

BOK RANCH

Volunteer Handbook

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volunteercoordinator@bokranch.org

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Woodside, CA 94062

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Thank you for volunteering with BOK Ranch!

Volunteers are essential to the success of the BOK Ranch Full Inclusion Horseback Riding program.

The BOK Ranch is a Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.) Member Center. BOK Ranch meets the PATH Intl. standards for health and safety to ensure the well-being of all our riders and horses. As a volunteer you will gain tremendous satisfaction helping our riders enjoy the physical, mental and emotional bond that develops with our beautiful, gentle horses.

Our Philosophy

BOK Ranch was founded in 1985 with the mission to provide the highest quality, recreationally based, horseback riding lessons to all children, teens, and adults regardless of their special needs.

BOK Ranch believes that:

- All who share a commitment to our mission are welcome to join us in our work regardless of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status. Everyone is welcome at our barn.
- We are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our staff, volunteers, and clients. BOK Ranch is made up of a diverse group of individuals who put aside personal agendas, egos, and differences to support our mission and our riders and horses.
- Every member is valuable and everyone's time, talents, and efforts are special gifts that are to be appreciated, respected, recognized, and never taken for granted.
- The right role can be found for any person with a desire and heart to serve. Volunteers and staff are given opportunities to learn and grow within the organization.
- The work of every volunteer is valued equally. All volunteers are treated with dignity and respect.
- BOK Ranch values volunteers by giving them meaningful work to do and the materials, tools, training, and supervision to complete their tasks safely and in a timely manner.
- Volunteers are responsible for their conduct and meeting their commitment to BOK Ranch, its clients, and its mission.

- All volunteers deserve frequent and accurate information about BOK Ranch activities and operations provided through regular, open, one-on-one communication with staff, through publications, and through conversations with volunteer leaders.
- Volunteers provide our organization with credibility, insight, perspective, diversity, and expertise that enlightens our operations, helps fulfill our mission, and engages the community in our activities.

To implement this philosophy, BOK Instructors, the Volunteer Coordinator, and staff will:

- Actively seek and encourage participation of volunteers in all areas of the organization including planning, problem-solving, barn management, and administration.
- Share strategic and business plans and on-going schedules to inform volunteers and staff and focus their energies.
- Respond to all inquiries from prospective volunteers in a timely manner to facilitate their orientation and scheduling.
- Match volunteers with tasks that meet their interest and skills, with clear instructions, deadlines, materials, tools, and freedom to complete the tasks.
- Foster personal growth among volunteers by providing skilled supervision, training, and opportunities to learn new skills.
- Train all volunteers who are willing to learn.
- Give volunteers meaningful work and abundant thanks, directly and frequently.
- Consider all volunteer requests, suggestions, and grievances in a respectful and timely manner.
- Work together to continually renew and reinforce our mutual commitment to the mission of BOK Ranch.

About Us

BOK Ranch, Incorporated is a California nonprofit public benefit corporation recognized as a charitable, tax-exempt organization pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. BOK Ranch offers lessons year-round at The Horse Park at Woodside - a 270 acre, premier equestrian facility. BOK Ranch is located in the training barn area of the Horse Park. This ideal setting provides a serene, private environment where our riders can flourish.

Our main programs are Equine Assisted Activities including creative games and sports activities that encourage a sense of well-being and accomplishment in our riders. In addition, riders learn horse care, grooming, and equipment use through hands-on experience. While most of our lessons are in small groups, each rider has specific goals that we establish by consulting with their physicians, parents, educators, and therapists. For more information, please visit our website at www.bokranch.org.

The Benefits of Riding

Horseback riding at the BOK Ranch is a special combination of a nurturing environment, sport, therapeutic recreation, and education. At BOK Ranch, individuals with and without special needs participate in a structured program to acquire skills leading to the accomplishment of specific physical, social, and developmental goals. In addition, individuals participate in a variety of horse-related activities that provide social and emotional benefits.

Physical - The horse's movement has a dynamic effect on the rider's body. Through horseback riding, individuals who may be unable to walk can develop the appropriate neurological connections and strengthen the necessary muscles to take their first steps. Physical benefits also include improved muscle tone, balance, core strength, and overall body awareness.

Cognitive - The horse provides the rider with a motivation to learn many new things. Educational goals such as letter recognition, sequencing, and executive function are often included in riding activities. The opportunity to give verbal commands to the horse has inspired some of our riders with minimal expressive language. Other benefits to our riders include increased comprehension, judgment, reasoning, problem solving, and perception.

