

VSPN & Vulnerable Sector Check Fee Waiver FAQs

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The Volunteer Screening Program is made possible through funding from the Government of Alberta

1. What is a Vulnerable Sector Check?

A Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC) is a background check completed by the RCMP or police service that searches the federal database of record suspensions (previously known as pardons) for any records relating to sexual offences. These are only ever conducted in conjunction with a regular Police Information Check/Criminal Record Check and are not issued on their own.

Access to a VSC is regulated by the federal [Criminal Records Act](#) (section 6.3 (3)) and can only be requested when a person is in a position of trust or authority over a vulnerable person, the applicant has consented for the verification of their status, and the approval of disclosure by the Minister of Public Safety has been issued.

A vulnerable person is further defined as someone who, because of their age, disability, or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, is in a position of dependency on others or is otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by a person in a position of trust or authority towards them.

A position of trust or authority is more than just having incidental contact with vulnerable persons. The nature of the position must cause the individual to have authority over, and/or develop a significant level of trust with the vulnerable person(s). In most cases, this is also affected by the level of unsupervised access the individual may have to the vulnerable persons. Positions with casual or occasional contact with vulnerable persons would not normally require a VSC unless the nature of the position leads vulnerable persons to have a high degree of trust in the individual. Similarly, an individual who may have frequent contact with vulnerable persons but is always supervised by an already screened staff or volunteer would not hold the same level of authority and would not normally require a VSC.

If you have questions regarding the criteria for Vulnerable Sector Checks, please contact your local police or RCMP detachment.

2. What is a VSPN?

The Volunteer Screening Program Number (VSPN) is the unique code that is assigned to your organization, that helps us facilitate the usage of the VSC Fee Waiver between the participating police services and RCMP detachments in Alberta.

In a previous iteration of the program prior to 2017, we had a similar code called a VOAN but has since been retired. If you had a VOAN, it doesn't necessarily mean you have an active VSPN!

3. What is the review and approval process for applying for a VSC Fee Waiver?

Applications will be reviewed on an ongoing basis as they are submitted. Please allow 5 to 10 business days for applications to be processed. We will contact you with any questions we may encounter with

your application. Please note: this can prolong the review process, so we ask you provide as much information as possible in the initial application. All applicants will hear back from Volunteer Alberta once the application is processed, regardless of if they are approved or denied. If approved, we will issue you an Approval Letter and it will be sent to the program contact noted in your application. This letter will include all necessary information to get you started, including your organization specific VSPN, your approved position codes, the program Terms of Use, and your next renewal date. We recommend that you keep this letter for your own records for this reason.

4. We submitted an application and received a VSPN, but not all our positions were approved. Why are some positions covered and not others?

The eligibility for Vulnerable Sector Check Fee Waivers is very specific and is designed to help us ensure that we are only approving roles that the police services or RCMP will also process based what we know about their legal criteria. Our eligibility criteria requires volunteers to be in a position of significant trust and authority over vulnerable people, as well as have regular unsupervised access to them inherent to their role. We also do not approve roles that require youth under the age of 18 to obtain a VSC as youth should not be requested to obtain one ([see this article for more information](#)). If a position you applied for does not meet these criteria, it will not be approved.

We understand that a VSC is sometimes required by an insurance or parent organization for certain volunteer positions. In the case that these positions are not approved for a VSC Fee waiver, we encourage you to continue to screen your volunteers as your policies require. However, if volunteer positions don't meet the program eligibility criteria, they are still not eligible for VSC Fee Waivers.

We always encourage organizations to review whether a VSC is necessary for a role, or if additional screening methods can be used instead to help mitigate risk. Our team is happy to help you to conduct this review and to help advocate for any changes to your leadership.

5. We already have a VSPN and approved position code(s), can we be approved for more positions?

Yes! You can apply for more positions at any time by filling out the [Renewal Form](#) for Returning Applicants. This same form will allow you to provide any updates to existing positions (like role name change, updated role descriptions) or indicate if a volunteer position is no longer active. You will be required to submit your volunteer screening policy and/or procedure, as well as a description of a risk assessment that has been completed within the last two years.

6. Which communities are participating in the VSC Fee Waiver?

Currently, the VSC Fee Waiver is available to organizations operating in the following participating communities where a service fee is required: Airdrie, Camrose, Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lacombe, Lethbridge, Lloydminster, Medicine Hat, and St. Albert.

7. The community my organization operates in is not on the participating communities list, can we still apply?

If you operate in a community outside of the participating communities, but many of your volunteers live in a community that is participating, you may still apply. Please note however that only volunteers residing in the participating communities will be able to access the Fee Waiver. Most police stations restrict their PICs and VSCs to residents within their service areas and will not conduct a search for external residents.

For example, if your organization is based in Banff, but many of your volunteers drive in from Calgary or Airdrie to volunteer, those volunteers would be eligible to have the fees waived for their Vulnerable Sector Check, but only at the police services in Airdrie or Calgary. Volunteers who reside in Banff would be unable to access the Fee Waiver.

