

What is volunteer screening and why is it important?

Screening practices help define the relationship between people and organisations and increase both the quality and safety of programs and services in communities. Screening takes into account the skills, experience, and qualifications that are required for an assignment and puts in place an ongoing process to engage people best suited to fill the role. It also allows organisations to explore the interests, motivations, and personal goals of applicants. Screening puts in place touchstones, throughout a volunteer's involvement, that support mutual benefit while reducing risk for everyone concerned. The benefits of screening are threefold:

To **better match** people's skills and experience to the needs and opportunities in s;

To **improve the quality and safety** of programs and services in communities;

To **reduce the risks and liability** for both people and organisations.

Screening practices play a critical role for organisations in fulfilling their moral, legal, and ethical responsibilities to all those they reach, including members, clients, participants, employees, and volunteers. This obligation is even greater when they are working with vulnerable people, including children, youth, people with disabilities, and senior adults. Every organisation has a unique set of considerations, depending upon its mandate, the population it serves, the nature of its activities, and the jurisdiction in which it is located. Each position within an organisation has a unique set of requirements, risks, and benefits. Boards of Directors need to establish screening policies that address the range of roles and circumstances within the organisation.

Ten Steps of Screening – An Ongoing Process

Organisations should have comprehensive and ongoing screening practices in place that recognise the importance and value of all the relevant steps in determining the right fit for an assignment. To rely solely on Garda Vetting 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 organisation. 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 organisation's commitment to safe and meaningful engagement.

Assessment of risk

An assessment of the programme, activity, position, and assignment to determine:

Level of service or quality standard • Internal policy implications

Legislative requirements

Risks and liabilities

Tips for Assessment of Risks

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?

Volunteer Position – Assignment

Role descriptions clearly articulate bona fide requirements and level of risk that were identified during the assessment.

The organisation

Scope of the activity

Requirements of the volunteer position / assignment

Benefits and opportunities

Screening practices

Tips for Writing Position / Assignment Descriptions

Organisation

Name of organisation

Mission

Programme / activities

Human resource and volunteer resource management policies

Volunteer Position / Assignment

Title

Scope of activity

Tasks / responsibilities

Skills, experience and qualifications required

Time commitment

Benefits

Screening practices

Recruitment

Recruitment plans and practices need to be carefully planned and clearly communicated that include selection systems that are:

fair

consistent

appropriate for the position or assignment and include:

Tips for Designing Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment strategies need to reflect:

The vision and mission of the organisation

Value of being inclusive, open, and transparent

- The general requirements for the position
- The opportunities and benefits
- The screening protocol the position / assignment

Application

A standardised application form is used for all volunteer positions and assignments that:

- Collects basic information to process the application
- Asks questions directly related to the bona fide requirements of the position or assignment
- Respects human rights legislation
- Requests reference information and consent
- Seeks permission to obtain Garda Vetting, if required

Tips for the Application Process

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

- The application process
- The organisation
- Program or activity
- Description of the position or assignment

Interview

An interview provides an opportunity to talk with candidates about their skills, interests, qualifications, and personal goals to help determine if there is a potential match within the organisation.

Tips for Interviews

- 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

References

References need to be checked in accordance with the requirements of the position or assignment and in compliance with relevant legislation including human rights, protection of privacy, and access to information. The standing of regulated professionals should be verified.

Tips for Checking References

- Identify yourself and the organisation
- 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

Garda Vetting

Depending upon the whether the role involves access to children or vulnerable persons, Garda Vetting may be requested to help assess the suitability of an applicant.

Considerations about Garda Vetting

- The assignment cannot begin before the disclosure is received
- How will a determination be made about the relevance of Garda Vetting to the position / assignment?
- What is your policy on re-vetting

Orientation and Training

Orientation and Training can be done in groups and / or on an individual basis to provide information and continue to assess the suitability of the match.

Group sessions can provide an opportunity to observe an applicant's interpersonal skills, ability to work with others, and demonstrated understanding and acceptance of the organisation's mission, values, and policies.

Tips for Orientation and Training

Orientation provides general information:

- The Organisation'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)

Orientation and Training Practices

- Making orientation and training sessions mandatory
- Holding regular training sessions throughout the year (volunteer meetings)
- Probationary Period
- Buddy systems; pairing a new volunteer with an experienced member of the team

Support and Supervision

Ongoing support and supervision are an essential part of ensuring that the match between people and assignments continues to be mutually beneficial, to maintain and improve quality and safe programs and services, and to reduce risks and liabilities.

Lack of adequate support and supervision may constitute a breach of the standard of care expected of an organisation

and a court ruling of negligence, holding the organisation liable for any harm done to individuals as a result.

Tips for Supervision and Support

Identify the supervisor or contact person within the organisation

Set-up 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 organisational policies and legal advice)

Follow-up and Feedback

A clear follow-up system with programme participants is an important part of monitoring the suitability of the match, the quality of the programs and services, and exposure to risks and liabilities.

All parties, including participants, paid employees, and other volunteers, need to know who they can contact if they are concerned about the actions or inactions of a volunteer.

Tips for Follow-up and Feedback

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