Emotional and Social - The success of overcoming fear and anxiety can help a rider realize self-worth and increase self-esteem. Achieving a riding skill positively impacts the rider's self-perception. In the barn environment, human-animal interaction, and development of new skills are all critical components in the rider's success. Riders gain confidence in themselves, build relationships with Instructors, volunteers, horses, and peers, and take pride in their abilities.

Definition of Volunteer Duties

Age of Volunteers – BOK Ranch Instructors and the Volunteer Coordinator evaluate the abilities and competency of all volunteers and assign appropriate, safe activities as availability and conditions permit. Volunteers under the age of 14 must present a waiver of liability form signed by a parent or legal guardian and must be accompanied by an adult when volunteering with BOK Ranch. There are limited opportunities for volunteers under 16. There is no maximum age for BOK volunteers.

Horse Handler or Handler – Person who walks at the horse's shoulder holding the lead rope and is responsible for the horse. Handlers stand directly in front of the horse when halted. This is especially important during the mount and dismount. Use your voice in a firm tone if the horse will not stand still. We treat our horses gently, if a horse misbehaves, tell the Instructor.

Side walker – Person who walks at the rider's leg and is responsible for the rider. Side walkers should do the minimum to help the riders in a safe manner. Don't hold on to the rider unless necessary! Follow the Instructor's directions.

Spotter - The Spotter acts as an extra set of eyes in the arena and is responsible for both the horse and the rider. The Spotter stands on the opposite side of the horse from the Instructor when a rider is mounting and dismounting, if necessary, for safety reasons. During mounting and dismounting, the Spotter often assists by moving the rider's legs, feet and offers support, etc. Spotters need to listen and follow exact directions. When a rider becomes more independent, the handler and the side walker positions are sometimes combined into the Spotter position. The Spotter walks on the inside--between the horse and the center of the arena, not between the horse and the fence--in the position of the side walker to provide assistance if necessary.

For all positions, it is important to remember to allow the riders to do as much as possible on their own. Give the rider plenty of time to perform independently. Be sure that your rider understands the Instructor. Be aware of the rider and the horse and how they are responding. If you are uncomfortable for any reason with your strider or horse, tell the Instructor immediately. You are the first one to become aware of a potential problem.

Detailed Volunteer Job Descriptions

Position: Horse Handler, Side Walker, or Spotter

Supervisor: Certified PATH Instructor

Qualifications:

1. *In good health*
2. *Enjoys working with people*
3. *Able to work around horses*
4. *Dependable and able to commitment to volunteer program*
5. *Transportation to and from BOK is reliable*
6. *Can follow multiple instructions from Instructor and can help riders relate and respond to directions.*

Training:

1. *Volunteer orientation/training*
2. *On-job-training*
3. *Volunteer Handbook*

Specific Duties and Responsibilities:

1. *After your orientation, you will receive an email from the Volunteer Coordinator that will include a Personal Identification Number (PIN) you will use when you sign in for your shift using the Volgistics touchscreen kiosk*
2. *Report to the barn 15 minutes before volunteer shift begins*
3. *Check daily lesson schedule on the white board for assignments*
4. *Assist Instructors in grooming and tacking horses before lessons and untacking and grooming horses after lessons*
5. *Assist in keeping the barn and barn area neat and clean*
6. *Help riders prepare for class*
7. *Serve as side walker or horse handler during lessons as assigned or as directed by Instructor*
8. *Assist in feeding the horses and cleaning the barn after lessons*
9. *Report to the Instructor before leaving barn.*

For all volunteer positions, it is important to allow the rider to do as much as possible on their own. Give the rider plenty of time to perform independently. Be sure that your rider understands the Instructor's directions. Be aware of the rider and the horse and how they are responding. If you are uncomfortable for any reason with your rider or horse, tell the Instructor immediately. You are the first person to become aware of a potential problem.

Safety First

Safety is the most important job for everyone at BOK. Any number of different scenarios, from weather to stray dogs, may affect the behavior of your horse and/or your rider. A volunteer should be constantly scanning the environment looking for potential hazards. Are there any dogs or other strange animals that may scare the horse? Is the wind blowing up dust or making the trees sway wildly? What are the other horses doing (both BOK and non-BOK horses/riders)? Are there any cars, trucks, bicycles, etc. that may suddenly change direction and scare the horse? If something concerns you, bring it to the attention of the Instructor immediately.

Everyone takes safety seriously and no one will think your question or concern is foolish. In the unlikely event that your horse spooks or your rider falls, you must remain with your horse. Everybody has his or her job. The side walkers need to stay with the rider, and the handler must stay with the horse. If you let go of your horse to help the rider, you may end up with a loose, scared horse with a rider still on top, or partially on top.

