

Survey Sheds Light on Screening Practices of Volunteer Organizations

Resource Type: Articles

Topic: Volunteer Risk Management

APRIL 22, 2008 — Washington, DC — At a press conference attended by representatives of prominent youth serving organizations and the local media, the [National Center for Victims of Crime](#) revealed the results of Who's Lending a Hand? A National Survey of Nonprofit Volunteer Screening Practices. The findings presented in the report were based on data compiled through telephone surveys with 517 nonprofit human services organizations drawn from a random sample of 2,251 nonprofits that provide direct services to clients. The sample was purchased from [GuideStar](#).

The project was made possible through a grant from [ChoicePoint](#) to the National Center for Victims of Crime. The telephone surveys were conducted by representatives of the Schaefer Center for Public Policy at the University of Baltimore.

The report highlights “gaps in the volunteer screening practices of nonprofit organization” and the disconnect between the goal of many nonprofits who seek to avoid recruiting volunteers whose backgrounds make them unsuitable for service but who still lack adequate screening measures. For example while 65% of the surveyed nonprofits indicated that they would regard a prospective volunteer ineligible if he or she had been accused of child abuse, only 42% of the responding organizations acknowledged submitting applicant names to state Child Protective Services agencies in order to determine if allegations of abuse are on file with these agencies.

Of the 60 organizations (12% of the respondents) that reported no screening activities for volunteer applicants, three reasons were cited: (1) lack of usefulness of screening; (2) insufficient resources; and (3) concern about offending prospective volunteers.

In the section titled “Conclusions and Recommendations,” the authors of the study remind readers that “Volunteer screening should only be one part of an overall volunteer management policy within the organization. In addition to thoroughly screening potential volunteers, the organization also has an ongoing obligation to adequately supervise and train all staff and volunteers to ensure the quality of services and the well-being of clients receiving services.”

Did You Know?

... that all 50 states have made their sex offender registries available online? Visit the [following web page](#) of the FBI for quick links to the various state registries.

... that a workshop on “Who's Lending a Hand?” will be featured as Session #12 at the upcoming Risk Management and Finance Summit for Nonprofits in Minneapolis this September 8-9? The full program includes three thought-provoking keynote sessions and 30 workshops on a wide range of risk management topics. [See program and registration details here.](#)

Acknowledging that the information was self-reported by those who agreed to be interviewed, Julie Whitman, Director of Special Projects for NCVV noted, “We recommend a further study that would involve direct observation and review of actual policies and practices.”

The Survey also revealed that half of the criminal history background checks conducted by those interviewed were done on a national (multi-state) basis, while the remaining were limited to a single state’s criminal history records. In addition, only 32% of the respondents reported that their volunteers were subjected to periodic re-screening.

Also speaking at the press conference was M. Carmela Welte, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the [National CASA](#). National CASA is a network of “50,000 volunteers that serve 225,000 abused and neglected children through 900+ local program offices nationwide.” Welte reports that National CASA has adopted national standards for volunteer placement. “Our standard for volunteer screening and selection requires a written application and three references, an interview and an initial training of three hours. We find that the training is often when volunteers are screened out. Our background checks include national, state and local checks, checking sex offender registries, a child protective services check if that is possible, and a motor vehicle records check.”

For more information on the Who’s Lending a Hand, and to download the report, visit www.ncvc.org.

TOOLS YOU CAN USE

The Nonprofit Risk Management Center recommends that nonprofits adjust the rigor of the screening process based on the risks posed by the position a volunteer or staff member seeks to occupy. That means that within one nonprofit there may be several screening “tracks” in place in order to adequately and affordably screen volunteers.

For information on volunteer and staff screening, consult the third edition of our [Staff Screening Tool Kit](#).

Also, next month the Center will unveil a new online screening tool called QualitySelect that promises to make the process of creating a customized screening program for your nonprofit accessible and affordable. For more information on this new resource, contact the Center at (202) 785-3891.