



VOLUNTEER

A L B E R T A

THE BASICS OF RISK MANAGEMENT FOR VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

GETTING STARTED



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Canada



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INTRODUCTION

Why this resource? Why now?

From the moment we wake up in the morning until the time we go to bed in the evening, we encounter and manage many risks. For the most part, the management of these risks is often done at a subconscious level. However, there are times when we know we will be facing risks. This is when it is important to think about them and plan for them before they occur.

For managers of volunteers*, managing risk has become an essential part of our day. Our roles are constantly evolving along with the nature of the work that the voluntary sector* undertakes. Voluntary organizations believe that, more often than not, taking risks will make the communities where we live safer, healthier and more vibrant. Therefore, this is something that cannot be put on the back burner and needs to be addressed by your organization.

As volunteers* continue to be recognized as key players in meeting a voluntary organization's* mission, understanding and being proactive about the kinds of activities we involve them in is of the utmost importance.

This resource intended to give you a brief overview of risk and risk management and how these realities fit into the cycle of engaging volunteers. It will also point you to other resources that will assist you in developing a risk management process in your organization. It is intended for all types of organizations that thrive in the voluntary sector – faith communities, sports organizations, schools, voluntary organizations, service clubs, and more. If you are a manager of volunteers, in a paid or unpaid capacity, then this quick resource will either affirm the work you are doing in this area or will point you in the right direction as you begin.

Background

In 1996, Volunteer Canada in partnership with the Solicitor General Canada, Justice Canada and Health Canada launched 'The National Education Campaign on Screening Volunteers and Employees in Positions of Trust with Children and other Vulnerable People'. This program emphasized the importance of screening* volunteers who work with vulnerable populations such as children and seniors. It also created the momentum that managers of volunteers needed in order to raise this issue with key stakeholders both internal and external to organizations. For a few years, the discussions at professional associations, conferences and other professional development opportunities focused on screening* of volunteers. However, this quickly changed into a more holistic approach which we now refer to as risk management.

* Please see the Glossary at the end of this resource for definitions of these terms.

What is risk?

Risk is any uncertainty about a future event that threatens your organization's ability to accomplish its mission.

Source: The Alliance for Nonprofit Management (2001a)

What is risk management?

Risk management is the discipline for dealing with the possibility that some future event will cause harm. It provides strategies, techniques and an approach to recognize and confront any threat or danger that may hinder the organization from fulfilling its mission.

Source: The Alliance for Nonprofit Management (2001c)

// Any organization that provides programs to the public has a moral, legal and spiritual obligation to institute appropriate risk management practices for volunteer programs. This is not only the right thing to do; it is legally required under the principle of duty of care. //

Marlene Deboisbriand
President, Volunteer Canada

How does risk management fit into my work?

In *'Better Safe... Risk Management in Volunteer Programs & Community Service'*, the author, Linda Graff, states that "good volunteer management is synonymous with risk management". **Thus, risk management begins at the very moment your organization decides to create a volunteer opportunity and continues until that volunteer leaves the organization.**

The points below are important to understand as you continue to read this resource and as your organization considers its risk management practices.

1. Although the manager of volunteers is often the catalyst for addressing key volunteer risk management issues, it is not appropriate or acceptable for the entire responsibility of risk management to sit with only one individual. It is a commitment of the entire organization to ensure that risks are being identified, discussed and managed by **all** staff.
2. Risk management does not simply mean buying an insurance policy. Although making sure you have adequate insurance coverage is very important, it is part of a bigger, more involved process.
3. The role of the manager of volunteers is now recognized as a profession in the voluntary sector. As the profession grows, individuals who are in this role need to realize that in order for a volunteer program, and therefore volunteers, to be successful a structure and systems must be in place. Within the organization, a manager of volunteers needs to talk about issues such as risk management. The key to success is to realize that the 'language' that is used internally may not be appropriate to use when seeking volunteers for your organization. For example:

