

Screening volunteers appropriately when you recruit them is a good way to engage the best-fit people for your Volunteer-Involving Organisation (VIO) and head off potential problems before they arise. Depending on your type of organisation you may have legal obligations to screen some volunteers, but for most VIOs it's about managing risk and getting to know the strengths and opportunities that your volunteers bring to your organisation.

Why screen volunteers?

Screening your volunteers appropriately before they start is extremely important. Your organisation will benefit from screening potential volunteer applicants by:

- Identifying skills, experience, and qualifications to match the applicant to the task(s)
- Identifying and mitigating any risk posed by or to the applicant
- Providing an opportunity to learn more about the applicant's motivation, suitability and prospects
- Ensuring that you meet any requirements that you may have under the law such as 'duty of care'
- Aligning with industry best practice and your organisational policies which capture this

What screening and checks should I do?

The screening and checks you conduct will depend on the nature of the work the volunteer will be doing and their circumstances. If someone has access to money, equipment or data, it may be appropriate to conduct a police check. If they will be working with children* (this has a special meaning), it's a legal requirement to conduct a Working with Children Check. Specific requirements also apply to workers providing National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services and supports.

Each volunteer role may require a different level of screening, or you may have an organisational policy to screen all volunteers in a consistent way, regardless of their individual role.

All of this should be captured in your organisation's relevant policies and procedures.

Your Organisational Policy

It's important to capture your volunteer screening requirements (from a legal as well as a professional perspective) in your organisation's policy documents to ensure that they are carried out in a consistent and accountable way.

Examples of policies you may need to address volunteer screening in include:

- Privacy
- Volunteer Recruitment
- Volunteering Screening (including Police Check)
- Risk Mitigation Policy
- Child Safety Policy (including WWCC)

Working with Children Checks (WWCC)

When are WWC Checks required by law?

In Victoria, most people who perform 'child-related work' (see below) are required to undergo a WWC Check. If your organisation conducts 'child-related work', you should carefully consider whether employees and volunteers must have a WWC Check before starting to work with your organisation.

What is 'child-related work'?

A 'child' is defined in the Worker Screening Act as any person under 18 years old.

Activities considered to be 'child-related work' usually involve direct contact with a child. Contact which is only occasional or incidental to the work does not fall within the definition of 'child-related work' under the [Worker Screening Act 2020 \(Vic\)](#).

How does a WWCC work?

Working with Children Checks are free for volunteers to apply for through the Department of Justice. It is a check that involves monitoring over time so if someone is charged with a child related offence while volunteering with you, your organization will be notified. Working with children checks last 5 years. After this time, the Department of Justice will advise you, and you may need to remind your volunteers to renew their check, if need be.

Police Checks

Those who recruit volunteers for services have a duty of care to ensure that they take reasonable steps to avoid harm to the organisation and its existing employees, volunteers, and clients. Even if the law, or any funding agreement, doesn't require a police records check, your organisation may decide that a criminal record check is necessary.

It is important to note that unlike a WWCC, a Police Check does not involve an assessment by a government agency; it is only the result of a request for a list of offences at a point in time in relation to an individual. It is the responsibility of the organisation to assess someone's suitability as a volunteer based on the outcome of the police check, and this would be captured as part of your relevant policies.

Police Check Protections

If your organisation requires that applicants undergo police checks during the recruitment process, you must not refuse an applicant because they have a prior conviction for an offence that has no relevance to the position.

There are legal protections against discrimination on the basis of criminal record, and you should only refuse an applicant on the basis of a criminal past when you believe that the prior offence prevents the applicant from performing the 'inherent requirements' of the position.

For more information go to the [Australian Human Rights Commission \(AHRC\)](#).

Registered NDIS Providers

As a provider of services to NDIS participants, your volunteers will need to undergo an NDIS screening check to ensure that they do not pose an unacceptable risk to participants. Go to:

[NDIS Worker Screening Check | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](#)

N.B. Volunteers can apply to have the application fee waived by completing the 'Volunteer Waiver Form' available to download on the above website.

Inclusive Screening

Some members of the community may face barriers in accessing suitable volunteer roles (eg. CALD, LGBTIQ+ communities, people with a disability, recently arrived migrants, etc.) therefore it is important to consider whether there is anything in your screening process that is making it inaccessible for potential volunteers. requirements

Think about what you can do to make the process more inclusive, including but not limited to ensuring:

- you have easy English options for those who may have low literacy or limited English
- the room you are interviewing in is accessible
- you have information for how to involve support workers
- volunteers are given multiple ID options for police and reference checks, particularly if they have recently immigrated from overseas
- you have no excessive or unnecessary screening

Inhouse screening

Interviews and Information sessions

Many organisations ask individuals to come along to an information session and or an interview as part of their screening process. This can help an organization determine whether the volunteer is suited to the organization or has a correct understanding of the role being offered. It can be a great way to deal with potential problems at the start i.e. not all volunteer roles at the Zoo may involve contact with animals so its important this is clarified at the start.

Reference checks

In addition to interviews, some organisations ask potential volunteers to provide references (personal or professional) who can vouch for their skill and motivations. These are not required by law but can be an effective low-cost way of ensuring a volunteer is a good fit for your organisation.

More information

[Recruiting-Volunteers-Guide](#)

[Essential-Volunteer-Policies-and-Procedures Guide](#)

[Protecting-Privacy-for-Volunteers Guide](#)

[Insurance-and-Liability-Guide](#)

Child Safe Standards [Department of Health and Human Services Victoria | Child Safe Standards \(dhhs.vic.gov.au\)](#)

[Do I need a Check? | Working with Children](#)

[NDIS National Disability Insurance Scheme \(Practice Standards—Worker Screening\) Rules 2018](#)