While the level of safety must always be 100%, the degree of control that the handler may need over the horse varies from rider to rider. Many riders are successful at telling the horse to stop, turn, or walk on by themselves, while others can only attempt the command but haven't mastered the skill to make the horse listen.

As you work with specific riders, you will learn their differing levels for controlling their horse. One rider may be able to stop his horse but sometimes it takes him two or three tries. Your job is to let that rider take those three tries until he successfully stops his horse. Another rider might not yet be able to stop his horse, but does know how to execute the command (i.e. shorten the reins and say "whoa"). If you hear the rider attempt the command, but it doesn't work, you may then help him by bringing the horse to a stop. In this way, over time, he will gain confidence with his skill and eventually succeed on his own.

Volunteer Safety Checklist

As a volunteer, it is crucial that you take responsibility for insuring the safety of BOK Ranch's riders and program. Before a lesson, assist the Instructor by going through this safety checklist. The Instructor will double check all conditions before the lesson begins.

1. Be aware of the weather conditions

- Are you prepared if the weather conditions change?
- Are you dressed appropriately based on weather conditions?

2. In the arena

- Are the gates securely closed during the lesson?
- Does the footing in the arena look safe?
- Are the obstacles and toys in good condition and placed safely around the arena?
- Is the arena free of debris, branches, and manure?

3. General environment

- Are spectators, dogs, and other nearby activities under control?
- Are other riders or vehicles a potential hazard?
- Is there a clear path from the barn to the arena?

4. How does the horse look?

- Know what the "normal" horse is supposed to look like.
- How is the horse behaving? A lot of this depends on how you are treating the horse. Horses begin reading your body language the instant they see you, be aware how you move and act around them. Your body stance and movements will tell a horse whether he should be afraid, attentive, or relaxed.
- While grooming the horse do you notice anything unusual?
 - Are shoes loose or missing?
 - Are there any new cuts, ticks, runny eyes, bumps, thrush, etc.?
 - Any signs of colic?

5. How does the tack look?

- Does the saddle fit correctly? Does it clear the horse's withers by 2-3 finger widths with no pinching at shoulder and is it balanced correctly?
- Is the girth in the correct position and not too tight, too loose or twisted?
- Are the stirrup bar safety catches in the open position? Are the safety stirrups on correctly with the rubber bands in good shape and towards the front of the horse?
- Is all the leather smooth and supple, the stitching secure, the buckles in working order, and the tree sound? Are the flaps tucked under?

- Is the saddle pad smooth, pulled up into the pommel, and correctly secured?
 - Is the string halter tied correctly with the lead rope attached? Are the reins in good condition and attached to the headstall?
- 6. How does the rider look?**
- Is the helmet the correct size and securely placed on the rider's head?
 - Is the rider dressed for riding – long pants, tie-on shoes with a heel?
 - No gum, candy, or toys (unless the toy is used in the lesson).
 - How is the rider feeling? Are they prepared to ride? Do they need to use the bathroom? Are they frightened?
 - Is the rider getting ready before mounting by checking the stirrups and girth?

Emergency Procedures

Before an Emergency Occurs:

- 1. Report any unsafe conditions to the Instructor.**
- 2. Identify the location of the following items:**
 - Telephones: landline in the BOK Office
 - Emergency Information: by the telephone in the BOK Office
 - Fire Extinguishers: throughout the barn on the end caps of each barn aisle
 - Human and Equine First Aid Kits: Tack Room
 - AED machine in the BOK office
- 3. Practice emergency procedures (fire drills, evacuation, etc.).**

Specific Emergency Procedures:

- 1. When a rider falls off:**
 - Remain calm. Usually all riders in the class will need to HALT.
 - Maintain your designated position/duty. Don't rush to help a fallen rider if you need to be handling/leading a horse or if you are side walking. Your assigned rider is your priority.
 - The Instructor will help the fallen rider and delegate jobs to volunteers as needed.
 - If the rider seems injured, the Instructor will treat as needed. The other riders may need assistance in remaining calm and comfortable.
 - If the rider appears uninjured, the Instructor will allow time for the rider to regain composure and watch for any delayed reactions.
 - Sometimes the other riders will be frightened so they will need to process the event as a group.

2. When an independent rider loses control:

- If the horse has its head in the grass, let the rider do as much as possible to regain control of the horse on their own. Give simple instructions such as: use your legs, crop, one rein. If needed, help the rider by reinforcing the pull on the rein, halter or lead rope.
- If the horse is running away (this rarely happens), all riders will HALT and the Instructor will assist the rider.

