

2022-2023



Changing the Conversation

Research, Surprising Findings, and
the Volunteer Screening Program

Acknowledgements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To support Volunteer Alberta's ongoing commitment to being reflective about and responsive to the need of the communities we served, we created this report in 2023 as part of the Volunteer Screening Program (VSP). The VSP is a partnership between Volunteer Alberta and the Government of Alberta, funded by the Government of Alberta.

We extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to everyone who contributed to the creation of this report. We'd like to pay special tribute to the volunteers and volunteer engagement specialists who shared their voices, experiences, and wisdom with us. Our program and our work would not be possible without you. Thank you.

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Introduction

The Volunteer Screening Program (VSP) helps build a thriving, resilient civil society by supporting Alberta's nonprofit organizations to address volunteer screening and engagement, as well as community safety. The program provides educational opportunities, online resources, and financial support to ensure nonprofit organizations have the tools and support they need to develop and implement good practices in volunteer screening, engagement, and risk management. VSP is more critical now than ever as Albertan nonprofit organizations change their volunteer screening and engagement practices due to COVID-19 and public safety concerns.

The Government of Alberta (GOA) and Volunteer Alberta (VA) have partnered to deliver the Volunteer Screening Program since 2017. The Volunteer Screening Program is a partnership between the GOA's Ministry of Culture and VA to address gaps and needs related to volunteer screening and risk management in Alberta's nonprofit voluntary sector (NPVS). VA and the GOA developed VSP in its current form after recognizing that NPVS organizations relied on police checks in place of comprehensive screening policies and practices. The central pillars of this program are:

- Educational Programming to educate the Albertan NPVS community about volunteer screening good practices
- Volunteer Screening Development Grants (SDGs), which provide microgrants to small groups of nonprofits every year to develop their screening policies and practices
- Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC) Fee Waivers, which covers the cost of volunteer VSCs for vulnerable sector serving organizations that need them

After six years of delivering educational programming through VSP, there is room for the conversation around volunteer screening practices to change. NPVS organizations have continuously supported the development of resources related to screening. Still, they do not show significant changes in mindsets about volunteer position development, police information checks, and volunteer evaluation. It is becoming clear that there is a disconnect between what is considered best practices in volunteer screening and their practical application to organizational screening practices and policies.

This disconnect has become increasingly challenging to address during COVID-19. For example, conversations around equity and inclusion in the NPVS have accelerated in recent years, posing serious questions about the effectiveness and equity of police information checks, reference checks, as well as the entire volunteer screening process. As a result, Volunteer Alberta conducted an environmental scan into the current conversations in the provincial, national, and international NPVS community about anti-racism and volunteer screening.

Reports from [Volunteer Connector](#), [The Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement](#), and [UK-based Dr. Helen Timbrell](#) all support the conclusion that many aspects of what is considered best practices in volunteer engagement create barriers for equity-deserving communities, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC).

And the pandemic has continued to place burdens on basic volunteer activities, forcing organizations to engage volunteers in different ways. These conversations have needed to happen for quite some time, but COVID-19 has put them in the spotlight, and our educational programming needs to address it.

These environmental changes are why VSP's educational programming is shifting towards emphasizing community engagement and "good practices" informed by community members instead of "best practices" handed down by capacity builders. The prescriptive nature of volunteer screening "best practices" does not address the individualized risks and dynamics of the regional and cultural communities that NPVS organizations operate within.

"People across racial identities experience barriers to volunteering. BIPOC participants reported facing more barriers across every single category. There is not a single step in the volunteer screening practice that does not impose significant barriers for BIPOC participants. The biggest barrier for BIPOC participants was personal references. There are many possible reasons for this, but it does highlight the white western influence of volunteering towards a capitalist and institutional HR experience. The next biggest barrier is in police checks, which likely correlates to BIPOC individuals' previous experiences with police in Canada"

An Anti-Racist Approach To Volunteering, 2022, Volunteer Connector

Our Approach

In the spirit of mutuality, reciprocity, and respect, Volunteer Alberta strives to ensure that our work responds in a genuine way to the needs of the communities we serve. Therefore, we approached our research and program evaluation with the following goals:



01. Check Ourselves & Identify Gaps

To check if the current resources we offer are meeting the needs of our community and where gaps may exist, we spoke with and surveyed volunteer engagement specialists and volunteers, who, through training and lived experience, are the true experts in volunteer screening & engagement.



02. Establish Benchmarks & Trends

To evaluate the future effectiveness of our programming, we determined program outcomes and indicators, and sought to establish benchmarks to measure our future progress. We explored new and emerging trends in the volunteer screening & engagement landscape.



03. Adapt Our Program

To better serve our communities, we are taking an evidence-based approach to adapting our program based on the data gathered to meet the identified needs, gaps, and program outcomes.

Our Approach

Volunteer Alberta engages NPVS organizations and has historically not engaged volunteers directly. However, it was necessary to incorporate volunteers into our evaluation activities to gain a new perspective on screening practices and resources. Therefore, we developed opportunities for NPVS organizations and volunteers to provide feedback on our programming and emerging trends in the volunteer sector.

The activities included:

- Four focus groups with staff from NPVS organizations in Alberta
- Four focus groups with volunteers in Alberta
- A NPVS Benchmark Survey
- A Volunteer Benchmark Survey



Focus Group Methods

Before conducting each NPVS and volunteer focus group, we required participants to sign a consent form electronically. The consent forms provided information about the nature of the focus group, how the data would be used, and how to withdraw their consent should participants change their minds about participating in our research and evaluation activities.

We informed participants that they would be allowed to withdraw their consent up to two weeks after the focus groups. After that point, the data was anonymized, and it would not have been possible to pull particular responses from the data.

NPVS Focus Groups

We shared a call for focus group participants via VA's website, social media, and Volunteer Connector. We were intentional about approaching and calling for organizations representing equity-deserving groups or primarily serving equity-deserving groups, as we know Voices of equity-deserving groups are often missing from conversations about volunteer screening and engagement. Unfortunately, we did not have as many organizations sign up as needed, so we opened the call to any NPVS organizations to participate in the focus groups.

We held focus groups on July 26, July 28, August 3, and August 10, 2022, with 24 participants from 22 organizations.

Participants were required to:

- Watch a 1-hour recorded webinar of ["Screening Volunteers In. Not Out."](#)
- Fill out a short pre-focus group survey
- Participate in the 1.5-hour focus group, in which we explored their thoughts on our resources and volunteer screening overall
- Fill out a short 2-month follow-up survey



As recognition for the valuable time participants contributed to our research, we gave each participant a free 3-month membership to Volunteer Alberta.

NPVS Focus Groups Continued

The pre-focus group surveys were intended to get a baseline of participants' understanding of volunteer screening and gather some demographic information. Questions included:

- Are you a volunteer or a paid staff?
- According to the 2018 Alberta Health Regions Map, which region(s) does your organization operate in?
- What does your organization's volunteer screening process look like? Feel free to provide a general overview or list specific steps of the process.
- Which components of the Volunteer Screening Program (VSP) have you used within the past year?
- Are you currently experiencing any barriers to effective volunteer screening? If so, please explain.

The focus groups were conducted over zoom and the conversations were recorded and transcribed.

A summary of what we asked and what we heard during the NPVS focus groups begins on [page 17](#).

The 2-month follow-up surveys were intended to double-check that the main themes we recorded matched the participants' recollection and provide them with an additional opportunity to provide their thoughts and reflections after engaging with the material and reflecting on their practices over the two months following the focus group.

Questions included:

1. We've made a summary of the key points from all 4 focus groups. Please review that summary [here](#): [link to document]. Does this summary cover your recollection of the conversation, generally speaking? Is there anything you feel is important that we missed?
2. Is there anything you learned from the webinar or the focus group that you've put into practice in the last 2 months? Have any of your screening practices or policies changed since watching the webinar or participating in the focus group?
3. Is there anything else about volunteer screening & engagement and/or Volunteer Alberta's services/resources you would like to tell us?

Volunteer Focus Groups

We shared a call for focus group participants via VA's website, social media, and Volunteer Connector. We also utilized Volunteer Connector's mailing list. We emailed anyone who had provided consent for VA to contact them via Volunteer Connector (around 4000 individuals) to reach a demographically diverse audience.

We held focus groups on November 1, November 3, November 7 and November 9, 2022, with 12 volunteer participants in total.

Participants were required to:

- Have volunteered or applied for at least one volunteer position in Alberta in the past year
- Fill out a short pre-focus group survey
- Participate in the 1hr -1.5hr focus group, in which we explored their experiences of volunteer screening in Alberta
- Fill out a short follow-up survey

As recognition for the valuable time participants contributed to our research, we gave each participant a \$25.00 honourarium.

The pre-focus group surveys were intended to get a baseline of participants' understanding of the concept of volunteer screening and gather some demographic information.

Questions included:

- According to the 2018 Alberta Health Regions Map, which region(s) does your organization operate in?
- How long have you been volunteering? How many volunteer roles have you participated in, or applied for in the past year?
- What does Volunteer Screening mean to you? What sorts of steps or processes do you associate with the term "volunteer screening"?

Volunteer Focus Groups Continued

The focus groups were conducted over zoom and the conversations were recorded and transcribed.



A summary of what we asked and what we heard during the volunteer focus groups begins on [page 19](#).

Due to time constraints in the project timeline, we had to conduct the follow-up survey before two months had passed. Therefore, we sent the follow-up survey approximately one month after the focus groups. The survey was intended to double-check that the main themes we recorded matched the participants' recollections and provide participants with an additional opportunity to provide their thoughts and reflections.

Questions included:

- We've made a summary of the key points from all 4 focus groups. Please review that summary [here](#): [link to document] Does this summary cover your recollection of the conversation, generally speaking? Is there anything you feel is important that we missed?
- Is there anything else about volunteer screening & engagement and/or Volunteer Alberta's services/resources you would like to tell us?



Benchmark Survey Methods

NPVS Benchmark Survey

To intentionally plan for and track upcoming changes to VSP, we determined program objectives and then needed to establish benchmark indicators, or in other words, establish a baseline of feedback and community context to inform the future direction of VSP.

We utilized a comprehensive online survey targeted at Alberta-based NPVS organizations. We shared a call for survey participants via VA's website, social media, and Volunteer Connector. The survey was open for approximately one month, between Jun 29, 2022, and July 31, 2022. As an incentive to encourage responses, we offered each respondent a chance to win one of six \$25.00 gift cards.

Initially, we collected well over 100 responses. However, while sorting through them, we realized many responses were 'spam' or not legitimate. We believe this was due to the advertisement for the gift cards. After sorting through and removing illegitimate responses, we ended up with 71 responses to our survey. Questions were demographic, quantitative, and qualitative. A summary and discussion of the questions and findings will appear later in this report.



The survey was explained as follows:

"Thank you for taking the time to complete this 35-minute survey. The purpose of this survey is to collect benchmark data and establish a baseline of feedback, which will be used to shape the future direction of the Volunteer Screening Program (VSP). VSP is an umbrella of services delivered by Volunteer Alberta (VA), with funding from the Government of Alberta (GoA). We provide educational resources and funding to support good practices in volunteer screening.

The three major components of VSP are:

1. General educational resources,
2. Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC) fee waivers, and
3. Screening Development Grants (SDGs).

We recommend answering the full survey in one session, however, you are able to save your responses and come back to finish the survey later. You are also able to edit your responses until the survey closes at 11:45PM on July 31, 2022.

Your responses to this survey are anonymous by default. However, if you are interested in continuing the conversation with VA about volunteer screening and engagement, you will have the opportunity to submit your contact information at the end of the survey. Your responses will remain confidential.

Listed below are some definitions for several key terms that are used in this survey:

- Volunteer screening: VA primarily uses the 10 Steps to Screening from Volunteer Canada's Screening Handbook. Volunteer screening is a practical framework for improving volunteer engagement and public safety. It does NOT solely refer to the use of Police Information Checks (PICs), Vulnerable Sector Checks (VSCs), or Criminal Record Checks (CRCs).
- Volunteer engagement specialists (paid staff and volunteers): this includes managers, coordinators, etc.: Volunteer engagement specialists are responsible for providing volunteers a supportive and safe environment, assigning volunteers appropriate tasks based on their experience and preferences, conducting risk management practices, increasing organizational cross-functionality, improving volunteer/staff relations, and increasing effectiveness of volunteer contributions (source information)
- Equity-deserving groups: Communities that identify barriers to equal access, opportunities, and resources due to [systemic] discrimination, and [who deserve] social justice and reparation (definition adapted from Canada Council).
- Background checks: This term will refer to the collective use of Police Information Checks (PICs), Vulnerable Sector Checks (VSCs), Criminal Record Checks (CRCs), Child Intervention Checks (CICs) or Child Welfare Checks (CWCs), and other third-party checks, in the context of volunteer screening."

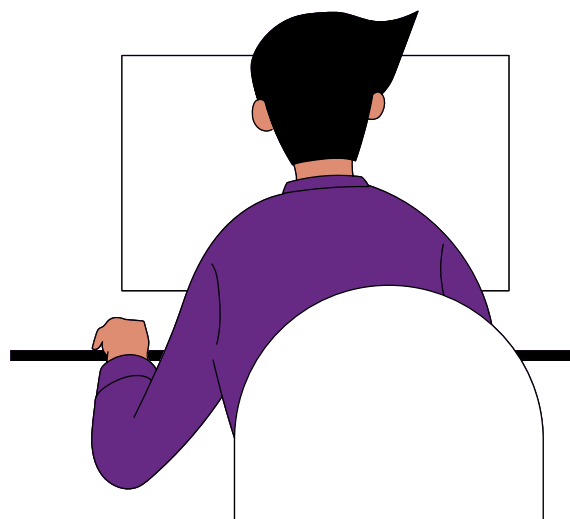
Benchmark Survey Methods

Volunteer Benchmark Survey

We needed to incorporate volunteers into our evaluation activities to gain a new perspective on our practices and resources. In addition, we wanted to double-check that organizations' perceptions of volunteer screening and engagement matched volunteer perceptions and experiences or whether some gaps or disconnects were present. Therefore, after the NPVS Benchmark Survey closed, we developed and conducted a similar Volunteer Benchmark Survey.

We shared a call for survey participants via VA's website, social media, and Volunteer Connector. The survey was open for one month, between October 11, 2022, and November 11, 2022. Unfortunately, due to the challenges presented by offering the Visa gift cards for the NPVS Benchmark Survey, we decided not to provide any incentives for this survey.

We collected 57 responses by the deadline. However, the first question asked, "Have you applied for at least one volunteer position in Alberta in the past year?" If the respondent selected "no," the survey ended and thanked them for participating. 38 respondents answered "yes" and completed the rest of the survey. Questions were demographic, quantitative, and qualitative. A summary and discussion of the questions and findings will appear later in this report.



The survey was explained as follows:

“Thank you for taking the time to complete this 25-minute survey. The purpose of this survey is to collect benchmark data and establish a baseline of feedback, which will be used to help deepen our understanding of volunteer screening experiences in Alberta and help shape the future direction of the Volunteer Screening Program (VSP). VSP is an umbrella of services delivered by Volunteer Alberta (VA), with funding from the Government of Alberta (GoA). We provide educational resources and funding to support good practices in volunteer screening. The three major components of VSP are:

1. General educational resources,
2. Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC) fee waivers, and
3. Screening Development Grants (SDGs).

We recommend answering the full survey in one session, however, you are able to save your responses and come back to finish the survey later. You are also able to edit your responses until the survey closes at 11:45PM on November 11, 2022.

Your responses to this survey are anonymous by default. However, if you are interested in continuing the conversation with VA about volunteer screening and engagement, you will have the opportunity to submit your contact information at the end of the survey. If you choose to provide your contact information, your responses will no longer be anonymous, however, Volunteer Alberta will maintain your confidentiality and will never release any data with identifying information.

