

Strengthening the Caring Community: Parish Volunteer Screening Manual



This manual is prepared for Parish
Volunteer Screening Committees, Parish
community leaders, volunteers,
participants, and all members of the various
Parish communities in the Archdiocese of
Toronto.

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This manual was prepared by the Archdiocese of Toronto (Ontario).

A portion of this manual is compiled from the Screening in Faith manual developed by Volunteer Canada, which acts as a reference manual for these procedures. It is to be noted that Volunteer Canada and the Archdiocese of Toronto do not share pastoral responsibilities or duties and are not legally bound to each other.

We wish to thank Volunteer Canada, the national voice for volunteerism in Canada, for their excellent work and for providing us with great resources.

This document is a work in progress and is therefore subject to change.

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About this Manual

This manual provides the parishes in the Archdiocese of Toronto with guidelines and ready-to-use forms for the screening and supervision of volunteers. It is the policy of the Archdiocese of Toronto that these procedures be followed in all of the parish communities under its jurisdiction in order to ensure the protection of volunteers, staff, parishioners and the Archdiocese of Toronto.

Our Commitment to a Safe Environment

It is the purpose of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto:

1. To safeguard, in all respects, all of those, but most especially the vulnerable, to whom we minister.

- We have an obligation to protect everyone whom we serve. However, when vulnerable people participate in our programs, we have a much higher obligation to ensure their protection than if they were able-bodied adults who could take care of themselves. This means screening, very thoroughly, people who are going to work with them.

2. To ensure the integrity, safety and reputation of our volunteers.

Our volunteer management program ensures that:

- volunteers are working in an organized, structured environment;
- policies and procedures outline the volunteers' rights as well as responsibilities, and how they will be supported when an incident occurs;
- position descriptions are developed, interviews are conducted and volunteers are supervised and placed in positions that best suit to their abilities and interests;
- risk assessments are conducted with consideration for the personal safety of all involved. The risk assessment ensures that we are not placing a volunteer in a dangerous location (i.e. unsafe equipment or working alone at night) or placing an inexperienced volunteer alone.

3. To ensure, that, as a faith community, we fulfill all our obligations.

- The development of screening policies and procedures is intended to meet our legal obligations, but even more importantly adequate screening measures will fulfill our ethical, moral and spiritual responsibilities to promote wholeness, accountability, trust and care in our ministries.

Liability Coverage

The Liability coverage afforded to the Archdiocese of Toronto administered by Catholic Mutual Canada provides coverage on a legal liability basis, to all volunteers and employees who are responsible for screening of other volunteers and employees. Coverage applies to all volunteers and employees while acting within the scope of their duties, and responds to any legal liability for bodily injury and/or property damage subject to the policy exclusions, terms and conditions. The policy does not respond to abuse of any kind.

Terminology

Duty of Care

A general principle in civil law that identifies the obligations of individuals and organizations to take reasonable measures to care for and protect its participants and deliver its programs in a safe and well-managed manner. Canadian courts will hold parishes accountable on the basis of “neglect” if appropriate screening has not been conducted and some incident has occurred.

Full Disclosure

Volunteers have the right to know and to be informed from the outset of all screening procedures that will be used with respect to any position for which they apply.

Participants

Those who participate in programs or who receive services from ministries. The word participant is used as a generic term for these people.

Position of Trust

1. Situations in which someone has a significant degree of:
 - Authority or decision-making power over another
 - Unsupervised access to another person and to his/her property
 - Interaction with vulnerable individuals.
2. Situations where the success of the service depends on the development of a close, personal relationship between the individuals as in mentoring, counselling or home visiting programs.

Risk Management

A process of assessing potential problems and developing strategies for solutions to minimize the risk. In other words; it involves looking at the possibilities of loss or injury that might arise in programs, activities and services and taking steps to stop, minimize, prevent or eliminate them. Screening is an exercise in risk management.

Volunteer

A person who:

- chooses to undertake a ministry position, service or activity;
- does this ministry activity in service to an individual, or to assist the parish or diocesan community-at-large;
- is not coerced or compelled to do this activity;
- does not receive a salary or wage for this service or ministry activity.

Vulnerable Person

One who has difficulty protecting himself or herself from harm temporarily or permanently and is at risk because of age, disability or circumstances such as emotional distress due to extreme crisis or trauma.

