

Taking Control of Volunteer Risk

Nonprofits depend on volunteers. Take the following precautions to minimize the risks associated with volunteer workers.



Screen Your Volunteers

- Create job descriptions. Provide applicants with clear job descriptions along with the minimum qualifications needed.
- Run background checks. Get written consent to check for criminal offenses that could disqualify applicants.
- Check driving records. If volunteers will be driving, check their driving history for crashes, tickets and DUIs.
- Get references. Ask applicants for references and follow up by contacting these references.
- Perform drug tests. Consider requiring applicants to undergo drug screening for illegal substances.



Prepare Your Volunteers

- Start positively. Genuinely welcome volunteers, communicate the organization's vision and ensure volunteers know what is expected of them.
- Provide training. Before volunteers start work, they should receive proper training on their duties.
- Develop a volunteer handbook. A handbook can provide job descriptions, policies, procedures and safety tips.
- Get signatures. Have new volunteers sign key documents, including a handbook acknowledgement form and a waiver of liability.



Support Your Volunteers

- Assess your volunteers. Regular assessments can identify problem areas and help volunteers improve.
- Provide a contact. Volunteers should have someone to contact regarding questions and issues, including harassment and safety issues.
- Continue training. Volunteers may need additional training sessions to review procedures or learn new procedures.



Supervise Your Volunteers

- Watch for problems. Have systems in place to receive complaints and to monitor for any incidents.
- Document issues. Keep a record of all complaints and incidents, as well as the response taken.
- Take action. If problems arise, volunteers may need to receive additional training, to be moved to a new position or to be dismissed. Document your actions.
- Learn. Conduct exit interviews when a volunteer ends their assistance or is asked to step down, and record the findings to share with other managers.

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