

Volunteer Screening Manual

Section Five
Before Selecting Volunteers

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SECTION FIVE: BEFORE SELECTING VOLUNTEERS

Step One: Determining Risk

The nature of the ministry and the inherent level of risks involved dictate the need for screening. Consequently, the greater the risk, the greater the degree of screening that is to be completed. When in doubt as to the level of risk, a position will be categorized as high risk. The following factors help determine the risk: the participant, the setting, the nature of the activity and the level of supervision.

The participant

The vulnerability of the persons being served is to be taken into account. Small children, teens, the physically or mentally challenged, and seniors are the most vulnerable. A vulnerable adult is someone who does not have full use of his or her faculties or who is experiencing the effects of trauma or abuse and is unable to function and reason clearly.

The setting

The setting is the context in which a ministry is provided. The following questions may help to establish criteria for determining the risk: Where is the activity taking place (for example, in someone's home, a parish centre, in a public or private place)? Are the participants meeting on a one-to-one basis or with others?

The nature of the activity

The relationship established between participants is important. The following questions may help to establish criteria for determining the risk: What authority (if any) does the volunteer have in a given ministry? Is the volunteer in a position to establish a close relationship with the participant (for example, as a mentor)? Is the volunteer involved with very emotional or traumatized participants? How often do the participants come together?

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The level of supervision

The level of supervision may vary from one ministry to another. The presence or absence of supervision helps to determine the risk (for example, if a ministry always requires supervision and it takes place in a group setting, the risk would be lower than for an activity that has no supervision and takes place one-on-one).

Summary

- The need for screening reflects the nature of a given ministry and the inherent risks.
- The level of risk may be determined by the participants, the setting, the nature of the activity and the level of supervision.

Defining Risk Levels

Volunteer positions are to be assessed for risk according to one of these three levels:

- **Low Risk:** Volunteers who participate in a group setting, who have minimal or no contact with children or other vulnerable people, and who have minimal access to confidential information.
- **Medium Risk:** Volunteers who participate in activities that may involve contact with vulnerable people, either on a more regular basis or in a private setting but in the presence of another volunteer. Volunteers who have greater access to confidential information.
- **High Risk:** Volunteers who participate in ministries that involve an on-going, intensive or lone interaction with vulnerable people, such as children and seniors; and volunteers who are in a position to exert influence over youth. It includes volunteers who have access to confidential records, the physical premises and money.

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Volunteers must agree to be screened according to the level of risk that is determined for the position in which they serve. Volunteers who are involved in more than one ministry are to be screened for the position with the highest level of risk. If a volunteer changes positions and assumes a ministry with a higher risk, that person is to be screened again according to the corresponding level of risk.

The only persons who are not to be considered within one of these three categories are the special event volunteers. Volunteers who help out only for special events within the parish, (such as Fall Fiestas, Spaghetti Suppers and Bake Sales), may or may not belong to a specific ministry. These volunteers will be asked to sign in upon arrival at such events, so a record is kept on file. The sign-in sheet should include the name of the parish, the activity, and the date the event takes place. Volunteers will be recording their names, addresses and phone numbers. In so doing, the parish will have a list it can use to ask for help in the future, and will have a record as to which individuals volunteered at such events.

Summary

- Volunteers are to be screened according to the level of risk that is determined for each position.
- Special event volunteers do not belong within any of the three levels of risk.

Risk Management

Risk management is a process of assessing potential problems and developing strategies for dealing with them. The following strategies are to be considered for risk management:

a) Eliminate the risk.

Sometimes the risks associated with a given activity are too great and the potential consequences too damaging to assume. If this is the case, the ministry position is to be terminated or significantly altered.

b) Modify the activity.

There may be ways of changing some aspects of a ministry or activity so that it reduces the risk. This modification may involve changing the way in which

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something is done, where it takes place, by which it is carried out, or it may mean that a particular aspect of an activity is to be discontinued.

c) Transfer liability.

In some cases, a choice may be made to have someone else, an individual or organization for example, take on part of a task and assume the liability for it. This outside party is usually a company or organization that can assume the risks because it has a particular professional expertise in an area that members of the parish do not have.

d) Assume the risk.

Having clearly identified the risks, assessed the probability of their occurrence, looked at the possible losses, and determined the consequences, a decision is then made to introduce or continue an activity or ministry and assume the risk.

e) Minimize assumed risk

Having decided to assume the risk, consideration should be directed towards further reducing the risks. The ongoing training and supervision of volunteers are two ways of further minimizing the risk.

All of these strategies taken together do not guarantee that everyone is completely protected. It is important that an ongoing effort be made to review, assess and document the steps that are being taken to reduce risk.

