

Diocese of Ontario

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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

A. Screening has become commonplace in many organizations who rely on volunteers, and is now an accepted part of volunteering. In many ways, we are simply catching up with the times. That doesn't mean, however, that we shouldn't be aware of the concerns of some of our people. If approached with sensitivity, along with clear explanations of exactly what is involved, why it is necessary, and the benefits to be realized, screening doesn't need to turn volunteers away. In fact, good screening and volunteer management programs in churches have demonstrated increased recruitment and retention of lay leadership and have assisted in preventing volunteer burnout by spreading work out more evenly.

Remember that the screening and volunteer management program 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.

Q. What can we do if we don't feel the terms "*Volunteer Management*" or "*Volunteer Coordinator*" are appropriate for our local context?

A. The Diocesan Centre recognizes the uniqueness of each parish and the need to adapt programs to meet the needs of the local congregation. Some have expressed that the word "volunteer" and associated terminology is too secular and some churches would prefer to use "disciple" in lieu of "volunteer", or "Lay Ministry Coordinator/Parish Ministry Coordinator", in lieu of "Volunteer Coordinator". The Diocese encourages each parish to use the terminology that works best for the local congregation.

The creation of the position of *Volunteer Coordinator* is recommended, but not mandatory, and it stems from the experience of other Dioceses and what has worked for them with respect to implementing screening. Acknowledging the breadth of responsibilities that reside with the Incumbent, it has also been strongly recommended by Diocesan colleagues that the parish designate someone other than the Priest as the screening coordinator. While the method of program delivery may vary from congregation to congregation, each parish will be required to provide the Diocesan Centre with the name of a screening liaison.

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

A. Police Record Checks are not the most important part of this program. They will be used relatively infrequently and only for positions of highest trust. In short, all licensed clergy, active honorary assistants, and licensed lay workers will need to have a PRC. 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.

Examples: Those who run residential programs with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Those who provide individual counseling in closed settings.

Q. I have heard that Police Records Checks are costly and take a long time to process. Will this interfere with program delivery and who will bear the financial costs of this?

A. Most Police Records Check (PRCs) require approximately two to three weeks processing time and can be obtained free of cost (for volunteers) or for a lesser fee of \$15.00. Many of the OPP detachments in our region will waive the cost of a PRC for people who are volunteering, so it is recommended that the church supply the volunteer with a letter at the time of their application for a PRC.

In addition, many Police detachments will consider expediting a background check where there are time constraints involved – again, a letter from the church explaining why the PRC would need to be processed more quickly will be helpful to the volunteer. The Diocese will supply letter templates in the *Volunteer Management and Screening Handbook* and accompanying CD Rom.

In other Dioceses where screening and volunteer management have become a regular part of congregational life, some churches have offered to cover the costs associated with PRCs and make them part of the annual budgeting process.

Q. How long does a PRC last?

A. A PRC that is more than three years old will be deemed invalid and need to be updated. The Diocesan Centre will periodically provide parishes with a notice of those PRCs that are coming close to the three-year term so that new ones may be sought in a timely manner.

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

A. 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, a copy will be made to be forwarded to the Diocesan Centre and the original PRC returned to the individual. Confidentiality of all information will be given highest consideration.

Q. 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?

A. Managing and screening your ministry staff and volunteers is the responsibility of each parish. But ultimately the Diocese of Ontario has a duty of care to know that the Screening in Faith 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.

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

A. 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."

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

A. 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.

Q. What are the possible financial costs?

A. 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.

Q. It is going to take us a lot of time to get the job descriptions completed. Do you have any resources that might make the process easier?

A. The Congregational Development office will provide each parish with a Volunteer Management & Screening Handbook as well as a CD Rom with template job descriptions for those positions most frequently found in churches which you are free to customize for your own use. If your church has a specific job not covered in the Handbook templates, the Congregational Development office will assist you in sourcing and or developing one.

With the job description templates as a guide, you may choose to hold a meeting or job description writing/editing 'blitz' - bringing together as many volunteers as possible, describing the process and then having people review and edit their job descriptions. Another possibility is to have the supervisor for those ministries and their volunteers edit the job descriptions together.

If you have additional questions or concerns about Screening in Faith that have not been addressed in this briefing, you may feel free to contact the Diocesan Archdeacon for Ministry and Program by phone at 613-777-0530 or by email at nvarley@ontario.anglican.ca.