**Meal Volunteer Handbook**

**First Light, Inc.**

**2230 Fourth Avenue North**

**Birmingham, AL 35203**

**205-323-4277**

[**www.firstlightshelter.org**](http://www.firstlightshelter.org)

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**First Light Volunteer Handbook (June 2018 update)**

**I. Organizational Background**

**A. Mission**

First Light’s Mission is to work with **homeless women and their children** to create hospitality in a safe and nurturing community, to encourage them to find hope, to seek opportunity, and to grow spiritually, thereby achieving their full potential.

**B. History**

First Light began in the basement of First Presbyterian Church in 1983 as an emergency night shelter operated solely by volunteers. The basement shelter accommodated 15 women and children, but would sometimes provide safety to over 40 women and children. It was soon evident that more space and services were required for the homeless women and children in Birmingham. First Light was incorporated in 1998 and a capital campaign began to renovate the old Granada Hotel, which was located just two blocks away from the church and had recently burned. The old hotel was renovated to accommodate more women and children, to provide space for social services and day programs, and to have living space for permanent residents who were unlikely to live independently again. First Light is a 501(c)3 nonprofit.

**C. Programs**

**Emergency Shelter**
The First Light emergency shelter is a dorm-like setting which offers a bed, locker and bathroom and laundry facilities for 36 women and one family on any given night. An overnight volunteer is available to distribute hygiene products and to simply be present to women who are in crisis. Every guest in the emergency shelter has a Social Worker, employed by First Light, who assesses her situation and helps her come up with a plan and access community resources. First Light is NOT a domestic violence shelter. We do not accept women who are seeking safety from a dangerous partner.

**Overflow Emergency Shelter**
On cold nights, on rainy nights, on weekends, where does a woman go when all shelters, including First Light’s emergency shelter, are full? The overflow emergency shelter was born from necessity. We now provide mats, pillows and clean linens for up to 15 women and children nightly. Our overflow Social Worker’s first goal is to get these women and children off of the floor- whether into a bed in our emergency shelter or at another shelter.

**Supportive Housing Programs**
*Permanent Supportive Housing*
First Light’s fourth floor is home to nine women with severe mental illness who are unlikely to successfully live independently.

*Bessemer HUD Permanent Supportive Housing Program*
Ten chronically homeless women have been housed in apartments in Bessemer, Alabama through this program. They are provided with intensive support from the Permanent Supportive Housing Social Worker.

*Shelter Plus Care Permanent Supportive Housing Program*
Shelter Plus Care is a collaboration between First Light and the Jefferson County Housing Authority through which housing and supportive care is provided to women who are homeless due to a disabling condition, such as mental illness, past substance abuse or HIV/AIDS. They are provided with intensive support from our Shelter Plus Care Social Worker.

*HUD East Permanent Supportive Housing Program*

Eight chronically homeless women will be housed in apartments in Birmingham through this program. They are provided with intensive support from the Permanent Supportive Housing Social Worker.

*First Light Transitional Housing for Women in Crisis*

Through a collaboration with the YWCA, up to 12 women will be housed and receive supportive social services from First Light over the next 3 years. These women will have become homeless due to domestic violence, and one the goals for the program is independence.

*Noah’s Ark Permanent Supportive Housing*

For up to 15 shelter guests who have disabling conditions (diabetes, addictions, mental illness, HIV, other physical illnesses) Intensive supportive care and payment of rent is provided.

*Forever Home*

A locally funded transitional/rapid housing program designed to assist women with children who do NOT have criteria such as disabling conditions, etc., and can quickly rebound if given temporary assistance.

**Project Healthy Minds**
This is a comprehensive program, which addresses the overall health and well-being of all of our guests. It includes group and individual counseling sessions, assistance with securing diagnoses and medications, and transportation assistance when necessary.

**Day Programs**
This category entails the numerous activities offered to First Light guests by outside volunteers. They range from makeovers to Bible Studies to field trips to arts and crafts projects to movie parties.

**D. Funding of the Agency**

First Light operates all of these programs thanks to the generosity of the community in the form of donations from individuals, churches, businesses, civic groups and private foundations. We also are the recipients of grants from private foundations, corporate foundations and the local and federal government. Lastly, we conduct 3 special events per year to raise a significant portion of our income:

**The gala is our major fundraiser**, held in April or May of each year, and is designed to provide a meaningful evening of entertainment and updates about the good work done at First Light.

