

THE SAFE STEP

Your connection to protecting those who improve your community



VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

Ensuring the safety, integrity and effectiveness of your volunteer program begins with a robust recruitment and screening process. This is especially critical for roles involving vulnerable populations, sensitive data or public-facing responsibilities.

WHY SCREENINGS MATTER

Volunteers are essential to your mission, but not every willing individual is the right fit. A thorough screening process:

- Protects your organization from liability and reputational harm.
- Safeguards clients, especially those in vulnerable groups.
- Ensures volunteers are placed in roles that match their skills and values.
- Reinforces your commitment to professionalism, safety and accountability.

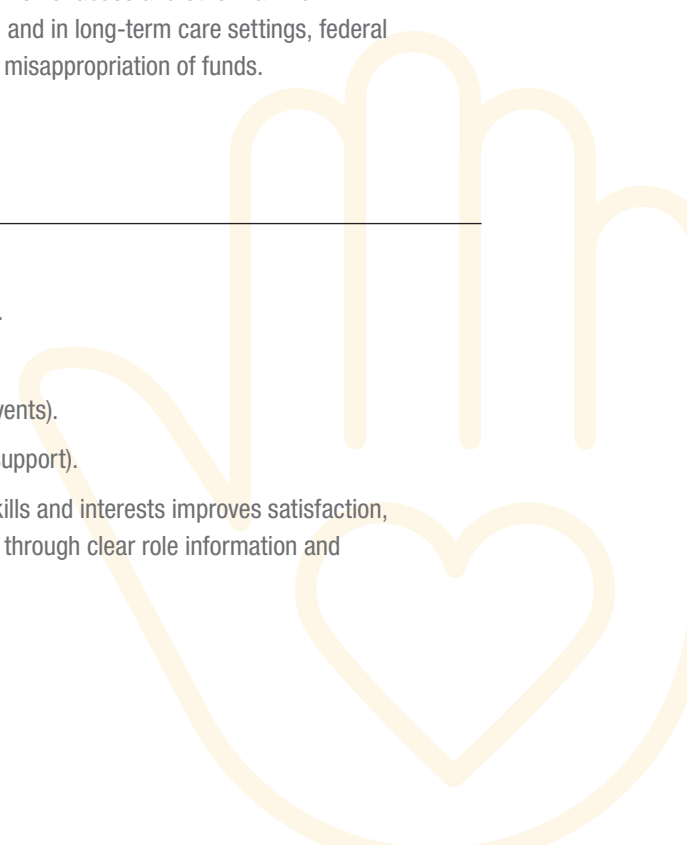
According to U.S. Department of Justice guidance, screening helps reduce the risk of abuse and other harmful misconduct in programs serving youth, seniors, or individuals with disabilities; and in long-term care settings, federal background check initiatives are designed to help prevent abuse, neglect, and misappropriation of funds.

WHEN TO SCREEN THOROUGHLY

Screening should be mandatory for volunteer roles that:

- Involve direct interaction with youth, seniors or individuals with disabilities.
- Provide access to sensitive data, financial records or cash handling.
- Represent your organization publicly (e.g., social media, donor relations, events).
- Require physical exertion or specialized skills (e.g., driving, caregiving, IT support).

Federal guidance emphasizes that matching volunteers to roles that fit their skills and interests improves satisfaction, and recruitment/retention guidance notes that reducing “unmet expectations” through clear role information and onboarding helps sustain volunteer engagement.



KEY COMPONENTS OF A SCREENING PROCESS

A comprehensive screening process may include:

1. Background Checks

- National and state criminal history checks
- Sex offender registry screening
- Motor vehicle records (for driving roles)

2. Reference Checks

- Contact past employers, volunteer supervisors or personal references
- Ask about reliability, interpersonal skills and any red flags

3. Physical and Skill-Based Assessments

- Confirm ability to perform physical tasks (e.g., lifting, standing)
- Evaluate technical or soft skills (e.g., computer literacy, customer service)

4. Interviews and Role-Specific Questions

- Assess alignment with your mission and values
- Clarify expectations, boundaries and commitment levels

5. Driver Evaluations (if applicable)

- On-the-road assessments
- Verification of license, insurance and vehicle registration

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT & SCREENING CHECKLIST

Step 1: Define Screening Requirements

- Identify which volunteer roles require screening and determine the level needed.

Step 2: Application & Consent

- Volunteer completes application form.
- Volunteer signs consent for background and reference checks.

Step 3: Background Checks

- National and state criminal history check.
- Sex offender registry screening.
- Motor vehicle records check (for driving roles).

Step 4: Reference Checks

- Contact references and ask about reliability, interpersonal skills and any red flags.

Step 5: Physical & Skill-Based Assessments

- Confirm ability to perform physical tasks.
- Evaluate technical or soft skills.

Step 6: Interviews & Role-Specific Questions

- Assess alignment with mission and values.
- Clarify expectations, boundaries and commitment levels.

Step 7: Driver Evaluations (if applicable)

- On-the-road assessment.
- Verification of license, insurance and vehicle registration.

Step 8: Decision & Documentation

- Review screening results confidentially.
- Document all results and decisions securely.
- Use a volunteer management system to track applications, screening status and renewals.

Step 9: Disqualification Criteria

- Refusal to submit to screening.
- Relevant criminal convictions.
- Inability to meet physical or skill-based requirements.

Step 10: Communication

- Clearly communicate the purpose and steps of the screening process to all applicants.
- Notify applicants of results and next steps.

Step 11: Ongoing Review

- Reassess screening for long-term or high-risk roles periodically.
- Train screeners for consistency, fairness and legal compliance.

ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES

- Be Transparent: Clearly communicate the purpose and steps of the screening process.
- Document Everything: Maintain secure records of screening results and decisions.
- Train Screeners: Ensure consistency, fairness and legal compliance.
- Reassess Periodically: Especially for long-term or high-risk roles.
- Use a tracking method: to monitor applications, screening status, and renewals.

SOURCES

1. [DOJ/OJJDP publication](#)
2. [CMS National Background Check Program \(NBCP\)](#)
3. [FEMA/USFA: Retention and Recruitment for the Volunteer Emergency Services](#)
4. [Retention and Recruitment Manual](#)
5. [Matching Jobs with Volunteers](#)
6. [What You Need to Know about Background Screening](#)