

VOLUNTEER SCREENING BEST PRACTICES

ARE YOU KEEPING UP?

Discover the most up-to-date information and industry standards on how to safely keep your volunteers in order and easily maintain their status.



EBOOK OVERVIEW

There's a lot to think about when screening volunteers, so we created this Ebook to help organizations think through the complexities and craft a smart, well-conceived program that maximizes screening benefits while managing the costs of doing so.

- Overcoming the Challenges of Screening Volunteers
- Trends Point to More Volunteer Screening
- Defining Who Is a Volunteer
- Setting Standards for Pass/Fail
- Who Will Review the Results?
- Managing Notifications
- Establishing an Effective Appeals Process
- Screening Annually for Maximum Protection
- Using Visible Credentials that Expire Each Year
- Implementing a Self-Funded Volunteer Screening Program
- Best Practices Checklist

Overcoming the Challenges of Screening Volunteers

While screening employees and staff has become standard practice, screening volunteers is also fast becoming a necessity. Failing to do so puts your employees, individuals or children at risk and leaves your organization open to liability.

Every organization is different, and volunteers bring unique issues with them that you or your team must handle. For example, the sheer number of volunteers can make screening and tracking them a challenge from a cost and manpower perspective. Often, organizations balance complex and demanding budgets, and the cost of screening all volunteers is a difficult decision for an organization to make. They may be forced to reduce the number of screenings to only certain types of volunteers, or they may conduct less thorough screenings in order to reduce per-screen costs.

Denying a person the opportunity to volunteer can cause conflicts for an organization and even elicit lawsuits. Parent advocacy groups often support screening but find it difficult to cope with the reality that someone they know may be screened out of volunteering.



Deciding Who is a Volunteer

One of the most critical aspects of developing an effective volunteer screening program is defining the volunteer. The real distinction that must be made is that of visitor vs. volunteer.

There are occasions that could be classified as “visitor” events, and complete background screening wouldn’t be required in some cases.

- Observing or visiting children periodically
- Attending organization activities and events

When a individual or parent wants to do more than visit or offering to help the organization in some way, that person should then be considered a volunteer and should have a background screening completed.

Some of these examples include:

- Helping in food services
- Classroom or room monitor
- Periodically works within organization
- Chaperon for a field trip
- A “coach” who works with the children



Best Practice Guideline

Develop a clear and concise policy guideline as to what past offenses will prevent a potential volunteer from passing the background screen. Communicate this to the volunteer candidate prior to the background screen application.



Setting the Standards for Pass/Fail Screens

What does an organization do when someone does not pass the background screening process? A volunteer in this situation will not be happy about the result, and each “failure to pass” outcome will create conflict that, in turn, will create more work for the organization's staff.

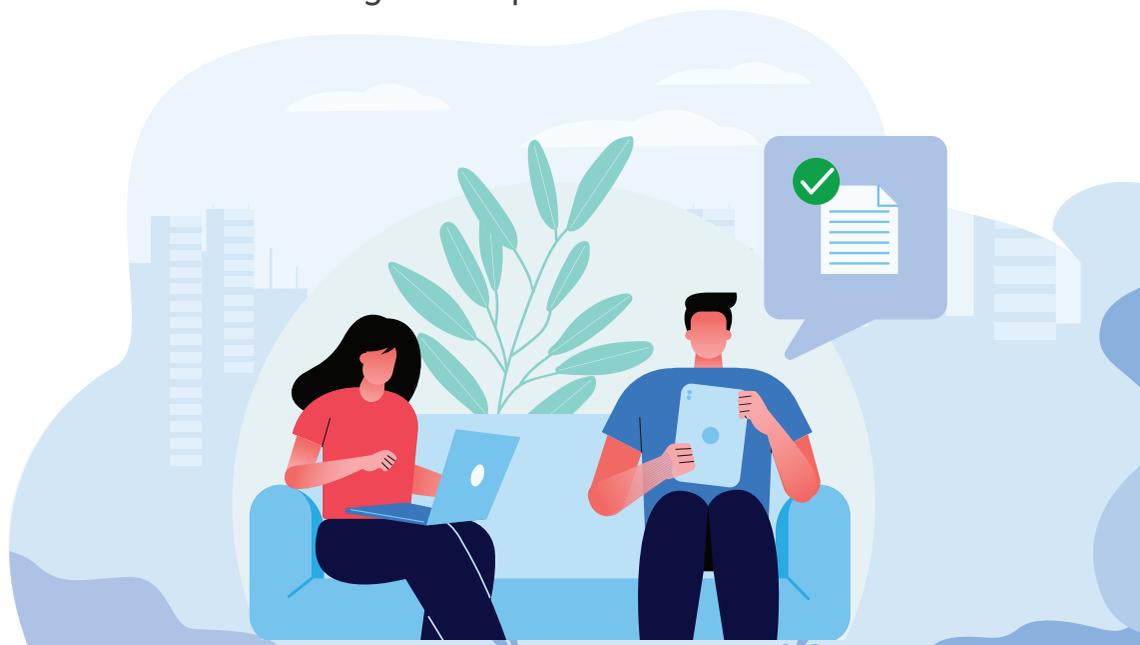
There are things that organizations can do to make this process much easier to manage. First, develop a clear and concise policy guideline as to what past offenses will prevent a potential volunteer from “passing” the background screen. This should be a detailed document of offenses, and we suggest working with the organization council and a professional background screening company to develop these guidelines.