 **Holiday Lights** is a fundraiser that begins each November. Through this program people or businesses make contributions to First Light in memory or in honor of loved ones or business associates. First Light then sends a hand-addressed holiday greeting card to the person being honored notifying them of the gift given. This provides our supporters with a meaningful way to give a gift during the special holiday season while supporting their favorite nonprofit!

Annual reports can be found on our website at <http://www.firstlightshelter.org/news_resources/annual_reports.html>.

**E. Organizational Chart**

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**F. Board of Directors 2016-2017**

Our board of directors governs the agency’s policies and fiscal responsibility. The board includes the following members:

James C. Phillips, President Accenture

Staci M. Pierce Action Resources, Inc.

Ben Greer, Treasurer Protective Life

Elizabeth Tucker, Secretary Community Volunteer

Cindy Coyle ArchitectureWorks

Cary Lott Iron Mountain INsurance

Marva J. May Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

Lisa Moose SunGard iWorks Healthcare

Heather Nelms ProAssurance

Dawn D. Rock J.D., CHC, CHPC Healthsouth Corporation

Dorothy Sanders Community Volunteer

Darri Scott Community Volunteer

Emma Taylor Community Volunteer

Erol Wallace RSM US, LLP

Chris Kyle, *Ex Officio* National Bank of Commerce

Rev. Catherine Oliver, *Ex Officio* Associate Pastor, First Presbyterian Church

**II. Volunteer Program**

**A. What Volunteers Do**

A volunteer is someone who gives time, effort or talent to a need or cause without profiting monetarily. They contribute to the mission of this agency with no expectation of reimbursement. Volunteers fill all kinds of roles at First Light. They:

- bring and serve breakfast and dinner

- stay overnight in the emergency shelter

- conduct fun group activities

- teach important topics like how to fill out a job application

- conduct Bible Study classes or chapel services

- serve on special event committees or volunteer at fundraisers

- provide services like haircuts, manicures, facials and chair massages

- do deep cleaning in the shelter or on the courtyard

- assist with or teach an art class

- serve on the board of directors

- assist ladies who are moving into their own apartments

- mentor ladies who are in our permanent housing programs

- create short, informal videos used to promote First Light

- offer graphic design or marketing skills and expertise

- teach healthy cooking classes to our permanent housing residents

- play music or put on a concert for the ladies

- run supply drives in the community to meet the basic needs of our guests (like toothpaste!)

- provide photography services at special events

No matter what role volunteers are playing at First Light, we can assure you that it matters greatly! During our last fiscal year, our volunteers logged just under 10,000 hours! According to Independent Sector, a volunteer hour in Alabama is valued at $17.70, meaning that the financial impact of volunteer hours at First Light last year reached over $175,000!

**B. Becoming a Volunteer**

Volunteering at First Light is a deeply personal, rewarding experience. For the right people, it can also be incredibly fulfilling. For this reason combined with the generosity and philanthropic nature of our community, we are abundantly blessed with volunteers. As such, it is impossible to place every person or group that expresses a desire to volunteer. While every effort will be made to accommodate the schedule, desired activities and needs of those interested in volunteering, there are times when this will not be possible. There are also situations where there is not a good fit between the individual wishing to volunteer and the agency’s current needs.

**Recruitment:** In general, no recruitment is done by our staff beyond having volunteer program information on the agency website. Occasionally staff will attend community service fairs for populations greatly unrepresented among our supporters or when seeking volunteers for specific programs.

**Application and Screening:** Individuals wishing to volunteer at First Light should fill out a volunteer application in person, via email or online at <http://www.firstlightshelter.org/volunteer/apply.html>. All applications will be reviewed and kept on file. Personal information will be treated with privacy and not shared with third parties or sold. Upon receipt, the Volunteer Manager will determine if an in-person meeting is appropriate. **The factors used to determine whether someone is a good fit to volunteer at First Light include their suitability and ability to complete the training and assigned task, and the need for that task to be completed during the available times and dates given by the volunteer.** We reserve the right to require a background and reference check for people wishing to volunteer with children or who will be largely unsupervised while volunteering.

