Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

**Volunteers and Trainees in Labs**

A number of questions have been raised relative to volunteers working in labs. Although our ability to offer these experiences may be viewed as a community service, it is not an encouraged practice because there are some restrictions and liability issues. Volunteers/trainees are not eligible to participate in any of Harvard’s health, disability, or life insurance programs nor are they eligible for Workers’ Compensation in the event of an injury. This bulletin will summarize past practices and requirements. Additional information is available through your Human Resources Partner.

In determining “volunteer” status, the courts and the Department of Labor consider factors that do not fit neatly with a learning experience in a lab. For SPH’s purposes, the “trainee” status is a better fit since we can generally meet the six-factor test used by DOL to determine trainee classification. The participation of trainees/volunteers must not contribute to job displacement or benefits evasion.

If you have any further questions, contact your [HR Partner](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/human-resources/whos-who-in-hr/who-we-are/).