

Screening & Selecting Volunteers & Employees

Introduction

Whether paid staff or volunteers, proper screening is crucial to protecting your organization from potential problems and sheltering your organization from embarrassment and lawsuits. Vehicle accidents, child abuse and theft does happen and it is imperative that organizations have a screening process in place to prevent potential problem situations.

Guidelines for Screening and Selecting Volunteers

There are a number of critical risk management guidelines your organization should keep in mind and apply when screening and selecting staff.

1. ***The rigor of the process should mirror the risk of the position.*** Different positions warrant different levels of screening. For example, a volunteer ticket taker at a one-time event should not be required to go through the same process as a teacher in a children's garden.

2. ***Prior to recruiting for a volunteer position, develop a position description and assessment of risk.*** The assessment should at least include:



- The position's responsibilities and key tasks;
- The primary risk posed by the position, including risks to the staff member (does the position require driving visitors around the garden) and risk to the others (will the volunteer ever work one-on-one with children?);
- Educational requirements, special skills or licenses; and
- Reporting relationship for the staff member and their supervisor

3. ***Once the organization determines the risk for each position, assign as risk category for each job and develop a corresponding screening process.*** Most organizations find that positions fall either into a basic screening process for "low-risk positions" or a rigorous process for positions deemed "high-risk positions."

4. ***Never skip steps in prescribed screening process or allow special considerations because a volunteer or staff member is overly enthusiastic, qualified or a friend of a staff or board member.***

5. ***If any "red flags" are raised during the screening process, STOP.*** If an applicant's references are vague or abrupt, or you don't understand the results of a criminal history background check, consult a legal professional before proceeding.

Elements of a Basic Screening Process

The core elements of a basic screening process include:

- ◆ Written applications,
- ◆ Interviews, and
- ◆ Employment and/or personal reference checks.

Screening Rules and Reminders

- ◆ One important goal of the screening process is to develop a mutual understanding of the nature and expectations of the positions and the organization.
- ◆ If the basic screening process discloses potential problems, the applicant should not be accepted until the issues presented are resolved.
- ◆ Since resumes may not provide all the information you need, the organization may want to develop an application to ask the questions specific to the position.
- ◆ Volunteer applicants should be interviewed in most cases one-on-one versus in a group.
- ◆ Reference checks are an important screening tool and should rarely be omitted.
- ◆ If your organization uses shortcuts while recruiting volunteers and staff, be aware of the risks and understand that other risk reduction strategies, such as increased staff supervision, may be required to compensate for shortcomings in your screening process.

Elements of a Rigorous Screening Process

When the risk is greater, a more extensive screening process should take place. ***In addition*** to the basic screening process, your organization has several options for additional screening.

- ◆ Official agency record check,
- ◆ Motor vehicle record check (MVR),
- ◆ License verifications, and
- ◆ Additional reference checks.

Record Check Reminders

- ◆ The most common types of criminal history record checks are state-based checks and federal (FBI) record checks. Generally, checking both state and federal criminal history databases involves two separate processes.
- ◆ A criminal history record check is part of a screening process – not a selection criterion.
- ◆ Your organization should complete the following steps before starting criminal background checks:
 1. ***Establish screening criteria.*** An organization should develop clear guidelines state which offenses disqualify a person from a certain position. Be sure to research and take into account state and local laws and regulations. In general, individuals should be permanently disqualified from holding positions that require contact with children if their criminal records include any of the following: past history of sexual abuse of children, conviction for any crime in which children were involved, and any history of any violence or sexually exploitive behavior.
 2. ***Determine in advance what offenses will disqualify an applicant and what, if any, other factors will be considered.***
 3. ***Determine how the rights of the applicant will be preserved.***



Motor Vehicle Record Checks

If an employee or volunteer's job requires them to drive any vehicles (including trams, golf carts and any motorized transportation), you should run a MVR to determine if they have a history of poor driving decisions.

- ◆ First, determine how many driver points are acceptable in the past three years before an employee is ineligible to drive a company vehicle.
- ◆ We recommend the following criteria based on insurance company eligibility guidelines:
 - Any drinking violations or a reckless driving conviction in the past *five* years automatically disqualifies a driver with no exceptions.
 - In the past *three* years,

<u>Points</u>	<u>Rating</u>
Three and below	Satisfactory
Four to six	Probationary
Seven and above	Unsatisfactory
- ◆ In addition, many states offer programs that will notify you if any of your drivers receive a citation.

Information for this article was taken from the Alliance of Nonprofits for Insurance Risk Retention Group's publication "Managing Volunteers: Balancing Risk and Reward."