**Orientation and Training:** Individuals who become volunteers will receive a thorough orientation to the agency and the training necessary to complete their assigned tasks.

**C. Volunteer Guidelines**

1. A volunteer’s conduct should always portray the mission of First Light. Guests, residents, staff and other volunteers should be treated with kindness, respect and dignity at all times. Guests are expected to treat volunteers, staff and other guests with the same kindness, respect and dignity.

2. Volunteers should respect the privacy and confidentiality of all First Light guests at all times. Names and identifying information about guests should never be shared with anyone other than First Light staff. This is extremely important.

3. Any volunteer who does not show up for 2 or more scheduled volunteer opportunities within a 6-month period of time will be dismissed from volunteering at First Light. At the time of dismissal, the future volunteer schedule of the volunteer dismissed will be cancelled.

4. Personal relationships inside or outside of First Light between First Light guests and volunteers are not appropriate. First Light volunteers should maintain a professional relationship and appropriate boundaries with guests at all times.

5. Volunteers who anticipate arriving late or being unable to report for their scheduled volunteer service should notify the Director of Volunteers or another on-duty staff person as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made. (If after business hours or on weekends call the shelter!)

6. Volunteers must never enter into the role of counselor or social worker with First Light guests. First Light is fortunate to have a wonderful team of social workers who are very knowledgeable of and attentive to the guests’ individual situations, needs and the community’s available resources.

7. Volunteers may not give money or items such as clothing, shoes, toiletries, etc. to First Light guests. If a guest expresses a need for such items and you wish to assist her with those needs, you may contact her social worker and get approval to do so, indirectly. Otherwise, donations should be made to First Light for staff to distribute as needed.

8. All volunteers are asked to schedule their volunteer service through the Director of Volunteers.

9. Volunteers may only come to First Light when scheduled to perform a specific task or duty previously scheduled through the Volunteer Director. Volunteers should not come to First Light to “hang out,” chat with the guests or visit the guests without having a specific task to do.

10. Please do not take photographs of First Light guests without their prior written consent. Photo release forms can be gotten at the front desk and should be turned back into the front desk when completed.

11. Please do not attempt to sell or promote any products or services to First Light guests. Financial benefit of any kind should not be obtained by volunteering at First Light.

12. Volunteers should dress appropriately for their task. We also ask that volunteers not wear attire that may be considered vulgar, offensive, or overly revealing.

13. Due to the nature of the work done at First Light, volunteers will often not be supervised by staff members, although a staff member will always be available to support the volunteer, answer questions and help solve problems.

14. Staff members take precautions to provide a safe environment for our guests and volunteers. If an unsafe situation is noticed, please take the proper procedures to protect yourself and your belongings and notify staff immediately. While you are here, use good judgment in protecting yourself, your belongings and First Light property. If you bring your children to volunteer with you, please keep them with you at all times. A staff member should be notified immediately in the case of a medical emergency, a guest expressing the desire to hurt themselves or someone else, or in the case of suspected child abuse or neglect.

15. While First Light relies on volunteers to advocate for the homeless and for the agency, it is important that volunteers obtain prior approval from First Light to represent the agency to the media or through specific fundraising events. Please contact the Development Director if you wish to do a fundraiser for First Light.

16. Life skills classes, individual therapy sessions and group therapy sessions conducted at First Light are private and closed to visitors. No one may enter these confidential meetings without prior consent from the Director of Social Services.

17. Harassment of any kind is not tolerated at First Light. Guests, staff, volunteers and visitors are all held to this standard. Harassment of any kind should be reported to a full-time staff person as soon as possible. Volunteers who harass staff members or guests will be dismissed from their volunteer service.

18. Expenses incurred during volunteer service are largely unreimbursed by the agency. In some select cases, expenses incurred while volunteering may be reimbursed when there is a prior agreement with the Executive Director. Please consult the IRS code or your tax professional with questions about the deductibility of in-kind donations and expenses incurred while volunteering. In-kind donation forms are always available at the front desk or to be mailed to donors upon request.

19.If you wish to eat breakfast or dinner with the ladies when you are here to volunteer, please only do so AFTER all of the women and children have been served and when the meal volunteers do not mind. Please be respectful of the fact that the meal volunteers purchase the meal and may also wish to eat after serving all of the guests.

