

## **VOLUNTEER SCREENING**

As a volunteer-based organization that provide services to participants under the age of 19, Triathlon BC must provide adequate, appropriate, safe and well managed programs. With clear moral, ethical and legal obligations, implicit and explicit to exercise, Triathlon BC must provide reasonable care to protect the individuals in our care, our volunteers and the community at large. That includes a responsibility to screen any person who will have access to young competitors and this responsibility is incorporated under the “Standard of Care” concept.

“Standard of Care” is a legal principle that defines an organization’s obligations to take reasonable measures to care for and protect their members. When those members are children/youth the duty becomes more intense and the standard of responsibility higher. Duty of care encompasses both moral and legal obligations and it is imperative to realize the courts will uphold that responsibility with regard to screening in the context of their “Duty Of Care”.

An association and its leaders are generally responsible and potentially liable for the activities done in its name including hiring and retaining volunteers.

**What is / What isn’t Screening?** Screening is not just about identifying sex offenders or doing criminal record checks. It is about the need for appropriate, considered, comprehensive selection of volunteers who will be working in a position of trust.

Screening is the process used by an organization to select and evaluate volunteers who will provide services for them. Screening takes place before people join the association and continues until they leave. Through screening we must try to weed out those who might cause harm to our children - harm not only in the physical sense but in the moral and ethical sense. We must decide what standards are appropriate and necessary for the person doing the job and then strive to ensure those standards are met and maintained with care and consistency. We also have an obligation to ensure that our volunteers are properly hired, trained, supervised and evaluated.

**How Do We Screen?** Screening follows the basis steps of risk management - we identify the risks attached to any volunteer position, assess the significance of those risks and implement standards to eliminate the risks.

Before you begin to screen volunteers within your organization you need to develop a good screening policy and a definitive process by which to assess the level of “risk” that each volunteer position entails. The ten elements of screening will assist you in establishing the policy and process that work best for your association, team, or club.

**1. Job Design** - Clearly identify the positions within the organization and group them according to “low”, “medium” or “high” risk activity. For example, coaches who have power over young athletes and have opportunities to be alone with children would fall into the high risk category.

**2. Job Descriptions** - The job description defines the parameters of each specific position and clearly establishes responsibilities, lines of communication, supervision, etc. - the ground rules as to what the volunteer can expect and what is expected of him/her.

**3. Application Form** - This valuable screening tool collects basic information - name, address, experience, etc. - and gives the association permission to conduct reference checks and criminal record checks.

**4. Recruitment Process** - All too often we recruit our volunteers haphazardly because we are under pressure to fill the position so we can “get on with it”. This action leaves us vulnerable as having “pressured” a volunteer to assume a position we are then often hesitant to apply proper screening measures.

Establish a proper recruitment process within your association - regularly post a list of the volunteer positions, send letters to the membership, have job descriptions and applications on hand at all times and invite questions from the membership - be prepared not desperate!

**5. Interviews** - The interview provides the opportunity to speak with the potential volunteer face to face about their background, skills, experience, attitudes and philosophy. It assists you in determining whether that individual is suitable for your organization and that specific position.

The “B.C. Human Rights Act” (HRA) can assist in developing interview questions. It clearly states what type of question may or may not be asked during an interview as well as on what grounds discrimination is prohibited or permitted during the interview and hiring/selection process.

The “Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act” contains kinds of information that may be collected about an individual and to whom that information may be disseminated.

**6. Reference Checks** - References will confirm the background and skill of the person and provide an outside opinion on the suitability of the person for the position. The application form should state that the references should be someone who can be objective (not a family member) and if the volunteer is to be working closely with children one of the references should be someone familiar with their work with children.

**7. Criminal Record Checks and Vulnerable Person Checks** - A criminal record check and vulnerable person check cannot be used as a standalone screening tool. A positive response indicates only one thing- the person has been convicted of a crime.

There is value in that it lets volunteers, members and the community know that you are serious about protecting the children in your care and conscientious about selecting the right volunteers.

Every association needs to have a clear policy on hiring individuals with criminal records. The policy may state, for exempt, that a panel will assess all persons with a record or it may say that no one with a criminal record will be hired. The policy must be clearly communicated and consistently applied.

**8. Orientation and Training** - Our responsibility does not end once the volunteer is “hired” but continues through that volunteer’s entire involvement with the association. The orientation process allows the association a chance to see the volunteer in action and to further assist that volunteer in gaining necessary information relating to their specific job, to the structure, rules and philosophy of the sport organization of the association.

Volunteers should be provided with adequate opportunity for ongoing training both internal and external to the association. Where mandatory training is required specific details such as program content, time required, etc. should be clearly communicated.

9) **Supervision/Evaluation** - Evaluation of the job performance should occur at least once a year. The purpose of an evaluation process is:

- a) to ensure a standard level of practice
- b) to improve the experiences of the volunteer and the athlete
- c) to improve a volunteer's experiences with their role
- d) to protect all participants - volunteers and athletes

It is extremely difficult to let volunteers go but by formalizing our screening process we ensure that standards are applied fairly and consistently among all volunteers and that things are not taken personally. Any cause for concern requires immediate action and dismissal with cause is appropriate.

10. **Participant Follow up** - Ask the children/youth how they feel about their experiences, their reaction to the people around them and the way they are treated.

Included is a checklist to utilize when working through the process of screening volunteers who will "work" directly and indirectly with children and for whom you need to make a determination of their suitability in becoming a productive member of Triathlon BC, or an affiliate club or team.

#### **Volunteer Orientation Checklist**

- Job parameters clearly described
- Job description
- Code of Conduct

Limits to authority clear

Association policies and procedures clear

- copy of Constitution and Bylaws
- rule books

Rights and Responsibilities clear

Contract established and signed

Orientation completed

Training ongoing

- mandatory training explained

Supervisor and lines of communication clearly identified

Regular supervision carried out

Regular evaluation completed

Regular feedback from participants

Random spot checks

Documentation kept on incidents.