

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Implementing Junior Member Programs

Encouraging young people to participate in junior member programs is an excellent way to encourage interest in emergency service organizations. Early participation often leads junior members to continue with the emergency service agency as adults. However, because explorer and junior members are minors, they present a unique set of circumstances.

Unfortunately, situations have developed where adult advisors have violated the trust of their organization and have caused injury or harm to minor member(s). To help protect the organization, adult advisors, individual members/employees and the program participants, it is important to have safeguards in place. Safety policies, ethics, child labor laws, rules of participation, written guidelines and enforcement of those policies are issues for emergency service organizations.

The following are several best practice recommendations:

1. Establish policies or procedures for conduct of adult supervisory personnel
2. Consider criminal background checks for program advisors. This may include evaluation standards for background check findings to ensure a consistent approval/denial process
3. Develop sexual harassment policies for adult program advisors, general department membership and junior members that are strictly enforced and include:
 - a. Clear definitions of what constitutes as sexual harassment and prohibited activities
 - b. Defined procedures for reporting violations and protecting confidentiality
 - c. Mandated and documented training
 - d. A provision for parents and/or legal guardians to be informed
 - e. A signed acknowledgement of receipt and understanding of the policy
4. Policies regarding age and gender mix among both junior members and advisors may include:
 - a. Provisions and/or restrictions on the minimum/maximum number of adults vs. juniors permitted during activities
 - b. Minimize one-on-one contact in isolation between adults and youth
 - c. One-on-one activities such as counseling should not be performed in seclusion. Provisions may be made for privacy but conduct the meeting in full view of others.
 - d. Use caution in allowing situations to arise where there is one-on-one gender mix between adults and juniors
 - e. Avoid one-on-one and mixed gender sleeping arrangements with adults and/or youth by offering separate facilities whenever possible
5. Include safe and confidential reporting provisions of incidents or actions for the junior member to both an advisor and non-advisor that may include:
 - a. The junior member or organization reserves the right to utilize outside third parties to help resolve any allegations.
 - b. A commitment statement by the emergency service organization (ESO) indicating they are committed to providing a safe environment for the junior members and are equally committed to conducting prompt, thorough and fair internal investigations of all complaints of work-related wrongdoing

This is a sample guideline furnished to you by VFIS. Your organization should review this guideline and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization's needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm, or damage to personnel, property, and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact your VFIS Risk Control Representative at (800) 233-1957.

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

- c. Junior members are not required to confront person(s) involved in alleged incidents
 - d. Any person named in the complaint shall not be part of the investigative team. Neutral persons within the organization will be designated to handle internal investigations.
6. Prohibit bullying and/or hazing by both adult and junior members
7. Appropriate attire requirement for both adults and youth
8. Develop, distribute and enforce restrictions and usage of computers, internet, video recording and other social media policies. Address usage at ESO facilities, official duties and emergency scenes.
9. Written membership application and detailed explanation of the program's expectations, along with the release statement for parents and guardians. Include a statement indicating that junior members may not be eligible for any federal line-of-duty benefits, even if participating in emergency activities
10. Appropriate Child Labor Laws. (Make sure your policies are not in violation of these laws.) Require training and documentation.
11. Emergency vehicle riding policies
12. Policies on the types of service calls where the juniors are permitted to participate
13. Emergency scene safety and direct supervision (dedicated senior advisor to provide one-on-one supervision of minors)
14. Consider the following for hours and/or conditions under which juniors will or will not be permitted in the quarters or participate in activities:
 - a. School day hours
 - b. Holiday hours
 - c. Restrictions for non-member guests to be in quarters
 - d. Appropriate supervision
15. Any and all conditions of membership should be written out such as:
 - a. Maintaining GPA
 - b. Hours of participation
 - c. When junior members are permitted to respond
 - d. Minimum participation standards/expectations

This list is not to be considered extensive but rather highlights areas that should be of concern to your organization. ESOs are encouraged to have their policies reviewed by a qualified attorney prior to instituting any new or revised policy.