Developing Position Descriptions

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Position descriptions are a critical part of the staff screening process. Position descriptions spell out the requirements of the job and help to identify possible risks associated with that position. By understanding these risks, organizations are better able to select individuals who are capable of performing the position's duties, but who do not constitute an unacceptable threat to the safety of service recipients, other staff, organizational assets, or to themselves.

Answering the following questions will help you create consistent position descriptions in your organization.

- What is the title of the position for which you are screening?
- What purpose is the position going to serve? Why will it exist?
- What are the specific responsibilities for the position? What limitations are placed on performing these functions?
- What qualifications or skills must the person holding the position have? How are these qualifications related to the specific functions or responsibilities? Are they reasonable or discriminatory?
- Who will supervise the staff member?
- What is the minimum amount of time required by the position? What is the maximum amount of time permitted?
- What training will be provided to the individual selected for this position? Will participation in the training be a prerequisite to assuming the position?
- Where will the services be performed?

The position description provides the justification for information to be collected in each subsequent phase of staff screening: application forms, interviews, reference checks, record checks and other screening techniques (drug screening or psychological tests).

As important as screening is for nonprofit organizations to ensure that their employees and volunteers meet the standards, no screening process is totally effective. Organizations must continue to maintain their vigilance and ensure that all of their staff members (employees and volunteers) receive adequate training, supervision and management support to fulfill their missions.

More assistance with staff screening policies and procedures can be found in the *Staff Screening Notebook*, published by the Nonprofit Risk Management Center.

The Nonprofit Risk Management Center welcomes questions and comments at 703.777.3504.