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Volunteer Screening for Nonprofits

White Paper

Priority Research Corp.

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Volunteer Screening for Nonprofits

Since 2005 Priority Research has screened hundreds of thousands of volunteers that work with vulnerable persons at churches, camps, youth sports, hospitals and other volunteer based organizations. Through our sister company Protect My Ministry Priority Research serves more than 3,000 churches and religious organizations. In a strategic partnership with the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) Priority Research continues to grow its dedication to youth serving organizations and fulfilling the background screening needs of hundreds of municipalities and sports leagues.

Where do people in the U.S. volunteer?

Volunteer-based organizations can require hundreds or even thousands of volunteers to operate effectively. Small organizations may operate with less than thirty volunteers. Turnover among volunteers can be as much as 100% each year.

The Corporation for National and Community Service predicts that by 2010 75 million people will volunteer with nonprofit and service-driven organizations across the country (i).

The Background Check Process

A minimum-standard for all background screens is an SSN Verification, Address History Trace and National Criminal & Sex Offender Database search. These are the basic services recommended for screening volunteers working with vulnerable persons. Priority Research recommends additional court searches in thirty (30) or more states. A comprehensive review of the best source of criminal records in each state is provided by Priority Research at www.priorityresearch.com/consultation. By following Priority Research's recommendations you can reduce the possibility of missing criminal records in your background search process.

Volunteer service breakdown:

Religious Organizations	34.8%
Educational & Youth-serving Organization	26.2%
Social & Community Service	14.4%



What is a fully FCRA compliant National Database Search?

A key component to the national background check process is the process of re-verifying the accuracy of records from the database search. Priority Research is the leading provider of a fully FCRA compliant volunteer background check process.

The following illustration outlines the process of re-verification, which prevents any false or inaccurate information from being reported to clients:

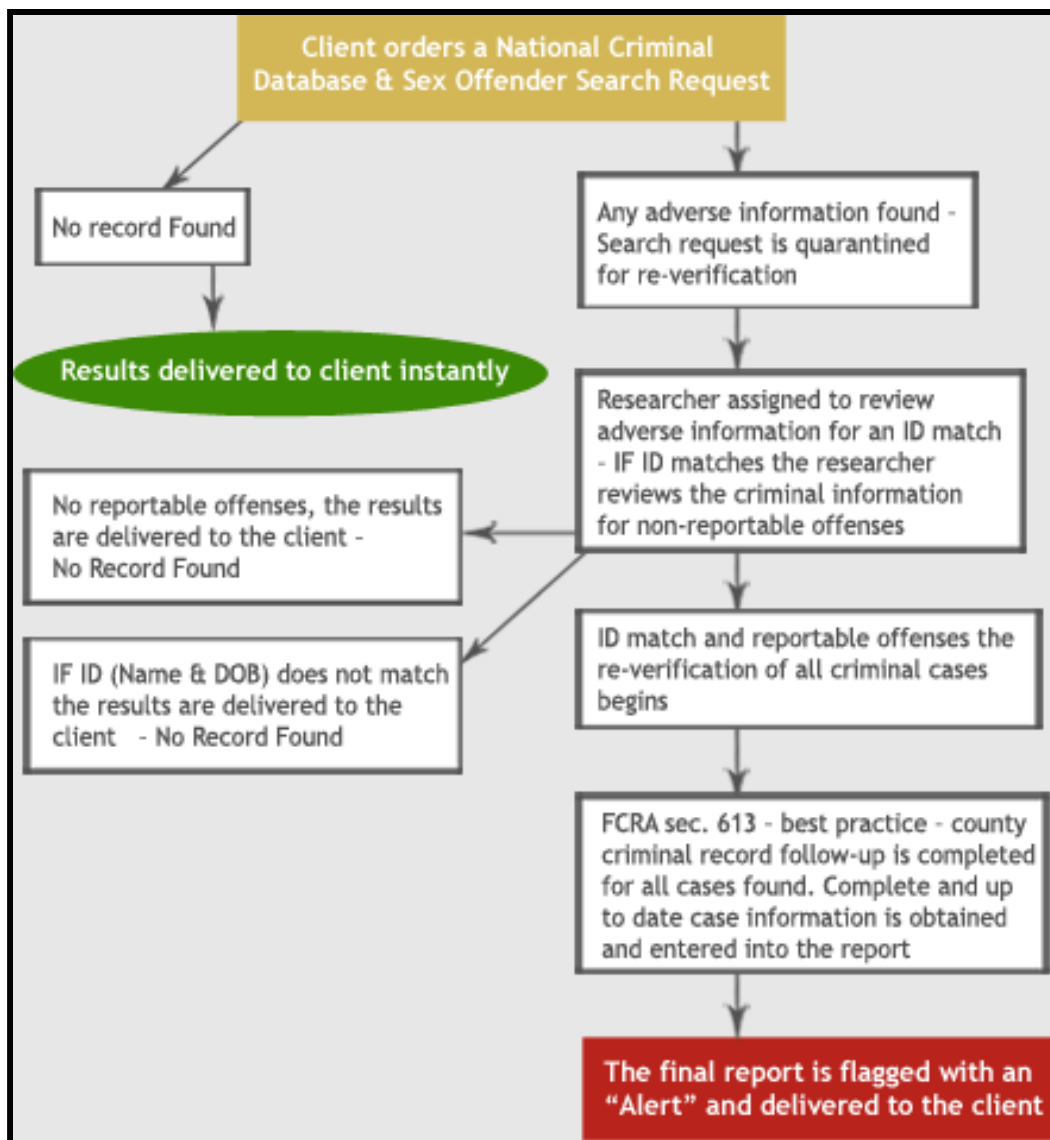


Diagram of Priority Research's proprietary Re-verification process

What is the risk awareness level among volunteer-based organizations?