Listed below are some definitions for several key terms that are used in this survey:

- Volunteer screening: VA primarily uses the 10 Steps to Screening from Volunteer Canada’s Screening Handbook. Volunteer screening is a practical framework for improving volunteer engagement and public safety. It does NOT solely refer to the use of Police Information Checks (PICs), Vulnerable Sector Checks (VSCs), or Criminal Record Checks (CRCs).
- Equity-deserving groups: Communities that identify barriers to equal access, opportunities, and resources due to systemic discrimination, and who deserve social justice and reparation (definition adapted from Canada Council).
- Background checks: This term will refer to the collective use of Police Information Checks (PICs), Vulnerable Sector Checks (VSCs), Criminal Record Checks (CRCs), Child Intervention Checks (CICs) or Child Welfare Checks (CWCs), and other third party checks, in the context of volunteer screening.

Content Warning: This survey will be asking questions about challenges or barriers to volunteering and we understand reliving those experiences may be painful to some. Although we appreciate all responses, we ask that you take a minute to check in with yourself and ask if this is a way you feel you can participate at this time.

Please answer the following questions based on an average of your volunteer experiences over the past year, unless otherwise stated. If a question doesn't apply, please select or write N/A.”

Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data gathered in the NPVS and Volunteer focus groups, Volunteer Alberta engaged a volunteer. We shared a call for survey participants via VA's website, social media, and Volunteer Connector. Volunteer Alberta selected a candidate and outlined the expectations of the role. We were careful to ensure that the expectations of this role were more flexible than that of a paid employee to account for the fact that a volunteer is completing the tasks without monetary compensation. The volunteer committed to working 5-10 hours per week on data analysis from December 2022 to the end of January 2023. VA's Senior Coordinator of Research and Knowledge Mobilization acted as the volunteer's supervisor and communicated primarily by email with minimal check-ins as the volunteer could work independently. The result was a summary document including key themes and representative quotes.

We pulled quantitative data directly from the NPVS and Volunteer Benchmark Surveys on SurveyMonkey, the program we used to conduct both surveys. Qualitative data were analyzed by gathering answers into an Excel spreadsheet and coding them to reflect the central theme present in the response. We created a table to track the program objectives determined at the start of the program year and tie back each question as it relates to the indicator to set a benchmark for future evaluations of program effectiveness and to inform future program changes based on the data.

Example:

Program Outcome	Survey Question(s)	Current Benchmark	Future Focus Areas
Increased use of risk assessments for all volunteer roles at an organization	8. How consistently does your organization use risk assessments when developing or updating volunteer positions? 9. What does your organization's risk assessment process look like? (long answer)	44% = all volunteer positions. 32% = some volunteer positions. 24% = don't use risk assessments at all. Qualitative data reveals 45% of the answers reflect what VA has identified as good practices in conducting risk assessments.	Data suggests VA could deepen its work with organizations to explain what a risk assessment is; work with them to establish good practices in conducting risk assessments; and to highlight the importance of conducting risk assessments for all volunteer positions on a regular / reoccurring basis.

Findings

NPVS FOCUS GROUPS

WHAT WE ASKED

WHAT WE HEARD

1. Reflecting on the webinar "*Screening Volunteers In. Not Out.*" was there any information in the video that you found surprising – good or bad?

- a. Follow up: Do you think there was any key information missing in the video?
- b. Follow up: Do you feel like this information reflects your screening practices as an organization?

- The webinar was helpful, provided good reminders, was a refresher, and affirmed that folks are “on the right track”
- The webinar was seen as a good resource for new volunteer engagement specialists
- A focus group discussed being surprised by the extensive process of onboarding. Some participants felt that if this process is too long volunteers will lose interest
 - It was recognized that although onboarding can be time consuming it helps to build trust and reliability, and ensures accountability, particularly for those volunteering with vulnerable populations
- Some participants reported being surprised by the fact that there are no current standards for screening in Alberta and there are so many steps (over and above references and police checks)

2. Thinking back to the 10 steps of screening, do you think there are any steps missing from the 10 steps?

- a. Follow up: What are some limitations and or challenges of the 10 steps to screening?

- Some participants felt that there are too many screening steps for some volunteers
 - Organizations often do not have enough time and human resources to fully engage with the 10 steps
- A common challenge identified was time. The extensive time police checks took was found to be frustrating and not always understood by potential volunteers
 - A solution to this offered by participants was to use this waiting time for training and orientation

(Continued from last page)

- Regarding newcomers: the 10 steps are sometimes difficult to utilize for this population due to barriers such as providing references, and cultural and language barriers
 - Participants felt a lack of references should not be a barrier as there are other ways to assess if someone is a good fit for a role. For example, provide a test opportunity, training period observations, and interviews
- Recognition is missing from the 10 steps and easy to neglect
- Some participants felt that equity and inclusion are missing from the webinar/10 steps
 - For example: cultural sensitivity in screening and cultural accommodations

3. Did you learn anything new from the webinar that you will be putting into practice?

- Information that was identified as new to focus group participants included:
 - insurance information, risk assessment matrix, volunteer description templates, vulnerable sector check fee waiver, and reference check processes

Other things we heard:

- Volunteer positions should be tiered appropriately in terms of skill level and risks to allow for variation in screening. The level of screening should fit with the level of skill and risk associated with the volunteer role
- A participant explained the need to use technology as much as possible as it can help with efficiency and time management.
- Participants pointed out that language can sometimes be a barrier and questions were asked on how to recruit newcomers because they often 'self-screen out' because of perceived [or actual] barriers. It was pointed out that adapting volunteer roles is not always possible as sometimes a certain level of language proficiency is required to ensure client safety
 - Suggestions provided by focus group participants to address this included: providing sample applications, mentorship opportunities, or a volunteer buddy.

Findings

VOLUNTEER FOCUS GROUPS

WHAT WE ASKED

WHAT WE HEARD

1. Short story of the best volunteer experience you had and why.



Common themes expressed in answering this prompt:

- It's important for the organization to learn about who volunteers are so they can find the best fit with organization
- Participants appreciate comfort, community, and a supportive environment. A good organizational structure made it easy to become a volunteer and feel supported
- Organizations that offered a range of volunteer opportunities were valued, especially when the opportunities were meaningful
- Regular communication helped volunteers "feel at home", useful, and valuable
- "Closing the loop:" It's important for organizations to keep in touch with potential volunteers during the application and screening process. Organizational responsiveness was considered essential as it demonstrates respect for volunteer time and effort
- Some volunteers appreciate a rigorous and comprehensive screening process and report that it instills confidence in the organization that they conduct their programs in a safe and thorough manner
- Other volunteers feel that rigorous screening processes can be a breach of their privacy, make them feel untrusted by the organization, and can present a barrier to volunteers; some more than others

2. From what you've experienced, what does volunteer screening look like? Can you give examples to explain what it means to you?

a. What sorts of steps or processes do you associate with the term "volunteer screening"?

b. If the term "volunteer screening" doesn't bring anything specific to mind, what steps or processes do you associate with applying for, securing, and onboarding to a new volunteer role?

- Volunteers seemed to have a basic understanding of what the screening process entails: applications, interviews, reference checks, background checks, training and orientation. However they did not as readily identify supervision/support or follow-up/feedback as part of the screening process
- Focus group participants clearly explained that early interviews or even the idea of "pre-screening" can help to match the goals of both volunteers and the organization
- Overall, the theme of flexibility was common. It's important to make the screening process as simple as possible; reducing hurdles and preventing the process from becoming discouraging were highlighted

3. Have you ever decided not to apply or pursue a volunteer role because of the screening/intake requirements? What do you wish would have been different? Why?

- A specific group of potential volunteers identified as facing numerous barriers are newcomers. People who are new to Canada often have to wait 6-9 months to be considered and screened. This wait period limits opportunities that newcomer volunteers could fit or match with

4. Have you ever been asked to provide a background check (PIC, VSC, CRC, CIC) before being able to volunteer somewhere?

a. What is your reaction to being asked for background checks before being allowed to volunteer? Why?

- Background checks were described as both a necessity and a hurdle by participants
- Overwhelmingly, participants asserted that the requested check must match or fit the purpose or volunteer role
- The security check processes should be streamlined, volunteers should be compensated, and the time required for the process should be recognized
- Some participants felt that volunteers should not be ruled out by police check results. Situations should be addressed on a case-by-case basis to determine the circumstances and whether an adaptation to the current role is possible, or if there is another role available

5. Have you ever encountered screening policies/practices that you would consider 'inclusive' or provide opportunities for equitable engagement of volunteers?

a. Has an organization ever gone above and beyond to accommodate you either in the screening process or during your time volunteering? What did they do? What did it mean to you?

- Volunteers consistently reported that inclusivity in volunteering is about the culture of the organization and whether they are holistically inclusive, rather than having one or two policies aimed at inclusivity
- Examples of things that suggest an organization is inclusive:
 - Seeing BIPOC folks working for and leading the organization "from the top down" (board of directors, managers, etc.)
 - Documents and screening processes translated into multiple languages
 - Accepting newcomers as volunteers
 - Organization staff are committed to working with volunteers' specific skills and desires and committed to finding a role that works for volunteers (e.g., wheelchair accessible)
 - Flexibility in schedule for shifts and orientation/training
- EDI training and awareness must be invested in intentionally
- EDI may be common sense to some, but not others, which points to the need for policies.
- Discussions around the use of 'tick boxes' or application questions regarding applicants' gender, ethnicity, etc queried how to ask these questions and why. Do these questions screen out or screen in volunteers?
 - This highlighted the need for explanations regarding the process. For example, knowledge of ethnicity or gender could be necessary as some volunteer roles require careful and considered matching of volunteers with clients.



6. What would you want organizations to know about your experience(s) with volunteer screening?

a. What do you think organizations can do better when screening their volunteers? what would you like to see more of? Why?

b. Would you want organizations to change any of their volunteer screening/engagement practices or policies? Why?

- Some participants thought it may be beneficial to engage with potential volunteers before the screening process takes place. A pre-interview before offering an application could help potential volunteers and organizations “get to know each other”, which would contribute to finding a “good fit” or mutual match
- When someone is offering their knowledge and skills, organizations should get to know them and why they want to be part of their organization
- Creating detailed volunteer descriptions is the first step to screening and matching, which would help increase volunteer success
- Understanding clear expectations and responsibilities is essential for volunteers
 - This information should include the time, effort, and steps involved in the screening process so that they are not surprised or discouraged by the length or effort required for screening
- information regarding the specific reasons for background checks should be relayed in order to help volunteers understand the importance of the process

Other things we heard:

- The need for flexibility was specifically mentioned for newcomers. As newcomers often have time to give and want to be immersed in the Canadian culture, accommodating them and finding ways for them to participate is important.
- “Relational volunteering” was explained as: if the connection and relationships are there; volunteers will offer any services required by an organization. Such unconditional giving is special, valuable, and appreciated but finding a mutual fit/match was cited as the critical factor in the success of finding, supporting, and retaining volunteers.

Benchmark Survey Findings & Learnings

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Nonprofit Survey	Volunteer Survey
71 respondents	38 respondents
89% Nonprofits (others are Co-ops, Social Enterprises, Municipal, & Charities)	
Primary Sectors: Culture/Recreation, Social Services, Health	
92% work with vulnerable populations	85% did <u>not</u> identify as belonging to a vulnerable population
Most serve Calgary Zone, Edmonton Zone, Central Zone	Most volunteered in the Edmonton Zone
87% serve a diverse set of equity-deserving communities. 13% do not serve any equity-deserving communities	47% of respondents identified as belonging to at least one equity-deserving group. 50% do not identify as belonging to an equity-deserving group. One individual selected that they preferred not to say.
79% = paid staff 21% = volunteers	

Keep in mind throughout the findings that the sample size for the Volunteer Survey is quite a bit smaller than the Nonprofit Survey. Therefore, we must be careful to avoid over-generalizing these results.

*Please note we are not affiliated with Alberta Health Services, we simply borrowed their regional map for our surveys.

For example:

- 2SLGBTQI+
- People with disabilities
- People who are low-income
- People experiencing homelessness
- Newcomers
- Seniors

For the rest of this report, anytime you see questions in **PURPLE** they are from the Nonprofit Survey.

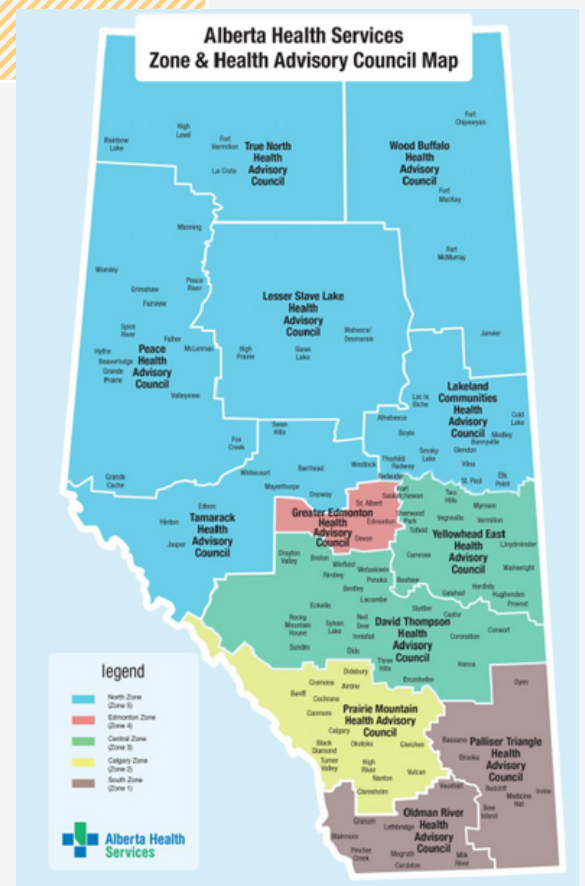
Anytime you see questions in **YELLOW** they are from the Volunteer Survey



= Volunteer Survey



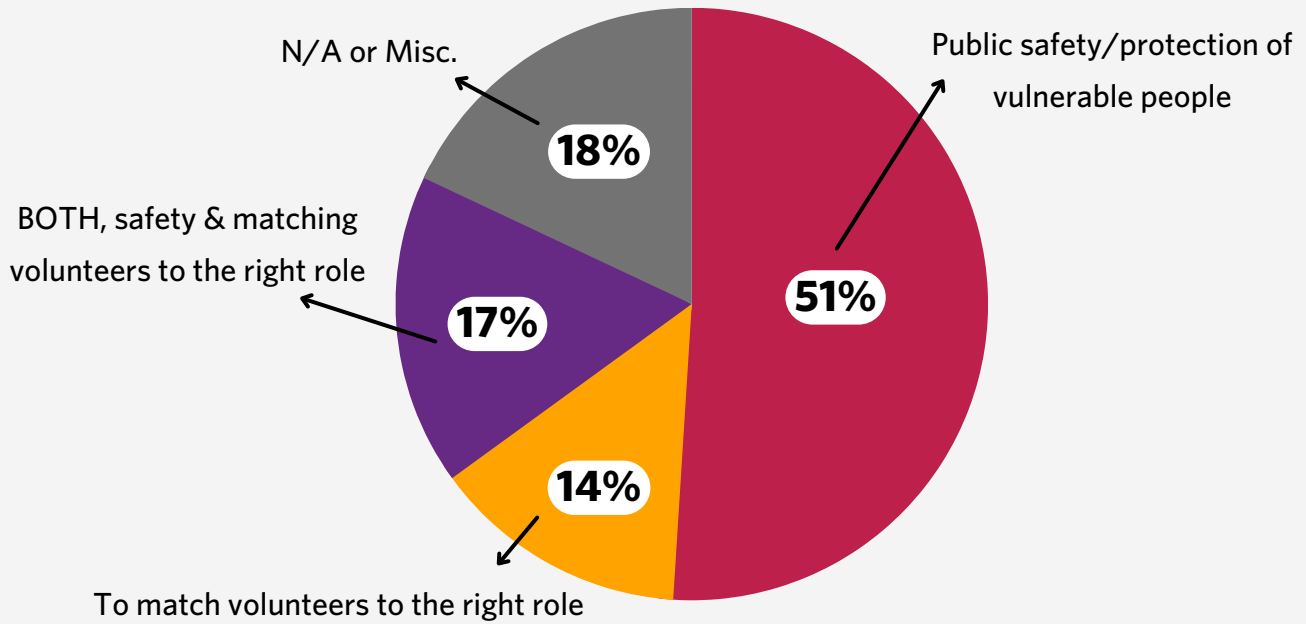
= Nonprofit Survey



WHY DO ORGANIZATIONS SCREEN VOLUNTEERS?