3. When a horse is injured or sick:

- The rider on the sick or injured horse should dismount with assistance if needed.
- An injured horse needs space to stay calm; don't crowd the horse. Help other riders to remain calm. Only those adults needed to treat the horse should be near it.
- Stay in your position with your rider unless the Instructor delegates a specific task to you.
- If you are assigned to call the vet, remain calm on the phone, and relate detailed information between the Instructor and the vet. Write all information down.

4. When a rider "bails off":

- To prevent "bailing", try to keep this type of rider busy and engaged in the activity.
- If the rider is going to bail and you're the side walker, alert the handler/leader to halt the horse, and immediately alert the Instructor.
- If the rider is not responding to the side walker's instructions to sit up, stay on, hold on, etc., the rider should dismount the proper way (either right or left side).

5. When there is a disaster (fire, earthquake, etc.):

- Stay calm, breathe.
- Follow procedures familiar to you from the fire drills and the directions posted in the Tack Room. Listen to the Instructor.
- Stay in your designated position unless otherwise instructed.
- If you are directed to call 911, make sure you relate all the information clearly. Don't hang up until the 911 operator has all the needed information.
- Halt the horses. Depending on the situation, the riders should dismount.
- Gather in front of the horse barn so everyone is accounted for.
- Keep the driveway clear for emergency vehicles.
- Depending on the situation, the Instructor will give instructions depending on the immediate hazards. In case of

fire, you may need to use hoses, buckets, or the fire extinguisher. NEVER put yourself in danger.

6. If a rider becomes ill (heat exhaustion or allergic reaction):

- Be aware if the rider you are working with is prone to any of the above conditions.
- Look for signs and symptoms (discomfort, red face, glazed eyes, convulsions).
- The side walker tells the handler/leader if the horse needs to halt.
- Always alert the Instructor if a rider becomes ill. In most situations, the rider would end his or her lesson and dismount. If the rider needs to dismount right away, get extra help if needed. Dismount the rider as smoothly as possible.
- If illness is severe, someone will be delegated to call 911 and the parents.
- Do not medicate anyone, unless instructed, i.e. bee sting medicine or epi-pen.

7. If you or another volunteer becomes ill:

- Alert the Instructor. Someone will take your place so you can exit the lesson safely.
- As with the above situation, the illness will be assessed depending on severity. Make your medical conditions and emergency contact information known to the Instructor and Volunteer Coordinator prior to volunteering.

8. Most Important! Each incident must be handled on a case by case basis:

- As each situation differs with each rider, we need to remember that our program caters to the individual. What may happen with one person may be different for another. As a general rule, these procedures should help you to be prepared in the case of an emergency.

Basic Tips for Volunteers

First Things First: Always sign in using the Volgistics touchscreen kiosk when you first arrive for your shift at the barn. If you need help signing in, ask another volunteer or the Volunteer Coordinator to assist you.

What to Wear: While volunteering, you will be outside for several hours and need to be comfortable.

- Comfortable walking or jogging shoes. Tennis shoes, running shoes, and hiking or paddock boots are preferred. **NO OPEN-TOE SHOES OR SANDALS.**
- Weather-appropriate clothing, shorts, sunglasses, raincoat, sweatshirt, or jacket for late afternoon.

What to Bring:

- Your enthusiastic self!
- There is a water dispenser available in the tack room. You may want to bring your own mug or cup with your name on it, or you may bring your own water bottle, especially on a hot day.
- You may also bring energy bars or other light snack items. **NO NUTS-** BOK tries to avoid nut-based products in an attempt to keep people with allergies safe. Please dispose of wrappers and leftovers properly.

What NOT to Bring:

- No cell phones may be used in the barn area, arenas or on the trail. Leave your cell phone in your purse or backpack stored in the classroom or in your vehicle.
- Dogs and other pets are not allowed at BOK Ranch or at The Horse Park. Leave your pets at home. Do not leave them in a locked car in the parking lot.

Confidentiality at BOK Ranch

The staff, volunteers, and enrolled participants will keep confidential all medical, social, personal, and financial information regarding students and their families. It is important to remember that all people at the BOK Ranch have a right to expect respect and privacy. Always refrain from talking about or asking question about a rider, while in front of them. It is important to use discretion whenever discussing a BOK Ranch rider in the community; as you never know who may overhear your conversation.

Although you are welcome to photograph the facility and the horses, please do not photograph any riders. Parents may photograph their own children. It is necessary that everyone at BOK Ranch maintain a high level of trust and professionalism; this includes the confidentiality of our students.

