

Volunteer Background Screening Policy and Procedures

El Paso County

PURPOSE:

To establish a background screening procedure for volunteers and unpaid interns interested in serving El Paso County which ensures the safety of all participants, particularly the most vulnerable groups such as children, elderly, and intellectually challenged.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

1. The County provides opportunities for community members to share their gifts and talents through volunteer experiences.
2. The County recognizes the importance volunteerism plays in community wellness.
3. The County places the highest priority on the safety of its customers, staff, and volunteers.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To conduct criminal background screening in accordance with the County's New Hire Procedures which provides that Human Resources will conduct a background check on candidates being considered for volunteer service with the county.
2. To conduct criminal background screenings on volunteers assigned to work with vulnerable populations in a timely manner.
3. To maintain confidentiality to the extent allowed by law of volunteers who willingly submit to screening.

DEFINITIONS:

Volunteers shall be defined as anyone who, without compensation, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of the county. A volunteer or representative for an approved volunteer group must be officially accepted and enrolled by the department prior to performance of tasks. Unpaid interns shall be defined as trainees who work at the County for a discrete period of time to gain work experience and knowledge about a particular field or position. For the purposes of this policy, unpaid interns are treated as volunteers. Unpaid interns undergo the same background screening procedures as volunteers.

1. Social Security Verification is a screening used to verify the name of every volunteer against the Social Security Number provided. This helps to eliminate the possibility of false names and/or information.
 - a. Social Security verifications are a critical first step in the process as they help to ensure that the name and other personal data given by the applicant are accurate.
 - b. Volunteers who do not have a Social Security Number, or choose not to provide one, should provide two forms of ID with matching identifiers. i.e., Driver's license or state-issued ID, birth certificate, passport, etc.

2. Address Trace is a screening used to verify the current address and identify any previous addresses of every volunteer. This information is used to determine the jurisdiction in which the background screening is conducted.
3. State or County Criminal Records Check is a statewide or countywide (depending on the jurisdiction) criminal record check performed to capture all misdemeanor and felony convictions in that jurisdiction. The search should be conducted in the jurisdiction with the longest and most current residency.
4. National Criminal History Database Search is used to supplement the local criminal history search. There is no one national record check whether through the government or private sector that identifies every crime ever committed. However, there are now criminal history databases available that contain millions of criminal records and cover much of the United States. This is beneficial in expanding the search across the country but should not be used as a standalone source background screening.
5. Sex Offender Registry conducts a search of the appropriate state sex offender registries based on the address history.
6. Timely results should be returned within ten (10) business days to allow for proper planning and assignment of volunteers.
7. Volunteer Coordinator is defined as the person who oversees the coordination of volunteer programs for a department or the county overall.
8. Vulnerable Populations are defined as youth, elderly, or intellectually challenged.

PROCEDURES:

1. PROGRAM INFORMATION
 - a. A third-party public information vendor will conduct background checks for Credentialing Volunteers. That process includes generating the following in a timely manner:
 - 1) Social Security Verification
 - 2) Address Trace
 - 3) State or County Criminal Records Check
 - 4) National Criminal History Database Search
 - 5) Sex Offender Registry
 - b. Background check records will be accessible to the Volunteer Coordinator and Human Resources Department. Departments will only be notified of volunteer acceptance or denial. Details of the background check will be kept confidential.
 - c. Background screening exceptions include one-time public events where volunteers would not be working with vulnerable populations or one-time public events where volunteers could be working around vulnerable populations in a highly visible, public, and non-relational role. Example: one-time major public events, parks clean-ups.

- d. A volunteer photo identification system will be implemented in accordance with the County Employee Identification Badge policy.

2. PROGRAM PROCEDURES

a. REQUIREMENTS FOR VOLUNTEER BACKGROUND SCREENINGS

- 1) Valid Driver's License or Other Identification Card (Birth Certificate, Passport, etc.)
- 2) Social Security Number (if applicable)
- 3) Completed Volunteer Application
- 4) Completed Background Check Registration
- 5) Signed Consent to Release Information or online acceptance of policies.

b. REGULATIONS

- 1) All volunteers or volunteer representatives who are representing an approved volunteer group are required to complete a volunteer application, and those working with vulnerable populations must complete a background screening before beginning an assignment.
 - a) Volunteer groups working in an activity position that is subject to background screenings per this policy will be required to have individual applications and screenings for each volunteer.
 - b) Volunteers, depending on their position, may be subject to additional screening.
- 2) Each criminal background screen is reviewed against this policy. Each volunteer's program participation is based on the adopted recommended criteria for exclusion.
- 3) Following review, the volunteer and requesting Department are notified within ten (10) business days regarding the results of the applicant's criminal background screening.
 - a) Applicants with questions regarding their background screening results shall set up an appointment to meet with the County Volunteer Coordinator.
 - b) The contents of this policy are not negotiable. The County Volunteer Coordinator will provide contact information for the background screening vendor to address questions regarding results provided.
- 4) Volunteer background screenings shall be done annually on all positions that work with vulnerable populations.
- 5) Volunteers must be verified as having been properly screened for each new assignment.
- 6) Volunteers working with vulnerable populations must be monitored by staff.

3. DISQUALIFICATIONS

A person shall be disqualified and prohibited from serving as a credentialed volunteer if the person has been found guilty of the following crimes.

For purposes of this policy, guilty shall mean that a person was found guilty following a trial, entered a guilty plea, entered a no-contest plea accompanied by a court finding of guilt (regardless of adjudication or deferment) or received court-directed programs in lieu of conviction.

a. SEX OFFENSES

1) All sex offenses regardless of the amount of time since offense.

a) To include sex offenses where the final adjudication or final plea was of a lesser-included sentence or non-sex-related statute (i.e., Indecency with a Child pled to Injury to a Child).

b) Examples include but are not limited to: Sexual Assault, Indecency with a Child, Prostitution, Online Solicitation of a Minor, Indecent Exposure, etc.

b. FELONIES

1) All violence-related felony offenses regardless of the amount of time since offense. Examples include but are not limited to: Murder, Manslaughter, Aggravated Assault, Kidnapping, Robbery, etc.

2) All felony offenses other than those related to violence or sex within the past ten (10) years.

Examples include but are not limited to: Drug Offenses, Theft (including Embezzlement), Fraud, Abandoning or Endangering a Child, etc.

c. MISDEMEANORS

1) All misdemeanor violent offenses within the past seven (7) years.

Examples include but are not limited to: Assault (including Domestic Violence), Deadly Conduct, Terroristic Threat, etc.

2) All misdemeanor drug & alcohol offenses within the past five (5) years or multiple offenses in the past ten (10) years.

Examples include but are not limited to: Driving While Intoxicated, Drug Possession charges (including Paraphernalia), Public Intoxication, etc.

3) Any other misdemeanor within the past five (5) years that would be considered a potential danger to children or is directly related to the functions of that volunteer.

Examples include but are not limited to: Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor, Providing Alcohol to a Minor, Theft (if person is handling monies), etc.

d. PENDING CASES

1) Individuals found to have pending court cases for any of the disqualifying offenses will be disqualified. If the disposition of the pending case does not meet the criteria for disqualification as listed above, the individual would then be cleared and reinstated.