The Volunteer Screening Program

Screening a volunteer begins long before people offer themselves in ministry, and only ends after they leave ministry. Volunteer Canada developed the Ten Safe Steps of volunteer screening. The Archdiocese of Toronto's Volunteer Screening Program models this process. The ten steps are divided into three sections:

Before Volunteer Selection

1. *Determine the Risk*

The degree of screening required for any volunteer position depends on the nature of the ministry and the inherent level of risk involved in the work. Four major factors are considered when determining risk: the participant, the setting, and the nature of ministry activities and the level of supervision. All ministry positions are either General Risk or High Risk.

2. *Ministry Position Description*

Standardized Ministry Position Descriptions outline the tasks, responsibilities, risks and rules for every volunteer ministry position. Documented roles provide greater protection for participants, volunteers, the parish and the Archdiocese.

3. *Recruitment*

Recruitment of volunteers happens publicly in the parish, through the Parish Volunteer Screening Committee or Ministry Leaders/Coordinators; it can also be done through invitation from the Pastor. During recruitment, the focus is on motivating the parish to give of gifts and talents, setting expectations about ministry positions and the screening process, and establishing the importance of appropriate screening.

The Selection Process

4. *Volunteer Application Form*

Every applicant to a ministry position must complete a Volunteer Application Form. This form remains in the folder of active volunteers and ensures that the parish has adequate records of volunteers.

Ministries Affected: General Risk, High Risk

5. *Interviews*

Interviews are an opportunity to speak directly with applicants regarding their background, gifts, talents, skills, interests and availability. It is also the space to help determine whether a person is “best-fit” for a particular ministry.

Ministries Affected: High Risk

6. *Reference Check*

A reference check may be the most effective screening step during the selection process. References will confirm the background, gifts, talents and skills of the applicant and will provide an outside opinion on the suitability of the person for the ministry.

Ministries Affected: High Risk

7. *Criminal Record Check*

The police record check signals, in a very public way, our concern about the safety of our people. The Archdiocese of Toronto makes this process accessible to all applicants by covering the cost of the police check and providing a secure system for completion through a third-party provider. Criminal Records Checks cannot be relied on as the only form of screening, as they have several limitations including:

- The report is technically only valid for the date it is completed
- Most recent convictions or records from another country may not have been added as yet
- The use of an alias may make name and date-of-birth irrelevant search criteria
- Pardoned offenses will not be shown
- There is nothing to report if a person has committed a crime but has not been apprehended

Ministries Affected: High Risk

Managing the Volunteers

8. *Orientation and Training*

All new volunteers will receive a copy of the Volunteer Guidelines and Code of Conduct for review and will sign the Acknowledgement & Agreement statement at the back.

Ministry Leaders/Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that volunteers receive essential training that will allow them to perform their ministry duties effectively.

Ministries Affected: General Risk, High Risk

9. *Supervision and Evaluation*

Supervision is one of the ways that risk can be removed from, or minimized, in a ministry position. The level of supervision will depend on the intensity and nature of the activity and the participants involved. Ministry Leaders/Coordinators supervise all ministry positions; or more senior/experienced volunteers oversee activities, provide support, and give and receive feedback from volunteers.

When the risk level in ministry is high, a formal process of evaluation exists, including the Self-Review and “on the job” observations.

Ministries Affected: General Risk, High Risk (Self-Review)

10. *Participant Follow-Up*

Ongoing contact with program participants and their families is required particularly when volunteering happens without any supervision or off parish property. It ensures that feedback on the experience or relationship does not come solely from volunteers, and can act as a deterrent to those considering harm.

The Archdiocese provides a formal questionnaire for program participants, which Ministry Leaders/Coordinators administer, however random spot-checks or visits to off-site volunteering locations are also valuable tools for gathering information.

Ministries Affected: High Risk

Note:

See 10 Safe Steps of Screening for details

Risk Management Strategies

Most volunteer positions in the parish coincide with Standardized Ministry Position Descriptions that already determine the level of risk inherent in the role. The Parish Volunteer Screening Committee/Coordinator must manage potential risks by applying the following strategies:

1. *Eliminate the risk*

This is necessary when activities include risks and potential consequences that are greater than the benefits and a parish decides to discontinue the activities.

Example: a parish may decide an overnight camping trip with altar servers is an activity with unacceptable risks.

2. *Modify the activity*

This can happen when a parish removes or reduces elements of risk by changing activities, location, or the level of supervision.

Examples: all home visitations to the sick happen with at least two volunteers; youth group leaders have at least one other adult volunteer present; volunteers can meet in a public location rather than a person's home.

3. *Transfer or Share Liabilities*

This may be necessary when ministry includes activities with risks that other organizations or groups are better prepared to handle.

Example: transportation of youth or vulnerable adults, such as seniors, arranged through a local bus or taxi company.

