10 Steps of Volunteer Screening

Volunteer Screening is an Ongoing Process

Organizations should have comprehensive and ongoing screening practices in place that recognize the importance and value of all the relevant steps in determining the right fit for an assignment.

To rely solely on Criminal History/Background Checks as the only screening protocol is to ignore other important and valuable sources of relevant information.

Screening practices begin when an opportunity is created in an organization. They are the basis of the selection process and continue throughout an individual's involvement.

The following ten steps provide clear guidelines for developing screening policies and practices that reflect an organization's commitment to safe and meaningful engagement:

1. **Assessment** (of Programs, Policies and Risks)
   Outline how you collect, use and disclose information.
   TIPS: Assessing the potential risks of a position involves identifying:
   - Who is the participant?
   - What is the nature of the activity?
   - What is the setting?
   - What is the level of supervision?

2. **Volunteer Position and Assignment Description**
   Clearly set out the responsibilities, expectations, skills and abilities required to perform volunteer task successfully.
   TIPS: Position/Assignment:
   - Title
   - Scope of activity
   - Tasks/Responsibilities
   - Skills, experience and qualifications required
   - Time commitment
   - Benefits
   - Screening practices

3. **Recruitment and Communication Strategy**
   Inform volunteers about what personal information you are collecting, why you collect it and what you do with the information.
   TIPS: Recruitment strategies need to reflect:
   - The vision and mission of the organization;
   - Value of being inclusive, open, and transparent;
   - The general requirements for the position;
   - The opportunities and benefits;
   - The screening protocol the position/ assignment.

4. Application Form and Information Package

Limit the information collected to what is necessary for carrying out your screening obligations.

TIPS: An information sheet or package can be provided to candidates about:

- The application process;
- The organization;
- Program or activity;
- Description of the position or assignment.

5. Interview and Information Sessions

These allow both the organization and the potential volunteer to make informed decisions about participation.

TIPS: Have a format that include the following:

- Have a standard set of questions
- Establish a comfortable environment
- Explain the selection process
- Describe the position or assignment based on the written description
- Outline the screening process
- Document responses

6. References

When checking references, get consent from potential volunteers to obtain personal information from third party referees.

TIPS: What to say:

- Identify yourself and the organization
- Describe the position/assignment
- Define the level of vulnerability of the participants
- Outline the required qualifications
- Ask open-ended questions
- Record responses
- Always check more than one reference

7. Criminal History/Background Checks

The collection, use and disclosure of this information must be directly related to the volunteer opportunity and circumstances.

TIPS: Use the Volunteer Network's Screening Tipsheet Resource

8. Orientation and Training

Educate volunteers about your privacy practices and policies to increase their trust and help build pride.

TIPS: Orientation provides general information:

- The Organization's history, mission, vision;
- The Volunteer Engagement Approach, Policies, and Practices;
- Key programs and services.

Training includes:

- Specific tasks, skills, and logistics related to the assignment or position (initial);
- Updates, refreshers, or re-training (ongoing).

9. Support, Supervision and Evaluation

An organization must balance both its legal obligation to provide supervision in the interest of program safety and the volunteer's right to privacy.

TIPS:

Identify the supervisor or contact person within the organization:

- Setup a system for regular communication to discuss the assignment and for two-way feedback to be shared, using the written description as the reference point;
- Arrange for a back-up system for when problems or questions arise.

Carry out unscheduled spot-checks:

- Have a formal evaluation session prior to the end of probation to provide and receive feedback and to determine whether or not to continue the assignment;
- At any time, adapt, change, or terminate an assignment, if there are concerns about safety or misconduct (following organizational policies and legal advice).

10. Follow-up and Feedback

Provide evidence of a volunteer's progress and history, which serves as an authoritative source of accurate information about them.

TIPS:

- Schedule regular follow-up calls or visits with participants.
- Provide participants and family members with information about where to call with questions or concerns.
- Fill out incident reports, as required.
- Document actions taken to respond to incidents, complaints or other feedback.

Compiled from: The Screening Handbook by Volunteer Canada for Public Safety Canada Community Safety and Partnerships Branch, March 2012