

Volunteer Screening Manual

Section Seven Supporting Volunteers

SECTION SEVEN - SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS

Step Eight: Orientation and Training

Orientation, training, supervision, volunteer evaluations, participant follow-up and dismissal policies are ongoing screening measures. Orientation and training are the next steps in providing ongoing support and management of risk to the volunteers. Volunteers need to be given information and support so as not to put themselves, the participants or the church at risk. It is dangerous to assume the risks end when a volunteer has been “screened”. The screening process is ongoing throughout the volunteer’s involvement in ministry.

Orientation

Orientation provides volunteers with information on the policies and procedures that formulate activities and responsibilities. It is important to explain the limitations and boundaries of a given ministry. Policies need to be clearly understood by all volunteers, especially when working with vulnerable participants. Volunteers are to know where to obtain information or support if needed. Volunteers need to know how to respond in an emergency situation and how to report it.

Policies cannot be followed if they have not been communicated. This information is to be conveyed in two ways: verbally during an orientation session, and in writing. There are two main written tools for orientation which benefit the volunteer by clearly outlining, what is expected of him or her and the duty of the church to the volunteer: the position description and Responsible Faith Ministry Guidelines.

All volunteers are to be given a copy of:

Responsible Faith Ministry Volunteer Screening Initiative – Volunteer Guidelines.

- The screening committee is responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient copies for the parish.
- The ministry and group leaders will help the screening committees distribute the Responsible Faith Ministry Screening Volunteer Guidelines to every parish volunteer.

- For current and new volunteers, orientation sessions are mandatory. An orientation session should be offered at least once a year. An orientation session provides volunteers with an opportunity to learn new procedures, exchange ideas and share experiences unique to a given ministry.

Training

In addition to orientation, volunteers are to receive training specific to the volunteer position. Some volunteers perform very straightforward tasks, while others carry out quite complicated or demanding ones. Volunteers must be given appropriate training to learn how to perform their activities without putting themselves or others at risk.

Key Elements of Training

- Pastors, parish teams or ministry leaders can provide orientation and training at the parish level (Orientation and training for a specific ministry can be done together)
- Volunteers are to be informed of the limitations and boundaries. Discuss the rationale for these limits to make sure volunteers understand them
- The volunteers need to know that measures are in place if boundaries are overstepped. Explain the guidelines for reassigning, or removing a volunteer as provided in this manual
- Provide new volunteers with an opportunity to interact with current volunteers and ask questions
- Have a current volunteer guide and coach a new volunteer
- Provide volunteers with the opportunity to attend workshops outside of the parish, i.e. diocesan workshops

Summary

- Orientation and training provide ongoing screening of volunteers
- Orientation and training provide volunteers with the activities and responsibilities, limitations and boundaries, as well as support needed to fulfil the ministry

- Upon completing orientation and training of volunteers in medium and high risk positions, the pastor, parish team or ministry leader inform the Screening Committee. The Parish Screening Committee must document this on the Screening Checklist on page 3 of the Volunteer Information Form 1010. The form is filed in the volunteer's confidential file.

Step Nine: Supervision and Evaluation

Supervision

Supervision is the most effective step of the screening process. The level of supervision is to be based on the level of risk involved in the volunteer position. Many positions in the parish require little or no supervision. Informal supervision already exists for many ministries. Part of the screening process is to identify current supervision practices and to establish a process of supervision where none exists. The screening committees will work with the ministry and group leaders to assess the level of supervision already in place and determine what more may be required. One of the reasons that low risk ministries such as Readers, are low risk is because the activities take place within the parish setting in view of the parishioners. For many high risk positions, however, activities take place outside the parish setting. Positions such as Eucharistic Ministers to the Sick involve the volunteer working one on one with a vulnerable parishioner in the parishioner's home.

Examples of Supervision

Probation Establishes a time frame, such as three months after which time the volunteer receives an evaluation
Helps introduce new volunteers to the parish and activities and responsibilities of the ministry position
Volunteers may use this time to determine if this is the right ministry for them
Allows the ministry leader or parish team an opportunity to determine volunteers' suitability and make recommendations

Buddy System

- Provides new volunteers with experienced volunteers for guidance and support Provides immediate feedback
- Provides an immediate correction of inappropriate behaviour or actions

Mentoring

- Mentors act as a guide, coach and role model to a new volunteer
- Affirms the efforts of the volunteer
- Addresses any questions the volunteer may have and provides ongoing support

Random spots checks

- Offer periodic checks during one on one volunteer's activities
- Volunteers should be made aware that random checks will occur
- Provide supervision and on-going support to groups, (such as Youth Groups and Children's Liturgy)

Check-ins

- Volunteers report in to ministry leaders or other assigned supervisors after performing their duties off site
- Provide a safety measure to protect the volunteer
- Provide a contact person and information for emergency situations

Evaluation

Volunteers need to know that evaluation is a part of the ongoing screening process. Periodic evaluations can provide volunteers with support and a sense of achievement. In order to meet the needs of the parish community it is important to have an evaluation process in place. Programs are relevant when volunteers have an opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions. Ongoing evaluations can be combined with some of the forms of supervision such as at the interview at the end of the probation time, during mentoring and random spot checks.

Purpose of Evaluations

- discuss problems and develop positive approaches to correct them
- help manage risk and prevent harm
- protect all participants
- encourage and support the volunteers
- enlist the volunteers help in assessing the ministry or program
- keep the position description updated
- show appreciation to the volunteer
- provide clear details regarding inappropriate or unsatisfactory performance or behaviour.