A rural church or small youth sports league will often know their volunteers personally and may not see the need for background checks. It's not uncommon to hear, "We don't need to do background checks on our volunteers...we've known them for years..." This mentality still pervades from time to time, but used to be a typical response only a few years ago. This perception has changed steadily over the past few years.

Many small organizations have started implementing standard practices for risk management, the same standards used by our nations' largest volunteer based organizations, including our nation's largest churches, camps, youth sports & educational organizations.

General awareness of the true risks of sexually based crimes in our culture and the pedophilia epidemic that continues to plague our children has also affected a change of mindset toward the importance of background checks. Today's state of awareness is evidenced by the common use of training and background checks as standard risk management and risk prevention tools. HR professionals, administrators and volunteers often receive training on the best methods for identifying sexual abuse and the procedures for how to report allegations to proper authorities.

What resources are available for volunteer screening?

The growing demand for background checks has created a new market for products that help protect organizations and individuals from these risks. Insurance companies include an optional sexual abuse protection option in addition to the general liability policy. Insurance providers also provide a wealth of literature on the topics of sexual abuse and how to protect the organization from liability, including training and screening recommendations. Other products have emerged and grown in popularity, including the national criminal and sex offender database search offered by 3rd party background check providers. Priority Research includes this option in all their searches and has concluded that there is no better way to check all 50 states sex offender registries and perform a quick and reliable criminal background check.



Verity is Priority Research's innovative solution to capturing volunteer information online for accurate background checks. Verity's also integrated with the NAYS Chapter Management System.

For more information on Priority Research's services for volunteer screening visit www.priorityresearch.com/services/volunteer-screening

Current Events

Disturbing stories on the local and national news broadcasts have made parents, guardians and leaders of organizations more aware of the issues related to sexual crimes and the real possibility that “our kids might not be safe.” It’s no longer uncommon for a parent to ask a coach, “Does this league do background checks on volunteers?”

Consider the story of Edward Boehlke

*Coach charged with child abuse (ii)
Police allege Ravenna youth football adviser assaulted 2 youths*

First published: Wednesday, January 7, 2009

RAVENA — Coeymans police say a Pop Warner football coach sexually assaulted two children. Edward Boehlke Jr. was charged with felony predatory sex offenses involving two children, 8 and 7 years old, police said. He was arrested at his home on Route 9W Tuesday after an investigation, police said. Police charged Boehlke with two counts each of predatory sexual assault against a child, criminal sexual acts in the first degree, forcible touching and endangering the welfare of a child. He was sent to Albany County Correctional Facility without bail. Boehlke, who does not have a history of similar charges, was an assistant coach for the Ravenna Pop Warner Football program. Police said there are no allegations that Boehlke had inappropriate contact with any of the children in the football league. But police are urging parents to speak with their children if they had contact with him. The scandal is the second to rock the Ravenna league in the last six months. In June, a league treasurer was charged with stealing almost \$20,000 in league funds by writing checks to herself.

A study released in February 2008 by the Pew Charitable Trusts Center on the States revealed that the incarceration rate for adults in the United States has reached 1 in every 99 adults (iii). While there is always the potential for first time offenders (who may not have a current record) to gain your trust and access to vulnerable persons, a criminal background check can detect those with a history and ward off any potential predators.

Conclusions

A typical nonprofit organization conducts background checks to determine if a current or potential volunteer is a registered sex offender and or has a recent criminal history of sexual deviance, violence, drunkenness, driving infractions or theft. What actually disqualifies a candidate can vary from organization to organization and applicant to applicant.

A standard needs to be established in your organization, which states how you will handle the results of the background check. Will you disqualify any applicant that has a sexual or violent criminal history? Will you have a policy that says each record will be reviewed on a case by case basis? The minimum standard should be that no volunteer with recent history of sexual abuse with children will be allowed to serve with children.

All volunteers should be considered as employees because the liability is the same. A national search should be conducted and all records should be re-verified for accuracy. There are several background check providers that all vary in the quality and scope of the services. Be careful to choose an organization that has a proven history of screening volunteers and cares about helping your organization be safe.

- i. Current Population Survey (CPS), <http://www.bls.gov/cps/> .U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics
- ii. (2009, January 7). Coach charged with child abuse. The Times Union. Retrieved April 15th, 2009, from Google.com.
- iii. "One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008." The Pew Charitable Trusts, Pew Center of the States. <http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/One%20in%20100.pdf>