



# Best Practices in Volunteer Screening Program

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Why do organizations require volunteers to get a Police Records Check (PRC)?

As part of sound risk management practices, organizations often require PRCs for volunteers who will potentially engage in higher-risk circumstances. This includes volunteers who will interact with individuals who are at greater risk of being harmed than the general population, such as children, seniors or persons with disabilities. The use of PRC is only one step in a multi-step volunteer screening process that helps protect citizens, individual volunteers, and voluntary sector organizations.

### 2. Why did the Guelph Police Service institute a fee for PRCs for volunteers?

Guelph Police Service has found that voluntary sector organizations are increasingly using PRC as a primary screening and risk management tool for volunteers. This practice generates increased administrative cost to the Guelph Police Service, which is difficult to absorb. From January 2012 through to October 2012, Guelph Police Service processed 4,690 PRCs for volunteers from over 100 community agencies.

### 3. Why develop the Best Practices in Volunteer Screening Program?

The Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington, Guelph Police Service and the City of Guelph have worked in partnership to find a way to defray costs associated with PRCs for volunteers. The goal is to ensure that community organizations can continue to affordably recruit and retain volunteers while protecting our most vulnerable citizens. The Best Practices in Volunteer Screening Program was created to enhance education and training for agencies regarding volunteer screening policies and procedures, reduce overuse or inappropriate use of PRCs, and to remove the costs for appropriately needed PRCs .

#### **4. What is the purpose of the Best Practices in Volunteer Screening Program?**

The Best Practices in Volunteer Screening Program allows volunteers to obtain PRCs from the Guelph Police Service for volunteers engaging in eligible volunteer roles with vulnerable individuals (i.e. minors, children, seniors and persons with disabilities) free of charge.

#### **5. Why is the Volunteer Centre managing this program?**

The Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington has demonstrated leadership in volunteer management and is the “go to” community resource in this area. The Centre has expertise in volunteer screening best practices and understands the appropriate use of Police Records Checks. Additionally, it is the role of the Volunteer Centre to connect citizens of Guelph with meaningful opportunities to become engaged in their communities and to support the community benefit organizations that involve volunteers.

#### **6. How does the program work?**

Volunteer Centre staff will work with registered nonprofits and charities in Guelph to ensure appropriate volunteer screening policies and procedures are in place and that volunteer position descriptions are well defined and indicate the necessity for a PRC. Once approved, the Volunteer Centre will provide an authorization number for those positions eligible to receive a free PRC. The Guelph Police Service will not charge any fees for conducting the PRC when an authorization number is presented.

#### **7. Which organizations are eligible to participate?**

The Best Practices in Volunteer Screening Program will allow volunteers to obtain PRCs free of charge. To participate in the program, organizations must meet ALL of the following criteria:

- ✓ be a member in good standing of the Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington;
- ✓ be a registered nonprofit or charitable organization;
- ✓ perform a community service in the City of Guelph;
- ✓ involve volunteers who work in eligible roles.

Roles considered for eligibility will be those that involve working with individuals who are at greater risk of being harmed than the general population because of:

- ✓ age (those under age 18, and those 65 years of age and older); or
- ✓ disability (including a physical or mental disability, or a mental illness);

AND the individuals the volunteer engages with are:

- ✓ in a position of dependence on others; or

- ✓ in the care of a volunteer who is in a position of direct authority or trust, relative to them, with potential to cause harm.

Finally, organizations must demonstrate that they have comprehensive volunteer screening policies and procedures in place by providing a copy to the Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington as part of the application process. If an organization does not have comprehensive screening measures in place, they will be supported to improve their policies.

## 8. What are some examples of volunteers working in eligible roles?

Sam wishes to volunteer as a Big Brother with Big Brothers Big Sisters. In this capacity, Sam would be spending time with a child who is under 18 years of age. Sam would also be in a position of authority or trust relative to the child. Sam, therefore, would be volunteering in an eligible position. As a volunteer for Big Brothers Big Sisters, Sam can use an authorization number to obtain a PRC free of charge.

As a volunteer with Meals on Wheels, Sally interacts with seniors who are 65 years of age and older. Sally would also be in a position where there is a relationship involving dependence and trust. Sally would, therefore, be volunteering in an eligible role. As a volunteer with Meals on Wheels, Sally can use an authorization number to obtain a PRC free of charge.