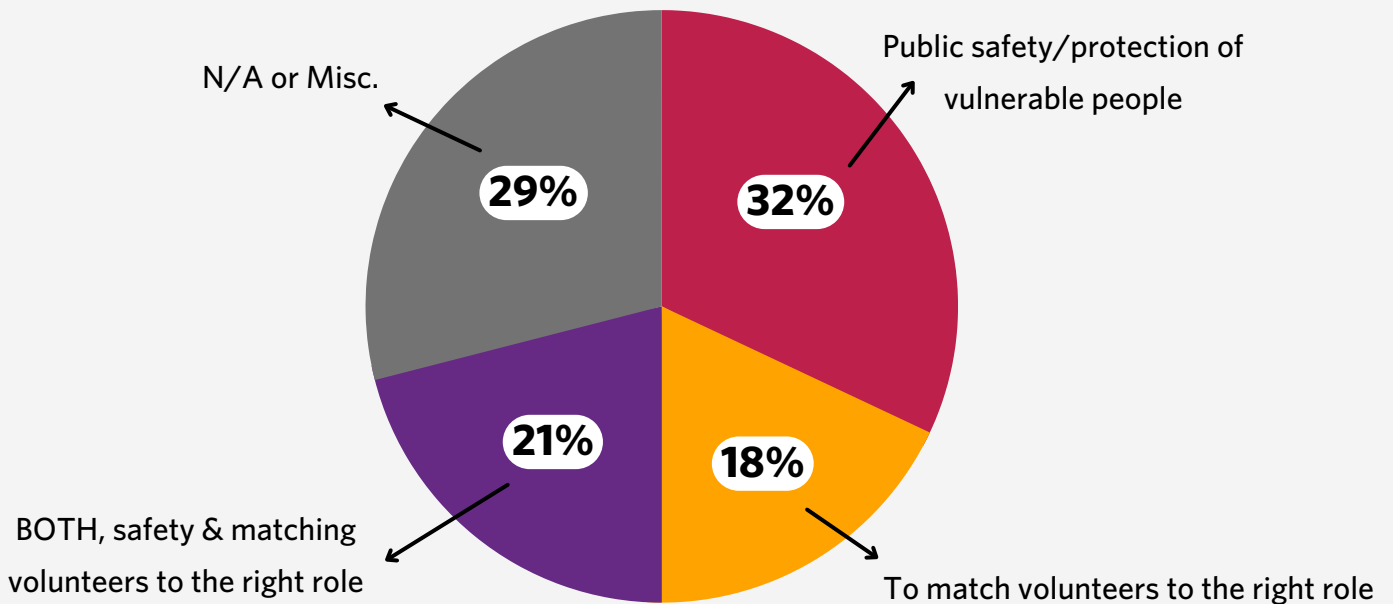
N

Why does your organization screen its volunteers?



V

Why do you believe organizations screen their volunteers?

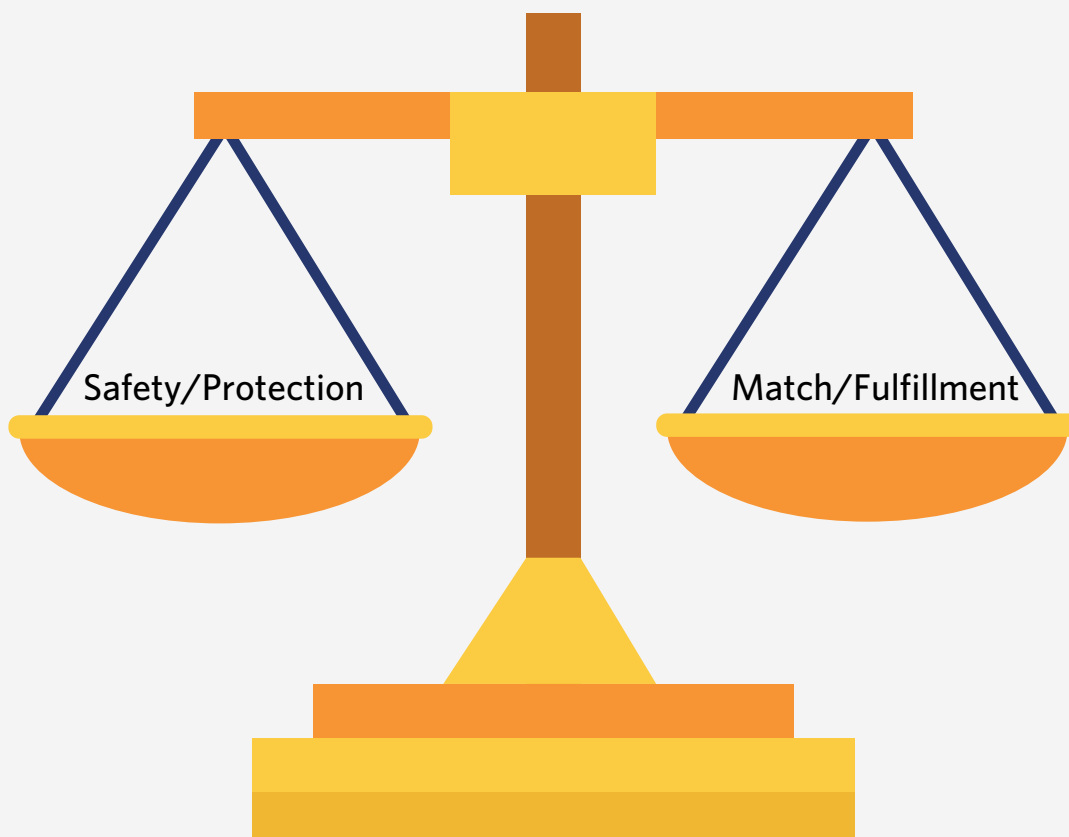


LEARNING MOMENT

These "Learning Moments" will appear after groups of data to share learnings gathered from the data and provide organizations with concrete suggestions to incorporate into their volunteer screening and engagement practices and policies.

WHY DO ORGANIZATIONS SCREEN VOLUNTEERS?

Volunteer Screening should be approached as a balanced process to address both:

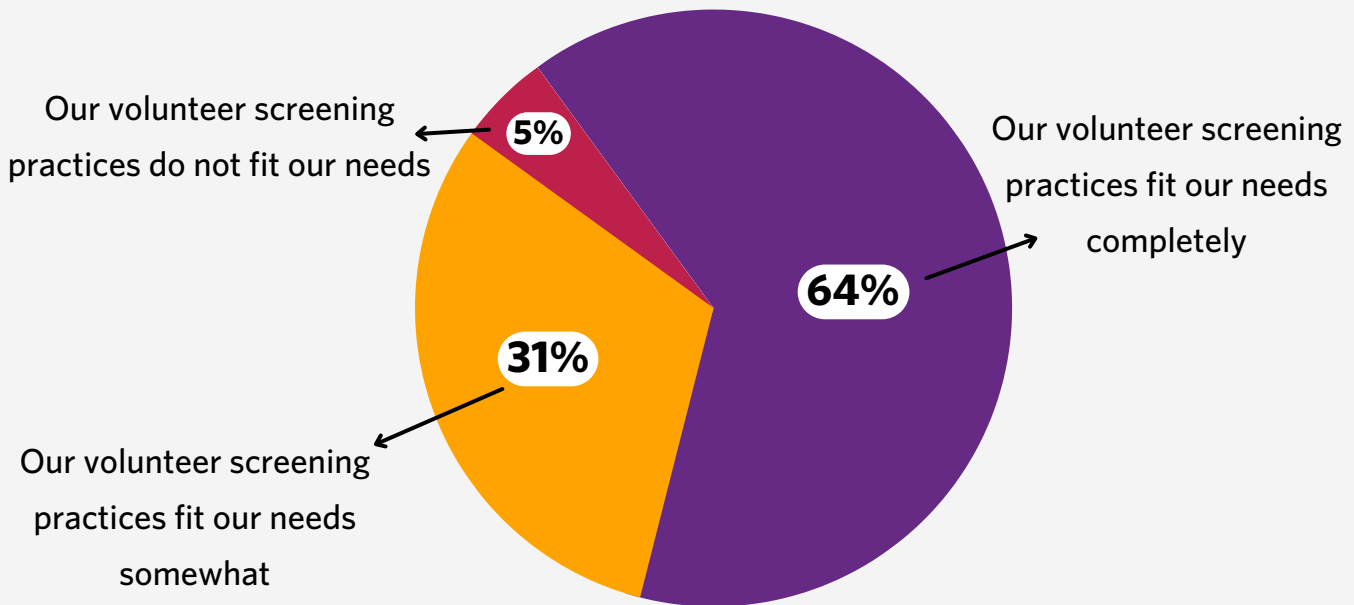


NPVS organizations should review their screening policies and practices and determine how many of their screening steps (risk assessment, position descriptions, recruitment process, applications, interviews, references, background checks, training & orientation, supervision & support, feedback & follow-up) are associated with safety or protection, and how many are geared towards finding the right match for volunteers' skills, interests, and values and finding fulfillment in their volunteer role - try to ensure equal weight is given to both!

DO YOUR SCREENING PRACTICES FIT YOUR/YOUR COMMUNITY'S NEEDS?

N

To what extent do your volunteer screening practices fit your organization's needs?



Of the 36% who indicated their volunteer screening practices somewhat, or did not fit their organization's needs, we asked:

N Why do your volunteer screening practices not fit your organization's needs completely, and what do you hope to improve within your screening practices?

"Always room for improvement! Would love to be more inclusive and remove barriers."

"We need formal policies and processes."

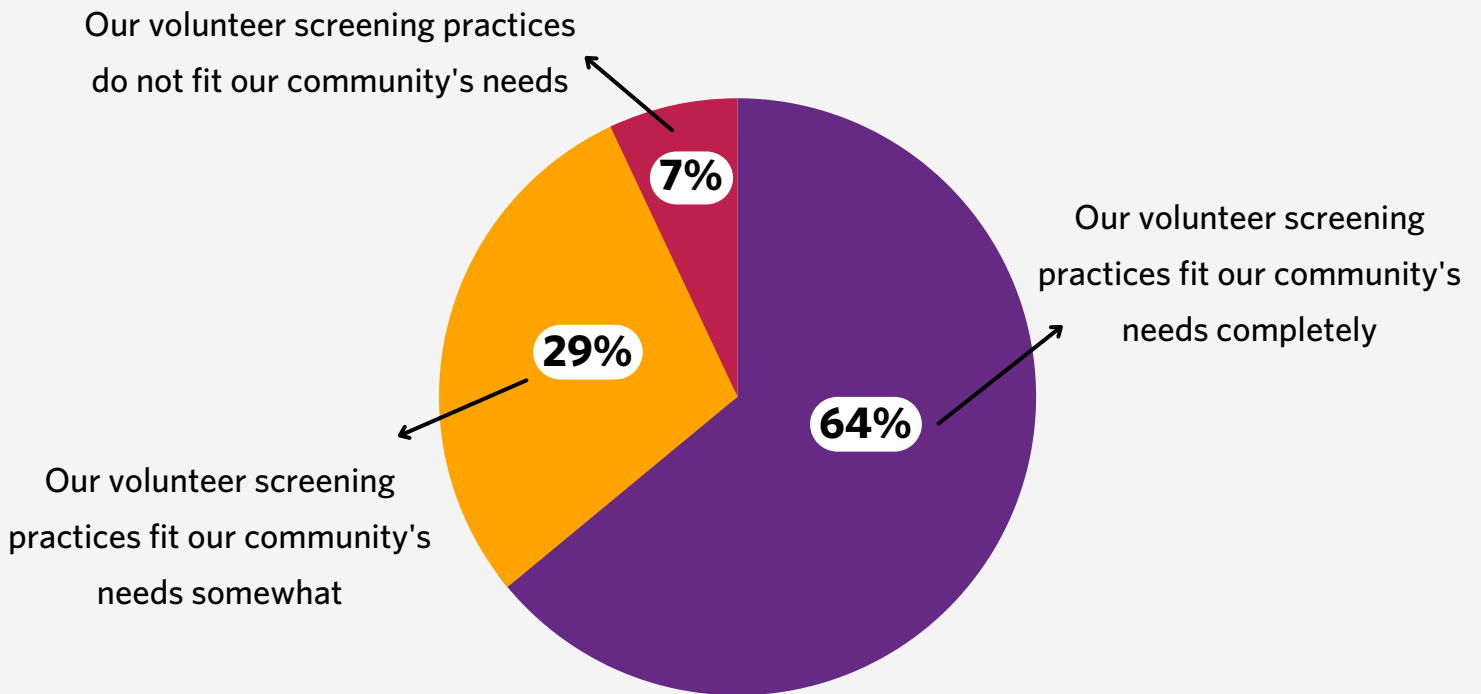
"To improve our volunteer interview questionnaire and implement a pre screening evaluation process."

"We are expanding the volunteer portfolio, so there may be a need to expand the screening as well."

"We have great job descriptions, applications and interview processes, but we need to improve on the police checks and policy around police checks."

N

To what extent do your volunteer screening practices fit your community members' needs? For this question, community members include participants/clients, and family or caretakers of participants/clients.



Of the 36% who indicated their volunteer screening practices somewhat, or did not fit their community's needs, we asked:

N

Why do your volunteer screening practices not fit your community's needs completely, and what do you hope to improve within your screening practices?

"Time. People don't understand the importance of getting the screening in on time."

"There are some individuals who would like to volunteer their time without any commitment to screening."

"People often volunteer in more than one place and may already have a police check from another source - we require [a specific third-party background check]."

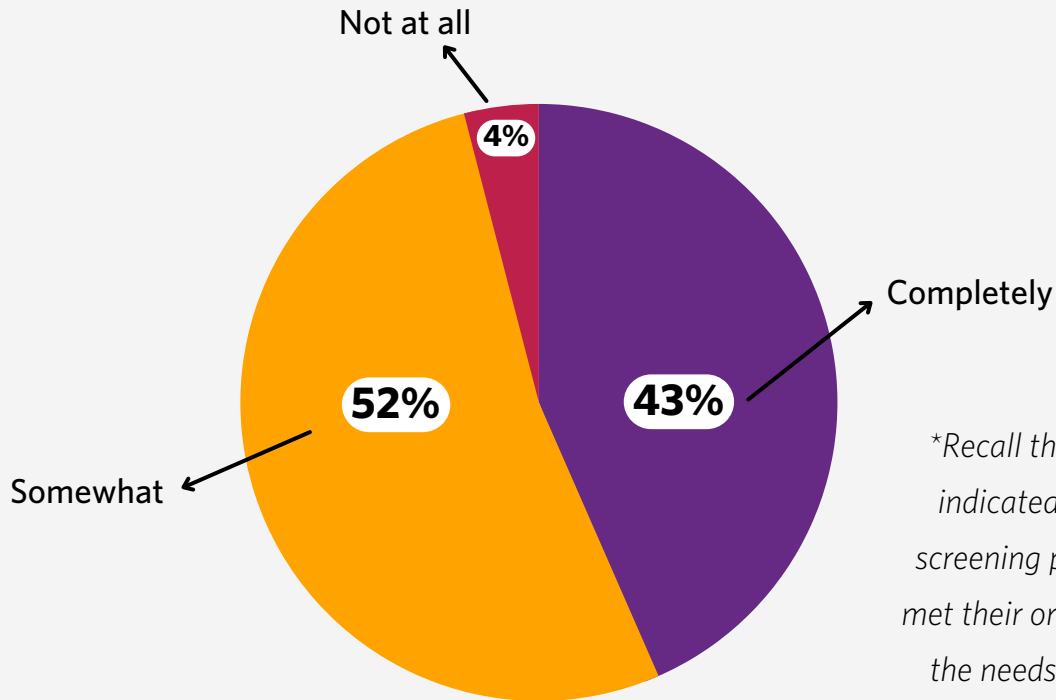
"We are wondering about upgrading the skill requirements to be a volunteer in our program."

