



VOLUNTEER SCREENING

IS A POLICE INFORMATION CHECK THE ONLY WAY?



**VOLUNTEER
ALBERTA**

EFFECTIVE SCREENING PRACTICES ARE IMPORTANT.

Volunteer screening is broadly defined as an ongoing process that matches people and organizations. It improves the safety and quality of programs, and reduces risks and liability. By following Volunteer Canada's **THE SCREENING HANDBOOK** and the **10 STEPS TO SCREENING**, you will be able to make informed, reasonable, and intuitive judgments about the volunteers you hire.

Police Information Checks are an element of volunteer screening and recruitment processes; however, they are only one step in a multi-step process. PICs are not always necessary. It is important to identify if, and when, it is necessary to seek a Police Information Check (PIC) or a Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC).

Public safety, quality of service delivery, and duty of care are highly valued and are shared interests in the nonprofit sector. Extra assurance is required for people volunteering with vulnerable persons. However, there are situations where PICs and VSCs are requested unnecessarily. In such cases, the privacy and rights of volunteers are compromised as organizations gain access to highly sensitive, private, and personal information of their volunteers, and the organization then becomes responsible for this information.



STILL NOT SURE?

If you are unsure if a Police Information Check and/or Vulnerable Sector Check is required, please check with your local police service.

To help police services offer clarity, provide the volunteer role description and risk assessment.

IS A POLICE INFORMATION CHECK NECESSARY?

In Alberta, police services provide Police Information Checks (PIC). When it is required for a volunteer role, Vulnerable Sector Checks (VSC) can be requested in addition to a PIC and obtained only through police services. A thorough screening process (following the *10 Steps to Screening*) will provide reasonable information to decide if a person is the right fit for the volunteer role *before* conducting a PIC and/or VSC. Understanding the difference between a PIC and VSC will help you determine which one is necessary for your volunteer roles.

POLICE INFORMATION CHECKS may be reasonable if a volunteer works in a position of trust, but is not solely responsible for the well-being of vulnerable persons (e.g. a board member). A volunteer role like this does not require a VSC, but for other risk considerations it may still be necessary to conduct one. PICs include existing criminal convictions, upcoming criminal court appearances and a scan of the local police records in the jurisdiction in which the applicant resides.

VULNERABLE SECTOR CHECKS may be requested in addition to a Police Information Check when a volunteer is solely responsible for the well-being of a vulnerable person (children under the age of 18, elderly persons over the age of 65, or people with physical or mental disabilities, whether temporary or permanent). Merely being in contact with a vulnerable person is not enough to justify a VSC; however, if the volunteer is in a position with a significant degree of trust or authority and with unsupervised access to vulnerable persons, a VSC may be warranted. A VSC is a scan of local and national police databases and includes all the information found in a PIC. A VSC will also determine if an applicant is a pardoned sex offender.

For more information on what information is disclosed in a police information check or vulnerable sector check, refer to the PIC disclosure procedures published by The Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police in 2019.

10 STEPS TO SCREENING

Following the 10 Steps to Screening, fulfilling duty of care by conducting reviews of positions/roles and associated risks, and interviewing potential volunteers are included in a effective screening practices.

PRE-HIRING PROCESS

- 1 Determine policies & risks**
Set standard policies and identify potential risks to participants and organization.
- 2 Write clear volunteer position/role descriptions**
Set guidelines and behavioural standards for volunteer positions, and clarify roles and responsibilities.
- 3 Establish a formal recruitment process**
Commit to a thorough recruitment process and make this commitment clear to potential volunteers by informing them of your recruitment process up front.

- 4 Use an application form**
Limit the collection of information to what is necessary to carry-out an interview for the volunteer role, and ask for permission to call references.

- 5 Conduct interviews - get to know the volunteer**
Communicate your organization's expectations and assess the suitability of the candidate for the role. Ask about past employment and volunteer positions. Remember to use your intuition!

- 6 Follow-up with references**
References need to be checked in accordance with the requirements of the position. Always do more than one reference check. Be sure to explain the position/role, the potential vulnerability of participants, and ask for open comments.

- 7 When necessary, request the appropriate PIC/VSC**
If you have determined a PIC/VSC is necessary for a volunteer role, contact your local police service to clarify which type of check you need. Be sure to include the volunteer role description for the benefit of the police service, your organization, and the volunteer during this process. Assess the results of the check against your policy.

HIRING PROCESS

- 8 Conduct orientation and training sessions**
Ensure that the candidate is aware of organizational structures and policies. Assess their approach, work style and skills. At this point, you may still decide if they are the right person for the volunteer role or not.

- 9 Supervise and evaluate**
Using the position description as a reference point, evaluate the volunteer at least once a year, and preferably 2-3 times a year. Clarify expectations and identify challenges.

- 10 Follow-up & feedback**
Listen to feedback about the service provided by the volunteer. Ensure that volunteers are aware that follow-ups will be conducted.

MANAGING VOLUNTEERS



NEXT STEPS

Volunteer screening and risk management are critical aspects of duty of care relevant to the success of volunteer engagement and public safety. Due diligence in volunteer screening is important, and the information gathered can be complex. This guide can support developing a good understanding of the screening process and how it relates to Police Information Checks.

- Follow The 10 Steps to Screening and integrate them into your screening practices.
- Contact your local police service to get informed about the local process. When seeking a Police Information Check, include a volunteer role description to help police services support you in identifying if Police Information Checks are appropriate for the volunteer role. Police services can support you in understanding this information.
- The information shared in a Police Information Check is highly sensitive and must be treated with due care in order to protect the privacy and rights of people who volunteer.

This document is provided for general information only and may be distributed. This document has been thoroughly researched; however, we cannot guarantee accuracy. Readers should consult with a lawyer regarding specific legal questions or concerns.

QUESTIONS?

For general inquiries, please contact
volab@volunteeralberta.ab.ca.

For questions specifically pertaining to the Volunteer Screening Program, please contact
screening@volunteeralberta.ab.ca

For questions about police checks, contact your local police services.

RESOURCES

Volunteer Canada | The Screening Handbook:
www.volunteer.ca

Volunteer Alberta | Volunteer Screening Program:
www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca/vspn

Alberta ■ Government

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