



National Commission on Children and Disasters



Recommended Guidelines for Conducting Background Checks on Volunteers

The safety of children in the mass care shelter environment is of paramount concern to the National Commission on Children and Disasters. Volunteer organizations active in disasters, faith-based groups and local governments should have the strongest possible screening policies and procedures to weed out individuals who may harm children or other vulnerable populations. No single background screening method is 100% fool proof. **Therefore, information on potential volunteers should be collected from a combination of trusted sources.**

The Commission recommends the following guidelines for screening volunteers prior to a disaster¹:

- 1) Collect personal identifiers from the applicant, including name, date of birth, current and previous addresses and social security number, verified by government issued photo identification.
- 2) Derive background check information from a combination of multiple sources and multiple levels, in order to verify identity and assess the most comprehensive criminal history profile of an individual possible. **If a commercial screening company is used, organizations should verify that the screening company conducts the following checks. Careful due diligence must be performed to find a reputable, professional company.**

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| <u>Sex offender registries</u> | + | <u>Social Security Trace-based criminal history</u> | + | <u>FBI fingerprint-based criminal history</u> <i>(whenever possible)</i> |
| Searches of the National Sex Offender Public Registry and all state public sex offender registries for states the applicant previously resided in. These sites are open to the public and free to search. Organizations may wish to initially perform these searches internally based on information provided by the applicant, as a positive match may preclude the need for further screening. | | The social security trace provides a history of past and present addresses and names associated with the applicant's social security number, including maiden names and aliases. Information obtained from the social security trace should be cross-referenced with information provided by the applicant. Organizations should verify that the check includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. State and county criminal history checks for all states and counties the applicant previously resided in. State and/or county checks may not always be available, but should be used whenever possible. B. Search of a reputable private national criminal history database to supplement (not replace) the thorough state and county criminal history search. C. Searches of state child abuse registries in states the applicant previously resided in if available. | | In addition to checking criminal history across the US, fingerprint-based checks are a reliable means of verifying identity. Given the potential for identity theft or fraud, fingerprints establish an absolute match with a criminal record. However, the ability to obtain FBI checks may be limited in some instances by state law and/or organizational financial constraints. |

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- 3) Screen criminal history as far back in time as possible (i.e. to the age of majority).
- 4) Re-screen volunteers annually.
- 5) Define criteria for automatic disqualification including, but not limited to:
 - Unwillingness to submit to a background check, failure to complete the screening process, lying about criminal history
 - All sex offenses, regardless of the amount of time since the offense (e.g., child molestation, rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, prostitution, solicitation, indecent exposure, etc.)
 - All offenses involving child abuse or neglect, regardless of the amount of time since the offense
 - All felony violence, regardless of the amount of time since the offense (e.g., murder, manslaughter, aggravated assault, kidnapping, robbery, aggravated burglary, etc.)
 - All felony offenses other than violence or sex within the past 10 years (e.g., drug offenses, theft, embezzlement, fraud, child endangerment, etc.)
 - All misdemeanor violence offenses within the past 7 years (e.g., simple assault, battery, domestic violence, hit & run, etc.)
 - All misdemeanor drug & alcohol offenses within the past 5 years or multiple offenses in the past 10 years (e.g., driving under the influence, simple drug possession, drunk and disorderly, public intoxication, possession of drug paraphernalia, etc.)
 - Any other misdemeanor within the past 5 years that would be considered a potential danger to children or is directly related to the functions of that volunteer (e.g., contributing to the delinquency of a minor, providing alcohol to a minor, theft, etc.)

A person should be disqualified and prohibited from serving as a volunteer if the person has been found guilty of designated “automatic disqualifiers.” Guilty means that a person was found guilty following a trial, entered a guilty plea, entered a no contest plea accompanied by a court finding of guilty, regardless of whether there was an adjudication of guilt (conviction) or a withholding of guilt. It is recommended that anyone who has been charged for any of the disqualifying offenses or for cases pending in court should not be permitted to volunteer until the official adjudication of the case.
- 6) In addition to disqualifying applicants based upon designated “automatic disqualifiers,” organizations should consider the entirety of the applicant’s criminal history, especially any history of offenses that indicates the applicant could pose a potential danger to children, including criminal charges that resulted in acquittal, nolle prosequi, or dismissal.
- 7) Beyond evaluating an applicant’s criminal history, final determinations should be based on a complete review of the candidate’s qualifications and characteristics. Interview potential volunteers, check personal and professional references, and look into the applicant’s volunteer history.
- 8) Designate and train staff to analyze and interpret background screening results and evaluate the fitness of applicants based on your organizational screening criteria, policies and procedures.
- 9) Notify applicants that a background check will be conducted, and inform them of organizational policies and procedures for background checks including what the check will consist of and automatic disqualifiers.
- 10) Background screening of volunteers is only the initial step. Organizations should have comprehensive policies and procedures in place to ensure children have a safe and secure shelter environment during and after a disaster (see additional resources, below).

Additional Resources

Background Screening:

- National Service Criminal History Checks Resource Center: <http://nationalserviceresources.org/criminal-history>
- National Association of Professional Background Screeners – *Criminal Background Checks for Employment Purposes White Paper*: <https://www.hrplus.com/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Fljnnll-17A%3d&tabid=756>

Providing a Safe and Secure Shelter Environment

- National Commission on Children and Disasters – *2010 Report to the President and Congress, Appendix E: Standards and Indicators for Disaster Shelter Care for Children*: <http://www.ahrq.gov/prep/nccdreport/nccdrptape.htm>
- National Resource Center for Child Protective Services – *Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect in Disaster Emergency Shelters*: <http://nrccps.org/information-dissemination/preventing-child-abuse/>
- Save the Children – *Child Safety Guidance for Emergency Evacuation Shelters and Local Assistance Centers*: <http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/child-safety-guidance-2007.pdf>
- Children’s Disaster Services – *Safety in a Children’s Disaster Services Center*: <http://www.brethren.org/CDSSafety>

¹ This document is intended as guidance for the screening of volunteers prior to a disaster. Organizations that accept spontaneous volunteers should have screening policies and procedures for them. At a minimum, organizations should initiate the screening process by collecting personal identifiers and searching the National Sex Offender Public Registry and should not allow spontaneous volunteers to come into contact with children until they have been thoroughly screened in accordance with the guidelines established in this document.