"The current practices were developed as needed. We are starting a strategic review of the role of volunteers and I am sure this will identify gaps."

"I cannot say they do so completely as we have never discussed the processes."

V

To what extent do you feel the volunteer screening practices you've experienced meet your needs?



**Recall that 64% of nonprofits indicated that their volunteer screening practices "completely" met their organization's needs and the needs of their community.*

Of the 56% who indicated the volunteer screening practices they've experienced somewhat, or did not meet their needs, we asked:

V Why do the volunteer screening practices you've experienced not fit your needs completely? What do you think could improve?

"The interviewers seem to be busy and they do not share a lot of information about a lot of things."

"I've never been screened; there's little opportunity to dialogue about interests. It's all about what the [organization] needs for operations. I might have some flexibility in my role in how I carry out tasks/responsibilities, but that's most often provided after a longer time of service."

"Volunteers should always feel safe around the people they are volunteering with. They should also have security volunteers if needed with dealing with others they have volunteered to serve. Volunteers from out of town could have their fuel money reimbursed and they would see a [definite] increase in hours volunteered."

"The requirements for screening were not made clear at the time of volunteering."

"I was not able to meet with the [volunteer coordinator] to explain my motivation for volunteering and abilities for the role."

"Too bureaucratic, difference in urban and rural views caused different standards to be considered."

Continued from last page:

V

Why do the volunteer screening practices you've experienced not fit your needs completely? What do you think could improve?

“Screening is just one portion of the recruiting process, and so are the unavoidable security checks, especially for those roles related to money management and vulnerable populations; but what happens next is what makes the difference in the volunteer-organization relationship, and therefore in the outcomes, and that is the onboarding process. **A tight relationship between the volunteer and the organization must be built**, or at least started up to generate positive results. Otherwise, they just deliver "some work experience" for the volunteer, and "some job done" for the organization.”

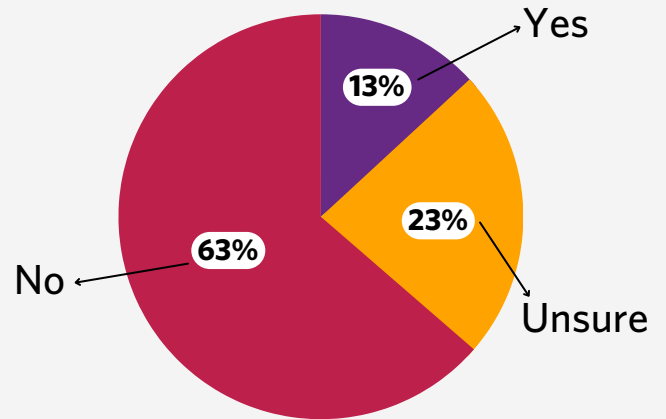
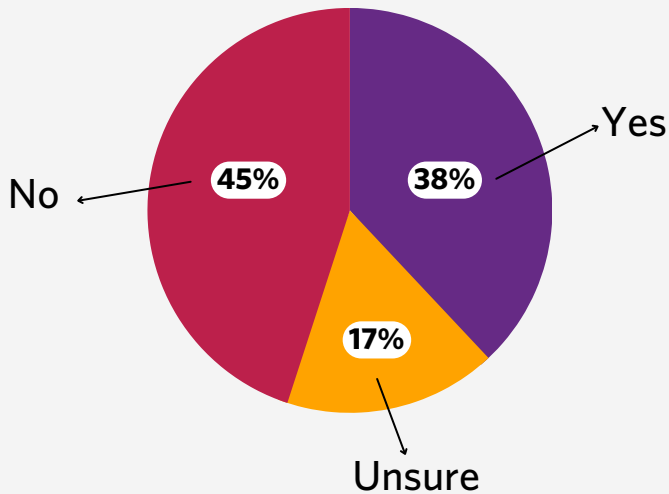


DO YOU SEEK FEEDBACK ABOUT YOUR VOLUNTEER SCREENING POLICIES & PRACTICES?

Does your organization seek feedback on its volunteer screening practices from its volunteers?

N

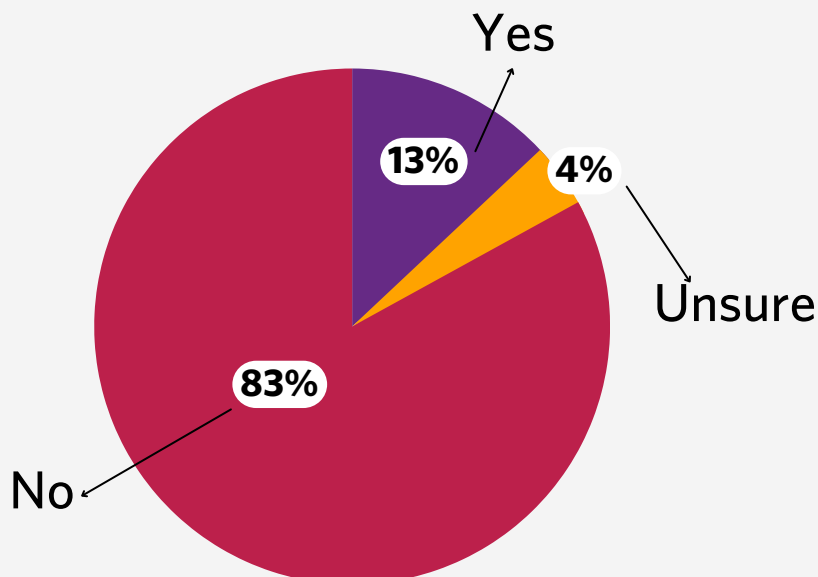
Does your organization seek feedback on its volunteer screening practices from community members?



**Recall that 64% of nonprofits indicated that their volunteer screening practices "completely" met the the needs of their community.*

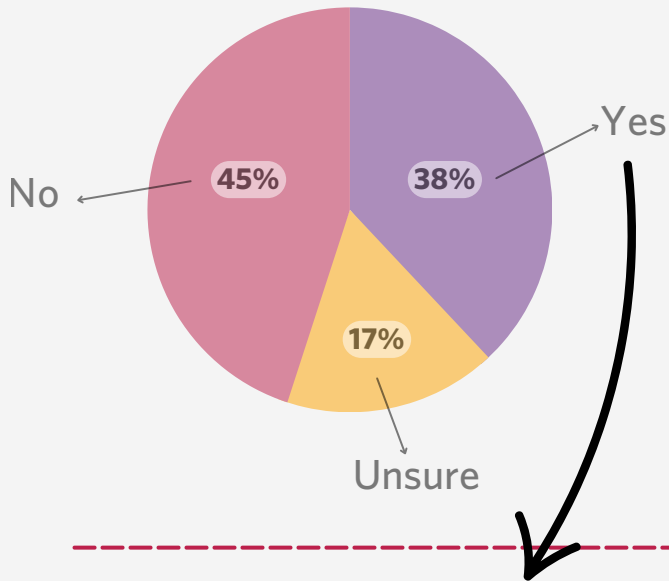
V

Have you ever been asked to provide feedback on an organization's screening practices?

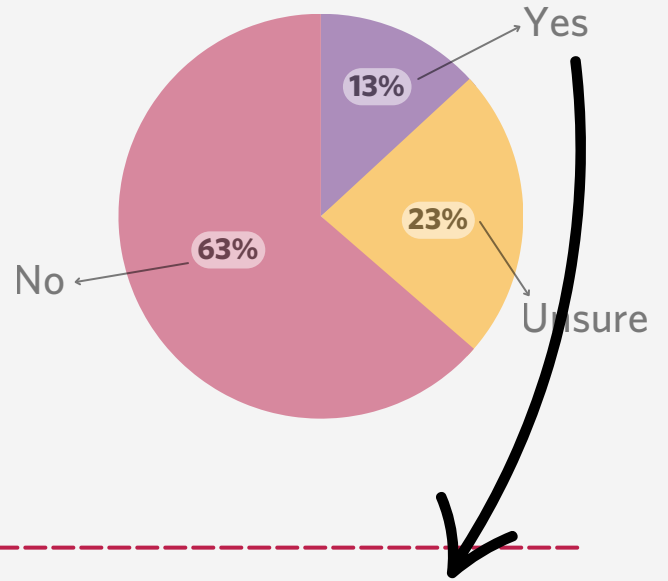


Remember that the sample size for the Volunteer Survey is quite a bit smaller than the nonprofit survey. Still, it appears many organizations are not actively and regularly seeking feedback from volunteers. In addition, these volunteers report even lower rates of opportunities to provide feedback than organizations indicated.

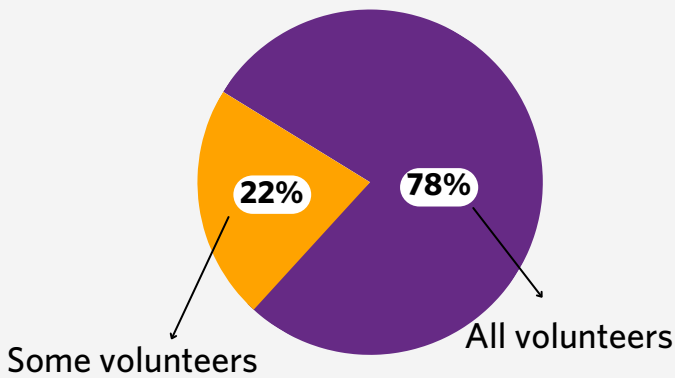
Does your organization seek feedback on its volunteer screening practices from its volunteers?



Does your organization seek feedback on its volunteer screening practices from community members?



Do you seek feedback from all volunteers (including current and former volunteers) or only some? If you select 'some volunteers' please specify who:



Qualitative answers indicated they solicit feedback from current or new volunteers, or those who are just leaving the organization, like an exit interview or survey.

N

Who from the community do you seek feedback from?

Qualitative answers were varied and including board members, clients, organization staff, current and former volunteers, stakeholders/funders, "community at large" (for example attendees of an event), or other agencies.

How does your organization seek feedback from volunteers?

Qualitative answers largely indicated the use of surveys, and some 1:1 conversations with volunteers.

N

How does your organization seek feedback from community members?

Qualitative answers largely indicated 1:1 conversations, and some use of surveys.

N Can you recall a time your organization adapted/changed its volunteer screening practices and/or policies in response to volunteer feedback? If so, please explain below. If not please write N/A:

“We keep our volunteer job descriptions more up to date.”

“I know we have, but I can't think of any off the top of my head.”

“Volunteers reviewed our Volunteer Policy Manual and provided suggestions for editing.”

“We do not often get enough “feedback” about the same topic in order to make changes. However, we do adapt and change if we feel something is not working.”

“We changed our practices for volunteers who want to try out a position 1-3 times before long-term commitment by having a separate process for them. It was difficult to get involved without understanding the position. This implementation allows volunteers to feel more comfortable with long-term commitment as per their feedback.”

“Yes, we changed our policy of having volunteer projects approved by the [Executive Director] of an organization when the volunteers said this took too long and complicated implementation. We changed our policy to such that a letter of informing the organization (rather than waiting for a return) was created.”

N Can you recall a time your organization adapted/changed its volunteer screening practices and/or policies in response to community feedback? If so, please explain. If not, please write N/A:

“We are currently working on making some changes to our volunteer intake process.”

“Sort of... We have tried to make our process easier by exploring the idea of a DIY tracker for volunteers to access. We also implemented a volunteer journey map to our website to make the process very clear to all.”

“Yes, we listen to every comment that we are given and if we feel there is a need we then develop a practice for moving forward.”

N **If your organization does not seek feedback on its volunteer screening practices from volunteers/community members, why not?**



They hadn't thought to or didn't know they could/should.

- > "We never thought about doing this."
- > "It has never come up, but the idea is great. Have been pondering the idea of a focus group lately for us to re-imagine volunteer engagement possibilities."
- > "I don't think it has occurred to anyone to do that."



They feel volunteers/community members don't have enough information or expertise to be involved in those conversations.

- > "Really? We seek feedback on many things and from different audiences, but not on screening from community members."
- > "We get feedback from those we help and those who volunteer but not randomly from the public."
- > "We only implement what we feel is required and it these screening processes are for the safety of our kids- not an option."



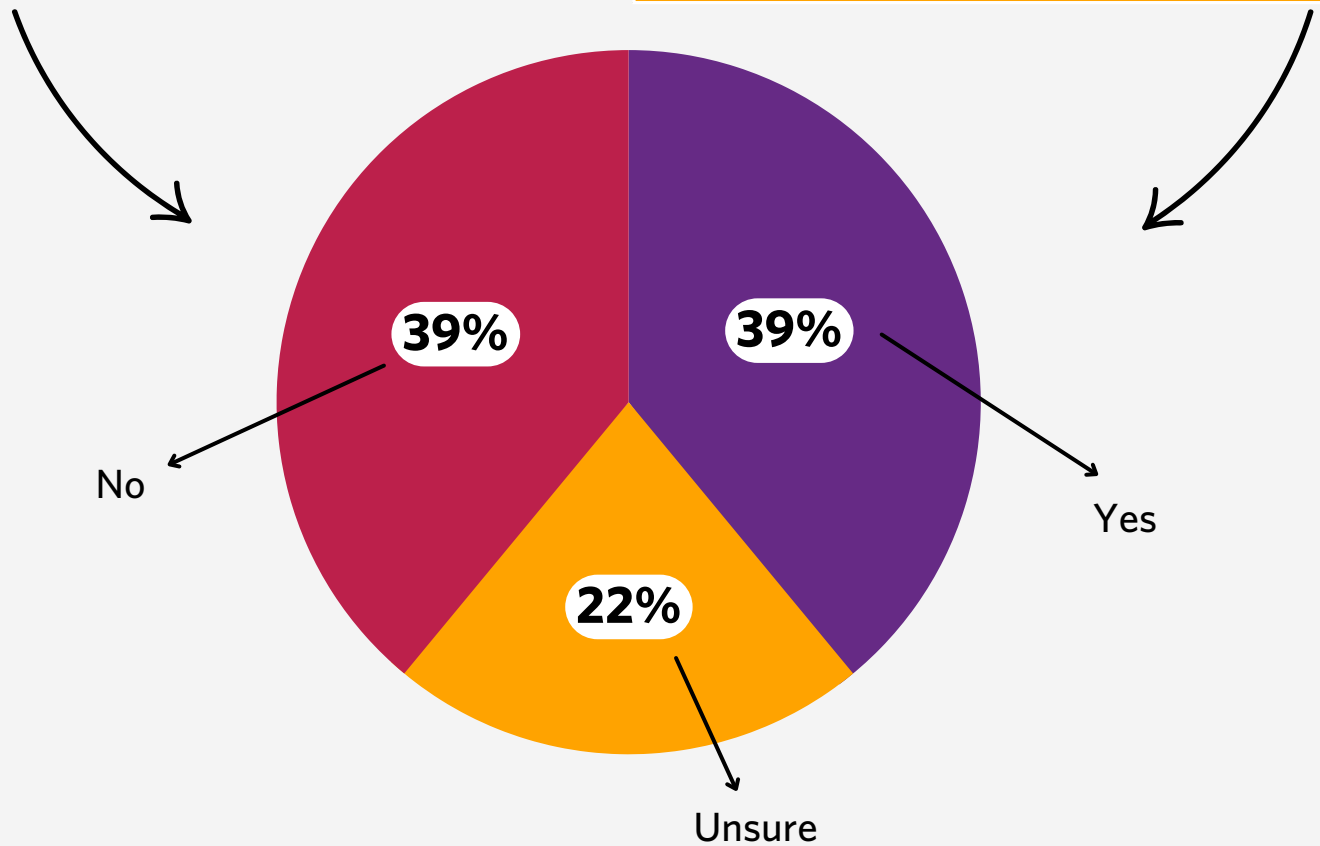
They don't have the resources or capacity to engage volunteers or community members on these topics.

- > "We welcome opportunities to improve but have not set aside resources to do so."
- > "We don't have the capacity to."
- > "It has been a capacity challenge since 2020."

As a volunteer, do you feel you have clear avenues to provide feedback to organizations about their volunteer screening practices?

As a volunteer, do you feel you have clear avenues to provide feedback to organizations about their risk management practices (such as reviewing risks associated with the volunteer position, orientation or training practices, or level of supervision)?