If you would like to discuss adding your community to the list of participating communities, please [contact us](#).

8. We have multiple branches/sites for our organization, and we all have similar volunteer positions, can we submit one application?

It depends! If your organization is incorporated under the same Nonprofit Registration Number (provincial) or Charitable Registration Number (federal), you may submit one application for review. However, we would recommend that each branch submit their own application if they individually manage their own volunteer screening policies or risk assessment process, or if they have unique circumstances that would make their volunteer program different from other branches.

Please be aware that only volunteers who reside in our participating communities will be able to access the Fee Waiver if approved. If you have questions about submitting a joint application, or to help determine if you should submit separate applications, please [contact us](#).

9. Does our VSPN Expire?

Yes, you will need to renew your organization's VSPN at least every two years. We also ask that if your program experiences any changes, you submit a [Renewal Form](#). This includes if you need to update your existing approved roles (including change in role descriptions, role titles, or risk

assessments/supervision levels), need to remove roles, or would like to add new roles. Contact information can also be updated via the form, however you may also just e-mail us if your program contact has changed.

10. Why do we have to renew our VSPN?

We hope that the renewal process will help ensure that our program records remain up to date with any changes that naturally happen in your organization, while also helping to encourage good practices. We believe it's valuable for organizations to review and update volunteer roles' risk assessments, position descriptions, and overall screening policies and processes on a regular basis. Our aim is to encourage organizations to review these policies and practices regularly, ensure that risk management assessments are completed, and assess which screening practices are best suited to mitigate those risks.

It is also our hope that the renewal period will allow your organization and Volunteer Alberta to better facilitate knowledge transfer if new staff take over management of your volunteer programs, including how to use the VSPN, our Terms of Use, and what to do when they need to report changes to the program (like add new roles, remove closed roles, or update contact information).

And finally, we want to get to know you better. The Volunteer Screening Program is aimed to help you, so we want to develop a closer relationship with your organization to not only increase opportunities to share our existing resources, but also to get feedback to see what additional tools or resources we should develop.

11. How do I reactivate my organizations suspended VSPN?

If your VSPN was suspended - either from failure to complete a Renewal Form by your deadline, from lack of eligible volunteer roles, or you were otherwise found ineligible - you will just need to submit a [Renewal Form](#). In this form you will be asked to provide contact details, submit your volunteer screening policy or procedure document(s), describe your Risk Assessment process, and confirm your approved volunteer roles have not changed (you will also be able to apply for new roles if you have additional ones that meet our [Eligibility Criteria](#)). We strongly suggest submitting copies of the role descriptions for roles you wish to have active on file.

Please be sure that your volunteer screening policy or procedure document clearly indicates the use of Vulnerable Sector Checks and the use of additional screening tools (ex. Application forms, interviews, role specific training etc.). This assessment should be a look at what risks are present for the volunteers, the program users, and the organization, as well as what strategies are in place to help mitigate and deal with those risks. Common risks include access to confidential information; roles that require physical touch, which may lead to inappropriate touching; or positions that are seen as authority figures outside of the program and may interact with program users.

12. I'm confused about the New Applicant form, or the Renewal/Update form. Where can I find more information about these forms?

We have developed a comprehensive [VSC Fee Waiver Application Guide](#) which reviews what information we're looking for and why we ask for that information. Refer to the Application Guide for any questions about the forms, or feel free to [contact us](#).

13. Do you offer any further supports for our volunteer program?

Yes! The VSC Fee Waiver is only one part of our broader Volunteer Screening Program (VSP). The goal of VSP is to help build a thriving, resilient civil society by supporting Alberta's nonprofit organizations in developing a deeper understanding of volunteer screening and engagement practices toward the broader goal of community safety. To do so, we have developed educational resources like live and recorded webinars, guides, and templates that can all be accessed through our [Resource Library](#). Anything directly created by our program is free to access at any point – and if there's something you don't see, we invite you to [contact us](#) and we can help provide coaching as needed.

We also offer a [Screening Development Micro-Grant](#) that opens once a year, usually in June, to help support smaller organizations that lack the resources or capacity to develop effective volunteer screening practices and processes.

14. Do we need to be a member of Volunteer Alberta in order to access the Volunteer Screening Program?

No! Thanks to funding from the Government of Alberta, all the components of this program are free to access, and you do not need to be a member of Volunteer Alberta. This includes the VSC Fee Waiver, the Screening Development Micro-Grant, and any of our VSP developed resources.

We do offer other services and benefits through our membership that may help you achieve your mission and develop your volunteer programming, so if you're interested in joining our Member network and supporting our broader programming through your membership, please feel free to [contact our membership team](#)!

15. If I have any further questions, who do I contact?

If you have any further questions, we encourage you to contact the Volunteer Screening Program Team at screening@volunteeralberta.ab.ca