Blue Star Families

Volunteer Handbook

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bluestarfam.org

Welcome!

Dear Blue Star Families Volunteer,

On behalf of the entire organization, welcome to Blue Star Families. We are so glad you are here.

For the most part, people do not volunteer because it benefits them personally. They volunteer because they believe in the power of making a difference. You are now part of a community of neighbors who have chosen to show up for military and Veteran families, helping create spaces of connection, belonging, and support.

Whether you are lending your creative skills, capturing stories, hosting a table at a local event, or spreading the word online, your time and talents matter. You help military families feel seen, supported, and connected in the very communities they call home.

This handbook will give you what you need to get started: a sense of our story, guidance for your role, and the policies that keep everyone safe. Please read it closely, keep it as a reference, and never hesitate to reach out with questions.

With gratitude,
The Blue Star Families Team

About Blue Star Families

Mission: Strengthen military families by connecting them with communities.

Vision: A nation where military families thrive.

Core Values:

- **Compassion**: We lead with care, prioritizing well-being.
- **Collaboration**: We believe we are stronger together.
- **Integrity**: We act transparently and with respect.

Our Story

Founded in 2009 by military spouses, Blue Star Families was born out of lived experience. Moving frequently, navigating deployments, and rebuilding life in new neighborhoods again and again can leave families feeling isolated. Our founder saw the power of connection — neighbors who showed up with a meal, local organizations who opened doors, fellow families who understood the journey.

From that beginning, Blue Star Families has grown into a nationwide network with over **350,000 members** and programs reaching **1.5 million military family members each year**. Together with civilian neighbors and community partners, we have distributed over **$336 million worth of benefits and resources**.

We believe when military families thrive, our communities thrive too.



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What It Means to Be a Blue Star Families Volunteer

A Blue Star Families volunteer is

- A community-builder who freely offers their time and talents.
- A partner in our mission, adding depth and reach to our programs.
- Someone who helps create spaces where military families and neighbors feel welcome, supported, and connected.

  Example: At a Welcome Week event, a volunteer may greet new arrivals at the door, take photos, or help kids with crafts. None of these are "extra" tasks — each one directly builds community.

A Blue Star Families volunteer is not

- A stand-in for paid staff or responsible for the organization's core operations.
- Obligated beyond the scope of their role description.
- Expected to take on responsibilities without training, tools, or support.

  Example: A volunteer may set up tables or hand out flyers, but they won't be asked to manage financial accounts or handle contracts — those are staff responsibilities.

Whether it's capturing photos at Welcome Week, sharing resources over the phone, or walking alongside a new family at a museum, volunteers expand the reach of our mission. They create space for stories, relationships, and opportunities that might otherwise be missed. In these ways, volunteers ensure military families experience community, connection, and belonging.

Getting Started

To keep this handbook welcoming and easy to navigate, we've placed the full, detailed policies in the Policy Appendix at the back. Those sections cover important topics like equal opportunity, conduct, safety, workplace guidelines, and recognition.

The appendix may feel more formal in tone. That's intentional — these policies ensure Blue Star Families remain compliant with nonprofit best practices as well as federal, state, and local laws. While comprehensive, the appendix is not meant to overwhelm you or anticipate every situation that may arise. Instead, it provides a strong framework to guide your service.

This handbook is reviewed annually. If a conflict ever exists between this handbook and an official Blue Star Families policy, the policy will take precedence. If a conflict exists between Blue Star Families policy (including this handbook) and federal, state, or local law, the law will always take precedence.

If you have questions about how a policy applies to you, or about specific laws in your state of residence, please contact the Volunteer Relations Department at volunteer@bluestarfam.org or your Chapter staff.

We encourage you to take time to review the handbook, noting how each section relates to your volunteer role. If something is unclear, ask — your feedback helps us strengthen the experience for every volunteer. Together, we can ensure your service is safe, impactful, and rewarding.

Rights & Responsibilities

Rights

- To receive meaningful assignments that match your skills and interests.
- To receive orientation, training, and supervision for your role.
- To contribute in an inclusive and respectful environment.
- To raise concerns about your role or supervision and have them addressed.
    - Start with your immediate contact; if unresolved, you may escalate to Chapter staff or the national Volunteer Relations team.
- To decline assignments that do not align with your skills, capacity, or availability.
- To care for your own well-being, knowing that sustainable service benefits both you and the community.
- To have clear guidance on protecting privacy and confidentiality.