*Same distribution of answers for both questions



When asked to elaborate on the above question, qualitative answers for both questions indicated most volunteers didn't realize they could provide feedback on these things. One respondent stated the organization did not accept feedback from volunteers when they tried to provide it. Another respondent said they felt they didn't have enough expertise to provide feedback.

LEARNING MOMENT

DO YOUR SCREENING PRACTICES FIT YOUR/YOUR COMMUNITY'S NEEDS? & DO YOU SEEK FEEDBACK ABOUT YOUR VOLUNTEER SCREENING POLICIES & PRACTICES?

We recommend organizations take an intentional and inclusive approach to seeking feedback about their volunteer screening practices and policies. It is good practice to involve volunteers, clients/participants, families, and the wider community in conversations about an organization's volunteer screening practices and policies.

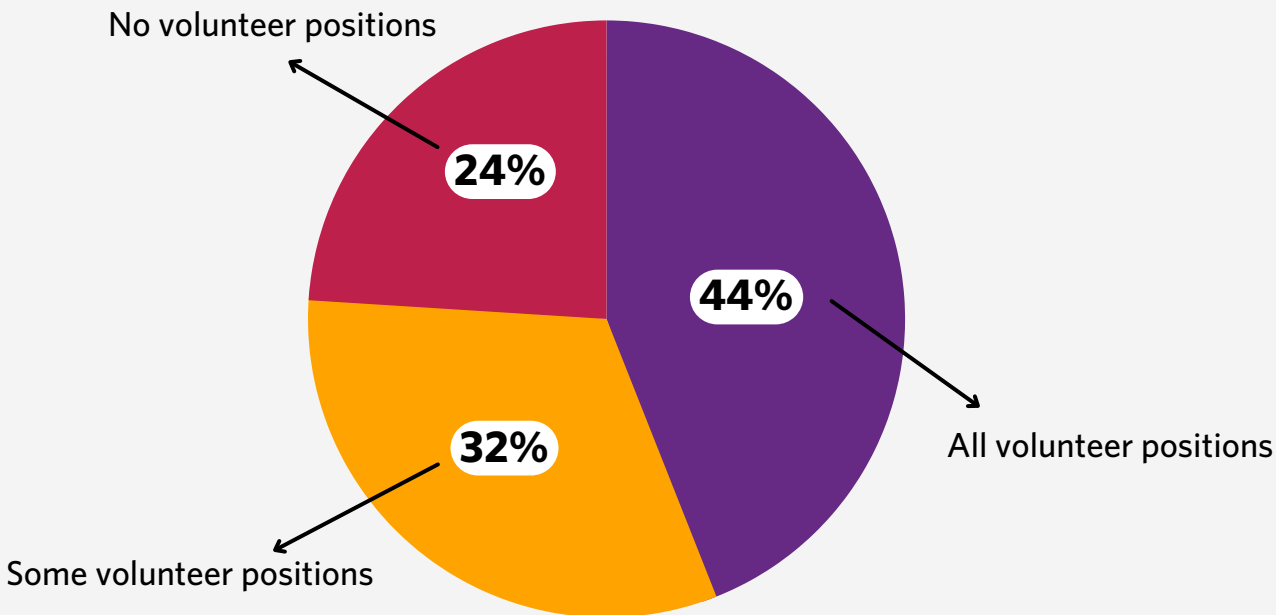
- Most notable data is that 64% of respondents to the Nonprofit Survey indicated that their screening practices “completely” meet the needs of their organization and their community. But only 38% actively seek feedback from their volunteers, and only 13% seek feedback from the wider community. **So, organizations should ask themselves often - how do you know your practices fit your community needs, in particular if you haven't yet taken the opportunity to ask them?**
- **Perhaps organizations need to be more intentional in seeking feedback.** Some qualitative answers from the Nonprofit Survey indicated that although organizations don't have a specific feedback strategy, they feel they get feedback from volunteers organically. We encourage organizations avoid assuming volunteers will approach them with feedback and to be more intentional about asking for it.

LEARNING MOMENT

- Regarding the trend of organizations not seeking feedback from volunteers and the wider community because staff feel those folks lack the experience and expertise to provide meaningful feedback :
 - This reaction occurred more when asked about seeking feedback from the wider community and it appears organizations more readily recognize the value of asking volunteers for feedback rather than the wider community.
 - While it's important to seek feedback from an organization's current volunteers, it's equally important to seek feedback from the organization's potential volunteers and community as a whole. If we limit seeking feedback only to the people who have made it through an organization's doors, we only receive a small snapshot of information. There could be a whole range of opinions on an organization's screening practices from folks who only made it half way through the process, or folks who were turned away from the organization, or even folks who decided not to apply to the organization for whatever reason that may be!
 - **If your organization has the time and capacity, there is great value in asking volunteers, and the wider community for input on your screening practices and policies.**
-
- **Approach community feedback openly and with curiosity. As a guideline, consider using IAP2's framework to inform the level of involvement the community may have, and understand the organization's responsibilities to report back and follow-up with people who provided feedback.**
 - If folks are suggesting unreasonable or unsafe practices, they do not need to be implemented;
 - However, if volunteers and the wider community are suggesting similar things repeatedly, it may signal that the "best practices" of the organization are not working for everyone and that the 'experts' may need some support to re-imagine what good practices in screening could look like, supported by the wider community.

DO YOU USE GOOD PRACTICES IN RISK ASSESSMENTS FOR YOUR VOLUNTEER POSITIONS?

N How consistently does your organization use risk assessments when developing or updating volunteer positions?



N What does your organization's risk assessment process look like?

45%

Provided answers that VA believes are reflective of good practices in conducting risk assessments. For example: consulting with a risk management professional, utilizing a rubric or matrix to 'grade' risks on a scale from low risk to high risk.

34%

Indicated their risk assessments were tied to individual volunteers in the screening process, rather than volunteer roles/positions overall.

LEARNING MOMENT

DO YOU USE GOOD PRACTICES IN RISK ASSESSMENTS FOR YOUR VOLUNTEER POSITIONS?

Risk assessments should be conducted on overall volunteer positions, not the individual volunteers. Organizations should regularly be reviewing their volunteer positions overall for the risk to program participants/clients, the volunteers themselves, or risk to the organization as a whole.

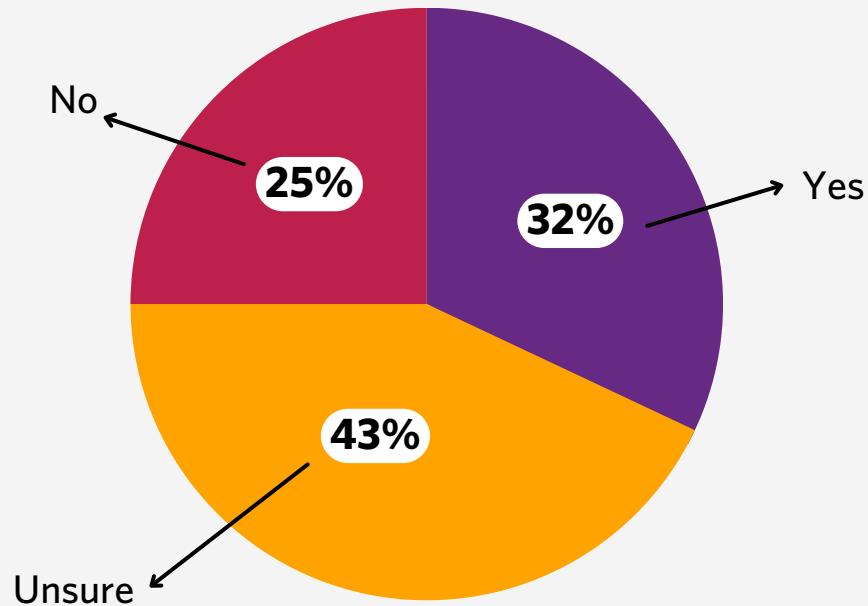
- Risk assessments are a key tool in determining what an organization's screening process should look like for particular volunteer roles.
- Our focus groups supported the idea that the level of screening should be directly tied to the complexity of the role, skill level required, and general level of risk associated with a given role. There should be more in-depth screening for more complex or high-risk roles, and less in-depth screening for roles that are simple and have very low levels of risk.



ARE YOUR VOLUNTEER SCREENING PRACTICES & POLICIES EQUITABLE & INCLUSIVE?

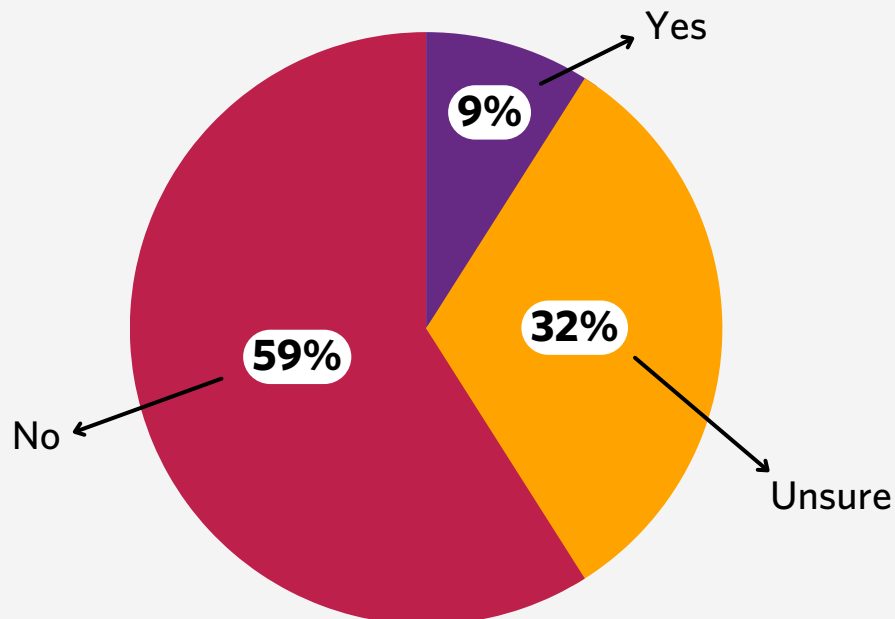
N

Has your organization implemented any volunteer screening policies and/or practices intended to improve equity for volunteers?



V

Do you know of any organizations who use volunteer screening practices or policies that are intended to improve equity for volunteers in the screening process? Or do you recall a time when an organization made an accommodation for you or another volunteer?



Of the 32% (or 20 respondents) who answered "Yes" their organization has implemented policies and practice intended to improve equity for volunteers, only 8 respondents provided examples.

N

Please provide a description or a link to your equity-based policies/practices.

"We have the capacity to build roles for people, based on their interest, ability and drive. We very rarely turn anyone away, as we have a wide variety of roles for different people to excel in."

"All volunteers must take our anti-racism course."

"[Our organization] values diversity and welcomes applications from First Nations, Inuit and Metis, New Canadian, racialized, differently abled and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities."

"Decolonizing screening which has basically meant doing very little screening. We post a position and if the volunteer seems like a good fit, we approve them through the volunteer connector and give them instructions on how to do the job. Most of our positions are virtual. All they need to do is complete the application through the Connector which takes less than 5 mins. "

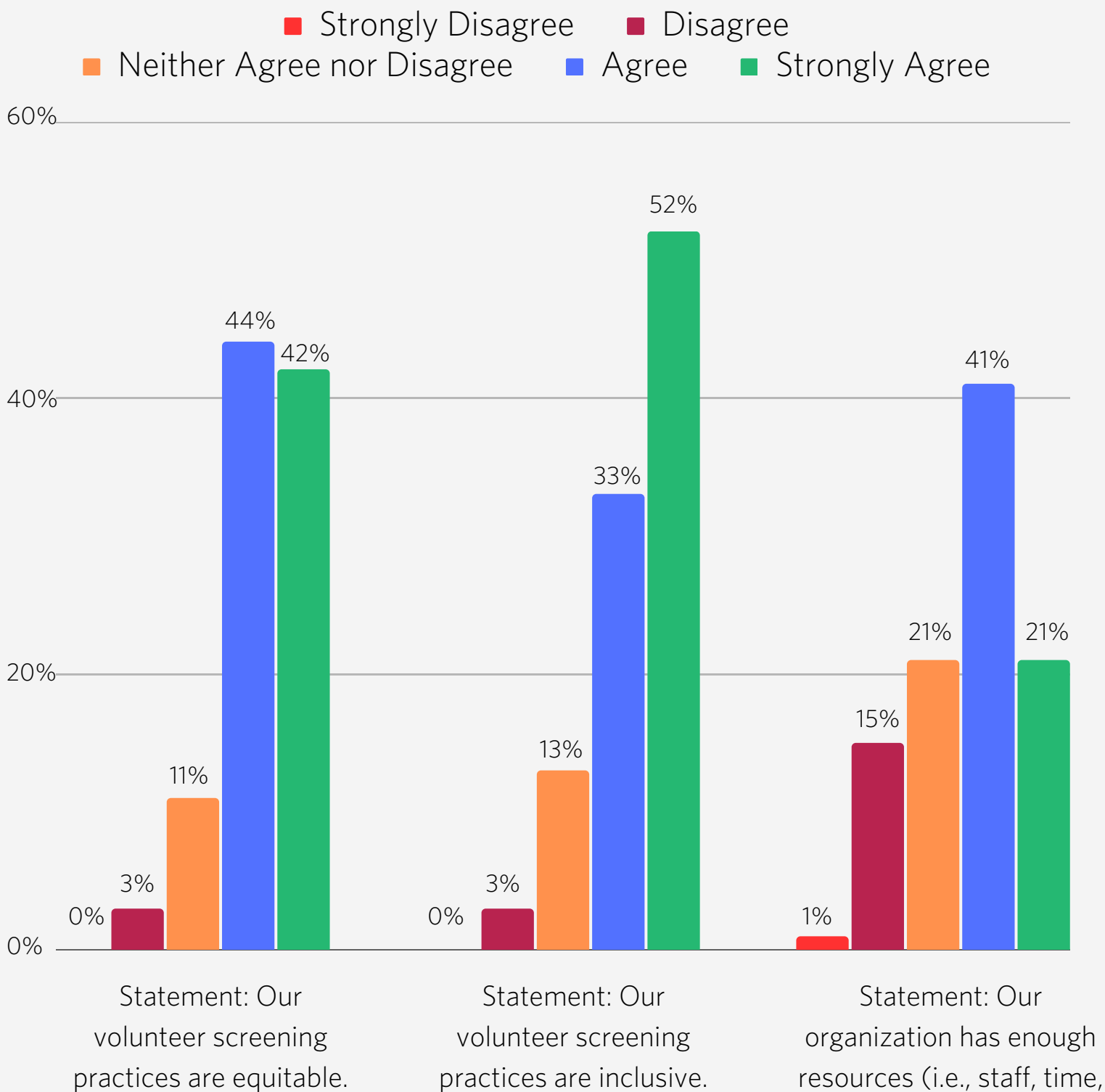
"We are an inclusive organization and will accommodate volunteers based on their interests and skills, and within the scope of their physical, cognitive, and emotional capacities, provided they are competent and qualified for their chosen role."

"We utilize a variety of volunteers from different ethnicities, socio-economic classes, gender, vulnerable persons, those with criminal history."

"[Organization provided a link to their diversity and inclusion policy]"

N

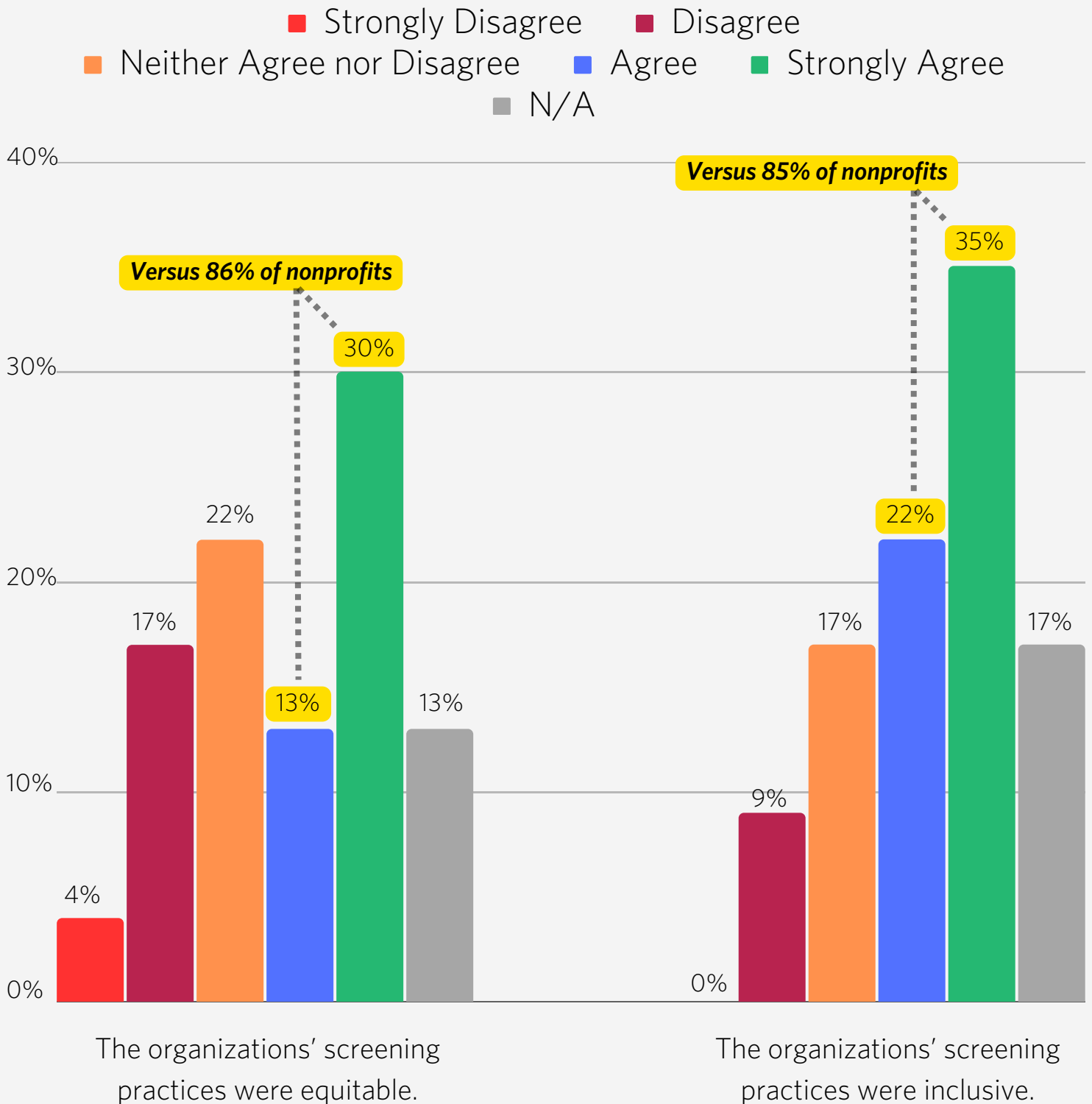
Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your organization:



**Recall that 32% of respondents indicated they have implemented policies and practices intended to improve equity for volunteers. Yet, 86% either agree or strongly agree that their policies are equitable*

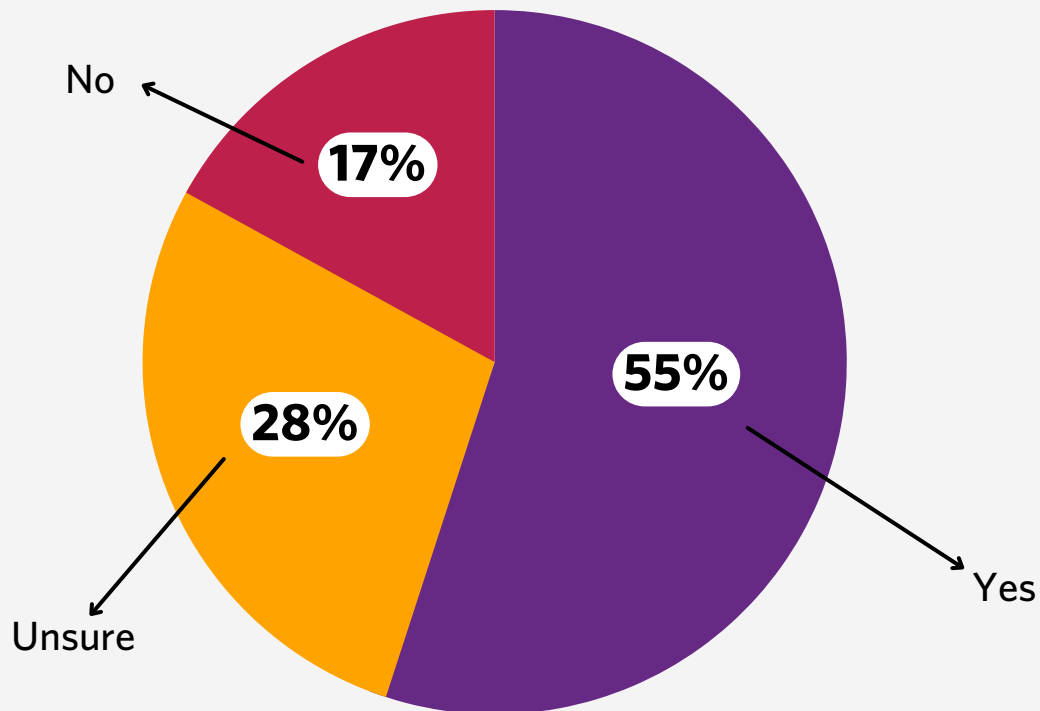
V

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. We recognize you may have volunteered with multiple different organizations in the past year, please answer these statements based on the volunteer experience you were most engaged with in the past year.

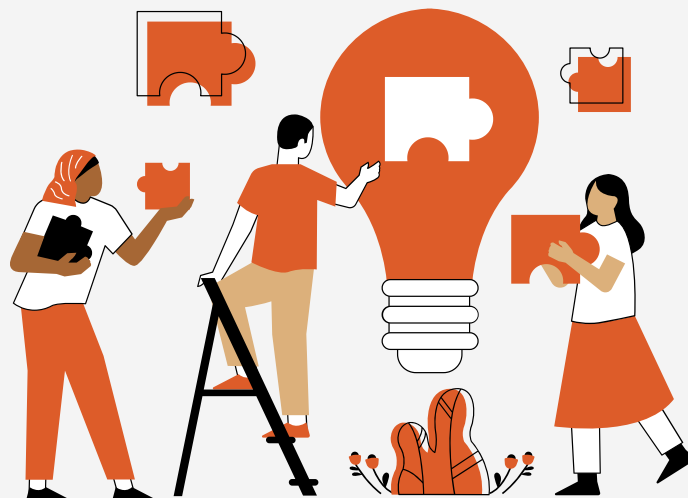


N

Is your organization interested in exploring/updating their screening policies from an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) perspective?



Unfortunately, we did not ask a follow-up question asking why folks answered the way they did. It's possible that the 17% of organizations who answered "No" may have already done this in their recent history and may not be interested in doing it again so soon. But, without having asked the follow-up question, we're left wondering how many organizations are genuinely not interested in exploring or updating their screening policies from an EDI perspective and whether or not we should be concerned about that number.



LEARNING MOMENT

ARE YOUR VOLUNTEER SCREENING PRACTICES & POLICIES EQUITABLE & INCLUSIVE?

We recommend organizations refrain from assuming their policies are equitable and inclusive and instead seek feedback from volunteers, participants, and the wider community.

We know that having concrete policies is one way to be accountable and ensure your organization is reducing participation barriers and working towards an entirely equitable and inclusive volunteer program. However, nourishing a culture of equity and inclusion in your organization and volunteer programs requires more than policy work. We must also take time as individuals and as organizations to do the deep inner work to understand and interrogate our ways of making sense of the world, and how they have biases embedded within them.

- Recall that only 32% of respondents to the Nonprofit Survey indicated they have implemented policies and practices intended to improve equity for volunteers. Yet, 86% either agree or strongly agree that their practices are equitable. This data suggests that many organizations believe their practices are equitable without having implemented specific or intentional policies and practices to improve equity.

Continued from last page:

LEARNING MOMENT

- This data could mean organizations are organically equitable and inclusive and have a culture embedded throughout the organization geared towards equity and inclusion. On the other hand, it could potentially suggest an over-assumption of how equitable and inclusive their policies and practices genuinely are, especially given very few organizations solicit feedback from volunteers and community members regarding their practices and provided how few organizations have not or are unsure of whether they have implemented any practices intending to improve equity and inclusion.
- If organizations have, in fact, implemented these practices, it appears there is a gap in volunteers being aware of or experiencing these policies. It seems volunteers don't know about the work organizations may have done to improve their organization's equity and inclusion.
- As a place to start, you may wish to check out our [Virtual Volunteer Screening & Engagement Guidebook](#), [GEDI Hub](#), or "[An Anti-Racist Approach to Volunteering](#)" to help you on your journey towards creating a more inclusive and welcoming experience for everyone.



DO YOU USE GOOD PRACTICES IN YOUR OVERALL SCREENING PROCESS & OBTAINING BACKGROUND CHECKS?

N

Please explain your understanding of when it is appropriate/necessary to obtain a Vulnerable Sector Check for a prospective volunteer?

28%

Provided answers that VA believes are reflective of good practices in obtaining Vulnerable Sector Checks (VSCs), which includes only asking for VSCs when the volunteer will be in direct contact with a vulnerable population, in a position of trust or authority over the vulnerable population, and/or with unsupervised access to the vulnerable population.

44%

Stated VSCs are appropriate when volunteers are working directly with vulnerable populations, regardless of position of trust or authority, and/or unsupervised access.

V

Please explain your understanding of when it is appropriate/necessary to obtain a Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC) for your volunteer role.

4%

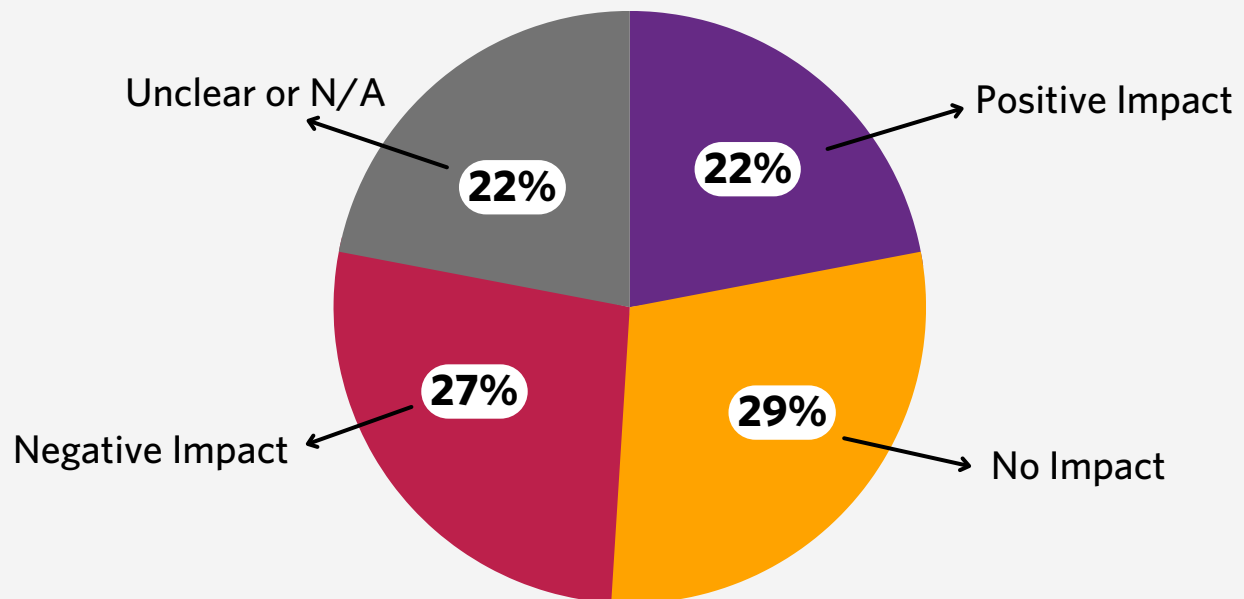
Provided answers that VA believes are reflective of good practices in obtaining Vulnerable Sector Checks (VSCs).

52%

Stated VSCs are appropriate when volunteers are working directly with vulnerable populations, regardless of position of trust or authority, and/or unsupervised access.

N

If applicable, how have the use of background checks in your screening process impacted your volunteer engagement? If not applicable, please write N/A.



"The need NOT to do background checks enables our volunteer engagement to be as big as we like!"

"It usually slows down the process of getting volunteers."

"We occasionally have volunteers that feel burdened by the additional steps."

"No impact. All volunteers have cleared their checks. We have policies in place to address volunteers whose checks come back with concerns."

"Some individuals are not willing to undergo the necessary screenings."

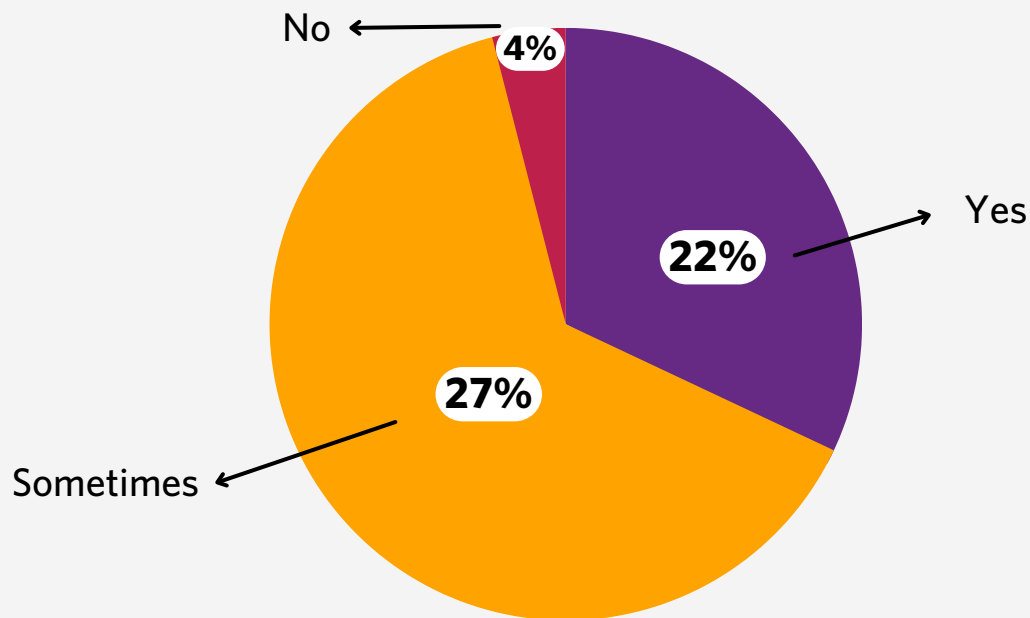
"Because of the relationship with the RCMP background checks are either free or subsidized. This takes away the financial cost from the volunteer. Also this has help create confidence to clients and general public to attend or participate in events or programs of the organization."

"They allow our volunteers and members to see the commitment we have to safe and professional practices."

"It does not impact it any way other than it is just another step for the volunteers to complete before they can actively volunteer."

V

Do you think background checks (PICs, VSCs, CRCs, etc.) should be required to volunteer?



"I think it is important for specific roles but understand they can be barrier for some wanting to get involved in their community. "

"If people have nothing to hide why would that bother them."