As a committee member of a Volunteer Centre, Meral attends monthly meetings to provide input on the planning of National Volunteer Week activities. Meral works as part of a group with other volunteers and staff. Meral's volunteer work does not involve interaction with someone from a vulnerable population, nor is she in a position with direct authority. This committee volunteer position would not be eligible to receive an authorization number.

## 9. Why does the organization have to be a member of the Volunteer Centre?

Organizations that are members of the Volunteer Centre agree to a shared commitment to best practices in volunteer engagement, especially with regard to volunteer screening. The membership requirement ensures that the Volunteer Centre is able to offer a variety of services and supports to organizations who engage volunteers in our community, as this program is one of many benefits available to members.

## 10. Is a unique authorization number needed for each volunteer?

No. Unique authorization numbers will be assigned to each eligible **volunteer role**. Every volunteer who applies for a particular role will use the same authorization number. The authorization number can only be used by the organization to which it is assigned. The volunteer must use this authorization number when requesting a PRC at the Guelph Police Service in order to obtain the PRC free of charge. The authorization number cannot be used for

volunteers in roles other than the ones deemed eligible. To ensure accountability, the authorization number must be presented at the time a PRC request is made to Guelph Police Service.

### **11. How can a nonprofit/charitable organization participate in the program?**

A nonprofit/charitable organization that meets the program's qualifications can apply for free PRCs through an online application on the Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington's website. If approved, the organization will receive an authorization number for each position that is deemed eligible to receive a PRC free of charge. The organization/volunteer can then use this authorization number when obtaining a PRC at Guelph Police Service. he

### **12. What if the volunteer role is considered ineligible to receive an authorization number?**

An organization that has a volunteer role that is deemed ineligible for an authorization number will have the ability to appeal the decision. An appeal process has been established. For more information on the appeal process, contact the Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington.

Please note that organizations can continue to request PRCs at Guelph Police Service for volunteer roles that do not fit this Best Practices model; however, in this case, a fee will be charged.

### **13. Do authorization numbers need to be renewed each year?**

No. An organization does not need to renew its authorization numbers. The organization is eligible to participate in the program as long as it fits the eligibility criteria. The volunteer role will remain eligible as long as the role does not change.

### **14. If my organization is already part of the Best Practices in Volunteer Screening Program, do I have to go through the whole process again if I need to get an authorization number for a new volunteer position?**

No. If you are introducing a new volunteer position, you can send the position description directly to the program administrator.

### **15. What are the responsibilities of the Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington as the Manager of the Best Practices in Volunteer Screening Program?**

The Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington will be responsible for:

- ✓ designing, implementing and managing the authorization application process;

- ✓ assessing the eligibility of nonprofit/voluntary sector organizations for participation in the program;
- ✓ approving eligible volunteer roles and assigning authorization numbers;
- ✓ organizing and managing the appeal process;
- ✓ monitoring and measuring participation rates in the program; and
- ✓ ensuring accountability on the part of the nonprofit/voluntary sector.

The Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington, the Guelph Police Service and the City of Guelph will jointly evaluate the success of the Best Practices in Volunteer Screening program on an annual basis. Guelph Police Service will continue to be responsible for conducting Police Records Checks as per their process and timelines.

### **16. How does this program apply to private sector (third-party) PRC providers?**

This program does not cover the costs of PRC services from private sector, third party providers. A volunteer must obtain a PRC direct from the Guelph Police Service in order to be covered under this program.

### **17. Are practicum positions that are not paid eligible?**

No. If a practicum is required by the education institution and credits are received for it, then the practicum does not fall under our definition of a volunteer position.

### **18. My organization is not a registered nonprofit or charity. Is there anything that I can do?**

The program is only for registered not-for-profit and charitable organizations.

### **19. How long will it take to get an authorization number for approved positions?**

The length of time to complete the process will depend on the quality and comprehensiveness of the application. Organizations that have solid volunteer screening policies and procedures and who have well-defined and comprehensive position descriptions will complete the process more swiftly. Organizations that need support and feedback on these documents may require more time to complete the process.

### **20. Does participation in the program affect the length of time required to get a PRC for my volunteers?**

You should consider the time it will take to apply and be approved through the Best Practices in Volunteer Screening Program (see answer to question 10). The time it takes for the police to complete the PRC is not affected by your participation in the program.