20. Volunteers who possess skills needed on our board of directors may be nominated to serve on the Board of Directors. Volunteers who possess skills necessary for conducting a fundraiser may be asked to serve on a special event committee. At this time, these are the only opportunities for advancement available, although volunteers are welcome to move in and out of different volunteer roles as they desire.

21. We appreciate every single one of our volunteers! However, it isn’t possible to formally recognize them all. Factors considered when choosing the individuals or groups to be honored as Volunteer of the Year include: exceptional service, going above and beyond in service, overcoming personal obstacles to volunteer, length of service, total hours served, adherence to First Light’s volunteer guidelines, and attitude toward and treatment of our guests. Anyone can nominate a volunteer for recognition by contacting the Director of Volunteers.

22. Former First Light guests may volunteer at First Light after having been gone from First Light for at least one year AND with the permission of the Director of Social Services. Previous First Light guests who wish to volunteer must disclose their previous stay at First Light to the Director of Volunteers before scheduling volunteer service so that appropriate training can be given.

23.We are committed to providing the most meaningful, fulfilling, and pleasant volunteer experiences possible. In order to do this, we need your help! We need for you to tell us what went well, what didn’t go well, what you were not prepared for, what happened that you didn’t expect, what was incredible and what you think needs to change! Orientation and training are only the beginning of learning about First Light and about volunteering with these special women- volunteers should be responsible for reading emails from First Light regarding changes and improvements.

24. At any time during the screening, placement, orientation, training or volunteering process either the volunteer or the agency can end the relationship. Reasonable notice should be given upon the ending of the relationship.

25. Staff will keep track of your information and volunteer hours in a secure, online database called Cool Focus. We never share or sell your information and respect your privacy. Please record your volunteer hours on the provided volunteer sign-in sheets.

**Dinner Volunteer Guide**

We understand that you might not regularly prepare and serve a meal to 60-70 people, and might need guidance. Below is some information that you might find useful, but always feel free to ask questions.

1. Prepare enough food to feed 70 women. You are more than welcome to cook in First Light’s large kitchen or to prepare the food before arriving. We have a conventional oven, a convection oven which cooks at a faster rate than a normal oven (located to the right of the pizza oven), a gas stovetop, a pizza oven and a small griddle. We also have large skillets and pots, serving utensils, basic spices, large cookie sheets and plastic wrap and foil for leftovers. Bringing extra appliances to be used in the kitchen trips the breakers- this results in none of the appliances working!

2. It only takes about 3-6 volunteers to prepare and serve a dinner at First Light, depending on the menu. Due to space restrictions, we cannot have more than 10-15 people in our kitchen at a time. Due to space restrictions in the dining area and the large number of women and children we are serving, we cannot have large numbers of volunteers out in the dining area at a time. Please respect these limitations, for the sake of our guest’s comfort and safety.

3. Please be ready to serve dinner by 6:30pm. Call 323-4277 and tell a First Light employee if you are going to be late, cannot come or will not be staying to serve.

\*note: The routine we keep at First Light is extremely important. When dinner is served late, the rest of the evening follows suit. We understand last-minute emergencies, but if it is at all possible, please arrive and serve promptly.

4. Meal ideas: sandwiches and soup, taco salad, hot dogs with all the trimmings, cold cut/cheese/raw veggie/ fruit trays, meat and three veggies, spaghetti or lasagna with salad and bread. Fruits and vegetables are greatly appreciated, as we all need them and sometimes have vegetarian guests.

5. What is provided and what should I bring with me? You do not have to bring drinks for the meal. However, if you do not bring drinks, please let the shelter assistant know when you arrive so that she can make drinks or help you make them. Paper goods are provided by First Light, although it is extremely helpful to our budget when groups are able to bring enough paper goods for the meal they are serving! We often have basic condiments, but not always. If you would rather use what we have, you may call a day in advance to find out if we have the condiment you will need for the meal.

**A note about the plates:** if you wish to being recyclable paper products for your meal, you are welcome to do so. To avoids spills, be sure to bring a paper plate weight that is appropriate for the meal you are providing. After a cost analysis, First Light decided to provide Styrofoam plates because (a) they are less expensive than paper and (b) using regular hard plates (you will notice them in the cupboards) requires extra service, time, supplies and water to use the dishwasher every night.