Next, communicate the guidelines to the potential volunteer prior to the background screen. Sharing this information in advance will act as a screen in itself. For example, once the screening process is in place and communicated up front, potential volunteers with serious background issues will then elect not to volunteer because they will be aware that they may not qualify.

Who Will Review the Results?

Another important aspect of a successful volunteer screening system is the review of the background screening results. The decision that must be made is whether or not to have organization staff review the final reports and make the decisions as to which volunteers passed or whether to have the background screening firm review the screens and provide the results of its review to the organization.

The screening firm may charge an additional fee for this service, so each administrator must weigh the costs of organization review against the cost of the screening firm's review. Of course, another consideration is whether organization staff has the proper training and expertise to make policy decisions based on the background reports.



Managing Notifications

Notifying someone that they will not be allowed to volunteer based on their background is an important but uncomfortable part of the process. Managing this process effectively is the best way to avoid political fallout over screening decisions.

Since most organizations use an outside background screening firm to conduct their background screens, we recommend the following process:

Approval Notification – A letter or email is sent to volunteers letting them know that they have passed the background screen and are approved to volunteer within the organization.

OR

Pre-Adverse Letter Mailed to the Volunteer with Notice of a Potential Policy Decision

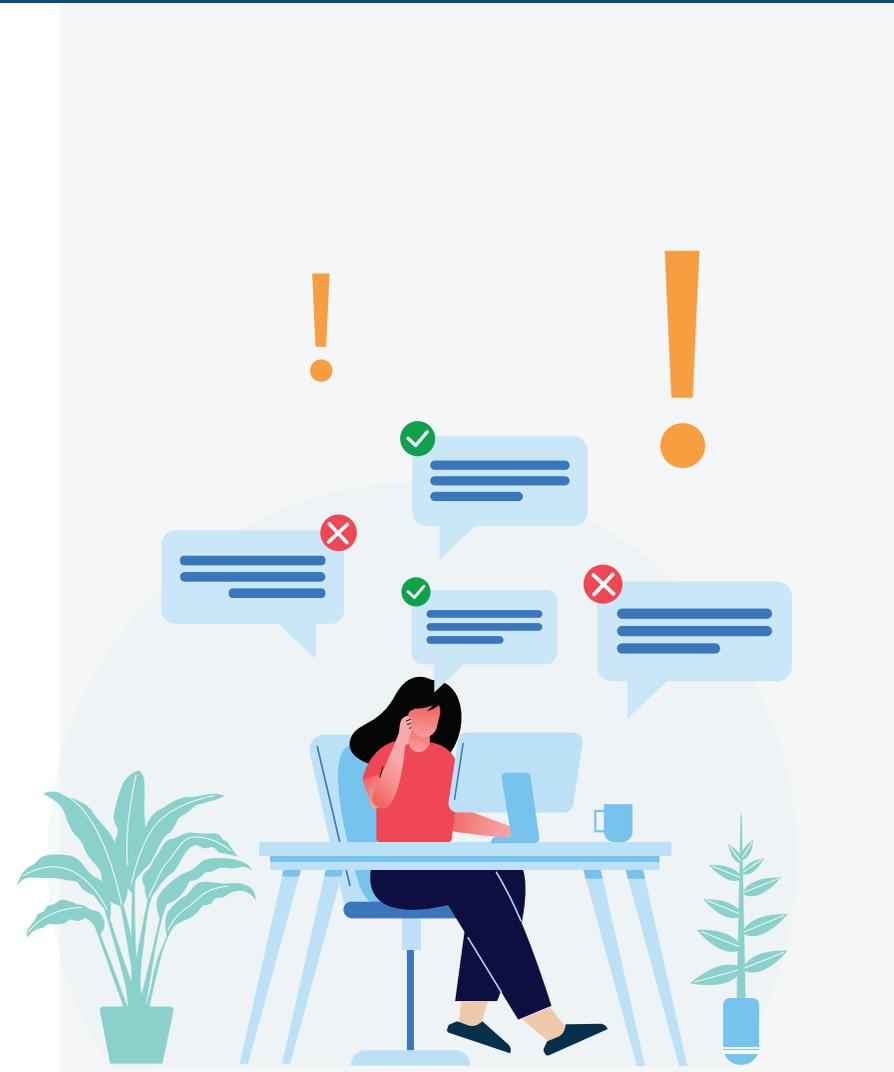
“Pre-Adverse Letter” is mailed to volunteers who did not pass the screen, along with a copy of the report and a copy of Consumer Rights. The volunteer is provided an opportunity to contact the background screening company directly within 10 days to dispute the report prior to a final decision being made.