// There is a fundamental principle of risk management in force in contemporary volunteering: the more demanding the work, and/or the more direct the contact between the volunteer and the client, the greater the potential risk. Volunteers are often in positions of significant risk. //

Linda Graff
Author, *'Better Safe, Risk Management in Volunteer Programs and Community Services'* and *'Beyond Police Checks'*

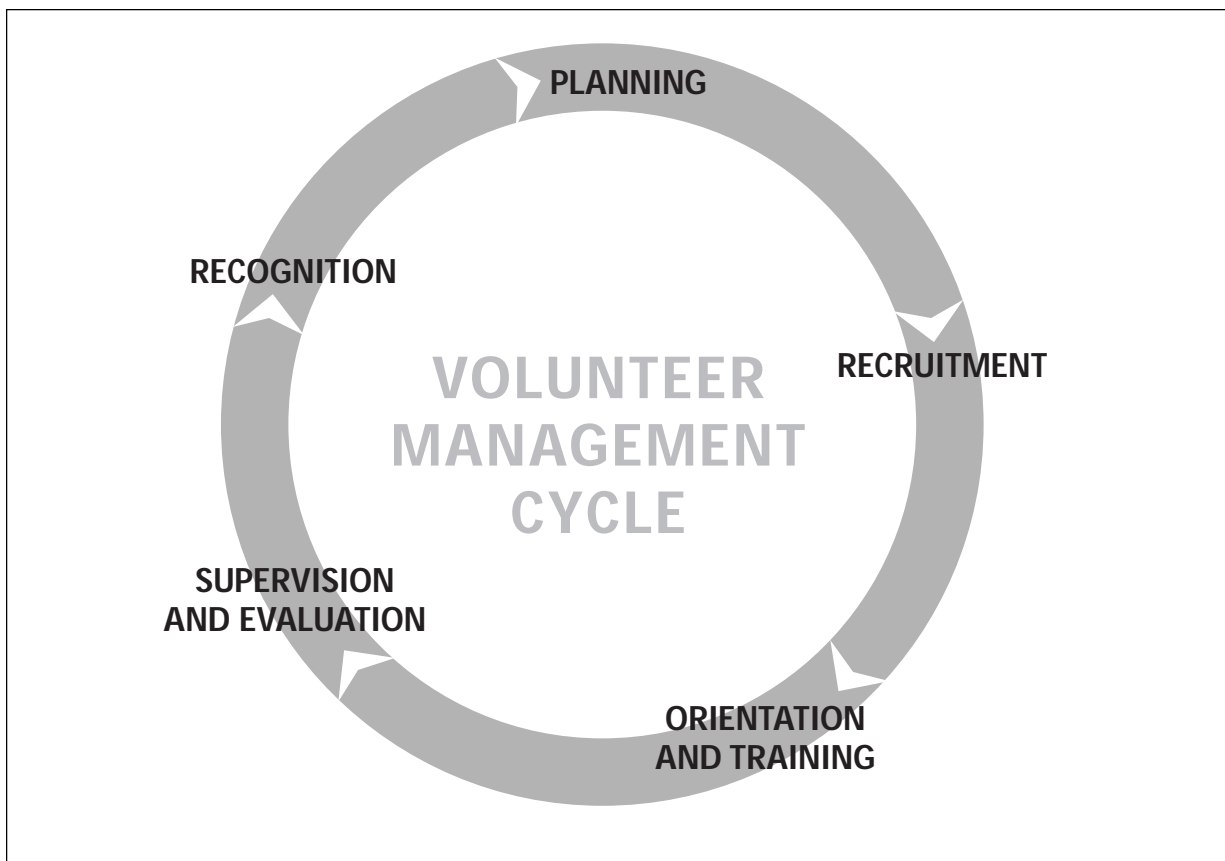
VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT MODEL

Risk Management and the Volunteer Management Cycle

Whether you work in an organization that has paid staff to manage the involvement of volunteers or you are part of an organization that is entirely volunteer driven, it is critical that risks are identified, discussed and appropriately managed. Overall you will want to discuss a volunteer's potential role with your colleagues and ask the following questions:

- What could go wrong?
- What will we do to prevent these things from going wrong?

