

# DIOCESE OF ALGOMA

## VOLUNTEER SCREENING REFERENCE GUIDE

The Screening in Faith process was adopted by our Diocese at Synod 2003, in the form of Canon H-5. This Canon requires all Parishes and Deanery or Diocesan organizations (such as Deanery Youth Units) to screen volunteers in a manner appropriate to the level of risk in their ministry.

### **This Canon obligates each Parish to:**

**1. Develop a Screening process.** There are many resources to help you develop your process. Each Parish has a copy of a Screening in Faith manual produced by Volunteer Canada. This manual outlines the steps of the screening process, and gives samples of Application Forms, Reference Check Forms, and Risk Assessment Forms. Additional resources can be found on the Volunteer Canada website [www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca), and our Diocesan website, [www.dioceseofalgoma.com](http://www.dioceseofalgoma.com)

**2. Complete the Parish Participation Report.** Parishes can access this form on the Diocesan website, using the link Parish Reporting Form. One copy of this form is included in the Annual Vestry Report of the Parish, a second copy is submitted to the Archdeacon of your Deanery, and the third copy is submitted to the Synod Office no later than February 28 to report on the preceding year.

### **Why Screen?**

Any organization that provides programs to vulnerable people has a moral, legal, and spiritual obligation to appropriately screen those who work for them, including volunteers. Screening is not only the right thing to do, it is legally required under the principle of “Duty of Care.”

### **Volunteer screening serves three main purposes:**

1. To safeguard, in all respects, all of those to whom we minister, particularly the vulnerable.
2. To ensure the integrity, safety and reputation of our volunteers.
3. To protect the faith community from defamation and retribution.

**This Workbook contains three Exercises intended to assist you in developing or refining your Parish's Screening Process, as well as some Questions & Answers about the Screening Process.**

**The 10 Elements of the Screening Process....Page 3**

**Exercise #1: Risk Management Policy for the Parish...Pages 4-5**

**Exercise: #2: Risk Assessment for Parish Ministries...Pages 6-7**

**Exercise #3: Screening Steps Assessment...Pages 8-9**

**Screening Q&A...Pages 10-11**

# TEN ELEMENTS OF THE SCREENING PROCESS

**1. Determine the risk** Churches can control the risk in their programs. Examining the potential for danger in programs and services may lead to preventing or eliminating the risk.

**2. Write a clear position description** Careful position descriptions send the message that a church is serious about screening. Responsibilities and expectations can be clearly set out, as well as the screening requirements.

**3. Establish a recruitment process** Whether a church posts notices for volunteer positions or sends home flyers, they must indicate that screening is part of the application process.

**4. Use an application form** The application form provides needed contact information. If the volunteer position requires other screening measures (driver's record, police records check), the application form will ask for permission to do so.

## **5. Conduct interviews**

Interviews help ensure that candidates meet the position requirements.

**6. Follow up on references** Identifying the level of trust required in the position and asking specific question will help determine the applicant's suitability.

## **7. Request a Police Records Check (PRC) when necessary**

PRCs signal that the church is concerned about the safety of its clients.

**8. Conduct orientation and training sessions** Screening does not end once the volunteer is in place. Orientation and training sessions offer an opportunity to observe volunteers in a different setting.

**9. Supervise and evaluate** The identified level of risk associated with a volunteer position will determine the necessary degree of supervision and evaluation. If the risk is great, it follows that the volunteer will be under close supervision.

**10. Follow up with program participants** Volunteers should be made aware of any follow-up activities that may occur. These could include spot checks for volunteers in high-risk positions.

## **EXERCISE #1: RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY FOR THE PARISH**

It is important for an organization to admit that some degree of risk is inevitable in their programs. It is how they handle the risk that is important. The existence of a Risk Management Policy indicates that risks will be identified and analyzed on an ongoing basis.

*Take a look at the following guidelines for reducing the risk in your ministries. Put a check beside the measures your church can implement as part of its Risk Management Policy.*

### **Guidelines for Avoiding Compromising Situations and Reducing Risk**

- It is preferable to meet with a group rather than be alone with an individual.
- It is preferable to have more than one adult present when working with vulnerable people (if the adult cannot be in the same room, it is best to have them close by in the same building).
- It is preferable to meet in an open, public space rather than a closed, private space. A church hall is better than a secluded room, a church office is better than a person's home, a living room is better than a bedroom.
- When meeting, an open door is better than a closed door, a door with a window is better than a solid door.
- It is always wise to make others aware of your activities and your whereabouts.
- It is best to schedule regular meetings with a supervisor to discuss the ongoing nature and actions of the ministry.
- Volunteers should not spend extended time alone with vulnerable care-seekers without consent and knowledge of the ministry leader/supervisor.
- When, and if, programming requires a volunteer to be alone with a vulnerable care-seeker every effort must be made to protect the person's privacy.
- Volunteers should not take others in their vehicle without letting the ministry leader/supervisor know that this occurred.
- Any physical contact between adults should occur in "public" and be sanctioned by the ministry leader/supervisor.
- Volunteers should not take money or property from a care-seeker for their volunteer ministry.
- Volunteers must not act outside the set boundaries of their ministry position description.