Dispute Resolution

If the volunteer disputes the reported information, and the dispute is valid, the background screening company will update the report.

Final Adverse Decision Letter

If no successful dispute has occurred, a letter is mailed to the volunteer applicant after the 10-day waiting period, advising that the applicant has not met the policy guidelines and may contact the school system for a personal appeals process.



Establishing an Effective Appeals Process

When a final decision has been made that a volunteer applicant has not passed the background screen, it is important to have an appeals process in place that provides individuals the opportunity to demonstrate a potential special circumstance.

The process should take into account real life situations and whether an individual has shown that they have “changed” or has current circumstances that would make passing the applicant plausible. This should be taken seriously and include the input of people who are experienced in conducting background screenings and evaluating criminal offenses.



Screening Annually for Maximum Protection

Organizations should require that all approved volunteers notify the organization if they are charged with an offense that would violate the background screening policy and volunteer screening should be an annual occurrence. Volunteers pose some of the greatest risks to organization because organization staff often have little control over them, and in many cases, long-term relationships are not established.

State criminal databases vary, and some may require a visit to a courthouse to find a record. Other states have more robust databases that can be accessed regularly, while still other database searches offer the opportunity to monitor volunteers on a frequent basis. Organizations need to know immediately if someone who has been charged with a crime is in their organization. Therefore, someone should speak with the organization's background screening firm to find out if it is possible to monitor the organization's screened volunteer population regularly.

Using Visible Credentials that Expire Each Year

Screening volunteers has often been anything but an exact process. So, hundreds, maybe thousands, of volunteers come in and out of organizations every day, and the complexities of keeping up with them are overwhelming. Often, office staff are required to know who is approved for programs, field trips, and other events. It's simply inefficient for staff to look someone up to see if they have passed the background screen.

We believe that the most effective tool is a visual credential that volunteers are required to carry with them while working at the organization. This credential should be offered to all volunteers containing their name and expiration date. The credentials should expire after one year and should be visually changed each year.



Implementing a Self-Funded Volunteer Screening Program

Organizations are faced with the tremendous struggle of managing demands and budget constraints. Implementing a robust and effective volunteer screening program can be costly, especially for organizations with thousands of volunteers. In a self-funded program, the cost of the volunteer screening program is outsourced to the volunteers themselves by asking them to pay for their own screen when they submit their application. This is a reasonable request, and when positioned against the alternative of reducing the effectiveness of the screening program, it is often seen as a safer alternative.

Of course, some may resist a self-funded program, suggesting that the program's expense will deter some individuals from volunteering. Therefore, we suggest using the organization's budget to offer financial assistance to potential volunteers who cannot afford the background screen. In this way, organizations can improve the safety of their organization while also effectively managing their budget.

Best Practices Checklist

- ★ Create a detailed list of Visitor vs Volunteer guidelines, and ensure it is communicated to staff, associates This list determines who must be screened.
- ★ Develop a clear and concise policy guideline as to what past offenses will prevent a potential volunteer from passing the background screen. Communicate this to the potential volunteer prior to the background screen application.
- ★ Set up a notification system that allows the background screening firm to handle printing and mailing of the notification letters and the initial disputes.
- ★ Establish a clear appeals process and build in some flexibility to make decisions.
- ★ Screen annually for maximum protection.
- ★ Issue visible credentials that expire every year. Make access to the school the responsibility of the volunteer to have their credentials properly displayed at all times.
- ★ Consider a self-funded volunteer screening program before cutting the scope or frequency of screening.



SecureVolunteer

Powered by BIB

What's included in a Secure Background Screening?

Enhancing safety, minimizes risks. Secure Volunteer offers the most reliable and affordable background screen available which includes:

Address History Trace (AHT):

This is a report revealing names, DOB's and addresses associated with a specific Social Security number. An AHT should go back to at least seven (7) years. **Why it's important:** AHT's create a profile of it's individual's residence history, this profile determines what Jurisdictions should be searched.

National Sex Offender Search:

A comprehensive, real-time search of registered sex offenders in all 50 states plus D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam and Native American Tribal Registries. **Why it's important:** Searching every available sex offender registry in real-time provides maximum protection from registered sex offenders gaining access to your students.

Also Know As (AKAs):

These can include maiden names, nicknames or aliases. **Why it's important:** Everyone doesn't always use the same name! Having as many possible names to search increases your chances of finding records.

Nationwide Criminal Record Locator:

A database search of over 400 million criminal records regularly collected from over 2,500 public and proprietary sources. All hits are verified at the court of record. **Why it's important:** Supplementing a county search with databases casts a wider net and helps find more records.



Utilized by school districts nationwide, our Secure Volunteer platform provides a turnkey, online volunteer check-in solution that is easy to deploy and creates a streamlined workflow process. Our intuitive software allows users to manage and facilitate all of their volunteer background check processing.