



Texas Department of Criminal Justice

Brad Livingston
Executive Director

Letter of Orientation for Special Volunteers

Dear Special Volunteer:

Welcome to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) volunteer program! Prior to service as a Special Volunteer with TDCJ, you are required to read and become familiar with the following rules of conduct. These rules are not inclusive of all TDCJ policies, but will help ensure the safety and security of facility operations as well as the welfare of our volunteers, staff and offenders. Professional behavior and good common sense are essential to your participation. Because you have requested to participate in a system that promotes positive change in offender behavior, you are encouraged and expected to demonstrate integrity in everything you do. We hope that your experience is very rewarding.

RULES OF CONDUCT:

- You cannot perform volunteer services on a facility where a relative or friend is incarcerated or if you or a friend or relative is the victim of an offender assigned to the facility.
- You or a representative from your group must submit a list of items you intend to bring into the facility to the facility administrator for approval prior to the event. Electronic musical devices (including PA systems/components) are allowed as well as lap top computers that are without broadband capability.
- TDCJ has a zero tolerance policy for all contraband (cell phones, alcohol, tobacco products, narcotics or any other prohibited item). Do not bring more than \$20.00 in to the facility. All individuals entering a secure facility are subject to pat-down searches. Anyone found in possession of a prohibited item(s) will be referred for prosecution.
- Firearms, or other instruments designed/used as a dangerous weapon or having explosive substance, are not allowed on TDCJ property. The exception is for those persons licensed to carry a handgun under Chapter 411, Subchapter H of the Texas Government Code to possess a handgun on TDCJ property if the *un*-loaded gun is secured in the locked trunk of a vehicle, or locked compartment if the vehicle does not have a trunk, prior to entering TDCJ property.
- You must be dressed in a manner appropriate for the occasion and service. Do not wear provocative/suggestive clothing or any attire that is of extreme design, revealing in nature, or any attire or haircut style that conveys messages of a derogatory or offensive nature through language, logos or symbols or jewelry on the facial area. Keep accessories simple and avoid wearing expensive jewelry. Wearing all white clothing on a secure facility is prohibited.
- Cold weather clothing (e.g., coats, gloves, scarves, hats, boots, etc.) shall be secured as determined by facility/department staff. Do not leave clothing or any other personal items unattended.
- If you have a prescription and/or non-prescription drug that you must take during your visit, you must provide a written statement to the appropriate staff beforehand indicating the name of the drug and prescribing health care provider and the possible side effects. You may only carry into the facility the amount needed during your visit and it must be in the original container.

Our mission is to provide public safety, promote positive change in offender behavior, reintegrate offenders into society, and assist victims of crime.

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Letter of Orientation for Special Volunteers, continued

- All special volunteers/volunteer groups are under the direct oversight of the appropriate staff. You must stay with your group during your visit. Volunteers do not supervise offenders.
- Do not mail any items, correspondence, etc. for offenders. Do not carry messages from offender to offender or to the offender's family members.
- Do not give money to an offender or his family, either directly or indirectly. Do not deposit money into an offender's trust fund account.
- Do not accept personal gifts from or give personal gifts to offenders.
- Refer all offender requests to the department/division volunteer staff and/or facility/office staff.
- You are required to report (immediately) any misconduct that you witness or any information that is revealed to you by an offender that is criminal in nature.
- Do not disparage the faith of any offender, nor deliberately seek to influence a change in any offender's denomination. Religious programs will not be used to proselytize from any group.
- TDCJ has a zero tolerance policy for sexual misconduct. Individuals that violate the rights of an offender or engage in sexual misconduct will be referred for prosecution.
- In the event you are taken hostage, the Department will not bargain for your release. Also, TDCJ will not be held liable and/or responsible in the case of personal injuries while you are on the facility.
- In the event that you are sued as a result of performing services, the State of Texas will not indemnify you and will not provide a defense to such litigation.
- Uniformed officers' orders are to be obeyed at all times. They are trained to protect and insure the safety of all individuals (visitors, staff and offenders) on the facility.
- Information gathered and maintained by TDCJ in connection with the supervision of offenders is confidential and privileged by statute, and shall not be disclosed to anyone other than those persons entitled to receive such information under Texas law.
- Some information related to substance abuse treatment is further made confidential by federal law, and may not be disclosed to anyone except as provided by that law.
- You may not communicate TDCJ business to the media without prior approval.

If you have any question or concern regarding policy and procedure or if a situation arises about which you are in doubt, **ASK BEFORE YOU ACT!**

Thank you for your interest and participation in the TDCJ volunteer program. The investment of your time is a generous contribution. It provides valuable interaction between the criminal justice system and the community and is a key element in the rehabilitation process. Should you be interested in becoming an Approved Volunteer, you can find the volunteer application on-line at www.tdcj.state.tx.us. Go to Quick Links and click on Rehabilitation and Reentry Programs Division. Please note that as a Special Volunteer you are allowed no more than four (4) visits system-wide in a year's time.

Sincerely,

Debbie Van Dyke
Director of Volunteer Services
Rehabilitation and Reentry Programs Division