

**Selecting the right volunteer for your program is important. Screening volunteers appropriately during the recruitment process is a good way to engage the best people for your organisation and avoid potential problems before they arise.**

**Depending on your type of organisation and activities, you may have legal obligations to screen some volunteers. This can help manage risk to your organisation, staff and its service recipients. Consider the requirements carefully; too much screening can also create challenges for some potential volunteers.**

### **Why screen volunteers?**

Screening your volunteers appropriately before they start is extremely important because it assists with risk management. 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 reducing any risk posed by or to the applicant
- » Providing an opportunity to learn more about the applicant's motivation, suitability and expectations
- » 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

### **What screening and checks should I do?**

Navigating screening checks to maintain the safety of your volunteers and the community can be a challenging task. This usually involves interviews and reference checks, as well as more formal legal requirements.

In Victoria, there are a few formal checks that may be required, depending on the program or activity and also the clients that are receiving the support. It is important to consider the legislation and the regulations that may apply if your volunteers engage with children and / or vulnerable people.

The formal screening and checks you conduct will depend on the nature of the work the volunteers 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 engaging directly with children (see 'child-related work' below), it is 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 outlined in your organisation's relevant policies and procedures, as well as the position description.

## Your Organisational Policy

All organisations involving children have to comply with the Standards under the [Child Wellbeing and Safety Act \(2005\)](#). The standards require organisations to have policies and practices to keep children safe, prevent child abuse, and respond properly to allegations of abuse.

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 way.

Volunteer screening may be referred to in the following policies within your organisation:

- » Privacy / Confidentiality
- » Volunteer Recruitment
- » Volunteering Screening (including Police Check)
- » Risk Mitigation Policy
- » Child Safety Policy (including Working With Children Check)

## Inclusive Screening

Some members of the community may face barriers in accessing suitable volunteer roles. It is important to consider whether there is anything in your screening process that is making it inaccessible for potential volunteers.

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 using for interviews is physically accessible
- » you have information for how to involve support workers
- » volunteers are given multiple identification options for police and reference checks, particularly if they have recently immigrated from overseas
- » support or assistance is available to help people navigate web-based application processes
- » you have no excessive or unnecessary screening

Remember that asking people to obtain checks may be a barrier to them participating as a volunteer. Establishing enough identification to go through the process itself can be a challenge. Consider the role of the volunteer when deciding what checks are required.

## In-house screening

### Interviews and Information sessions

Many organisations ask individuals to attend an information session or an interview as part of their screening process. This can help to decide if the person is suited to the organisation or has a correct understanding of the role being offered. It can be a great way to deal with potential problems at the start. For example, not all volunteer roles at the Zoo may involve contact with animals so it's important to clarify this at the start.

### Reference checks

In addition to interviews, some organisations ask potential volunteers to provide references (personal or professional). A referee can provide information about a volunteer's skills, reliability, 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.

## Working with Children Checks (WWCC)

### When are they required by law?

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

### What is 'child-related work'?

A 'child' is defined in the [Worker Screening Act \(2020\)](#) 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 Working With Children Check 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 organisation 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.

More information can be found on the following website:

[The Working with Children Check application process | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](#)

A list of [job categories](#) can also be found here.

## 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 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. Some organisations may require a particular time frame to accept this, for example within the last 6 months.

It is important to note that unlike a Working With Children Check, 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 because of a criminal record, and you should only refuse an applicant based on 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 \(AHRC\)](#).

An organisation may apply for a Community Volunteer Fee (CVF) number. This number could be provided to volunteers to enable them to qualify for a reduced application processing fee if they are applying for the purpose of volunteer work or student placement.

More information can be found on the following websites:

- » [Apply for a National Police Check - Victoria Police](#)
- » [Information sheet – Procedure for obtaining a National Police Check](#)
- » [Application Form for a Community Volunteer Fee Number](#)
- » [National police check fees and charges - Victoria Police](#)

## Registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Providers

If your organisation is a provider of services to NDIS participants, your volunteers will need to undergo a NDIS screening check to ensure that they do not pose an unacceptable risk to participants. All individuals volunteering for registered NDIS providers in certain types of roles – called risk assessed roles – will need a NDIS clearance before they can start. A volunteer must be in a risk assessed role to be eligible for the volunteer fee waiver.

Further information can be found here: [NDIS Worker Screening Check | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](#)

Note: volunteers can apply to have the application fee waived by completing the 'Volunteer Waiver Form' available to download on the above website.

### More information can be found via the following links:

[legislation.gov.au](http://legislation.gov.au)

[legislation.vic.gov.au](http://legislation.vic.gov.au) - worker screening act 2020

[legislation.vic.gov.au](http://legislation.vic.gov.au) - Child wellbeing and safety act 2005

[vic.gov.au](http://vic.gov.au) - exemptions under the act

[vic.gov.au](http://vic.gov.au) - about child safe standards

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

[nfplaw.org.au](http://nfplaw.org.au) - background checks

[nfplaw.org.au](http://nfplaw.org.au) - police checks - discrimination

[ccyp.vic.gov.au](http://ccyp.vic.gov.au) - child safe standards

### Volunteering Victoria guides containing further information:

- » [Recruiting Volunteers](#)
- » [Essential Volunteer Policies and Procedures](#)
- » [Protecting Privacy for Volunteers](#)
- » [Insurance and Liability](#)


## Further information

As Victoria's peak body for volunteering, you can always come to us for reliable resources and advice. Below are some helpful links and resources to continue your understanding of *Volunteer Screening*.







The [Volunteering Victoria website](#) is your go-to resource for all things volunteering, with timely and reliable support, training, resources, and expert advice.

### Can't find what you're looking for?

Contact the Volunteering Victoria team at [info@volunteeringvictoria.org.au](mailto:info@volunteeringvictoria.org.au) anytime with your questions.



**Volunteering Victoria website**

 <p>Guides for Leading Volunteers</p>	 <p>National Standards for Volunteer Involvement</p>	 <p>Training &amp; Workshops <i>(Some offered <b>free of charge</b>)</i></p>
 <p>National Knowledge Base for Volunteer Managers</p>	 <p>Service Victoria <a href="http://Service.vic.gov.au">Service.vic.gov.au</a></p>	 <p>Volunteer Management Guide for Non-profits</p>