"ALWAYS so organizations can base their selection only talent, experience, knowledge and attitude with the peace of mind that they have done everything they could to harbour safety, respect, diversity, inclusion and freedom of speech. "

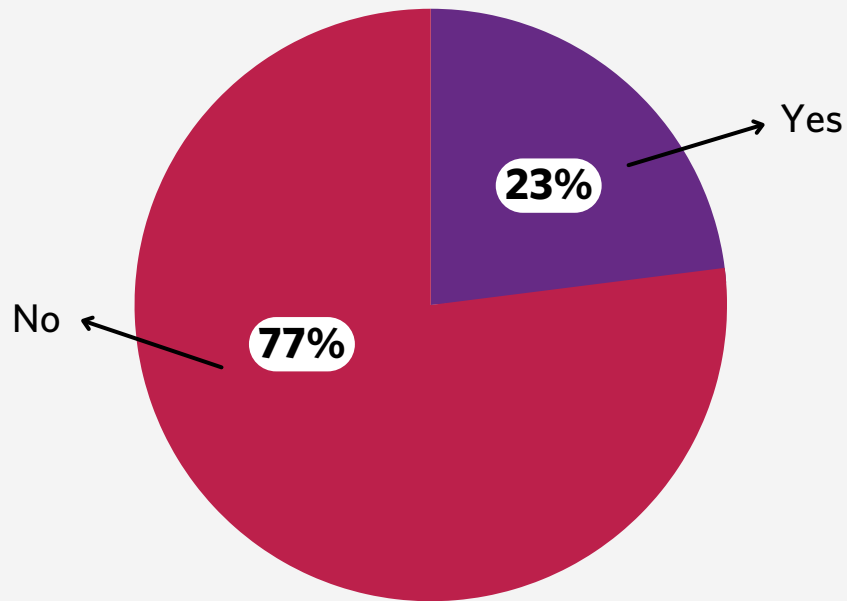
"If the volunteer role involves working with vulnerable people, then yes."

"It depends on the context of volunteering. There should be certain criteria to determine if these checks are needed depending on the volunteer's access to sensitive information, interactions with vulnerable populations, etc. In some situation, background checks can pose a barrier to certain individuals."

"Depends on what you're volunteering for. But if you're strictly supervised during your volunteer work, then I think background checks are unnecessary."

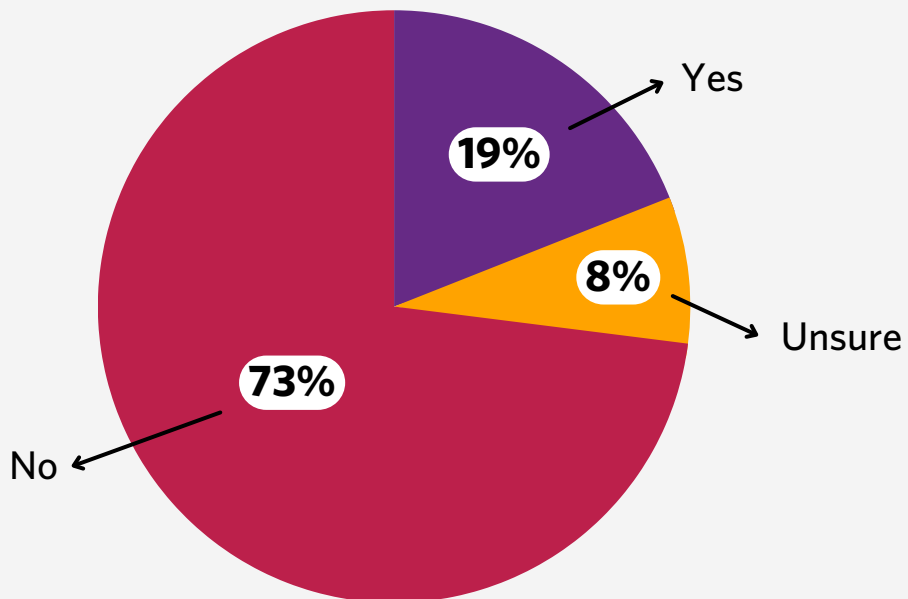
V

Have you ever not applied for a volunteer role due to screening requirements?



V

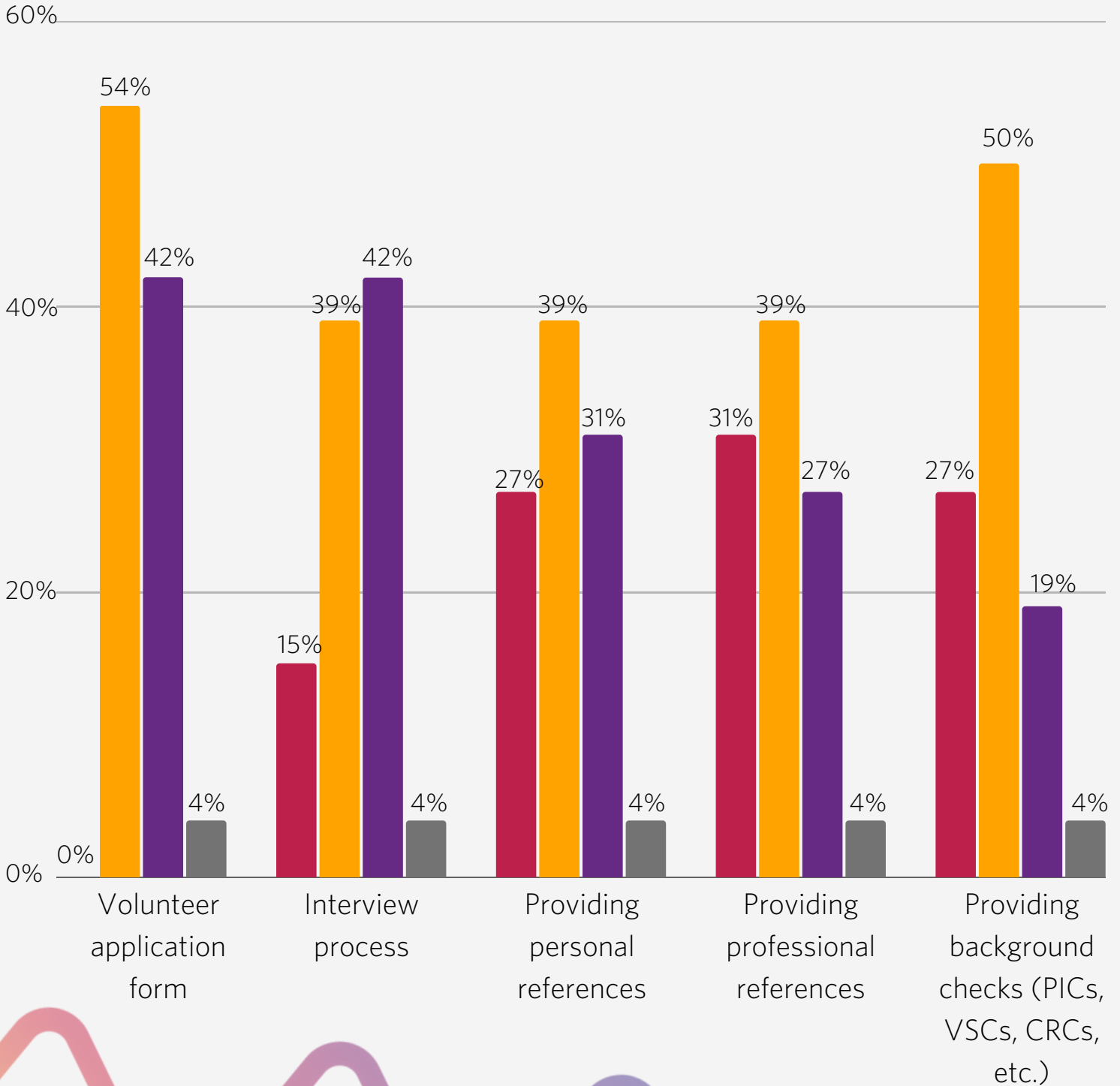
Have you ever experienced volunteer screening as a barrier to volunteering?





On a scale of 1-5, please indicate how each of the below methods of volunteer screening would impact your engagement as a volunteer.

- (1-2) Less Likely to Volunteer
- (3) No Impact
- (4-5) More Likely to Volunteer
- N/A



V

Would you like to elaborate on your answers to the 3 questions above?

"Information that I can provide myself to the organization (application form, interview, background checks) are relatively straightforward and don't present much of a barrier. Professional references are more of a barrier, as it involves asking others for their time in providing me with a reference."

"It makes me feel safe that my volunteer colleagues have been screened and they are good people."

"A one-on-one conversation/interview with the recruiting person is always helpful. to enhance the bonds between the volunteer and the organization, so the outcome is a memorable experience for both and the clients."

"If I want to volunteer with an organization I am willing to jump through the necessary hoops."

"I work full time and am not looking for continuing opportunities, so providing references and background checks is just not worth the time and resources for all parties."

"The more screening there is, the more complex the job is. I am looking for challenging things."

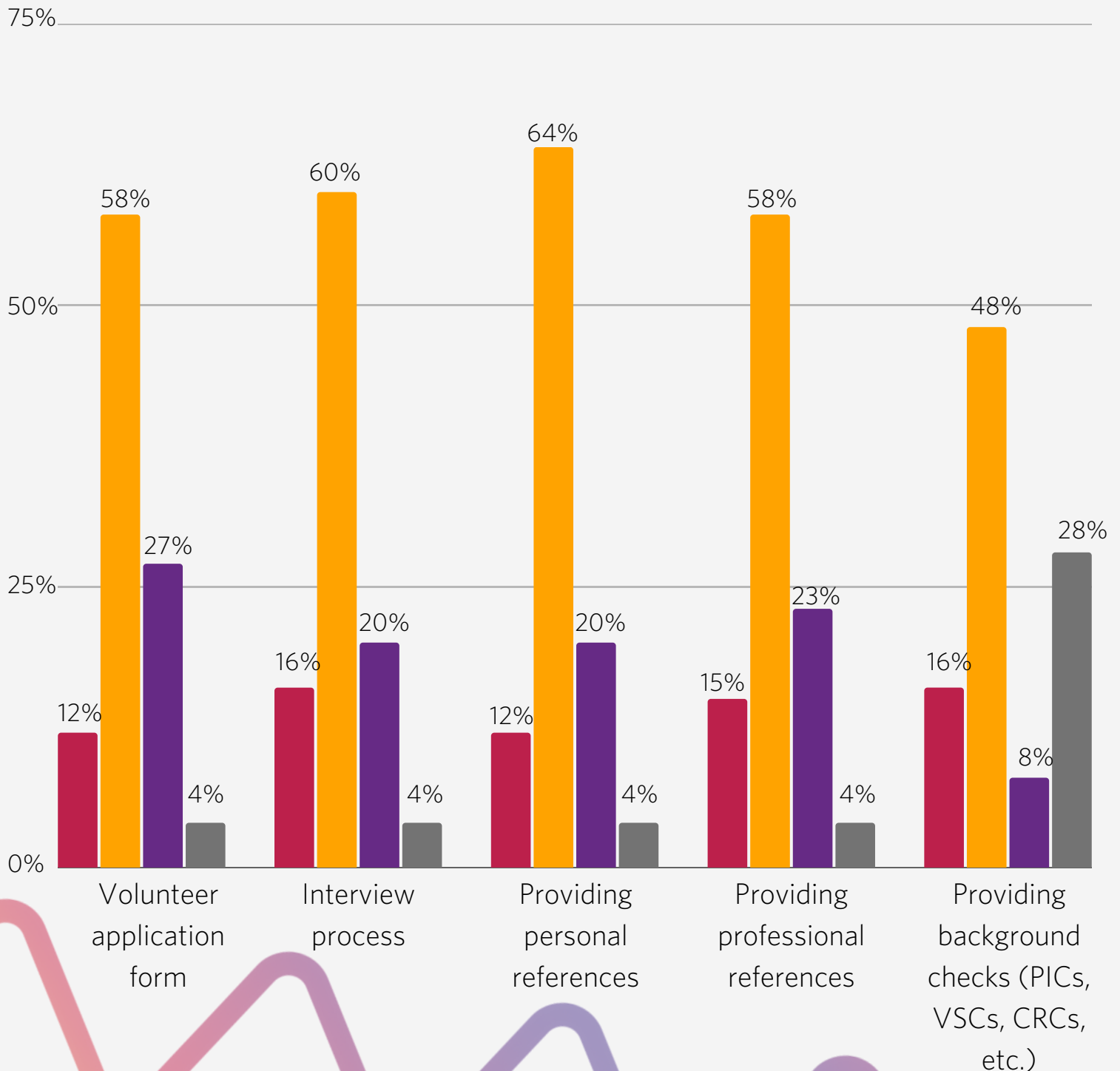
"Volunteer screening has not impede my willingness to volunteer as I understand that it's a way to match my capabilities to what the organization requires."

"This would have no impact on my decision to apply for a volunteer opportunity".



If applicable, how would the use of the following background checks in the volunteer screening process impact your engagement/willingness to volunteer for an organization?

■ Less Likely to Volunteer ■ No Impact
■ More Likely to Volunteer ■ N/A



V

Would you like to elaborate on your answer to the above question?

"To me, these checks are a standard part of the process and don't make me more or less likely to volunteer."

"This gives me peace of mind that the place is safe."

"If I were a general volunteer (without access to vulnerable persons, for example) I'd find these screening tools a bit much and may find them a deterrent. If the situation warranted it, then I'd appreciate them being utilized. (To protect the volunteer, club, and members)."

"I respect that as a light-skinned male without a criminal record the above process do not represent a barrier. If I was otherwise, I may feel intimidated by them."

"From my experience these checks are inconvenient. The PIC required scheduling an appointment a month in advance, there were only two available appointment both mid-week, mid-day. The location was also not very convenient to get to by any form of transit. So unless you have the means to take a day off work, or are financially stable or need to have a full time job. It's rather inconvenient."

"If organization will pay for the background checks, then I would still volunteer."

"Record checks or personal checks would not impact my decisions in this process."

N

What is your organization's policy or procedure if/when information is revealed on a PIC/VSC/CRC? Please write N/A if your organization does not have a relevant policy or procedure.

46%

Do not have a policy.

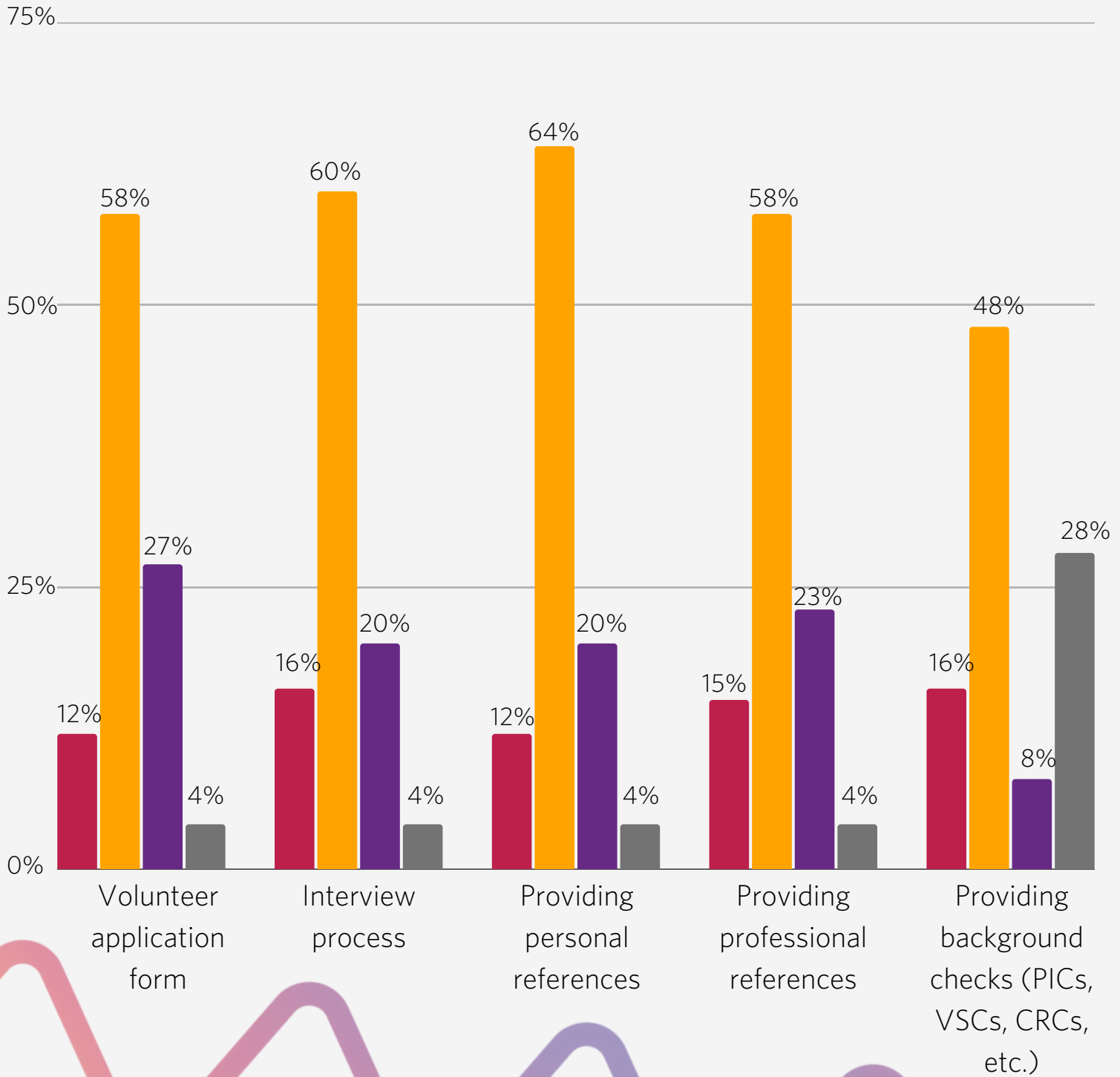
35%

Deal with situations on a case-by-case basis, but didn't necessarily state that they have clear policies on what may be accepted or not.