Responsibilities

As a Blue Star Families volunteer, you are a trusted partner in our mission. These responsibilities ensure that families, staff, and volunteers can thrive together:

- Follow BSF policies, role expectations, and training guidelines. These set the foundation for safe, consistent, and mission-aligned service.
- Treat all families, staff, and fellow volunteers with respect. Everyone deserves to feel welcome and valued in our community.
- Protect confidentiality.
    - Example: If a caregiver shares something deeply personal at an event, that story stays private unless they give explicit consent to share.
- Handle Personally Identifiable Information (PII) responsibly.
    - Example: Phone numbers, emails, or addresses you may come across are not to be shared outside BSF systems without permission.
- Communicate questions or concerns promptly with your supervisor. Open communication helps us support you and resolve issues quickly.
- Represent Blue Star Families with integrity. Remember, you are often the face of BSF to the community.
- Speak on behalf of BSF only if you are an approved representative. If unsure, check with your Chapter staff or the national team.
- Honor our nonpartisan commitment. BSF never endorses political parties or candidates.

Support

At Blue Star Families, we want your service to be a source of growth and joy. We provide training, mentorship, and role clarity. Every volunteer role has a description, a support person, and access to feedback.

Training & Development

Orientation is provided to all volunteers. Specialized training is provided for roles involving events, storytelling, or technology.

> **Example**: A volunteer photographer receives both a shot list and coaching on cultural sensitivity.

Supervision & Feedback

Every volunteer has a point of contact, either a staff member or an experienced volunteer lead. Feedback is ongoing, collaborative, and focused on helping you grow.



Essentials

Travel & Expenses

Some volunteers travel for Blue Star Families programs. Expenses must be pre-approved and will follow federal GSA per diem standards. Always save receipts, as they are required for reimbursement.

Recruitment

Blue Star Families provides equal opportunities to all volunteers regardless of race, religion, national origin, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, or military status.

Background Checks

Because of the unique communities we serve and the locations of our activities — often on or near military installations — **all volunteer roles require a background check**. This protects families, volunteers, and the integrity of our programs.

Role Descriptions

Every volunteer receives a written description to ensure clarity and prevent scope creep. This helps align your contributions with our mission while ensuring expectations are transparent.



Equal Opportunity & Anti-Discrimination Policy

Blue Star Families provides equal opportunities to all volunteers without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, marital status, military status, disability, or other protected status.

> **Example:** If two people apply for the same volunteer opportunity, one a military spouse and the other a civilian neighbor, both are considered equally. What matters is skills, interest, and alignment with Blue Star Families's mission.

Reports of discrimination should be submitted to your immediate supervisor or the Volunteer Relations Department.

Conduct & Ethics

Volunteers are trusted community representatives. That trust is earned by:

- Acting with integrity.
- Respecting confidentiality.
- Treating all families, volunteers, and partners with respect.

Safety & Workplace Conduct

Your safety and the safety of our families comes first. Volunteers may serve on installations, in community spaces, or online. Policies related to OPSEC, drug-free workplace, and weapons restrictions help us protect everyone.

Operational Guidelines

Clear expectations around technology, social media, dress code, and attendance ensure a smooth experience for you and the families we serve.

Recognition & Separation

We value the contributions of every volunteer. Recognition comes through awards, features in Blue Star Families communications, and local celebrations.

- We recognize service in many ways: annual awards, spot recognition, and features in Blue Star Families communications.
- We also celebrate impact through storytelling — sharing how your contributions create belonging for military families.

If a volunteer chooses to step away, we ask for notice to your supervisor and return of any Blue Star Families property. Exit interviews may be requested to help us continue improving.

Volunteer Culture Code

Every volunteer community has its own rhythm — a way it serves, connects, and comes alive. For Blue Star Families volunteers, our Culture Code is that rhythm. It is the heartbeat of our volunteer community and the story that reminds us who we are when we serve.

The Culture Code is not a rulebook. It is a shared understanding of how we show up for one another and for the families and neighbors we serve alongside. It is the voice that guides our actions and the tone that carries through every event, every message, and every moment of connection.

When we volunteer with Blue Star Families, we are part of a movement that brings people together. We strengthen military and civilian communities through trust, kindness, and shared purpose. The Culture Code keeps us grounded in that spirit. It reminds us that service is not one-sided. It is a partnership built on respect and the belief that everyone has something meaningful to contribute.

