

Step 7– Police Records Checks

Too many people believe that doing a PRC means that the person has been screened. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is not only important to know if someone has been convicted of a crime, the nature of that crime is also important. If a conviction is an abuse or harassment offence, it can be more pertinent than a conviction for shoplifting, depending on the position the volunteer will be filling.

You may need to consult both your local police force and the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) depending on the information you are seeking.

Local police force databases show:

- convictions and charges; and
- information about the individual as a complainant, victim, or witness to the occurrence
- suspect data.

CPIC databases show:

- criminal charges and convictions;
- probation;
- related court orders (e.g. possession of firearms, etc.).

Prior to requesting a PRC, your organization should decide what type of information is required from the police. For example, if the position allows a volunteer access to your organization's finances but there is no risk of one-on-one contact with a participant, the police should be checking the data base for any convictions related to theft, fraud, etc.

There are limitations to PRCs.

- They are only good up to the checking day; a recent conviction may not show.
- There are lags in sending records from one country to another.
- The individual may be using an alias, so only fingerprint checks will ensure they are "clear."
- Relying solely on PRCs is dangerous—a false sense of security may be created. Unfortunately, many abusers and sex offenders have never been convicted of a crime.
- The individual may have obtained a "pardon" and therefore is no longer on the list.
- The information may not be available because the conviction occurred while the individual was protected by the Young Offenders' Act.



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A number of steps should be taken when requesting a PRC.

- For high-risk positions, the position application form should state that the employee or volunteer will be asked to provide a PRC; the applicant should confirm acceptance of this. Just as stating your screening policy in your recruiting notices can be an effective deterrent, making all applicants aware that you conduct PRCs can ensure that some applicants screen themselves out.
- Use a release form which states the agreement of the volunteer or employee to a PRC.
- A written policy should be in place concerning whether or not to select individuals with criminal records.
- A number of police forces and municipalities now charge for PRCs. The organization will need a policy on who will bear the cost of the PRC. (See if your local police force has an arrangement.)

The following should be taken into consideration when your organization is developing a screening policy which includes PRCs:

1. Clear guidelines must be developed concerning how your organization will handle a volunteer whose PRC shows a previous conviction. The decision your organization makes will depend on the activities you carry out, the participants you deal with, as well as the organization's purpose, philosophy and values.
2. When deciding whether to accept or reject an applicant, the organization will base its decision on the following:
 - the nature of the program, services and activities provided;
 - the character and degree of vulnerability of the participant group served, and the organization's duty of care to the participants, to the staff and to the community;
 - the relevant moral, ethical, legal and policy issues and principles; and
 - the potential risks involved in the position the individual is applying for, based on the participant group being served, the nature of the position and its activities, the setting in which it takes place, the way in which it is supervised, and the nature of the relationship created between the volunteer and the participant.
3. Once organizations receive information about an applicant, whether from the applicant directly or from the police, the organization becomes responsible for that information and is then subject to many of the same legal requirements and regulations as other holders of personal information, in terms of confidentiality and access.

If the organization receives a report from the police (either directly or given to them by the individual), where will the information be kept?



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Consider the following questions when the information is provided directly to the applicant.

- Does your organization require an original or a copy of the document?
- Is the document kept or just verified?
- If it is kept, how does your organization deal with the issue of confidentiality?

If the information goes to the organization directly, the organization must be vigilant about confidentiality, as well as storage of and access to the information.

4. Organizations must also decide whether or not they will conduct PRCs more than once. Some organizations require that PRCs be done annually, or every two or three years. This requirement may act as a deterrent to some. However, the limitations on police records checks remain, regardless of the number of checks conducted.

PRCs should never be the first, last or only screening step used by an organization.

Summary of key concepts

1. PRCs are only one step in the 10-step screening process.
2. Be aware of the limitations of PRCs.
3. PRCs are an important screening tool, particularly for high-risk positions.
4. Organizations should consult with their local police force when establishing their policy.

For additional information and samples on Police Records Checks and other Volunteer Canada Screening Resources, or to order the complete Safe Steps workbook, please call 1-800-670-0401 or visit us at: www.volunteer.ca



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