6. If there is no place to park close to the entrance, please come in and tell the front desk staff. If there is any employee parked close to the door, they will move their car for you to park in their place. If no close parking place can be found, staff will be glad to help you bring in the food and walk you to your car after serving.

7. Please sign in and out in the volunteer sign-in binder located in the kitchen next to the ice machine. Name, time in, time out and signature are required for First Light to receive a match for your volunteer hours.

8. Please notify the front desk staff when you are ready to serve. They will then begin calling for the ladies to line up according to bed number (so that families with children and those with physical disabilities do not have to stand in line.)

9. Please do not pre-serve the ladies’ plates. They will tell you which dishes they would like and then the servers can determine the portion size (to make sure that you all don’t run out of the favorite dish!)

10. Leftovers that you wish to leave at First Light may be covered tightly, labeled with the date and placed in the walk-in cooler.

11. Please refrain from fixing our guests “to-go” plates, even if they say they didn’t have time to eat dinner because they were at work or say that they have a medical condition requiring them to eat every couple of hours. Unfortunately, we cannot allow the ladies to take food to the second floor. However, when the guests make us aware of special circumstances, we make sure their needs are taken care of.

12. If you could leave the kitchen like you found it (which is hopefully clean), we would be forever grateful! Doing the following is appreciated: placing leftovers you wish to leave in the cooler, wiping down the counters, washing and putting away utensils/pots/pans that were used, and sweeping or wiping up spills on the floor. THANK YOU!

**THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND EFFORT! If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Director of Volunteer Services at 323-4277 or by email at volunteer@firstlightshelter.org.**

**Please do not email or leave a message on Deb’s phone if there is a problem with arriving on time or there is some crisis with the meal—call the shelter and tell the front desk.**

**Dinner Volunteer Checklist**

For those of you who like instructions and steps, below you will find some helpful steps to serving dinner at First Light. Feel free to ask a staff person if you have questions not answered here, or if you need assistance with anything! Thank you so much for serving our ladies!

□ Before using the oven or stove, please turn on the hood vent (gray and red switches must be ON). The vent switches are located above the convection oven.

□ If you did not bring drinks, you may prepare a few pitchers of Kool-aid and ice water- or you may ask a Shelter Assistant to do this.

□ Drinks, cups and a cooler of ice will go on the drink cart and should be rolled out into the dining area just before dinner is served. The ladies will serve themselves the drinks.

□ Dinnertime is 6:30pm. When you are ready to serve, please tell the person at the front desk. They will then page the ladies to line up in a certain order, to decrease chaos and confusion.

□ Please allow the guests to tell you which dishes they would like on their plate. Some might not want meat, some might not want bread, etc. You control the portion sizes, so you can make sure not to run out of the favorite dish!

□ Before serving seconds to anyone, please verify with a staff person that all ladies have been called for firsts. Using the phone on the sign-in table, pick up and dial 0 to speak to a staff member.

**□** Please make sure the ovens and vent are turned off before leaving.

**□** We would greatly appreciate your group doing the following before leaving: wash, dry and put away any utensils and dishes used; wrap, date and place leftovers in the refrigerator; wipe down counters; and wipe up any spills on the floor. Our wonderful staff will take care of the rest before they leave at 8pm.

□ We hope that your experience at First Light was rewarding and enjoyable! Any comments or suggestions about your experience can be sent to the Director of Volunteers at volunteer@firstlightshelter.org, or you may leave a note at the front desk.

**Breakfast Volunteer Information**

**What do breakfast volunteers do?**

Breakfast volunteers bring, prepare and serve the meal for our guests.

**How do I schedule to bring and serve breakfast?**

Contact the director of Volunteers to schedule to bring breakfast. 323-4277 volunteer@firstlightshelter.org

**What time is breakfast served?**

Breakfast is served at 6:30am Monday-Friday and at 7:30am on Saturday and Sunday. Breakfast is served for approximately an hour. First Light strives daily to provide a stable, routine environment for guests. Therefore, it is very important for meals to be served at the designated time.

You are welcome to arrive early in order to prepare to serve breakfast. However, please try to minimize the amount of noise you make before 6am during the week and before 7am on the weekend. Guests in the emergency overflow shelter sleep on mats in the dining room and can hear everything being done in the kitchen!