It is required that everyone at BOK Ranch maintain a high level of trust and professionalism in regard to the confidentiality of our riders. If you have any questions about the policy, please contact an Instructor or the Executive Director.

Volunteer Conduct

Volunteers are essential to the quality and safety of the BOK Ranch program. They are given many important duties and are expected to conduct themselves in a mature and responsible manner. BOK Ranch is an at-will organization and has the right to terminate a volunteer without cause but will always consider the cause leading to the termination.

Although it is not possible to list all the forms of behavior or conduct that are considered unacceptable in the work place, the following are examples of infractions or conduct that may result in the limitation and termination of the volunteer relationship:

1. Volunteer is physically unable to perform their duties. Volunteers are expected to report any conditions that may affect their ability to perform their duties safely. In this instance, every effort is made to find a more suitable volunteer position within the program.
2. Inappropriate behavior or actions that compromise the safety of a rider, volunteer, horse, or staff member.
3. Purposeful disregard for directions or instructions given by a supervisor.
4. Poor attendance record without prior notification.
5. Acting outside of volunteer duties and responsibilities without permission from a supervisor.
6. Any breach of the confidentiality policy.
7. Theft or inappropriate removal or possession of BOK property
8. Misuse of BOK funds, equipment, or materials
9. Falsification of anything, including but not limited to timekeeping records

10. Working under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
11. Possession, distribution, sale, transfer, or use of alcoholic or illegal drugs in the work place, while on duty or while operating BOK equipment
12. Fighting or threatening violence in program area
13. Boisterous or disruptive activity in the program area
14. Negligence or improper conduct leading to the damage of property
15. Gross misconduct or insubordination
16. Abuse or mistreatment of riders, horses, volunteers, or employees
17. Sexual or other unlawful harassment or discrimination
18. Violation of BOK Ranch's anti-discrimination policies and procedures
19. Possession of dangerous or unauthorized materials, such as explosives or firearms.
20. BOK Ranch does not provide volunteer opportunities to work off court appointed community service hours.

Guest Dismissal Policy: It is BOK Ranch's policy that guests of volunteers, riders, or staff must be approved by staff prior to their arrival at the program area. However, interested passersby are encouraged to quietly observe in the waiting area so as not to disturb lessons.

Guests are educated about the program and policies and are expected to adhere to them. If the actions of a guest compromise the safety of a rider, volunteer, horse, or staff member, a staff member will address the guest and the host to inform them of proper conduct. If this does not correct the problem, the person will be asked to remove him or herself from the program area. If the problem is severe, BOK Ranch staff will follow up with communications prior to his or her next visit.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: *What if I want to bring the horses a treat?*

A: Horses have a special diet so they don't become sick and develop an illness. Please do not bring any horse treats to BOK Ranch.

Q: *What if the weather looks "iffy"?*

A: **Lessons are held rain or shine.** If you think lessons may be cancelled due to weather conditions, please call the office at 650-366-2265 or contact your Instructor.

Q: *What if I am unable to work my volunteer shift?*

A: Please email the Volunteer Coordinator to check if lessons are being held. If you know ahead of time that you can't work, please call the office and leave a message. The sooner we know the sooner we can find a substitute for you. Even if you must cancel at the last minute please call the Volunteer Coordinator or your Instructor and leave a message.

Q: *May I or my friends and family make donations to BOK Ranch?*

A: **YES!** BOK Ranch is funded entirely by lesson fees and private contributions. Donations not only help to sustain our current riding program; it enables us to implement new programs. Donations are deductible as provided by law. Talk to our Executive Director to find out more about the different ways you may donate to BOK Ranch.

Volunteer Acknowledgement and Receipt

To be read, signed, and returned to the Volunteer Coordinator before beginning any volunteer activities.

I am in receipt of the BOK Ranch Volunteer Handbook and understand I should consult with the BOK Ranch Volunteer Coordinator or the Executive Director if I have any questions about the policies or procedures contained therein.

I understand that from time to time there may be revisions to the Volunteer Handbook. Such revisions will require the prior approval of the Executive Director and will be communicated to volunteers.

I have entered into my volunteer relationship with BOK Ranch voluntarily and acknowledge there is no specified length of volunteering. Accordingly, either BOK Ranch or I can terminate the relations at will, with or without cause, at any time.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that this manual is neither a contract of employment or volunteering, nor a legal document. Although some or all of the policies and procedures may have explained to me verbally, I understand that it is my responsibility to fully read and comply with the policies contained in this handbook and any revisions made to it.

Volunteer's Signature Date Signed

Volunteer's Name (print)

Return to:

Volunteer Coordinator

BOK Ranch

PO Box 620702

Woodside, CA 94062