

Section 2: Risk Management

Whether you know it or not, your volunteer program probably has a lot of great risk management strategies in place. You may call them “common sense,” “safety measures” or simply “good management.” Whatever the label, these decisions and strategies put your program on a solid footing and in many respects enable your volunteer program to stride confidently toward its mission.

Organizations take risks by working with under-served members of a community. They refuse to say “It can’t be done.” They embrace risk when the potential reward is the opportunity to improve the quality of life in a community. And they never shy away from finding a way to serve client groups that the private sector can’t serve profitably.

The ultimate benefits of risk management, are protecting your agency, its clients, its staff and volunteers, and running a better program to meet your organization’s mission. Potential liabilities may include:

1. Liabilities of the individual volunteer — Based on criminal behavior or breach of obligation to the organization.
2. Liabilities of the agency to the volunteer — Based on agency not protecting volunteer from harm of discrimination, injury on job, etc.
3. Liabilities to the agency due to action by volunteers — Based on volunteers’ acting within or outside of the scope of their volunteer duties and/or failure to use proper care when selecting training and supervising volunteers.

2.1: Job Descriptions

Developing a volunteer position description is the first step in recruitment. It forces you to be clear and specific about the role a volunteer will undertake. It helps the volunteer to know exactly who you are, what you expect, and whether they fit that need.

Level of Risks in Volunteer Position Descriptions: In describing certain position descriptions as Low or High Level, you are able to get a clear indication of the steps you need to take in the screening process to apply risk management

Low Level

- Light occasional clerical work done during office hours
- Food repackaging and sorting|
- Food distribution (i.e. soup kitchen or produce drop)

High Level

- Homebound Food Delivery
- Filing and any instances where personal client information is seen by volunteers

Written Position Descriptions:

- Communicate expectations of volunteers
- Ability will be a significant selection criterion|
- Choose the proper level of screening
- Document that volunteer acted outside of an assignment
- Establish limitations that may discourage undesirable people from entering your program

2.1: Screening Procedures

It is important to screen volunteers because:

1. Helps find the right fit for the volunteer
2. Identifies training needs
3. Supports retention
4. Sends a message that this job is important
5. Mitigates Risks

2.3 Types of Screening

- Criminal Background Checks
- References
- Driving Records
- Interviews

It is important to maintain a feeling of contact with the volunteer during the background screening process.

- Clearly explain the steps in the screening process and who will be conducting them
- Give a pessimistic estimate of how long the process may take.
- Find ways to maintain contact with the volunteer during the screening period.
- If possible, find ways for them to be active like attending training programs or shadow another volunteer

As previously mentioned, categorizing positions into Low and High Levels indicates steps you need to take in the screening process.

Below is a tool to use to evaluate some important screening elements for a specific position. On the left, write in position requirements for a position you need to determine how to best screen for risk. Then determine if that position requires the screening procedures outlined on the top.

Position Requirements (Examples, write in your own)	Position Description	Application	Interview	Orient-ation	Reference Checks	Criminal Background Checks
Unsupervised contact with vulnerable client	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Delivery of meals to clients' home	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Packing and sorting food	Yes			Yes		
Filing client info in data system	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Serving meals to clients	Yes			Yes		

2.4 Elements of an Interview

The purpose of screening interviews is to learn more about the potential volunteer, his or her interests, abilities, experiences, and what he or she is looking for in a volunteer capacity. Screening interviews also can prevent future problems by ensuring that there is a clear understanding of the job requirements in the volunteer position, and to inform the volunteer about policies, procedures, and other organizational information.

Informational interviews generally provide potential volunteers with information on the agency and volunteer program. This may occur over the phone, prior to a screening interview (when a person indicates he or she is interested in volunteering).

Placement interviews allow the interviewer and potential volunteer to select the areas he or she is most interested and/or qualified to work in. Placement interviews may occur in an entrance interview (after screening), if the interviewer is confident that the potential volunteer is suitable for the agency.

Taking the time to interview volunteers enables you to determine:

1. What the volunteer has to offer to your organization
2. If the volunteer will fit into the culture of your organization
3. If the volunteer's motivational needs can be met
4. If your recruitment program seems to be attracting the best people for your organization and for available position