**How many people should I prepare for?**

70 adults. Even if there are less than 70 guests, those here will eat enough for 70 people!

**How many people does it take to serve breakfast?**

Depending on the meal being served, as few as one person and as many as 5 may be required. If pastries and fresh fruit are brought for breakfast, the food may be set out for self-service and one volunteer is all that is required. If a hot breakfast with several dishes is prepared, more servers may be required.

We are committed to your safety and to a positive volunteer experience for everyone-please limit the number of volunteers to a **maximum** of 10-15 **total**.

**Can children come and help serve?**

Children are welcome to volunteer at First Light when accompanied by a responsible adult. Please **closely supervise** all children in our kitchen. The kitchen contains a lot of equipment that can be very dangerous to unsupervised children. Please don’t allow them to play in the walk-in cooler.

**Are men allowed to come serve breakfast?**

Men are welcome to volunteer at First Light when accompanied by an adult female.

**Exactly what am I responsible for bringing?**

Breakfast volunteers are responsible for bringing the food for the meal and any necessary condiments. First Light has milk, coffee, cream, sugar, butter, jelly and napkins that you may use. On occasion we will also have honey, syrup or other breakfast items. Please feel free to use anything in the kitchen that is not specifically marked for use on another day.

First Light has silverware and reusable hard plastic cups, plates and bowls if you wish to use them. If you wish to use disposable dinnerware, you may bring your own or use what is in the kitchen (disposable dinnerware is usually available).

**What types of food should I bring?**

You may bring any type of food you wish. Some popular choices include: pastries, fresh fruit, biscuits, eggs, sausage, bacon, breakfast casseroles, quiche` and muffins. The guests will enjoy and appreciate anything you bring!

**Can I cook there or should I bring everything prepared?**

Most groups bring the food already prepared because doing so decreases the time it takes to clean the kitchen after breakfast. However, you are welcome to cook in the kitchen at First Light.

First Light has a commercial-type kitchen including a convection oven, pizza oven, conventional oven, gas stove, a griddle and a microwave. BEFORE USING ANY APPLIANCE IN THE KITCHEN, YOU **MUST** TURN ON THE HOOD VENT! There are two switches located on the vent above the convection oven. BOTH of them must be turned on before operating any appliance in the kitchen. If you have questions or difficulty, please notify the staff person at the front desk.

Please do not bring extra appliances into the kitchen. Plugging in and using extra appliances will trip the breakers and then none of the appliances will work.

**What supplies does First Light have in the kitchen?**

Pots, pans, skillets, plastic containers for storage, serving utensils, spices, serving trays, a large electric can-opener and knives.

**What should be done with leftovers?**

Leftovers may be wrapped or covered tightly, marked with the date and left in the walk-in cooler. They will be used the next morning or sent to the 4th floor permanent residents for the next day.

**Can I bring gifts for the guests?**

You may bring gifts to hand out to the guests as long as you bring enough for everyone. Please check with the Volunteer Manager prior to your scheduled volunteer date for an accurate count. We ask that you please refrain from giving the guests money, candles or anything made of glass.

**Can I talk to the guests?**

Absolutely! We only ask that you not give advice, counsel the guests, disclose information about other guests or become personally involved with any of the guests. We also ask that you not take pictures of the women and children. Of course you are welcome to photograph your volunteer group serving.

**May I serve breakfast earlier than the designated time if I am ready?**

It is usually ok to serve a little early, but please ask the front desk staff person if it is alright before doing so.

**Please contact the Director of Volunteers to schedule a date to bring breakfast!**

**Email: volunteer@firstlightshelter.org**

**Phone: 323-4277**

**Please do not email or leave a message on Deb’s phone if there is a problem arriving on time or a crisis occurs at the last minute—call the shelter and tell whoever answers the phone.**

**Releases and Agreement**

I have read and/or have been verbally taught and understand the volunteer guidelines of First Light, Inc. I agree to abide by these guidelines as a First Light volunteer.

Date: Signature:

Photo release:

I consent to and authorize the use and reproduction by First Light, Inc. of any and all photographs and other audio-visual materials taken of me for promotional material, educational activities, and exhibitions or for any other use for the benefit of the program.

Date: Signature: