



# FLORIDA RIGHTS RESTORATION COALITION

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## HOSTING A RIGHTS RESTORATION WORKSHOP

Rights Restoration Workshops are community events where individuals can obtain restoration of civil rights (RCR) assistance.

The nature of the assistance provided to each Applicant will vary depending on the Applicant's needs; assistance is individualized. Volunteers and the Applicants themselves have a wide range of discretion in deciding how to handle the application process. However, the following steps list the basic procedures for hosting a Rights Restoration Workshop.

***Volunteers at Rights Restoration Workshops do not give legal advice.*** The assistance provided at RCR workshops is not legal advice. Volunteers are expected to keep information about Applicants confidential and to create appropriate records so that Host Organization or Voting Rights Project (VRP) staff can provide on-going assistance after the workshop. Designated Workshop Leaders (and volunteer attorneys, if available) will act as resources to the RCR Volunteers and Applicants.

### WHAT DOES A RIGHTS RESTORATION WORKSHOP LOOK LIKE?

Most workshops consist of a one hour volunteer training (preceding the official start of the workshop), followed by two to four hours during which people can walk in and receive direct, individual assistance with their restoration of civil rights applications.

Workshops can have an optional program of inspirational/informational speakers at the beginning. If there is a program of speakers, then the workshop becomes less of a "drop in" event and more of an event that has an actual start time and end time. If you choose the latter format, people will generally show up all at once, and so more volunteers may be required. If there is a large turn-out, you may want to have a separate "Intake" process. General informational materials can be provided on a resource table, and/or a job fair can be conducted through which employers can set up tables to speak with people about job opportunities. Refreshments, while optional, definitely help to "fuel" volunteers and to ease the Applicants' wait.

Workshops should not be scheduled for longer than four hours.

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*The information contained herein is intended for educational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. FORM V-1 – Hosting a Workshop- 03/18/09*

*Prepared by the ACLU Foundation of Florida for the FRRC*

## ORGANIZING THE WORKSHOP

Workshops are relatively easy to organize. They just take time and a few committed people. Key workshop materials, such as the application, training materials for the volunteers, and other information, are available from the ACLU of Florida Voting Rights Project (VRP) staff.

The ACLU of Florida VRP staff also has templates for flyers, press releases, PSA's, etc. that can be customized for your event. The VRP staff can help you put together these press materials and provide you with suggestions on how to distribute them. However, getting the word out is ultimately the responsibility of those who are organizing the workshop in their local community.

Several steps that will help you achieve a successful event are as follows:

**1. Assemble a group of people/organizations that are interested in planning an event to help people apply for restoration of their civil and voting rights.**

- Contact local **non-partisan** organizations and officials in your area to find out who is interested. Contact local affiliates of Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRC) member organizations. Visit [www.restorerights.org/about\\_us](http://www.restorerights.org/about_us) for a list of FRRC members. Also consider thinking “outside the box” by contacting organizations such as chambers of commerce, city governments, and the like. If you have a supportive state legislator in your area, be sure to contact him or her as well. And don't forget to ask your local churches. In general, the more co-sponsors the better.
- Please be aware that if you are hosting a Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRC) workshop, only non-partisan organizations should be official co-sponsors of the event. Partisan organizations can help by spreading the word through their own networks, but they should not officially co-sponsor. Individuals with partisan affiliations are welcome to participate in the planning – no problem there!
- If you live in an area where there are few active organizations, don't worry! A group of community activists can also host an event like this.

**2. Arrange for the planning committee to meet regularly in person or by conference call, preferably weekly, until the workshop takes place.**

### 3. Decide what type of workshop you'd like to host.

Ideally, this decision should be made at the first meeting of the planning committee.

You can sponsor a straightforward rights restoration workshop at which volunteers assist persons with felony convictions in filling out the application for restoration of their civil rights. Or you combine that assistance with additional help in other areas. For example:

- **Job Fair.** You may want to combine the rights restoration workshop with a job fair. Agencies that provide employment assistance and local employers and employment agencies that are willing to accept applicants with past felonies can set up tables and offer employment information.
- **Seal & Expungement Assistance.** Your local office of Public Defender and state attorney's office can provide assistance with the application for sealing and expunging records (a separate process from the application for restoration of civil rights) to those who qualify. Please be aware that providing assistance with seal and expunge should be undertaken only if BOTH the public defender's office and the state attorney's office are involved, and only if the public defender is able to check EVERY person's record individually prior to providing any assistance.

Adding a job fair or providing assistance with seal and expunge will greatly increase your attendance at the workshop. However, they will also increase the work that the planning committee has to do.

### 4. Set a date for your event.

Again, this is a decision that should be made at the first meeting of your planning committee. Ideally, the planning committee will establish a regular date and location for on-going workshops.

If possible, allow at least 90 days between the first planning meeting and the date of your first event. Events can be planned more quickly, but 90 days should ensure that you have enough time to develop your plans, get the necessary training, and most importantly, spread the word to as many people as possible.

Once your planning committee has hosted one or two workshops, it will take less time to plan each one. Also, if you have a regularly scheduled and publicized workshop date and location, you may not need to do extensive publicity for each one.

Workshops are best held either on a Saturday or on a weekday evening. Wednesday evening should generally be avoided since many people will be at church-related events. Avoid scheduling your workshop close to a holiday, and be aware of traffic issues – i.e., if you hold

a workshop at 5:00 p.m. in a congested area, it will probably start late and your volunteers may be ready to go home while people are still arriving.

## **5. Find a venue for your event.**

Try to choose a location that is convenient and familiar to those you will be helping such as a community center or church. If people in your community rely on public transportation, try to choose a location that is accessible by bus. If people drive in your area, make sure there is plenty of free parking.

It is advantageous to choose a venue that has a copier that can be used DURING the workshop. (Phone and fax lines are required if seal and expungement assistance is provided because the Public Defenders office must pull each person's record).

## **6. Start recruiting volunteers for your event.**

Try to recruit a minimum of one RCR Volunteer per ten expected Applicants. You may also need additional volunteers to help with set-up on the day of the workshop. Ask each organization/individual on the planning committee to recruit volunteers. Give each person a date by which they should have a list of names and phone numbers.

Inform potential volunteers that they will be asked to volunteer for one day only. Training for volunteers providing RCR assistance (RCR Volunteers) may take place on the day of the workshop, one hour before the start of the workshop. Alternatively, a separate training session may be scheduled. If you want other volunteers to assist with set-up, arrange for them to arrive early, too.

## **7. Publicize Your Workshop.** Develop a strategy for spreading the word about your event. Getting the word out is the most important task you must undertake before the workshop.

- **Flyers. Approximately 3-4 weeks before the event, start distributing flyers.** Recruit volunteers to distribute flyers in key neighborhoods, in front of supermarkets, etc. Ask churches if they would be willing to make an announcement during church services, include a flyer in church bulletins, allow you to leave copies at the church for people to pick up.

Distribute flyers to representatives from community organizations, political groups or parties, churches, councils, organizations that specialize in helping ex-felons re-enter society, local supportive politicians, etc. You may also want to provide these community leaders with additional information about the issue of felony disfranchisement and NUMEROUS copies of flyers that they can distribute to their own groups. Maintain contact information for these community leaders so your planning committee can follow up with them later to see if word is getting out. If several people have e-mails, also create an e-mail version of the flyer and ask the organizational leaders to forward it to their own e-mail lists. This is particularly useful for recruiting volunteers.

**Note: You cannot rely solely on e-mail to generate attendance at your workshop. Many people do not have access to e-mail and will not get the word.**

- **Press Advisory.** Two weeks before the event, send out a press advisory to all media (ACLU of Florida VRP staff can provide you a template for the press advisory; we may also be able to provide you some media contacts in your area.)
    - After sending out the advisory, make follow up calls to all media in order to try to generate stories about the issue and coverage of the event.
    - **Immediately call any weekly newspapers.** Many weeklies have community calendars in which your workshop can be publicized, but the deadline for getting events into the community calendar is often two weeks in advance. Call weekly newspapers immediately after sending the advisory – at least two weeks before your event – so you are sure not to miss their publication deadlines.
  - **Radio PSA’s.** Effective outreach on the radio can significantly increase the turnout for your event. Call all popular radio stations and ask whether they would be willing to run a PSA, or have someone from your planning committee come in for a taped or live interview. (If you do not have anyone who is willing to do an interview, please contact the ACLU of Florida. We might be able to do it over the phone.) ACLU of Florida VRP staff can provide you a template for the PSA Announcement. **Request that the PSA or interview run during the morning drive time show on the two days preceding the event.**
8. **Designate one or more Workshop Leader and Confirm Volunteers.** During your Planning Committee meetings, and during the week just before the workshop:
- Confirm the attendance of the Volunteers, and confirm each Volunteer’s role at the workshop, for example: set up, sitting at welcome table, providing RCR assistance, etc.
  - Designate one or more Workshop Leader. The Workshop Leaders will:
    - i. Train the RCR volunteers during the hour prior to the workshop.
    - ii. Collect a signed Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement from each volunteer. These signed forms should be retained in the Host Organization’s files or forwarded to the ACLU of Florida Voting Rights Project so they can be retained in the Project’s files.
    - iii. Help RCR Volunteers who require additional assistance with an Applicant
    - iv. Collect and properly handle all original Applicant documents that Volunteers receive during the Workshop. See the box below: “Handling of Original Applicant Documents.”

- v. Collect and send to ACLU of Florida staff the Confidential Intake Form (original or copy). (This will allow the ACLU of Florida to add the Applicant to the FRRC Action Alert distribution list and/or contact the person to join in the restoration of civil rights campaign.)
- vi. Be generally available during the workshop to answer any questions that Volunteers and Applicants may have.

## AT THE WORKSHOP

### Arrive Early: Set-up and Train Volunteers

#### Set Up

Arrive approximately 2 hours before the Workshop to set-up:

- ❖ **Signage.** Post signs so Applicants can easily locate the workshop location.
- ❖ **Check-in Table.** Usually there is a check-in table at the front, from which each Applicant can be directed to a table to work with a RCR Volunteer (see below). If you are expecting a large turn-out, the Applicant can be greeted at the check-in table and then directed to an Intake Volunteer (see below).
- ❖ **RCR Volunteer Tables.** Set up tables where Intake Volunteers (if applicable) and RCR Volunteers can work with Applicants.
  - Place chairs on opposite sides of the table
  - Place the Applicant documents in an area that is accessible to the Intake Volunteers and RCR Volunteers. Also, have pens available at each table.
  - At each RCR Volunteer table, have an example of how the Applicant should fill out the section of the Data Worksheet authorizing inquiries on behalf of the Applicant. (See “Meeting with the RCR Volunteer” below).
- ❖ **Refreshments.** If you are providing refreshments for volunteers only, set up an area outside the workshop space.

## Train the RCR Volunteers

At least one hour before the workshop, conduct RCR Volunteer training. The training can be conducted by a Workshop Leader or another specially designated Volunteer Trainer.

Conduct the RCR Volunteer training by following the Workshop steps outlined in the *Volunteer Guide* (Form V-3):

- Provide Overview of the RCR Process. Refer to the *Florida Clemency Rules Summary* (Form V-4)
- Review the Volunteer Forms. Give each Volunteer:
  - *Confidentiality Form* (Form V-2)
  - *Volunteer Guide* (Form V-3)
  - *Florida Clemency Rules Summary* (Form V-4)
- Review the Applicant Forms
  - *Confidential Intake Form* (Form A-1)
  - *Restoration of Civil Rights Data Worksheet* (Form ADM 1501A)
  - *Florida Clemency Rules Summary* (Form A-2) (This is identical to Form V-4 above)
  - *After the Application... What Now?* (Form A-3)
  - *Restoration of Civil Rights Self-Preparation Guide – Assembling a Personal Portfolio & Preparing for the Hearing* (Form A-4)
  - *Form Letter Requesting Certificate of Rights Restoration* (Form A-5) (Note: this form letter is only used at Workshops where the Host Organization is able to access the Parole Commission Database of RCR Grants. See p. 12 below.)

**Make sure all Volunteers know who the Workshop Leaders are and that that the Workshop Leaders are available to provide assistance throughout the workshop.**

## **Step 1: Intake** **(Optional)**

If a large numbers of Applicants attend the Workshop, the Applicant should be greeted at the door and directed to an Intake Volunteer.

### **Follow the Intake Procedures set forth in the *Volunteer Guide* (Form V-3)**

If the Host Organization has access to the Parole Commission's database of individuals who have been granted RCR in Florida, the database search should be conducted during Intake. (See p. 12 for additional details.)

[In some counties, it is possible to look up the person's criminal record online. If this is possible, set up one or more of the computers at the Workshop with an Intake Volunteer who can look up the Applicant's record during Intake. The record can be printed out and given to the Applicant with his/her Intake Form. The Applicant should be instructed to provide the Intake Form and the print out to the RCR Volunteer. (*Note:* The online information may be out-of-date and may not provide the Applicant's entire criminal record.)]

## **Step 2: Meeting with the RCR Volunteer**

If a separate Intake process is used, the Applicant should be directed to an RCR Volunteer after completing his/her Intake Form. If there is not a separate Intake process, the Applicants should be greeted and directed to an RCR Volunteer.

### **Follow the RCR Volunteer Assistance Procedures set forth in the *Volunteer Guide* (Form V-3).**

The Office of Executive Clemency (OEC) permits Applicants to authorize third parties to contact the OEC regarding the Applicant's request for RCR. If the Applicant desires this assistance, she/he can indicate it on the Data Worksheet (this and all other information on the Data Worksheet must be written by the Applicant in his/her own handwriting, not the RCR Volunteer.)

- ❖ **Unless your Organization has an established, reliable procedure for providing on-going follow-up assistance, and you have designated staff/volunteers to provide that assistance, your organization should designate ACLU of Florida VRP Staff, as indicated in the box below.**

- ❖ The Volunteers should instruct the Applicant to: (a) cross out “Attorney” and write “Representative;” and (b) fill in the names and address of the Representative exactly as they appear in the following box. (Have an example of this language at each Volunteer table so the Applicant can easily copy it.)

***Representative***

~~Attorney~~ Name, Address & Telephone Number: \_ (NOTE: You do not need an attorney for this process.)

Elton Edwards and Muslima Lewis: ACLU of Florida, 4500 Biscayne Blvd. Ste. 340 Miami, FL 33137

- ❖ Volunteers should be instructed to give each Applicant a copy of the following reference documents:
  - *Florida Clemency Rules Summary* (Form A-2)
  - *After the Application... What Now?* (Form A-3)
  - *Restoration of Civil Rights Self-Preparation Guide* (Form A-4) – For Applicants in Level 2 and Level 3 only

**RED FLAG ISSUES & OUT-OF-STATE CONVICTIONS**

- Instruct RCR Volunteers to contact the Workshop Leader if an Applicant has one or more of the “Red Flag” issues listed in the *Volunteer Guide* (Form V-3) or if the Applicant has an out-of-state conviction.
- When in doubt about the advice to give an Applicant, tell the Applicant that you will have to get more information. Feel free to call the ACLU of Florida Voting Rights Project staff or forward the application to the VRP staff with a note about the issue. All such correspondence and/or calls can be directed to the ACLU of Florida c/o Voting Rights Project, 4500 Biscayne Blvd., Suite 340, Miami, FL 33137, 786-363-2731 or 786-363-2729 (phone), 786-363-1448 (fax), or [vrp@aclufl.org](mailto:vrp@aclufl.org).
- It is also completely okay to have a standing policy of forwarding all out-of-state or “red flag” cases to ACLU of Florida Voting Rights Project staff. Please do not hesitate to do so.

### Step 3: Concluding the Workshop

- ❖ Workshop Leader collects all Original Applicant Documents from the RCR Volunteers
- ❖ Workshop Leader should be sure to keep all Intake Forms with their corresponding Data Worksheet.
- ❖ Follow the instructions in the box below entitled “Handling of Original Applicant Documents.”

