

# Have You Risk-Proofed Your Operations?

We've all heard the stories. Stories we would like to forget or pretend had never happened. Unfortunately we can't. All we can really do is try to ensure they don't happen again.

Avoiding abuse, injuries, fraud and other types of risky situations to protect the volunteers, members, participants and everyone else involved in your group must be made

a top priority. And risk management starts with careful planning.

Over the last ten years, Volunteer Canada has led an education campaign to promote risk management in volunteer activities. Screening has become one of the most talked-about practices in volunteer involvement.

## What is Screening?

Screening is an ongoing ten-step process designed to identify any person – whether paid or unpaid, volunteer or staff – who may harm vulnerable people<sup>1</sup> or groups. By ensuring good screening practices, groups can create and maintain a safe environment for volunteers, clients, members and the organization.

## Why Screen?

The answer is simple. We want to do a better job at protecting ourselves, our participants and others involved in our work. It is much easier to ensure the right people take on the responsibilities that suit them best than it is to deal with problems that arise from poor recruitment, supervision or follow-up.

## TEN STEPS TO SCREENING

The following are the recommended “Ten safe steps” of screening.

### 1. Determine the risk

Organizations can control the risk in their programs. Examining the potential for danger in programs and services may lead to preventing or eliminating the risk altogether.

### 2. Write a clear position description

Careful position descriptions send the message that an organization is serious about screening. Responsibilities and expectations can be clearly set out, right down to the position's dos and don'ts. A clear position description indicates the screening requirements. When a volunteer changes positions, the screening procedures may change as well.

### 3. Establish a formal recruitment process

Whether an agency posts notices for volunteer positions or sends flyers to homes, they should indicate that screening is part of the application process.

### 4. Use an application form

The application form provides needed contact information. If the volunteer position requires other

screening measures (medical exam, driver's record, police records check), the application form will ask for permission to do so.

### 5. Conduct interviews

The interview provides not only an opportunity to talk to the potential volunteer about their back ground, skills, interests, and availability, but also to explore any doubts about the suitability of the candidate. In other words, the interview will help determine the "right fit".

### 6. Follow up on references

By identifying the level of trust required in the position and asking specific questions, the applicant's suitability may be easier to determine. People often do not expect their references to be checked. Do not assume that applicants only supply the names of people who will speak well of them.

### 7. Request a Police Records Check

A Police Records Check (PRC) is just one step in a ten-step screening process. PRCs signal — in a very public way — that the organization is concerned about the safety of its participants.

[More...](#)

<sup>1</sup> Vulnerable people are defined as individuals who have difficulty protecting themselves and are therefore at greater risk of harm.

### 8. Conduct orientation and training sessions

Screening does not end once the volunteer is in place. Orientation and training sessions offer an opportunity to observe volunteers in a different setting. These sessions also allow organizations to inform volunteers about policies and procedures. Probation periods give both the organization and the volunteer time to learn more about each other.

### 9. Supervise and evaluate

The identified level of risk associated with a volunteer position will determine the necessary degree of supervision and evaluation. If the risk is great, it follows

that the volunteer will be closely supervised. Frequent feedback in the first year is particularly important. Evaluations must be based on position descriptions.

### 10. Follow up with program participants

Regular contact with participants and family members can act as an effective deterrent to someone who might otherwise do harm. Volunteers should be made aware of any follow-up activities that may occur. These could include spot checks for volunteers in high-risk positions.

**Your group has a responsibility to protect program participants, volunteers and staff/board members. Sound screening practices will help meet this obligation. For more information on the screening process and to learn more about tools designed for each of the ten steps or access brochures, documents and training resources, contact your local volunteer centre or visit [www.volunteer.ca/screening](http://www.volunteer.ca/screening).**

## Volunteer Development Cycle

There is an approach to finding, involving and keeping dedicated volunteers. It's called **Volunteer Development** and it is made up of five stages. This **Fact Sheet** (no. 11 of 14) addresses the importance of **planning for volunteer involvement at all phases.**

For more information on the Volunteer Development Cycle or Volunteer Involvement, contact your local Volunteer Centre ([www.volunteer.ca/volunteercentres](http://www.volunteer.ca/volunteercentres)).



This series of Fact Sheets, **Involving Volunteers Effectively**, was designed to support citizen-based groups in the effective involvement of volunteers. The **Fact Sheets** were produced by the Ontario Volunteer Centre Network and Volunteer Canada,

with significant financial support from the **Ontario Trillium Foundation**. The Fact Sheets are available to all with the support of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative.

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Canada Volunteerism Initiative  
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Funded by the  
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