

Volunteer Management and Screening
Diocese of Niagara
Frequently Asked Questions

Won't screening turn people off and make it harder to get volunteers?

For some people it may. But if approached with sensitivity along with clear explanations of exactly what is involved, why it is necessary, and the benefits to be realized, it doesn't need to.

Remember that screening and management is designed to help ensure that people in positions of trust and authority are well suited to their positions in terms of skills, interests and attitudes, and to give people the training, support, supervision, follow-up, and recognition that they deserve to ensure that their ministries are life-giving to themselves and others.

Over time, good ministry screening and management makes it easier to recruit and retain good lay ministers.

Who will need to have a Police Records Check (PRC)?

Police Record Checks are not the most important part of this program. They will be used relatively infrequently and only for positions of highest risk. In short, all licensed clergy, active honorary assistants and licensed lay workers will need to have a PRC. The first PRC they have must include a Vulnerable Sector Check. Also, those who minister to vulnerable people, and who are deemed to be in a high-risk category where the risk cannot be reduced by another method, such as supervision, team ministry, etc. will need to have a PRC, the first of which must include a Vulnerable Sector Check. Examples: Those who run residential programs with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Those who provide individual counseling in closed settings.

If a parish wants to insist on PRC'S for other positions, they may do so.

How long does a PRC last?

A PRC that is more than three years old will be deemed invalid and need to be updated.

Who will have access to the information generated in a PRC, and how will it be used?

The PRC will remain the property of the individual. Where a PRC is required for a particular position, it will be reviewed by an appropriate supervisory person, photocopied and returned to the individual. Confidentiality of all information will be given highest consideration. Note that a previous police record does not necessarily exclude someone from ministry, depending on the record.

Could I be held personally liable if I become involved in screening and management and something goes wrong?

The Diocesan insurance policy provides coverage for "any employees, unpaid officials and church workers doing volunteer work... while acting within the scope of their duties."

How does this program affect scouts and other groups that use our facilities?

The church could be held vicariously liable if the groups that use our facilities minister to vulnerable people and do not properly screen. This is an opportunity to start a dialogue and help other volunteer organizations.

Scouts, in particular, are very aware of the need to screen and have an active program in place. Record of their screen practices must be kept on file and must comply with Diocesan policy.

Why does the Diocese need to see what we have done? I thought that the volunteer management and screening was the responsibility of each parish?

Yes. Managing and screening your ministry staff and volunteers is the responsibility of each parish. But ultimately the Diocese of Niagara has a 'duty of care' to know that the "Volunteer Management and Screening" policy that has been approved by the Diocesan Synod and the Bishop is actually being followed.

Receiving information from each parish about their procedures regularly will also help us to know what kind of help and support congregations need from the Diocesan office. It is only by working together that we can help to strengthen the ministries of each parish and, ultimately, the Diocese as a whole.

It is important that these procedures be a regular practice of ministry for all parishes and related ministries. Therefore every few years it is important for the diocese to follow up with parishes and ministries to ensure compliance is being maintained.

Are there any guidelines regarding dealing with tenants and renters?

These are guidelines which relate to programs that we would run in our buildings such as church school, youth group or a seniors club. Just offering a program does not make you liable. The Degree of Legal Responsibility for Programs in our Buildings is dependent on the following five levels:

1. opportunity for the employee/volunteer to abuse power
2. extent of power and authority given to the employee/volunteer
3. the known vulnerability of the participant
4. the nature of the employees/volunteers activity. Was the participation volunteer or mandatory?
5. the degree of physical contact between the volunteer/employee and the participant

These concepts are also transferable to the "renter environment" and the level of knowledge and support we have for that activity or program. The less we are involved the better.

Your parish may consider preparing a package to distribute to groups who use you building. In the package could include:

- a short description of the parish's policy for ensuring a safe and healthy environment for volunteers and participants
- a statement of what your congregation's expectations for groups who rent or use space in the building
- a request for something in writing from the group detailing their screening policy or an expectation that such a policy be created by them

One time users of the building (such as renting it for a party or meeting) fall into a different type of category. Included in their agreement to use the building, loan of the keys will be the provision of their own insurance or the choice to use the "User Group Insurance" which can be purchased through the Diocese.

How does this process affect the work of nominating committees and nominations from the floor of vestry?

It is important that the people being voted into office at congregational vestry meetings be willing and able to meet the requirements of the position, as set out in the job description. When a person is approached about letting their name stand for office, either by an individual parishioner or by a nominations committee, it is important that they see the job description so they are fully aware of the entire scope of the position, including the screening requirements. It is suggested that job descriptions be available in a prominent place, perhaps in a binder format, so that people can look them over when necessary. Voting or appointing a person to a specific ministry must be conditional on their ability to meet the screening requirements.

What are the possible financial costs?

The volunteer management and screening process itself is not costly. Parishes may consider paying for all or part of any police records checks that high-risk volunteers and staff are required to get. Training that is required for staff or volunteer positions may be provided at the parish or at the diocesan level or through outside agencies. Parishes could consider budgeting for the costs of sending their volunteers to such training workshops or money for providing speakers with honorariums. One way to create a safer environment and to reduce risks for both the participants and the volunteers or staff is to ensure that enclosed spaces and meeting rooms have windows. These costs could also be incorporated into the parish's budget.

It is taking us a lot of time and energy to get the job descriptions completed. Do you have any suggestions that might make the process easier?

Try to keep this task informal and non-threatening. The purpose is simply for everyone to discover exactly what the responsibilities are for each ministry in your parish. Help people to think about their ministry role, beginning by asking them to list their duties and responsibilities. Then ask them to take that list and incorporate it onto the job description template, filling in as much information as they can. Work with others to edit the job description as necessary.

You may choose to hold a meeting or job description writing 'blitz' - bringing together as many volunteers as possible, describing the process and then having people begin writing, returning their first drafts within one week. Another possibility is to have the supervisor for those ministries and their volunteers create one together.

Use the job description template included on this website as a guide. Use the expertise of members of your parish who may have experience with writing job descriptions at their places of employment.

Examples are provided on the website that can help you as you create your own job descriptions. The examples provided may be a good starting point. It is certainly easier to edit than to write from scratch. Also, once you 'get the hang' of it, the wordings come along quite easily. They are in PDF format, and therefore cannot be copied or used directly; however, you can contact Jane Wyse at 905-527-1316 x420 or jane.wyse@niagara.anglican.ca and she will be happy to send you a copy in Word.