#### **HANDLING OF ORIGINAL APPLICANT DOCUMENTS**

If your Workshop Leaders are entrusted with original documents, Host Organizations must **STRICTLY FOLLOW** these guidelines:

- ❖ Unless your Organization has an established, reliable system and designated staff/volunteers for providing on-going follow-up assistance, send all original documents (including the Intake Form) to the VRP staff in Miami within 3 days after they are received from the Applicant. (This will allow us to submit documents to the OEC within one week after you receive them.)
- ❖ If your organization has an established, reliable system and designated staff/volunteers to provide on-going follow-up assistance:
  - Submit all Data Worksheets and other original documents to the OEC **WITHIN ONE WEEK** of receiving them from the Applicant
  - Retain a copy of **every document** that you submit to OEC
  - Keep the Intake Form with your copy of the other documents
  - Return a copy of the Data Worksheet (or any other document obtained from an Applicant) **WITHIN ONE WEEK** of receipt
  - Send a copy of the Intake Form to the ACLU of Florida Voting Rights Project so we can add the person to the FRRC Action Alert distribution list and/or contact the Applicant to join the rights restoration campaign.

ACLU of Florida Voting Rights Project Staff is available to handle all documents, and all submissions to the OEC. The Host Organizations are encouraged to forward all original documents to the ACLU of Florida VRP staff, so we can submit them to the OEC.

## **AFTER THE WORKSHOP**

### **Continued Follow-Up**

The Rights Restoration Workshop is intended as a place where Applicants can begin their RCR process, but they may need additional help after their applications are filed with the Office of Executive Clemency.

If the Host Organization has the required resources to provide reliable on-going follow-up assistance (including designated staff/volunteers), you should be prepared to receive and respond to calls from people you have assisted at the Workshops, and to call the OEC to get periodic updates on the status of the Applicant's filing.

Materials at the Rights Restoration Workshop include documents describing what the Applicant should do after the application has been submitted and how the Applicant should prepare a personal portfolio (an optional step that some applicants wish to take). See: *After the Applicant...What Now* (Form A-3) and *Restoration of Civil Rights Self-Preparation Guide – Assembling a Personal Portfolio & Preparing for the Hearing* (Form A-4).

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### (FOR HOST ORGANIZATIONS IN POSSESSION OF THE DATABASE OF RCR GRANTS AND/OR ONLINE DATABASE ACCESS)

If the Host Organization has a CD-ROM or access to the parole commission's web database (<https://fpcweb.fpc.state.fl.us/>) containing all RCR grants in Florida, additional assistance can be given at the Workshop.

- ❖ During Intake, search for the Applicant's name, date of birth and/or other identifying information) in the database
- ❖ If the Applicant appears in the CD-ROM database, complete a Form Letter Requesting RCR Certificate (Form A-5). If the Applicant appears in the online database, the certificate can be printed for the Applicant at that point.
- ❖ Handle the Form Letter in the same manner as you handle other original documents

#### **Important Guidelines when using the RCR Grant Database**

1. If an Applicant's name DOES appear in other database version (CD-ROM or web database):
  - a. There is a chance that the listed person is not the Applicant.
  - b. So, encourage the Applicant to confirm his/her RCR status by contacting the OEC using the Form Letter Requesting RCR Certificate.

(Use caution: Since a person commits a felony if he/she registers to vote when his/her rights have not been restored, we encourage Applicants to get OEC confirmation that civil rights have been restored before registering to vote.)

2. If an Applicant's name DOES NOT appear in either database, but he/she believes his/her civil rights have been restored:
  - a. It is possible that the person's rights have actually been restored.
  - b. Encourage the Applicant to contact the OEC.

(We have identified some individuals whose civil rights have been restored in Florida, but their names did not appear in the database).

3. Obtain regular updates of the CD-ROM from the Parole Commission. The Parole Commission creates updated databases on approximately a monthly basis. The online database search tool is updated daily.