

Reading Opens Your World (ROW)

Volunteer Handbook

Welcome to ROW

Thank you for joining Reading Opens Your World! Volunteers are the heart of our program, and we're grateful for the time, energy, and care you bring to students. This handbook outlines what you can expect, what we ask in return, and the guidelines that keep everyone safe and supported. Please note, volunteering with ROW is a privilege and such privilege may be revoked at any time, for any reason.

What You Can Expect as a ROW Volunteer

As a ROW volunteer, you can expect:

- To be welcomed and respected as a valued member of the team
- Clear communication and support from ROW staff and coordinators
- A meaningful, rewarding volunteer experience
- Quality training and guidance to help you succeed
- A warm and friendly environment
- Opportunities to learn, grow, and make a difference
- Appreciation for your time and effort
- A chance to share feedback and ideas

What ROW Asks of You

In return, we ask that you:

- Support and uphold ROW's mission, values, and policies—including confidentiality
- Assist in creating a safe and welcoming environment for all students
- Represent ROW positively in our community
- Do your best in your role, following the expectations outlined for volunteers
- Respect each student and their unique background or needs
- Let your teacher know promptly if you're unable to attend or meet your responsibilities
- Communicate respectfully with your coordinator
- Share your feedback. It helps us improve.

Confidentiality

As a ROW volunteer, you may see or hear sensitive information. Please treat all such information with care and discretion. This includes:

- Student reading levels, behavior, or family situations
- Any materials or information shared by teachers, volunteers, or staff
- Volunteer or staff contact details, records, or personal matters

Do not share sensitive information outside the program. If in doubt regarding whether something constitutes sensitive information, do not discuss it.

Photos or videos of students are only allowed with written consent from a guardian and approval from both ROW and the school site.

If you hear something from a student that raises concern for their safety or well-being, report it immediately to the front office staff of the school.

When discussing students outside the program, use first names only—or better yet, none at all. Protecting the confidentiality of participating students is of the utmost importance.

Volunteer Training and Screening

All volunteers participate in a Welcome Meeting that introduces them to their specific school site, how ROW sessions are conducted, and what to expect in their role. This orientation helps ensure consistency, confidence, and a positive experience for everyone involved.

To support your learning, we also provide training videos on our website. These can be accessed anytime to reinforce what you learn in person.

All volunteers working with children must first undergo a background check and should not have a history of substantiated abuse, neglect reports, or other inappropriate conduct. If during the course of your volunteerism with ROW, you are accused of abuse, neglect, or other inappropriate conduct, you must notify ROW right away.

Volunteers must complete all required training and screening, and certify to ROW such completion, before beginning their volunteer role.

If anything feels unclear, please ask. We're here to help you make the most of your time and talents with ROW. The following trainings are required:

Sexual Misconduct Prevention Training

- **Objective:** Prevent incidents of sexual misconduct by educating volunteers on appropriate boundaries and behaviors.
- **Content:**
 - Understanding what constitutes sexual misconduct and harassment.
 - Establishing and maintaining professional boundaries.
 - Procedures for reporting misconduct within the organization.
- **Resources:**
 - ROW Mandatory Training: Child Abuse and Sexual Misconduct

Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Training

- **Objective:** Educate volunteers on recognizing signs of abuse and neglect and understanding their reporting obligations.
- **Content:**
 - Definitions and indicators of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as neglect.

- Procedures for reporting suspected abuse, including how to contact the Montana Child Abuse Hotline at 1-866-820-5437.
- Confidentiality and legal protections for reporters. [How to Report Abuse](#)
- **Resources:**
 - DPHHS provides a [training video](#) on mandatory reporting.
 - ROW Mandatory Training: Child Abuse and Sexual Misconduct

Ensuring Student Safety

The safety of students and volunteers is ROW's top priority. To ensure a safe and respectful environment, please follow these guidelines:

- Never take a student outside or away from school grounds
- Do not initiate or engage in contact outside of school unless you had a prior relationship (meaning before volunteering) with the student's parent or guardian
- Always remain in the designated reading area and in view of other adults
- Sign in upon arrival and wear your ROW name tag while volunteering
- Avoid lap sitting or any physical contact that could be considered inappropriate
- Immediately report any concerns of child abuse, neglect, any safety-related issue or troubling comments from students directly to the school front office staff—keep this information confidential
- Do not bring or give gifts to students
- Immediately report inappropriate behavior by other volunteers to your Volunteer Coordinator
- Contact ROW leadership directly to report discrimination or serious concerns

Cell Phones and Photos

Please stay focused during your time with students. Refrain from using your phone during reading sessions unless it's an emergency. At meetings, silence your phone out of respect for others.

Photos or videos of students are only permitted with written consent from a parent or guardian and approval from both the school and your Volunteer Coordinator.

Questions or Concerns?

If you have questions or run into any challenges, please reach out to:

- **Your Volunteer Coordinator** – your first point of contact for anything related to your volunteer role
- **ROW Leadership** – for anything more general or confidential, email: letstalk@readwithrow.org

Thank you for being a part of Reading Opens Your World. Together, we're creating joyful reading experiences that make a lasting impact!

Volunteer Acknowledgment

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed the Reading Opens Your World Volunteer Handbook and that I have completed the trainings listed above. I understand the expectations, policies, and procedures outlined in this handbook, and I agree to uphold them during my time as a volunteer.

I understand that failure to follow these guidelines may result in the termination of my volunteer role and that ROW may elect to terminate my volunteerism at any time for any reason.

If I have questions about the handbook or my responsibilities, I will reach out to my Volunteer Coordinator or ROW leadership for clarification.

Volunteer Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____