

VOLUNTEER SELECTION AND SCREENING



The most difficult questions for this section are:

1. At what level should which volunteers be screened?
Will all volunteers be screened the same way in spite of differences in their responsibilities?
In the definition section, have you established tiers of volunteers, like primary/secondary or regular/occasional?
Should anyone handling money have their credit report checked?
2. What disqualifications should be automatic?
(i.e. What, if anything, should restrict a potential volunteer from working with certain groups of individuals?)
3. Who will actually do the screening? Will there be a team to interview? A pastor to review the information from the criminal background checks and reference checks?

At a minimum,

The public **Megan's Law Registry** should be scanned for the names of any Regular participants in church activities, like visiting worship three times. The easiest way to accomplish this is to have the person who most easily recognizes those names (like the database administrator) scan www.nsopr.gov by zip code clusters of church participants.

Paid staff should at least be **fingerprinted** for screening through CA Department of Justice (a process free to any non-profit; the cost of "rolling" the prints may vary).

Be sure to:

Maintain confidential personnel files for your paid and volunteer staff and document all significant matters, including reprimands.

If there is a criminal record of child abuse, ask that volunteer to take assignments other than those involving children and youth, even if they have experienced a conversion, therapeutic recovery or a change of heart. (Remember that only 3% of predators have criminal records.)

Remember that however the church decides to screen its volunteers, that **process must be done for everyone** working with children, no matter how long they have been with the church or who they know. If even one person is excluded for this process, then the precedent will be set and others might expect the same exclusion.

SAMPLE POLICY TEXT BELOW



Screening Practices

To protect our children, youth and vulnerable adults from potential victimization, **all** church members and visitors will be checked using the National Sexual Offender Public Registry (www.nsopr.gov). Staff and applicants for primary volunteer positions with vulnerable populations will also be fingerprinted (or screened another way???).

All adults who have regular contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must have been a church member for six (6) months or associated with the church for one (1) year. Potential volunteers shall fill out a Volunteer Information Form and give it to a pastor (who will remove the confidential information and store it in a locked file).

To assure a match between the volunteer task and the potential volunteer's skills and experience, the direct supervisor of the program area in which the applicant has interest will:

(a) check at least two of the potential volunteer's references and

(b) conduct an interview with the applicant after reviewing the Information Form.

Reference checks and interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work or by others persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used. During the screening process, potential volunteers who have been in the church less than a year must provide a photo identification, such as a driver's license, as a check against the use of pseudonyms.

Persons asked as references may include employers, former pastors, and persons who have supervised applicants in church work previously. Those persons may be suggested by applicants on their Information Form or selected by the assigned interviewer(s). The references can be done by phone, mail, or in person.

Standard questions for the reference check and applicant interviews can be developed by each program supervisor. Notes of the results of the interviews with the applicant will be kept in the appropriate pastor's locked files, along with the Information Form. This information will only be released to authorized persons with a demonstrated need to know. A separate file will be maintained on each volunteer. The program pastor and the direct supervisor will make decisions regarding fitness as a primary volunteer.

Before beginning his or her work with vulnerable populations, the potential volunteer must indicate understanding and compliance with this policy and sign the Personal Safety Covenant and the Driver Authorization Form, if appropriate. Also, to help ensure the safety of youth while participating in mission and service projects, fellowship retreats and camps, and other youth activities, supervising adults are _____ (required or encouraged?) to maintain current certification in basic first aid and CPR certification. It is also *recommended* that other clergy also be trained in first aid/CPR. The church shall provide a yearly workshop on this, or pay the costs for training. Nursery workers and others serving young children may also want training in infant and toddler CPR.

While the church is waiting for background information and references, applicants may begin working with minors or vulnerable adults, but only in closely supervised settings. Failure to receive satisfactory responses in a timely manner may result in dismissal or withdrawal from volunteering in church programs.

A screening committee (or the pastor?) will be established to do the interviewing and reference checks, as well as review the results of criminal background checks. The information gathered will be protected from dissemination, except for the committee's final judgment about whether the volunteer can work in the suggested position. All

screening records and the list of person choosing not to complete or failing the screening process shall be secured in a locked file with access permitted only to approved personnel.

Record Keeping

Working with the screening committee, the designated Keeper of Records will be responsible for assuring that the information form, interviews, driver clearances, reference checks and background checks are done, but will not know the details of any discussions or results of reference or background checks related to the potential volunteer. Based on the decisions of the screening committee (or pastor), the Keeper of Records will maintain an updated list of:

- (1) approved primary volunteers, along with record of their compliance with the requirements for training, their Volunteer Information Forms, and copies of their Personal Safety Covenants
- (2) eligible drivers who can transport others on behalf of the church and their annual Driver Authorization Forms, insurance documentation and copy of drivers' licenses.
- (3) those parents allowing photographs of their children to be used in church publications, as well as the signed Publicity Release and Consent portion of the Medical and Emergency Contact Information and Release

These lists will be accessible to anyone who asks.

In secure confidential files, the program pastor will maintain the confidential section of the Volunteer Information Form, the fingerprint results from CA Department of Justice, and comments from the reference checks and interviews. The pastor will protect any information about why

Directors and volunteers who are the primary person responsible for an overnight or off-site trip must collect signed (1) Activity Permission and (2) a copy of Medical Release and Emergency Contact forms for each child and youth participating, and carry those two documents with them of the activity. The original Medical Release and Emergency Contact forms should be kept with the appropriate Director or Pastor who is most responsible for that child or youth.

Disqualifications

Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of a criminal background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a volunteer from participating in the leadership, sponsorship or supervising of any activities or programs with children, youth or vulnerable adults:

- Prior incident(s) of sexual misconduct or other forms of abuse of vulnerable individuals
- Felonies and misdemeanors that resulted in harm to another person
- Crimes related to the possession, use or sale of drugs or controlled substances

Only a pastor may view information obtained from the Department of Justice (via fingerprints) and the confidential information on the Volunteer Information Form.