The following model of volunteer management, as endorsed by Volunteer Canada, explains that the involvement of a volunteer follows a cycle.



For more information on volunteer management theory, visit <http://www.volunteer.ca/volcan/eng/iwork/vol-managment.php?display=3>

Looking at each element of the volunteer management cycle along with example risk management questions will help you and your organization further identify priorities for appropriate risk management. Please note that these questions are just a starting point and there are more that you will need to ask based on the situation in your organization.

At the end of this document, you will find internet and print resources that will help in gaining a deeper understanding the theory and process required to manage risks in your organization.

Planning

Long before a volunteer is approached and asked to join an organization, careful consideration of their role and the value of their contribution needs to be considered. It is in the planning stage that risk management begins. Ask yourself questions such as these:

- Have you discussed the role with your colleagues so that everyone is clear about the expectations of the volunteer?
- Have you developed a comprehensive position description?
- Have you assessed the position from a risk management perspective paying careful consideration to the vulnerability of the client and the volunteer?

Before you even write the volunteer position description, it will be helpful to consider the volunteer's potential role from these angles:

Acceptance

- Does our organization want to accept the risk that this position has?
- Are we willing to prepare for and accept the consequences if something should go wrong?

Avoidance:

- Does our organization want to avoid the risk all together by not offering the service because the risk is too high?

Reduction:

- Does our organization want to change or modify the activity so that the opportunity for risk is minimized?
- Are we willing to put policies and procedures in place to minimize the risks?
- Are we willing to negotiate with our insurance company to ensure we have adequate coverage?

Adapted from www.merrillassociates.net

Recruitment

When the time comes to go out and recruit a volunteer, consider developing a strategy so that the end result of the recruitment process is successful for both the organization and the volunteer.

- Are you clear about the kind of volunteer you are looking for?
- Have you outlined the kind of intake process that is most appropriate for the position (i.e.: interviews, police records checks, references, etc.)?

Orientation and Training

Once a volunteer has been engaged, they need to be given the information and tools to successfully fill their position. The orientation and training phase is also an excellent time to observe the volunteer and address any initial issues that arise from either the organization's or the volunteer's point of view.

- Do you have a comprehensive orientation process in place that introduces the volunteer to the organization?
- Do you have a training program in place that not only communicates the duties of the volunteer, but how their work links to the mission of the organization?

Supervision and Evaluation

Once a volunteer is trained and is working in the position for which they were recruited, it is essential that they are not forgotten.

- Do you have supervision in place with open communication about the role of the volunteer?
- Are there ongoing opportunities for the volunteer to be evaluated and for the volunteer to give feedback to your organization?

Recognition

Recognition as we know it is changing and evolving into different approaches for different people and motivations. Consider this a time to touch base with volunteers to ensure they are feeling valued and fulfilled. There is a direct link between volunteer recognition and the length of time a volunteer stays with your organization.

Next Steps

Managers of Volunteers often find themselves in positions where they have many responsibilities. In fact, you may feel overwhelmed reading this document and at the thought of implementing a risk management process. Consider these suggestions to support you in successfully establishing your risk management practices.

How not to get overwhelmed!

- **Create a timeline for developing your risk management practices.**
- **Set realistic goals.**
- **Break the process into manageable steps.**
- **Don't attempt to do it all at once**
- **Set priorities. What needs to be addressed first?**
- **Involve other staff in this process.**
- **Get support from your supervisor.**
- **Share this resource with your supervisor.**
- **Engage advisory volunteers such as a Human Resource consultant.**
- **Connect with other organizations that have already gone through this process to get support and recommendations.**
- **Connect with similar organizations and discuss commonalities.**

RESOURCES

If you haven't thought about how you are managing your volunteer program, you are putting yourself, your organization, your clients and your volunteers at risk. To assist you in continuing the development of your volunteer program and risk management practices please refer to the resources listed in this section.

The Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement (CCVI)

In 2001, Volunteer Canada launched the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement (CCVI). The CCVI is a national set of values, beliefs and organizational standards that need to be in place in order to support volunteers in your organization. Adopting and implementing the CCVI is an excellent example of how you can commit to putting safeguards in place to ensure volunteer involvement for the long run. To learn more about this valuable resource please go to: www.volunteer.ca

Volunteer Centres

Alberta is fortunate to have many communities that have established volunteer centres as well as a provincial organization – Volunteer Alberta. Volunteer centres are nonprofit organizations or programs dedicated to supporting the needs of volunteers, as well as the community organizations that require volunteer help. Volunteer centres may offer workshops or consulting in this area. To locate the closest volunteer centre, please go to: www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca

Alberta Community Development

Communities have access to support and assistance from the Libraries, Community and Volunteer Sector Services Branch of Alberta Community Development through the Wild Rose Foundation and ten regional offices located across the province. Support through the Branch includes:

- Financial assistance, skill development and training
- Facilitative assistance and resource material in effective not-for-profit governance practices
- Fostering and promoting the use of volunteers.

This link assists in locating the nearest regional office. http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/building_communities/volunteer_community/services/offices/index.asp

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)

FCSS is a funding partnership between the province of Alberta, and municipalities and Metis Settlements. Under FCSS, communities design and deliver social programs that are preventive in nature to promote and enhance well being among individuals, families, and communities. Volunteers are an important component to program management and delivery. FCSS staff in local offices may be able to assist in developing your risk management practices. Please go to this link to look up the closest FCSS office.

http://www.child.gov.ab.ca/whatwedo/fcss/fcss_lookup.cfm

The FCSS Association of Alberta supports FCSS volunteers and staff through its Resource Bank. You can also access a program listing and other resources on the FCSSAA web site at <http://www.fcssaa.ab.ca>

RESOURCES

Websites

- **Volunteer Alberta: www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca**
This site offers information about volunteerism and related subjects in Alberta. Check out the Links and Resources section for resources that will assist you in developing your volunteer program.
- **Volunteer Canada: www.volunteer.ca**
Click on Fast Find and choose screening as a topic area. Pay specific attention to the section that offers suggestions and directions in developing policy in this area.
(<http://www.volunteer.ca/volunteer/pdf/screeningpolicy.rtf>)
- **Charity Village: www.charityvillage.com**
Check out Charity Village for links to current research in volunteer management as well as other voluntary sector issues.
- **NonprofitRisk.Org: www.nonprofitrisk.org**
Visit the Events and Resource column on the right side of the home page and click on volunteer risk management to take a free tutorial on volunteer risk management.
(http://nonprofitrisk.org/tutorials/ns_tutorial/intro/1.htm)
- **Energize: www.energizeinc.com**
Visit this website on a regular basis, paying close attention to the articles published in e-volunteerism.
- **<http://www.icwa.wa.gov.au/cif/RiskUserGuide.pdf>**
This is a risk management assessment tool developed in Western Australia for free use by community groups.
- **Charity Channel: <http://www.charitychannel.com/>**
Scroll about half way down on the right hand side of the home page and click on the CharityNews-Canada.
- **Treasury Board of Canada: http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/hrpubs/vp-pb/vp-pb1_e.asp**
Visit this site to learn more about the Federal Governments policy on volunteers. This site includes an explanation of the objective, statement and application of the policy.
- **The Government of Western Australia: <http://www.icwa.wa.gov.au/cif/RiskUserGuide.pdf>**
This is a risk management assessment tool developed in Western Australia for free use by community groups.

