

Understanding Police Records Checks

Organizations that provide programs to children and other vulnerable people must take reasonable measures to protect them. This is why many organizations have screening policies for staff and volunteers who have, or will have, contact with children or other vulnerable people.

What is screening?

Screening is a process, performed by an organization, to ensure that the right match is made between the work to be done and the person who will do it. The screening process includes steps such as job design, recruitment and orientation. The steps that are most important in determining the suitability of a candidate are interviews, reference checks and, when dealing with vulnerable participants, a Police Records Check (PRC).

What is a Police Records Check (PRC)?

A Police Records Check (PRC) is a Criminal Records Check, as well as a search of the records held in the information database of a local police agency. The Police Records Check is one of the steps in Volunteer Canada's Safe Steps screening program.

Does screening guarantee the safety of vulnerable people?

Unfortunately, no. An organization can never eliminate all risks. Screening helps an organization create a safe environment by selecting the right people for each position. A Police Records Check may be one element in the screening process; however, the PRC will only identify the person who already has a criminal or other police record. Organizations must carry out a range of screening activities to properly assess staff and volunteers.

How does an organization decide who to screen?

In fact, the organization does not decide who to screen, it decides how to screen. Based solely on the risk involved in the position, the organization determines which screening steps are needed. For example, candidates for the job of a mentor, who works alone with a child, will need to be screened thoroughly for the safety of the child. On the other hand, the position where there is no access to children, confidential records, or money will likely involve fewer screening steps.

The request that you consent to a Police Records Check does not mean that the organization does not trust you or has concerns about you. It means the position you are applying for is considered to have a heightened risk and the organization is managing that risk appropriately.

How is a Police Records Check carried out?

To conduct a Police Records Check, the local police do several things. First, they query the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPI) database, operated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), to search for relevant criminal record information and/or the existence of a CPC record. Second, they search their own database for information about the individual. Lastly, they may contact other police detachments for information about the person. The CPC database is a compilation of police information and court decisions. Information collected in the CPC database includes individuals who:

- have a criminal record for any Criminal Code or other Federal Statute offence and/or
- have been judged not criminally responsible for an offence because of mental disorder and/or
- have federal and/or provincial charges pending and/or
- are on probation or subject to a Prohibition Order.

In addition, local police agencies compile information, in their own databases, about every complainant they receive. Examples of complaints include:

- local disturbances
- offences contrary to provincial statutes (such as traffic violations or liquor-related violations)
- abuse of children
- allegations of offences where charges were not laid.

The voluntary organization must have your written permission to request a PRC.

Since 2001, as a result of amendments to the Criminal Records Act, criminal records of pardoned sex offenders can be made available to organizations that work with vulnerable people.

Your written consent is required to search the CPC database for pardoned sexual offences.

What if you have a criminal record?

If the information obtained by the police indicates that you have a criminal record, does that mean you cannot volunteer?

Not necessarily; organizations may look at the following factors when considering your application:

- the nature of the organization and its work
- the nature of the offence
- the relevance of the criminal record to the position you are applying for.

If the CPC query produces a name and date of birth similar to yours, you can provide your fingerprints to confirm your identity. As fingerprints are the best personal identifier, your fingerprints will determine whether or not the information in the CPC database pertains to you.

For more information on the Safe Steps process, visit www.volunteer.ca or contact Volunteer Canada at **1-800-670-0401**

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