You can see our Culture Code in action when a volunteer welcomes a new family to town, when a neighbor listens with care, or when a team comes together to make programs and initiatives possible. It lives in those moments of generosity, curiosity, and belonging — the small gestures that make a big difference.

Our Culture Code helps ensure that every volunteer, no matter where they serve, carries the same spirit of compassion, collaboration, and connection that defines Blue Star Families. It is how we live our mission together.

1. ## We Believe in Belonging

   Wherever we gather — on base, in town, or online — we create spaces where everyone feels welcome. We know belonging is not something given. It is something we build together, one connection at a time.

2. ## We Lead with Compassion

   We approach people and stories with empathy and respect. We know that care is a form of strength and that showing up for one another helps communities thrive.

3. ## We Build Bridges

   We connect military and civilian neighbors through shared experiences and shared purpose. Together, we discover what is possible when every voice has a place at the table.

4. ## We Believe the Best in Each Other

   We recognize the effort behind every act of service. We choose trust, celebrate progress, and keep communication open so we can grow together.

5. ## We Serve with Integrity and Respect

   Stories, memories, and experiences are shared with trust, and we honor that. We act with professionalism and humility, safeguarding privacy, safety, and dignity while representing Blue Star Families with care.

6. ## We Stay Curious and Keep Learning

   We approach each opportunity as a chance to grow. We seek understanding, welcome feedback, and share what we learn to strengthen our collective impact.

7. ## We Care for Ourselves and Each Other

   We believe service should sustain, not drain. We model balance, kindness, and care because thriving volunteers build thriving communities.

8. ## We Celebrate Service

   We pause to notice, thank, and celebrate one another. Recognition reminds us that together, we are building something powerful — a community rooted in gratitude and purpose.

9. ## We Hold Ourselves Accountable With Care

We take responsibility for how we show up and the impact we have. When we make mistakes, we listen, learn, and make it right. Accountability here is not about blame. It is about respect — for one another, for the families we serve, and for the mission we share.

10. ## We Live the Mission

We strengthen military families by connecting them with their communities. Every greeting, every story, every event is part of that mission, and each of us plays a vital role in making it real.

We are neighbors, teammates, and storytellers. Through service, we bring connection to life and build a community where every military family feels at home.

Connected & Engaged

Keep Connected

- Joining the Blue Star Families Volunteers Facebook group.
- Connecting with your local Chapter.
- Exploring The Neighborhood platform (neighborhood.bluestarfam.org).
- Following Blue Star Families on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.
- Participating in the Military Family Lifestyle Survey each year.

Contact Information

If you have a question about…	Contact
National volunteer opportunities, training, or this handbook	volunteer@bluestarfam.org
Local Chapter events or day-to-day coordination	Your Chapter's staff team
Membership or The Neighborhood platform	membership@bluestarfam.org
Safety concerns or boundaries (confidential)	volunteer@bluestarfam.org



Blue Star Families

Policy Appendix

This appendix gathers Blue Star Families' detailed policies related to volunteers. It is designed to provide clarity on expectations, rights, and responsibilities. The tone is more formal than the rest of the handbook, because these policies also ensure compliance with federal, state, and local laws.

This appendix is not an exhaustive list of all Blue Star Families policies. If there is a conflict between these policies and the law, the law takes precedence. If there is a conflict between this appendix and another Blue Star Families policy, the official Blue Star Families policy takes precedence. Volunteers should direct any questions or concerns about these policies to the Volunteer Relations Department at volunteer@bluestarfam.org

Supervision & Feedback

Volunteers can expect to work in a variety of roles each of which will require varying degrees of supervision. Paid staff and volunteer supervisors are encouraged and expected to offer appropriate feedback as needed and requested to foster an environment of continuous learning and growth.

Travel & Expenses

On occasion, volunteers may be required to travel for official business. Blue Star Families reimburses volunteers' reasonable expenses incurred while traveling on Blue Star Families' business. Volunteers may only travel on Blue Star Families business when authorized and should verify which travel expenses are eligible for reimbursement prior to making travel arrangements.

Volunteers should submit travel requests at least three (3) weeks prior to the intended travel date via Salesforce Travel Request. Volunteers will be required to provide the following information: reason for travel, dates of travel, airport information, airfare preferences, hotel accommodation preferences. Blue Star Families adheres to federal GSA per diem rates for hotel accommodation, transportation, meals and incidentals. While traveling, volunteers must keep a detailed report of their business activities and the expenses they incur, including supporting documentation such as receipts. Volunteers must submit their Travel Expense Claim reports within fourteen (14) days of their return from travel or as otherwise requested by Blue Star Families.