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SAMPLE RISK LEVEL GRID

	High Risk Position	Medium Risk Position	Low Risk Position
Participant In Ministry	Youth (under 18 years old) Senior (over 70 years old) Handicapped/ disabled (any age) Infirm due to illness or emotional distress.	Youth (between 18-24)	Able-bodied adult (25 years old)
Setting	Isolated Participant's home Room with doors and no windows Off-site private space Home meetings Car Tents/Cabins	Room with doors and windows	Meeting room Meeting hall Worship space/Church Off-site public space
Activity	One-on-one home visits/ instructions/counseling Overnight activity with vulnerable participants Emotional /Physical activity Handling Money Financial/confidential information	Some financial information Youth group meetings/events with several adult leaders Hospital/Nursing home visiting in pairs	Group bible study Liturgical readings Decorating the church/hall Ushering and lecturing
Supervision	Little to none No documentation of meetings/events	Occasional supervision Some documentation of meetings/events	Supervisor always present Always in large group Documentation of every meeting

Risk Levels and Applicable Procedures

The extent of the screening process varies from one level of risk to another. Some tasks, especially those associated with low risk screening, may be delegated to the coordinator or contact person of the particular ministry. Volunteers within the Diocese of Peterborough are to be screened according to the following procedures.

Low Risk Volunteers

1. receive a position description
2. fill out a Volunteer Information Form (Form 1010 Pages 1 & 4)
3. Receive a copy of the Responsible Faith Ministry, Volunteer Screening Initiative- Volunteer Guidelines

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Medium Risk Volunteers

1. receive a position description
2. fill out a Volunteer Information Form, a References Form and a Consent for Reference Checks Form (Form 1010 pages 1/2/4)
3. have an interview conducted by the Parish Screening Committee (Forms 1030-1060)
4. have their references checked by the Parish Screening Committee (Form 1020)
5. receive appropriate orientation and training
6. are to have supervisory checks

High Risk Volunteers

1. receive a position description
2. fill out a Volunteer Information Form, a References Form and a Consent for Reference Checks Form (Forms 1010 pages 1-4)
3. have an interview conducted by the Parish Screening Committee (Form 1030-1060)
4. have their references checked by the Parish Screening Committee (Form 1020)
5. **provide an Enhanced Police Information Check (EPIC)**
6. receive appropriate orientation and training
7. have supervisory checks and evaluations

Step Two: Position Descriptions

A Parish Volunteer Screening Committee and the leaders or coordinators of the various ministries **are to review position descriptions for every ministry within the parish**. This position description identifies the level of risk, outlines the tasks of the particular ministry, and sets the ground rules for the participants. Each of the position descriptions is to be dated, approved by the pastor and screening committee and updated biannually.

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The following outline serves as a suggested format in reviewing a position description.

1. Name of Group/ Ministry

States the name of the group/ ministry.

2. Accountability

States from whom the volunteer is to take direction and to be accountable.

3. Purpose of Ministry

Explains the service that the ministry provides.

4. Participant Group

Outlines those to whom the volunteers minister.

5. Activities and Responsibilities

Lists the expectation for the volunteer in the exercise of his or her ministry.

6. Skills and Qualifications Required

Identifies the characteristics and qualities required of the volunteer.

7. Time Commitment and Duration

Identifies the time commitment that is required and the amount of time for which a person is to serve in a given ministry (for example, two hours every week for a two-year period).

8. Orientation and Training

Outlines the manner and extent of preparation required.

9. Support, Supervision and Evaluation

Outlines the support that is in place for the volunteer and the ways in which supervision and evaluation are to be carried out.

10. Risk Assessment and Screening Procedures.

After consultation with the ministry leader, the screening committee confirms the risk and implements the corresponding level of screening.

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Summary

- Comprehensive position descriptions and risk assessments are the foundation for all screening measures.
- The position description outlines the nature of the activity, the expectations incumbent upon the volunteer, the skill needed and the time commitment involved.
- The position description identifies the screening measures to be followed.
- Major alteration to the risk level or duties assigned to a position would require prior input from the Diocesan Screening Committee.

Step Three: Recruitment Process

The recruitment of volunteers is normally conducted on a less formal basis than the recruitment of employees. The more informally that volunteer recruitment is carried out, the less comfortable recruiters often are in applying formal screening steps. In a parish setting, there are ways to highlight the seriousness with which volunteer screening is being undertaken: printing or posting notices in the bulletin or hosting a ministry information day. When an individual expresses interest in volunteering for a particular ministry, provide the person with a ministry position description and the screening methods applicable for that ministry. In so doing, the individual will have a better understanding of the expectations and the role that he or she is to assume. Since not every volunteer is necessarily suited for the ministry for which he or she applies, the process may help to connect a potential volunteer with a corresponding suitable ministry.

In order to protect all those involved in ministry (both those who minister and those to whom they minister) potential volunteers are to observe the formal screening steps mandated for the Diocese. There is no need to apologize for the fact that care is being taken regarding screening volunteers. Volunteers, especially those who are in positions of trust with vulnerable people, enjoy a sacred trust and are to be screened accordingly.

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Summary

- Potential volunteers are to be made aware of the screening process.
- Recruitment materials must clearly state that all applicants are to undergo appropriate screening.
- Volunteering is a ministry and volunteers are to be placed in suitable roles.

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