility and awareness
- More offices are using volunteers
- Increased management support:
  - increased budget
  - state awards
  - included in speeches by key staff
  - newsletters
  - volunteers in management offices
  - managers attend volunteer meetings
  - management takes active role in my responsibilities
  - state received regional/national recognition

## What are my references?

- ☛ References GM 360
- ☛ ET Volunteer Handbook
  - Sample forms
  - Awards forms
- ☛ Orientation handbook for volunteers
- ☛ ET talking points (The Earth Team - Things You Should Know and Tell Others)
- ☛ ET volunteer fact sheet (Volunteers: A Vital Part of the Team)
- ☛ ET Database System User Guide
- ☛ ET Directory
- ☛ ET Business Plan and Executive summary
- ☛ ET Volunteer position descriptions
- ☛ Miscellaneous handouts
  - budget
  - needs inventory
  - recruiting tips

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