Recruitment

Blue Star Families provides equal opportunities to all volunteers without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, marital status, military status, disability, or other protected status.

> **Example:** If two people apply for the same volunteer opportunity, one a military spouse and the other a civilian neighbor, both are considered equally. What matters is skills, interest, and alignment with Blue Star Families's mission.

Reports of discrimination should be submitted to your immediate supervisor or the Volunteer Relations Department.

Background Checks

Because of the communities we serve and the locations of many of our activities (including some that take place on military installations), **all volunteer roles require a background check.**

- Blue Star Families may conduct various checks on potential or current volunteers.
- If an application is denied based on a report, Blue Star Families may provide a copy and allow you to dispute it in compliance with law.
- Current volunteers may be re-screened if permitted by law.

  Example: A volunteer supporting youth activities at a base library must pass a background check to protect children and families.

Equal Opportunity & Anti-Discrimination Policy

This policy applies to all volunteer recruitment, selection, placement, training, and termination of volunteer roles.

Blue Star Families prohibits discrimination and harassment based on:

- Race, color, or national origin
- Religion or creed
- Gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation
- Age (18+)
- Disability (physical or mental)
- Genetic information
- Marital or military status
- Any other protected category under federal, state, or local law

Prohibited Conduct

- **Discrimination:** Unfavorable treatment in assignments, opportunities, or program access based on protected characteristics.
- **Harassment:** Unwelcome conduct (verbal, written, or physical) that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.
- **Retaliation:** Adverse actions against individuals who report discrimination or participate in investigations.

Reporting & Investigation Process

- **How to Report:** Submit complaints to the Volunteer Relations Team.
- **Investigation:** Blue Star Families will promptly, thoroughly, and confidentially review all claims. Volunteers must cooperate fully.
- **Outcomes:** If a violation is found, corrective action may include reassignment, suspension, or termination of volunteer status.

Volunteer Conduct & Ethics

Code of Conduct
Volunteers must uphold the highest ethical standards, including:

Volunteers must uphold the highest ethical standards, including:

- **Integrity:** Avoid conflicts of interest to include but not limited to using Blue Star Families resources for personal or financial gain. Volunteers must avoid activities, relationships, and situations that may cause their outside interests to interfere with Blue Star Families interests or the volunteer duties.
- **Confidentiality:** Protect sensitive data to include but not limited to member records, donor info, internal communications, email addresses and phone numbers.
- **Professionalism:** Treat staff, fellow volunteers, and community members with respect. Unprofessional behavior may include bullying, workplace violence, harassment, discrimination and retaliation

  Example: If you hear a caregiver share something deeply personal during an event, that story stays private unless they give explicit consent to share.

Social Media Conduct

- Volunteers are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful, lawful, and responsible manner at all times — including on social media and outside of volunteer activities. Behavior, online or offline, that is discriminatory, harassing, harmful, or otherwise inconsistent with Blue Star Families' mission and values may result in the volunteer being asked to stop volunteering.
- Blue Star Families may review publicly available social media or other conduct when it could affect the organization's reputation, safety, or operations. If a volunteer's actions create harm, conflict, or risk for the organization or community, Blue Star Families reserves the right to end the volunteer relationship at any time.

Prohibited Behaviors

- **Minor Violations** (may result in corrective action):
  - Unexcused absences or chronic tardiness
  - Inappropriate use of Blue Star Families technology or social media
  - Failure to follow safety protocols
- **Major Violations** (may result in dismissal):
  - Discrimination, harassment, or retaliation
  - Theft, fraud, or misuse of Blue Star Families assets
  - Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information
  - Falsifying records or misrepresenting Blue Star Families
  - Possession of weapons on Blue Star Families property or events
  - Failure to report hazards, injuries, or unsafe conditions

Disciplinary Process

- Verbal Warning – for first-time minor violations.
- Written Warning – documented expectations for improvement.
- Suspension/Termination – for repeated violations or major misconduct.
  Note: Blue Star Families reserves the right to skip steps depending on severity.