RESOURCES

Books

Better Safe... Risk Management in Volunteer Programs and Community Service

Linda Graff & Associates, 2003

Legal Liability and Risk Management: Understanding Directors' Liability

Volunteer Canada, 2002

Managing Risks: Policies and Procedures for Community Agencies

Ontario Community Support Association, 2000

An Eye on the Community: Tools and Techniques for Screening Volunteers for Edmonton Community Leagues

Usunier, Deborah Allard. / 1st ed., 2000

Beyond Police Checks

Linda Graff & Associates, 1999

Risk Management for Boards

Johnstone Training & Consultation, 1999

Yes You Can!

Linda Graff and Associates, 1999

Planning It Safe: How to Control Liability and Risk in Volunteer Programs; Concrete Suggestions, Clear Definitions, and a Preventive Approach to Managing Legal Risk and Liability

Minnesota office of citizenship and volunteer services, 1998

Asking the Right Questions: Risk Management and Insurance Protection for Volunteer Organizations

Volunteer Calgary, 1997

Leaving Nothing to Chance

Nonprofit Risk Management Centre, Washington, DC., 1997

Managing Special Event Risks: 10 Steps to Safety

Nonprofit Risk Management Centre, Washington, DC, 1997

Risk Management

Volunteer Management Associates, Boulder, CO, 1997

The Screening Handbook

Volunteer Canada, 1996

RESOURCES

Libraries

For additional resources or to borrow any of the books listed, contact:

The Resource Centre for Voluntary Organizations (RCVO)

Grant MacEwan College

5 -132, 10700 - 104 Avenue

Edmonton, AB T5J 4S2

Phone: (780) 497-5616

Toll free in Alberta: 1-877-897-5616

www.rcvo.org

Volunteer Calgary Library

2nd Floor, Kahanoff Centre

1202 Centre Street SE

Calgary, Alberta

(403)265-5633

www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca

Post-Secondary Education

The following institutions offer certificate and degree programs in voluntary sector management.

Risk management will be incorporated in some of the required courses.

Voluntary Sector Management Program

Grant MacEwan College

Edmonton, AB

Phone: (780) 497-5268

<http://business.macewan.ca/gmcc/vsm>

Institute for Nonprofit Studies

Mount Royal College

Calgary, AB

Phone: (403) 440-7739

www.mtroyal.ab.ca/nonprofit

GLOSSARY

The following terms have been used in this document. For further information please go to:

- Volunteer Alberta www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca
- Volunteer Canada www.volunteer.ca

Volunteers

Volunteers are people from all walks of life who offer their skills, time and expertise to well-being of an individual, the community or society as a whole. Volunteers do not receive a salary or wages. Being a volunteer is a choice that one makes freely.

Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector is comprised of self-governing organizations that exist to serve a public benefit. The Voluntary Sector relies heavily on the efforts of volunteers in carrying out its mandate. In addition, it is independent of the formal structures of government or the profit sector.

Voluntary Organization

An organization whose work depends on serving a public benefit; on volunteers for at least for its governance; on some financial support from individuals and on limited direct influence by governments, other than in relation to any tax benefits accruing to the organization

The efforts, and is usually coordinated by a nonprofit or public sector organization,

Manager of Volunteers

A professional who applies the best practices in volunteer management in compliance with nationally accepted standards to identify, strengthen and effectively maximize voluntary involvement for the purpose of improving the quality of life of individuals and of communities. (Source: Canadian Administrators of Volunteer Resources)

Screening of Volunteers

Screening is an ongoing process designed to ensure any person (volunteer or staff) is a good match for their role and will not bring harm to themselves, the organization, or the public that is served by the organization. All organizations, from the smallest, most informal sports organizations to large institutions like hospitals, have a moral, legal, and spiritual obligation to appropriately screen those who work for them, including volunteers. Screening is not only the right thing to do; it is legally required under the principle of “Duty of Care.”

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