4. *Assume the risk but minimize it wherever possible*

For some volunteer positions, risk is unavoidable, though it can be minimized. Follow the guidelines for screening in *Strengthening the Caring Community*; assess potential risks for all new ministry positions; ensure that all volunteers receive orientation and training, including the *Guidelines for Parish Volunteers/Code of Conduct*.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a serious issue. Parish Volunteer Screening Committees must be aware of the potential legal liability if information about a volunteer is made public. Sharing details about a volunteer's application or experience verbally or in writing may constitute an invasion of privacy and is grounds for legal action.

Exceptions to this requirement include when:

- a person threatens suicide
- a minor (18 and under) reports physical or sexual abuse
- someone's life is in danger
- any person's physical well-being is threatened (including your own)
- someone exhibits extreme behaviours that may imply mental illness
- a situation occurs that is beyond your own experience and expertise.

Volunteers or parishioners should bring these situations to the attention of the Parish Volunteer Screening Committee, the Pastor, the appropriate government agency and/or law enforcement (see Volunteer Guidelines for more details).

The information gathered for the purposes of screening will be accessible only to the volunteer applicant and to the Parish Volunteer Screening Committee Members and the Pastor.

All volunteers have the right to expect that any personal information will be kept confidential, and that they can request access to their file at any time. Also reiterate that their file will remain the property of the parish/Archdiocese. Explain the guidelines on record maintenance and confidentiality to all volunteers and applicants.

Note:

See Volunteer Guidelines: Section 9, page 19

Rejecting Applicants to a Volunteer Position

It is the role of the Volunteer Screening Coordinator/Committee to determine a candidate's fit for ministry. All acceptance/rejection decisions must be based on how well a candidate fits the Ministry Position Description requirements.

Candidates may be rejected if:

- They pose a danger to others
- They are unable to dedicate the necessary time commitment.
- They do not have the skills to carry out the responsibilities as outlined in the Ministry Position Description
- They do not meet other requirements of the Ministry Position Description
- The Pastor has some information that would prevent the applicant from participating.

The information that a volunteer applicant has been rejected must never be made public. If there is uncertainty about selecting a person, consult the Pastor.

Notification of Unsuccessful Applications

All candidates for ministry should be aware that their acceptance is not guaranteed. Set the expectation early that rejection is possible.

All information related to a candidate's application and screening is confidential and should not be shared outside the Volunteer Screening Committee, except in cases where the Pastor must be consulted or notified. This includes the fact that a candidate was not accepted into a ministry.

- Before informing the candidate, review the decision based on the criteria outlined above and the Ministry Position Description. Consider how personal biases and feelings may be affecting the decision. Rejecting candidates for reasons other than fit is a violation of that person's rights and freedoms.
- Always follow up with unsuccessful candidates.
 - Phone calls allow for more dialogue and support, though they can be difficult

- Emails/Letters are more formal and efficient, but less personal and supportive
- Review the candidate’s file and interview notes before contact. Your response should include:
 - The reason why they were not chosen, based on the role requirements
 - Qualities and skills they do possess that would be a positive addition to the parish
 - Other ministries they may potentially be better suited to (if any exist)

Serving in ministry is a privilege. The diligence and selectivity of the volunteer screening process will set high expectations throughout the parish and can add cache to your recruitment efforts!

Record Keeping Protocols

Keep all volunteer files in a locked and secure location on parish property. Organize the files alphabetically by last name, and label them clearly. Mark the High Risk files so that they can easily be differentiated from General Risk.

High Risk Volunteer Files must contain:	General Risk Volunteer Files must contain:
● Volunteer Application Form	● Volunteer Application Form
● Ministry Position Description or list of Ministries involved in	● Ministry Position Description or list of Ministries involved in
● Interview Notes	● Any Letters of Praise/Appreciation, Awards, Certificates of Training, etc.
● Reference Forms (three)	
● Email confirmation of clear police check OR signed and sealed envelope containing police check	
● Yearly Self-Review & Annual Declaration Forms	
● Participant Follow up (if applicable)	
● Any Letters of Praise/Appreciation, Awards, Certificates of Training, etc.	

Electronic Records Management

Some Parish Volunteer Screening Committees will keep volunteer tracking information in electronic files. This information should be stored securely on a password-protected computer in the parish office. If the Volunteer Screening Committee is using a cloud system, it must be password-protected and access must be limited to Committee members.

File Retention (How long do you keep files?)

Keep and update the files of all volunteers active in ministry at the Parish. Screening data and ongoing service should be kept on file at the parish for five (5) years post-volunteering for legal purposes. At that time, all General Risk files should be shredded and all High Risk files must be sent to the Archives Department at the Archdiocese of Toronto, Catholic Pastoral Centre. These files must clearly indicate your parish name and the reason for archiving.