Safety & Workplace Conduct

Drug-Free Workplace

Blue Star Families's drug and alcohol policy applies to all volunteers. Drugs and alcohol are serious threats to Blue Star Families operations and success. Volunteers are prohibited from consuming, possessing, selling or purchasing illegal drugs at any time on Blue Star Families property or while

engaged in Blue Star Families activities. Alcohol/drug use is prohibited while representing Blue Star Families. Prescription medication is allowed but must not impair ability to serve safely.

A drug is considered illegal if it is illegal to possess or obtain or is legal to possess but has been obtained illegally, such as possessing prescription drugs without a valid prescription. This policy does not prohibit volunteers from lawfully possessing and using prescribed drugs. However, volunteers with valid prescription drugs are prohibited from abusing such drugs by consuming them in excess of the prescribed amounts or from consuming prescribed drugs that impair their ability to safely perform their duties. Blue Star Families reserves the right to require volunteers taking prescribed drugs to produce proof that they possess valid prescriptions. Consult a doctor if you are unsure as to the potential effects of any prescribed drugs you take. You are responsible for notifying your manager if any prescribed drugs you take may impair your ability to work safely or perform your duties effectively.

Weapons Policy

Volunteers may not possess weapons on Blue Star Families premises or during Blue Star Families events. Volunteers are expected to adhere to all local, state, and federal guidelines as it relates to the possession of weapons and firearms.

Operational & Workplace Security

Security remains a high priority for Blue Star Families, particularly as it relates to operational and workplace security. Operation Security, or OPSEC, is a process that identifies, analyzes, and protects critical information about an organization's activities from adversaries. It involves identifying vulnerabilities, assessing risks, and implementing countermeasures to prevent the compromise of sensitive information. OPSEC aims to deny adversaries the ability to use publicly available information to understand an organization's plans, capabilities, or intentions. When working with the military community, Blue Star Families volunteers may have access to military members, their families, DoD facilities or other sensitive information. Volunteers will regularly operate in positions of trust and should behave accordingly to ensure there are no violations of Blue Star Families or federal policies, guidelines, or regulations. Workplace security involves measures to protect volunteers, employees, assets, and information from both physical and digital threats. It combines physical security (badges, keycards, security systems, etc), information security, and workforce safety protocols. Effective workplace security is crucial for creating a safe environment, boosting productivity, and safeguarding Blue Star Families' reputation and financial well-being. Volunteers are required to immediately report any security concerns to their immediate supervisor.

> **Example:** If you know the date of a deployment farewell event, you do not share it publicly.

Operational Guidelines

Technology & Social Media

- Blue Star Families email and systems are for official use only.
- All email accounts and files are Blue Star Families property. They may be accessed, monitored, and disclosed if necessary.
- Volunteers may not use Blue Star Families systems to:
    - Transmit unauthorized confidential, proprietary, or sensitive information
    - Send documents in violation of law
    - Solicit for political causes or chain letters
    - Transmit offensive, harassing, or obscene content
    - Misrepresent Blue Star Families or disguise identity
    - Share copyrighted materials without authorization

Emails & Communication
Volunteers should respond within 24–48 hours and use a professional kind tone.

Dress Code

- Business casual or role-specific attire is expected (such as event T-shirts). Safety requirements apply when necessary.
- Neat, professional appearance required in all Blue Star Families business, in person or virtual.

Attendance

- Volunteers are expected to honor commitments.
- Notify supervisors of scheduling conflicts.
- Chronic absenteeism may result in reassignment.

Recognition & Separation

Awards
Blue Star Families is dedicated to recognizing the invaluable service volunteers provide. You may qualify for annual service awards or spot recognition.

> **Example**: A volunteer photographer's images may be featured in Blue Star Families's annual report, recognizing their impact.

Leaving Blue Star Families

Blue Star Families reserves the right to dismiss individuals from its active volunteer roster at any time, with or without cause or notice. Volunteers are asked to notify their supervisor if they intend to voluntarily separate from the active volunteer roster. A volunteer who regularly misses shifts, scheduled events, etc. may result in removal from the active volunteer roster. Any Blue Star Families property in the volunteer's possession at time of separation must be returned. Examples of potential property that may require return include but are not limited to: IT equipment, office supplies, business documents, telephones, identification badges and keys. Volunteers may also be asked to participate in an exit interview.

Even after your formal volunteer role ends, you're always part of the Blue Star Families family. Alumni volunteers are invited to stay connected through our newsletters, social media, and events.

Questions/Comments:

Any questions or recommendations pertaining to this handbook may be directed to Volunteer@BlueStarFam.org.



Blue Star Families

bluestarfam.org