## **Guidelines for Reducing Risk When Working with Children**

- Adults (age 16+) should not spend extended time alone with children without consent of the child's guardian and the knowledge of the ministry supervisor
- When, and if, programming requires an adult to be alone with children (for example overnight camps or field trips) every effort must be made to protect the child's privacy. Girls and boys must not change together and adults must change separately from the children. Adults should not sleep in proximity to children.
- Adults who form a relationship with children through our faith community's activities should not seek out opportunities to spend time with the child "off site". If off site interactions occur the appropriate people should be informed.
- Adults should not help children with toileting. The parent or guardian must give permission for toileting or changing help to be given for younger children who cannot manage alone.
- Children should not be taken in an adult's vehicle without parent/guardian permission and the knowledge of the ministry leader/supervisor.
- Any physical contact between adults and children should occur in "public" and be sanctioned by the ministry leader/supervisor and the parent/guardian. For example hugs and kisses for younger children or physical 'rough housing' with older kids.
- Parents/guardians of children enrolled in programs should be encouraged to ask questions and stay abreast of the nature of the adult/child interaction. They should be encouraged to talk with their children about the programs and the volunteers and staff they encounter.

### **'RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY'**

These guidelines are intended to provide a general overview. It is recognized that churches may not be able to implement all of these guidelines. It is important the churches adopt risk reducing measures that are appropriate to its volunteer ministries, and ensure that volunteers are aware of the church's Risk Management Policy as it applies to their position.

### **A 'BEST PRACTICE' FOR CHURCHES**

Give a journal to each volunteer who works one-on-one or in private with others and require the volunteer to make notes on each meeting. The notes should include date, time, duration, location as well as the content of each meeting.

## **EXERCISE #2: RISK ASSESSMENT FOR PARISH MINISTRIES**

In order to assess the risk level in each ministry, you will need to create a list of parish ministries and a brief job description for each. Samples of job descriptions are available on the Diocesan website. Please feel free to adapt these descriptions to reflect the needs of your church. If you wish to develop your own job descriptions, the following is a list of elements to consider:

- Title
- Participant group (children, seniors, etc.)
- Goals
- Activities and tasks
- Outline of responsibilities
- Time commitment expected
- Boundaries and Screening requirements
- Skills, experience and qualifications
- Personal traits and qualities
- Orientation and training available
- Support, supervision and evaluation provided
- Mandatory activities (e.g. training, monthly meetings, travel)
- Working conditions (e.g. non-smoking environment)
- Benefits to the volunteer

### **ASSESSING THE RISK LEVEL FOR EACH JOB DESCRIPTION**

**Designate all positions as ‘High Risk’, ‘Mid-Risk’ or ‘Low Risk’.**

*Please remember that your parishes’ Risk Management Policy  
can reduce or eliminate some of these risks.*

**High Risk** volunteer positions are positions that meet any of the following criteria:

- The position requires a volunteer to be alone and unsupervised with a client.
- The position requires a volunteer to develop a close, supportive relationship with a client or group of clients.
- The position may require or encourage driving with a client as a passenger.
- The position requires the volunteer to be left unsupervised in a building operated by the organization on a regularly scheduled basis.

**Mid-Risk** volunteer positions are positions that meet any of the following criteria:

- The position requires a volunteer to act on behalf of the organization in an unsupervised setting.
- The position requires the volunteer to handle money or food with a minimum of supervision.
- The volunteer has access to the organization’s confidential files.

**Low Risk** volunteer positions are positions that meet all of the following criteria:

- The position does not require close contact with clients or the public.
- The position is supervised at all times.
- The position does not require the volunteer to handle money or food.
- The position does not require/encourage driving.

**MY PARISH’S RISK ASSESSMENT**

*Please complete the following chart for your parish’s ministries*

Ministry Position or Title	Job Description (yes/no)	High Risk	Mid- Risk	Low Risk

## **EXERCISE #3: SCREENING STEPS ASSESSMENT**

Once you have identified your parish ministries, developed their job descriptions, and identified their level of risk, it is time to assign appropriate screening steps to each ministry.

