

Record Keeping

FOR VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

By Vice President Clark Beebe, PA/NJ Chapter

Most of us have been there. At the end of the year, you scramble to log your volunteer hours for the year. Why is it so important to maintain a volunteer log? Well, for tax purposes, obviously, but TACF and its chapters have a lot at stake too.

Funding is often based on something called 'program effectiveness' which is determined by the number of hours invested by volunteers. You've already put in the effort, now it is important that TACF and your local chapter get the benefit of your generous contributions.

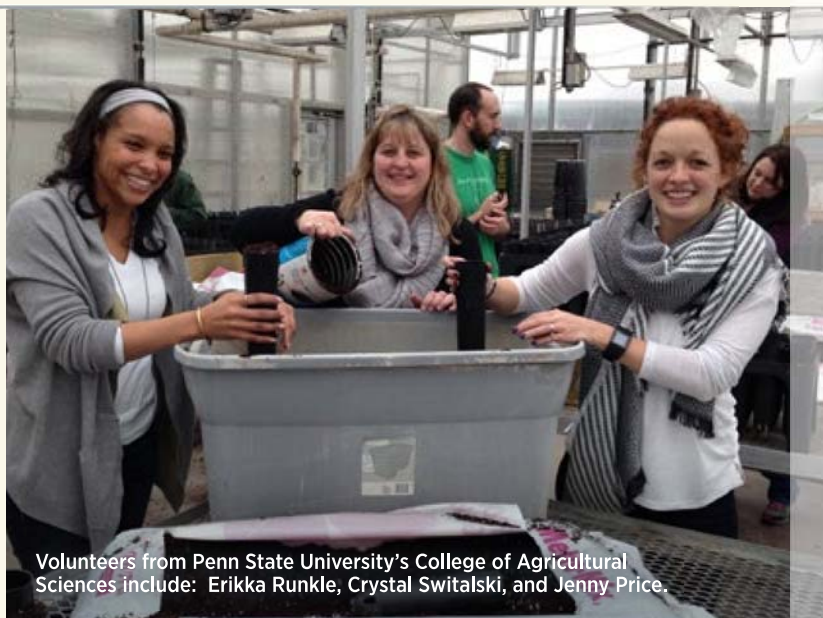
Aye, there's the rub – how many hours did you actually put in? You vaguely remember planting some trees in the spring, you helped staff the chapter booth at the Farm Show and again at the County 4H Fair – and you are sure there were one or two other outings/work sessions, but exactly when and how many hours, who knows?

Maybe you can fake it but come April 15 when you file your taxes, faking it has potentially severe consequences. And you do want to be able to list all your activities on your tax return because all those miles driven, tolls paid, and even meals eaten during such excursions are tax deductible as charitable contributions. So by having good records, you not only help TACF, but you also help yourself in the form of reduced income taxes.

I used to keep a hard copy agenda. I wrote down all of my activities in it. So two years ago when PA/NJ Chapter Administrator Jean Najjar asked for my hours, I did as I had done in previous years; I went to the agenda and recreated all my activities. Then, I went to my E-Z pass records to correlate those trips with tolls paid. I also tried to remember meals and other expenditures. It took hours and was only maybe 80% accurate. On top of the mind-numbing tedium of such effort, my accountant was not that enthralled with the result. She wanted more specifics and a better method to my record keeping.

So last year I got smart(er) (or, more accurately, a little less stupid). Throughout the entire year and after every activity, I recorded it in an Excel spreadsheet. I labeled columns for date, event, miles, tolls, hours, meals and "other". If I failed to record my miles during the event, I just went to Mapquest and plugged in the starting point and end point and used that number—no one can argue with that.

And, remember, when you record your hours, they are door-to-door, not just at the event. Travel time is part of your volunteer time. And don't forget other volunteer efforts such as writing an article for a newsletter; researching



Volunteers from Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences include: Erikka Runkle, Crystal Switalski, and Jenny Price.

a topic for a talk; making phone calls to arrange an event; reading and responding to emails – it all counts! Whatever you do, record it on your spreadsheet. Don't worry that you do not fill every column with every activity. Writing this article involved no miles or tolls or meals but it did take time and I just put it in my spread sheet!

So now when Jean asks for hours, I just total one column. When the accountant wants miles, tolls and expenses, she just totals a few columns. It is accurate because it is done at the time when the event is fresh in your mind. It also takes essentially no time because you just call up the spreadsheet and enter a few keystrokes after each event. It is easy to email to Jean and the accountant when they ask for it. And I get paid for doing it in the form of lower taxes! It is truly a win-win-win!

So, start now: open a spreadsheet, label a few columns, and be prepared for the year of volunteering that lies ahead. When your chapter or national requests volunteer hours this coming December, TACF will be a winner. And you will be a winner come April, 2017!