Transfer/Move to New Parish Procedures

If a volunteer moves and would like to volunteer at another Parish within the Archdiocese of Toronto, the new Parish will screen the volunteer as appropriate. A reference is asked from their former Pastor to the new Pastor stating that the volunteer left the Parish in good standing and the new Pastor may also request a copy of the volunteer file to assist with the new Parish's screening process.

Abuse/Inappropriate Conduct Reporting

In the case of the discovery of abuse by or against a volunteer, employee, or any other person, the person who has uncovered this information has the responsibility to report it in the following manner:

When victim is a minor under 18 years of age:

Step 1: Contact the local Children's Aid Society (CAS) (or Catholic CAS) to report an abuse. * This means that if a person suspects abuse, they must report this to the Children's Aid Society personally. They are not to pass the information to the Pastor with the expectation that he will report it.

Step 2: Contact the Pastor to update him on the situation. The Pastor will notify the volunteer that he/she must immediately withdraw from his/her ministry until further notice. The Pastor will then notify the Director of Human Resources at the Catholic Pastoral Centre and the Archbishop's Delegate, as outlined in the Archdiocese of Toronto Safe Environment Policy.

When victim is 18 years of age and older:

Contact the Pastor to update him on the situation. He will in turn notify the Director of Human Resources at the Catholic Pastoral Centre and the Archbishop's Delegate.

Documentation of Suspected Abuse/Inappropriate Conduct:

Document all statements, conversations and observations as soon as possible. Keep these documents strictly confidential and only pass them on to the Pastor.

See in Volunteer Guidelines:

- *Guidelines for reporting abuse: Section 6 and 7*
- *Protocol and Forms for recording and reporting abuse: Appendix A & B*
- *Legislation related to reporting: Appendix D*
- *Contact information for local CAS and other agencies: Appendix E*

Complaint Resolution Procedure

The Archdiocese of Toronto is committed to open and on-going communication between volunteers and their supervisors. It is anticipated that most issues will be resolved within the Parish at the personal level. Volunteers should feel free to discuss any concerns they may have with their Pastor.

When there is a complaint, disagreement or misunderstanding, or a volunteer is dissatisfied with the conditions of their ministry position, the purpose of these procedures is to provide volunteers with a uniform process for a prompt and equitable resolution to a complaint or dispute.

The complaint resolution process is not intended to be adversarial in nature. The objective of this process is to resolve disputes in a cooperative Christian

atmosphere. Volunteers are assured freedom from restraint, interference, coercion, discrimination or reprisal in their pursuit of resolution through the complaint resolution process. Retaliation, of any kind, is absolutely prohibited.

If a volunteer believes that any conditions of volunteering or the application of any policy is unjust or inequitable, and has been unable to resolve the issue through discussion with the Pastor, use the following procedures:

Steps 1:

The volunteer will set forth his/her complaint in writing, stating the nature of the complaint, all relevant details, and the desired remedy. The written complaint must be submitted to the Pastor within ten (10) working days after discussion of the complaint with the Pastor. The Pastor will investigate the complaint and reply in writing within ten (10) working days after receipt of a written complaint.

Step 2:

If the complaint was not resolved in Step 1, the volunteer may, within ten (10) working days of receipt of the Pastor's written response, present his/her written complaint to the Director of Human Resources. The Director of Human Resources will investigate the complaint and reply in writing within ten (10) working days after receipt of the written complaint with appropriate recommendations. The Director of Human Resources' decision on the matter shall be final.

See Volunteer Guidelines – Appendix B – for full Complaint procedures

Electronic Access to Resources

All Parish Volunteer Screening Committees have electronic access to all documents, forms and policies related to the Volunteer Screening Program through Google Drive.

All updates to the Volunteer Screening Program will be communicated by email to parishes and Parish Volunteer Screening Committees. Updated documents will also be added to the Google Drive Volunteer Screening Program folder.

[Access Google Drive Volunteer Screening Program folder](#)

Parish Tools for Volunteer Tracking

Parish secretaries use a database known as ***Parish Tools*** to track parishioners. This database is also capable of tracking our volunteers. Each co-ordinator or delegate (at the authorization and discretion of the Pastor) may have access to this Volunteer Screening module. In this module a volunteer's information is entered, including any ministries they may be involved in. The database recognizes whether the position is General or High Risk. There are areas to track when the interview, references and Criminal Record Check have been completed for a volunteer.

Training on how to use this database can be obtained through your parish secretary and by the training guide provided to the Parish.