**You have the following steps to consider** (*as described on page 3*)

- *Recruitment Process*: How will we fill this position when vacant?
- *Application Form*: What information do we need from a volunteer in this position?
- *Interview*: Does this position require an interview?  
What questions would we like to ask a volunteer in this position?
- *Reference Check*: Should we request references for this position?  
How many references? What questions should we ask the references?  
Are there other forms of reference required (i.e. proof of insurance for a volunteer driver, proof of First Aid qualification)
- *Police Record Check*: Does our local police station charge for checks for volunteers? Will we reimburse our volunteers for checks?
- *Orientation and Training*: What training do we require for this ministry?  
Will we pay for training from external sources? (First Aid, Babysitting Course)  
How will we provide for on-going skills development?
- *Supervision and Evaluations*: How will we supervise this position?  
How will we ensure the volunteer has opportunity to express concerns?

### **WHAT STEPS ARE APPROPRIATE?**

- The following elements are appropriate to ministries in *all risk levels*:  
Recruitment Process, Application Form, Orientation/Training and Supervision/Evaluation.
- An Application Form must request basic contact information, but can be expanded to include questions that substitute for an interview.
- Interviews and Reference Checks are appropriate to all Mid and High Risk ministries, and optional for Low Risk ministries.
- Police Record Checks are required for all High Risk Ministries and must be renewed every three years. They are optional for Mid and Low Risk ministries.



## SCREENING QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**Q: Does screening suggest that volunteers can't be trusted?**

A: No. Like most prudent behaviour, screening is intended to prevent the problem that may or may not occur. However, screening addresses the reality that it is possible a person could seek out faith communities with the intent of stealing money, property, or harming participants and/or staff.

**Q: Should all volunteers be screened?**

A: Ideally, all applicants should go through the basic elements of a screening process (Application, Training, Evaluation). However, the most important positions to screen are those where a person works with children or vulnerable adults.

**Q: I'm very involved in committees in my faith community. Do I have to be concerned about screening?**

A: Absolutely! Depending on the structure of your faith community, some committees or councils are ultimately responsible (and as a result, potentially liable) for the services and programs offered by your community. Even if you are not legally responsible you are morally and spiritually bound to protect others.

**Q: On what basis can an applicant be refused for a volunteer ministry?**

A: An applicant can be refused if his or her interests and experience do not meet the requirements of the ministry or if their background makes them unsuitable to work with vulnerable people. You can suggest another ministry more suitable to a person's background and talents. Be creative and think of ways for the person's gifts to be offered.

**Q: If a volunteer harms a participant, is the faith community responsible?**

A: Increasingly, the courts are holding non-profit and charitable organizations accountable for their volunteers' actions. If your organization has created or permitted a situation that results in harm, you can be held liable.

**Q: Won't our Insurance will take care of any potential liability?**

A: Insurance does not cover every eventuality; there are significant exceptions in any insurance policy. Then too, if a faith community has been negligent, insurance companies may not provide coverage. Some insurance companies are now asking explicit questions on application forms for third party liability about the faith community's screening of employees and volunteers.

**Q: What documents do we keep on file for volunteers?**

A: All volunteer files should be kept in a secure location to ensure confidentiality. Application Forms should be kept on file, as well as notes taken during Interviews, Reference Checks, Training/Orientation and Supervision/Evaluation sessions. Any concerns or complaints should be kept on file, as well as a record of actions taken toward resolution. In the interest of confidentiality, it is preferred that police records checks be provided to the faith organization for review, but not kept on file. The original document should be returned to the volunteer or paid staff person. What can be kept on file is a form stating that the check has been provided and reviewed. This form should be signed by a person or persons appointed by the faith community to review police records checks. The form should also indicate whether the check has been approved or if follow-up conversations are required, but should *not* record the nature of any charges or convictions.

**Q: How do Police Record Checks (PRC) work?**

A: The volunteer visits the local police station and requests the PRC. Once the volunteer receives the check, he/she must show it to the appropriate parish representative (Incumbent, Screening Team Contact, etc.) The parish representative will complete a Police Record Check Declaration (available on the Diocesan website) to keep on file and will return the PRC to the volunteer. In some areas of our Diocese it is also possible for the volunteer to authorize, in writing, the parish to request the Police Record Check on his/her behalf. In either case, the PRC must be returned to the volunteer and not kept on file.

**Q: Is this process only for volunteers?**

A: You can apply this process to paid staff at your church. The Synod Office handles the screening for Incumbents.

**Q: What if there is an allegation against a volunteer?**

A: The Diocese has procedures for dealing with allegations. Please ensure that the Incumbent is aware of the allegation and the Incumbent will follow procedures.

**Q: If I offer someone a ride to church, or go to a church member's house for lunch, do I need to be screened?**

A: The Screening Process applies to volunteers who are *deliberately engaged in activities on behalf of the parish*. Church members who engage in activities of their own initiative are not considered parish volunteers.