Methods of Evaluation

Interviews

- Carried out by the ministry leader and/or a member of the parish team or screening team
- Refer back to the position description and purpose of the ministry
- Provide feedback from the volunteer's experience in his or her ministry
- Provide an opportunity for the volunteer to make suggestions for improvement within the ministry
- Give feedback to the volunteer on his or her performance (please remember to accentuate the positive while clearly stating any concerns)
- Expresses appreciation for the volunteer's contributions on a personal level.

Personal Observations

- Provide ongoing support while the volunteer is performing his or her duties

Volunteer Evaluation and Feedback Questionnaire

- Allows the volunteer to express his or her satisfaction or concerns
- Is less time consuming for parish team than interviews
- May be used as the starting point for an interview.

Step nine includes examples of supervision and evaluation methods, but others may be used. When the supervision and evaluation methods have been established for a ministry, these must be applied consistently to all volunteers within that ministry.

Summary

- Supervision is the most important step of the screening process.
- The level of supervision is based on the level of risk involved in the volunteer position.
- Documented evaluations are to be held at least once a year for high risk positions.
- Both the volunteer and those conducting the evaluation are to use evaluations to share feedback.
- All information collected is to be kept confidential and used only for the purpose of volunteer screening.
- The evaluation is to be documented and placed in the volunteer's file by the screening committee. This information is to be included on Page 3 of the Volunteer Information Form (1010).

Step Ten: Participant Follow-up

One of the most valuable sources of information about the nature of relationships between a volunteer and vulnerable participant is the participant. Parishes having regular contact with participants and family members can act as an effective deterrent to a volunteer who might do harm or behave in an inappropriate manner. Volunteers should be made aware that any follow-up activities are a part of the screening and risk management procedures. It is important to remember that it is the nature of the position and the inherent level of risk which dictates the need for screening and participant follow-up rather than the character of the volunteer. There are times when this follow-up would be of benefit to the volunteer to help ensure his or her safety. These measures are to be used for all high risk positions.

Random spot checks

Make the volunteer aware that this type of follow-up will take place.

- Especially if a volunteer and a participant are usually one-on-one, conduct random spot checks by visiting the location when volunteer and participant are together
- Complete the Participant Follow-Up Report during the visit. Family members of the participant may be asked to help complete this Report.
- Document the visit and provide the screening team with this information. The screening team will keep this information in the volunteer's file.

Telephone Checks

- Not as effective as spot checks, but telephone checks are very beneficial.
- Listen carefully, not only to what the participant is saying but also to the tone
- Provides information about the work being done.
- Sends out a message about the importance of the task
- Allows the ministry leader to better match volunteer with participant (hours, needs, family involvement)
- Participants may feel more comfortable talking on the phone than in person.
- Document the phone call, complete the Participate Follow-up Report and provide the screening team with this information. The screening team will file this in the volunteer's file.

Summary

- The Participant Follow-Up Report may be completed by mail, phone or in person.
- This Report must be reviewed by the ministry leader or coordinator and they must follow-up any issues and complaints.
- Ministry leaders, parish teams, or screening committees will be responsible for follow-up. The screening team will be informed so they may document the follow-up in the volunteer's file.
- Participant follow-up is a risk management and screening measure that is utilized for everyone's protection.
- Follow-up is to be a regular occurrence for high risk ministries.

Volunteer Recognition and Appreciation

Volunteers are the lifelines of parishes. Without the time, effort and gifts of volunteers, the Church would not be able to fulfil its ministry to help those in need. It is important to recognize and show appreciation for the contributions of volunteers.

One way to let the volunteers know they have made a difference is to show appreciation for the work that they have done. Even the most unassuming volunteer wants to know that he or she makes a difference. Recognition activities provide a motivation for continuing commitment from parish volunteers. Recognition may be both formal and informal with events supported by the parish, as well as personal notes and communication from the parish team and/or the ministry leaders. Listening to volunteers, encouraging creativity and asking for feedback helps the volunteers to know they are valued for their ideas as well as their hard work.

Ideas to recognize and show appreciation to volunteers:

- Know the volunteers by name
- Thank volunteers individually and publicly (from the pulpit, at an appreciation event, in the bulletin)
- Send a thank you card (send one to the families too!)
- Phone them just to talk or thank them.
- Smile
- Give volunteers the necessary training to perform well and comfortably
- Give volunteers tasks suited to their gifts and talents
- Plan a volunteer celebration (social, retreat)
- Offer volunteers opportunities for professional development
- Create a yearbook and/or photo album for each volunteer
- Produce a video of the work done by the volunteers
- Celebrate anniversaries of a volunteer's years of service
- Provide the volunteers with coffee and treats while working
- Ask volunteers for feedback
- Give volunteers feedback

Volunteer Support

Supporting volunteers demonstrates the value and respect the parishes have for them. Parishes acknowledge the volunteers as individuals, each with unique talents and gifts by placing them in positions that match their gifts and talents. Also, as people with their own lives, volunteers who appear to be suffering or in difficulty should be treated with compassion and concern. Be sure they are not overwhelmed with their home life and would like to take a break from their parish responsibilities. Ask volunteers if they feel supported in the performance of their ministry duties. It should not be assumed that a parish volunteer wants to take on more responsibilities or stay in the same ministry. Check to ensure they are not bored with their duties or would like a change. Take the time to talk to volunteers, but more important, take the time to listen. By trying to do the best to serve volunteers in ministry with care and compassion it will help them serve God with enthusiasm and love.

Volunteer support involves a variety of activities including:

- Communication among volunteers and between volunteers and staff
- “Debriefing” (talking about the work)
- Acknowledging and using volunteer input
- Recognizing “burnout” or when a volunteer is experiencing stresses (either from volunteering or personal matters).
- Keeping in touch through newsletters, meetings, workshops, and celebrations”

Excerpted from Supporting, Recognizing and Challenging Volunteers by Monica Penner, June 17,2002