If applicable, how would the use of the following background checks in the volunteer screening process impact your engagement/willingness to volunteer for an organization?

- Less Likely to Volunteer
- No Impact
- More Likely to Volunteer
- N/A

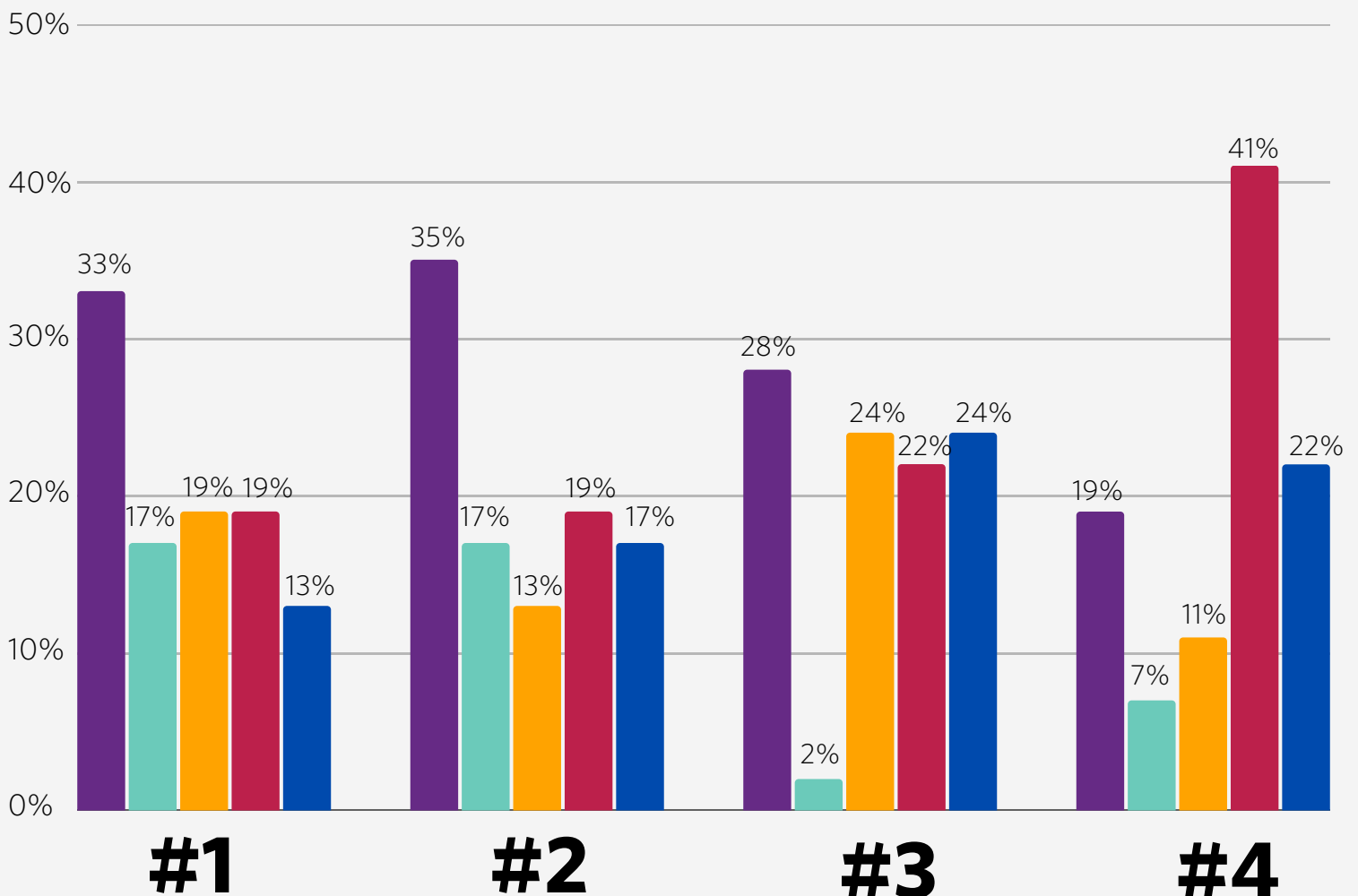
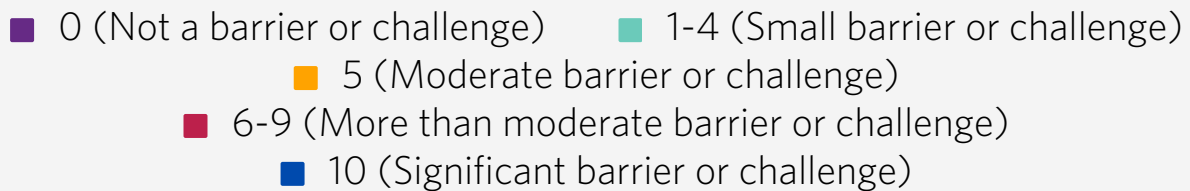


N

Through community conversations and research, Volunteer Alberta has identified the following as barriers or challenges to volunteers when organizations use background checks:

1. It is possible for non-conviction records such as mental health checks or calls to 911 to appear on background checks;
2. Background checks have a disproportionate effect of screening out Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) volunteers;
3. Fees for background checks;
4. Background checks are complex for newcomers due to administrative processes, lack of documentation, or inability to access checks from their previous home country.

On a scale from 0-10, please indicate to what extent you view these findings as barriers or challenges for volunteers.

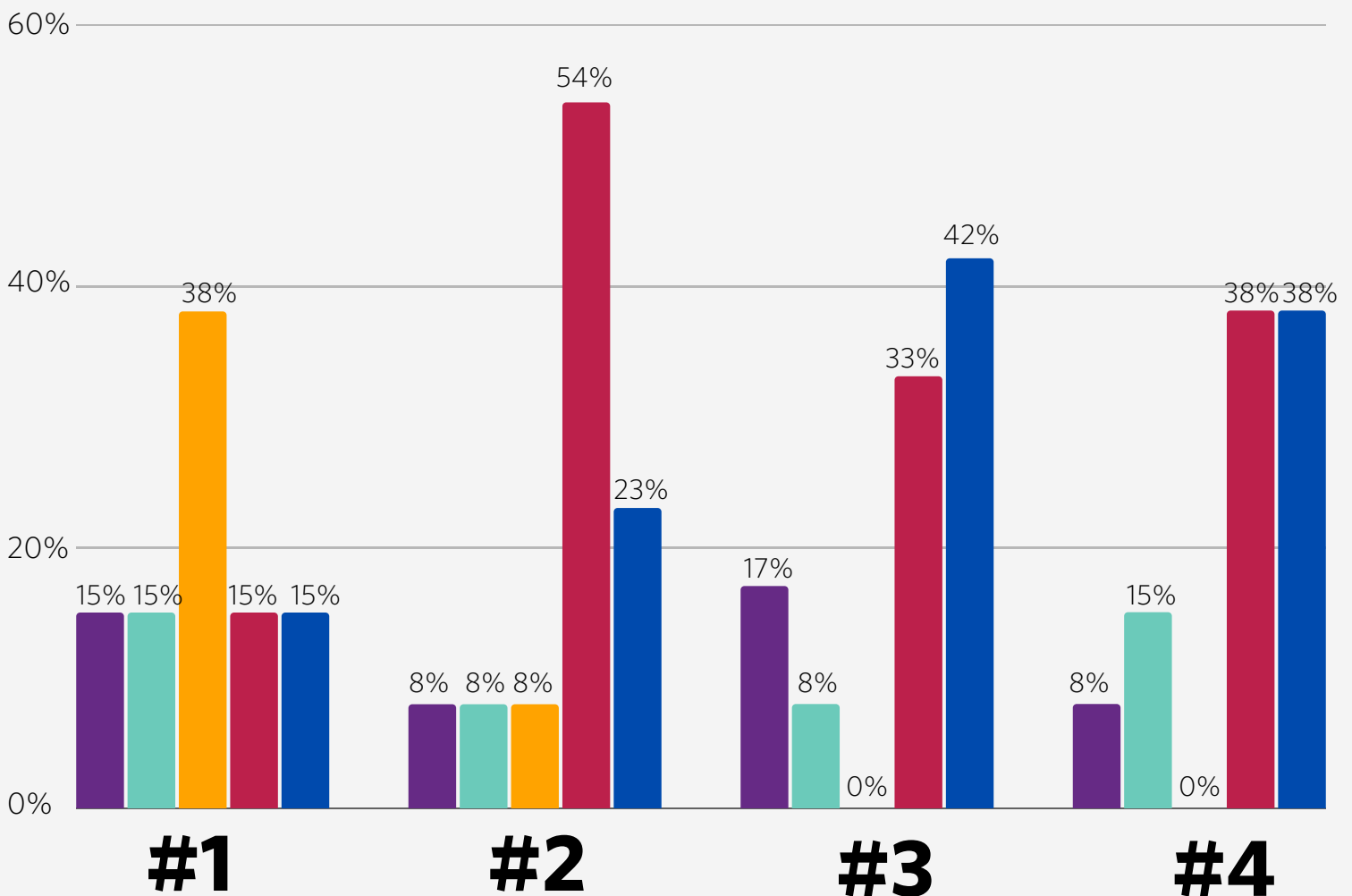
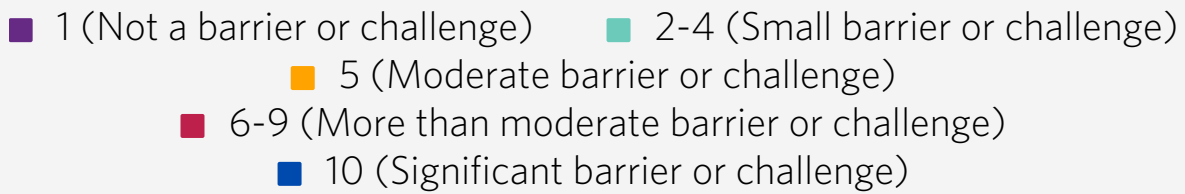


V

Through community conversations and research, Volunteer Alberta has identified the following as barriers or challenges to volunteers when organizations use background checks:

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3. Fees for background checks;
4. Background checks are complex for newcomers due to administrative processes, lack of documentation, or inability to access checks from their previous home country.

On a scale from 1-10, please indicate to what extent you view these findings as barriers or challenges to volunteering.



LEARNING MOMENT

DO YOU USE GOOD PRACTICES IN YOUR OVERALL SCREENING PROCESS & OBTAINING BACKGROUND CHECKS?

The level of screening, including but not limited to, the extent to which organizations ask for background checks and reference checks, should be directly related to the complexity or level of risk associated with a volunteer position.

There are both benefits and challenges to the use of background checks in the screening process. Therefore, we recommend organizations take a curious and open approach to obtaining background checks for volunteers.

Organizations should consider their recruitment strategy, philosophy/values, and level of risk to participants and volunteers.

- Our data show that people have diverse reactions to various screening methods and being asked to provide background checks. These reactions tend to correlate with differences in identity groups and demographics. Folks who identify as belonging to equity-deserving communities are more likely to experience screening and reference checks as a barrier.

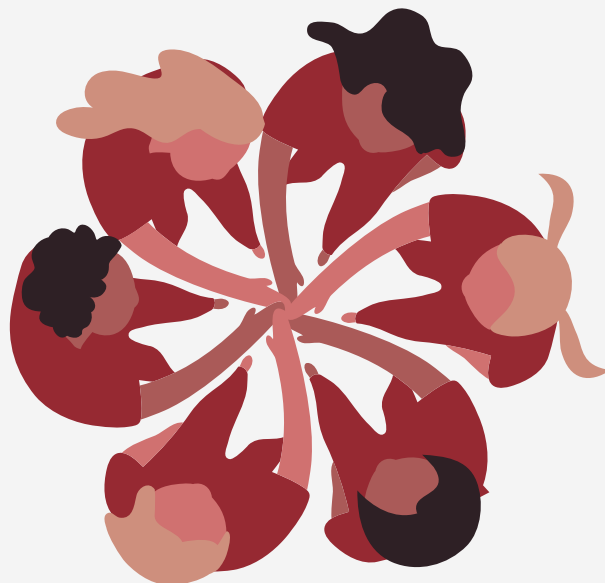
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LEARNING MOMENT

‘Background checks’ such as Criminal Record Checks, Police Information Checks, and Vulnerable Sector Checks have often been cited as barriers to volunteering by BIPOC individuals. The Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA) found that “because of systemic racism within the criminal justice system, BIPOC individuals are more likely to have a blemish on their background check” and are therefore more likely to be ‘screened out’ of a volunteer position. “By requiring background checks, this systemic racism carries over into volunteerism” (Joyslin, L. (2021). *Co-Creating Racial Equity in Volunteer Engagement: Learning from Listening Sessions with Black, Indigenous and People of Color*. Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration.).

Organizations tend to use these checks to mitigate risk and liability, but as stated in a 2014 report by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, “there is no evidence that broad use of criminal records materially reduces the risk of crime or violent offences in the workplace” (Canadian Civil Liberties Association. (2014). *False promises, hidden costs: The case for reframing employment and volunteer police record check practices in Canada*. falsepromises (ccla.org)).

If you would like to learn more about the various complexities of background checks, please review our [Virtual Volunteer Screening & Engagement Guidebook](#), where we have more information about the nuances and challenges of the broad use of background checks.



Conclusion

Through our research and the development of current benchmarks, the Volunteer Screening Program has now identified several future focus areas based on the good practices and gaps we found.

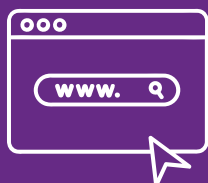
Those broad focus areas include deepening our work with organizations to:

- Balance the screening process to address both safety and matching volunteers to fulfilling roles;
- Encourage and educate organizations to seek and utilize feedback from volunteers, clients/participants, and the wider community;
- Be intentional in implementing policies and practices intended to improve equity and inclusion for volunteers and do the deep inner work to interrogate our ways of making sense of the world and how they have biases embedded within them;
- Review screening processes, specifically regarding background checks and reference checks, to ensure the level of screening is proportional to the risk and complexity of the role; and,
- Emphasize that equity-deserving communities have unique experiences and needs in the screening process due to historical and present-day injustices.

Thanks again to everyone who contributed to making this report possible. Volunteer Alberta and the Government of Alberta will use this report as an input to help us consider future continued improvements for VSP.

If you would like to learn more about good practices in volunteer screening and engagement, please refer to our [Virtual Volunteer Screening and Engagement Guidebook](#) as well as our [Resource Library](#) on our website.

You can also reach out to the Volunteer Screening Program team at any time by email: screening@volunteeralberta.ab.ca



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