

5 Tips to Better Volunteer Screening



Get more from your volunteer screening program with these five tips based on the practices of over 350 U.S. nonprofit organizations.*

TIP 1: Use Multiple Searches

There is no single database that contains every criminal record, not even the FBI's National Crime Information Center. Since criminal records reside within multiple data sources, there is always a risk of missing a record when screening volunteers. Organizations can reduce this risk by using multiple searches to screen volunteers – for example, using a nationwide database to supplement county and state searches.

TIP 2: Know Your Background Checks

Criminal record searches are unique and organizations must understand the differences between each type of search so they can make better decisions regarding how volunteers are screened. Many nonprofit organizations report confidence in the quality of their criminal data despite their reliance only on nationwide database searches or other incomplete screening methods. These organizations might be unaware of the limitations of these searches and may not realize that information is missing or inaccurate. Nationwide or multi-state database searches are not meant to stand alone, and for this reason, all hits must be validated at the primary source of information (county or state courthouse).

TIP 3: Don't Assume That Fingerprint Checks Are Reliable

Fingerprint checks may be required in certain situations; however, the notion that they are the most reliable way to conduct criminal record checks is a fallacy. Fingerprint checks query the FBI's National Crime Information Center, which is based on voluntary submission of records by each state. The records are often flawed, inaccurate and missing critical information.** For a more reliable search, organizations should use a combination of county and state searches based on address history, nationwide databases and the Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW).

TIP 4: Protect More Than Your People

Vulnerable populations often steal the spotlight when it comes to conversations regarding background checks, but they may not be the only vulnerability in your organization. Background checks do more than protect people – they protect your assets, your reputation and your brand. Anyone who handles finances, personally identifiable information (PII), technology, or makes important decisions on behalf of your organization should be screened; however, only 15% of organizations screen back office and administrative volunteers. Minor theft may not be of concern, but severe damage to your reputation could put your entire organization's livelihood at risk.

TIP 5: Question Hit Rates Under 3%

A low hit rate might allow you to onboard every volunteer, but it is indicative of a low quality check. If your organization is consistently finding that fewer than 3% of volunteers have a criminal record, your background checks might not be doing their job. Revisit your screening practices to ensure that you're searching the right places and digging deep enough into your volunteers' criminal history. If your low hit rate is still puzzling, consult a knowledgeable and reputable screening provider for further guidance and recommendations.

* Data Source: Verified Volunteers' Volunteer Screening Trends & Best Practices Report: 2016, which gathered responses of 352 U.S. professionals who work for nonprofit organizations that conduct background checks on their volunteers.

** The National Employment Law Project, "Wanted: Accurate FBI Background Checks for Employment."

The Verified Volunteers Difference

Monthly Updates and Alerts

Volunteer information is updated for you free of charge each month for the first year so you have the added security of monitoring your volunteers for new criminal records.

Flexible Payment Options and Contributions

Our flexible payment options allow you to pass on all, some or none of the background check cost to your volunteers.

Outstanding Volunteer Experience

Our secure and easy-to-use platform creates for a great user experience that allows your volunteers to complete the order process efficiently.

Quality of Service

Our dedicated Advocates Team is there when you need them to ensure the simplest, most effective experience for you and your volunteers.

Continuous Innovation

We ask for client feedback often – and use that feedback to enhance our platform and services regularly.

About Us

Verified Volunteers helps nonprofit organizations gain confidence in the volunteers working with those they serve by delivering thorough, compliant background checks. By enabling volunteers to order, manage and share their background checks via a secure online platform, we create a community of vetted volunteers and help nonprofit organizations save time and money. Our extensive expertise in screening and compliance best practices help clients recruit the best volunteers in order to maintain a safe environment and positive reputation. Verified Volunteers is backed by Sterling Talent Solutions, one of the world's largest background screening companies, and partnered with Points of Light, the world's largest organization dedicated to volunteer service.

Visit www.verifiedvolunteers.com.

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