



Safeguarding: Choosing staff, volunteers & trustees

Use this page to understand how to think about safeguarding during recruitment, including role descriptions, interviews, getting references, and when to carry out criminal record checks.

Before you start

As soon as you start thinking about bringing a new person to work in your organisation, you must consider how to make sure that person will be safe and responsible. This applies to staff, volunteers and trustees. Putting safeguarding first helps you create a safe and positive environment for your team and everyone you work with.

If your organisation works directly with children or adults at risk you should follow a detailed best practice guide for safer recruitment. However, even in a small organisation, you should use some elements of safer recruitment.

Three key principles will help make sure you're putting safeguarding into practice when choosing your staff and volunteers:

- Your processes must relate to the level of risk involved. Don't burden people with too many responsibilities for a low risk role.
- Your requirements must suit the risk of each role. Don't use a one-size-fits-all approach for all staff and volunteers.
- You must review this at least once a year, check you are following your plans and make sure they are working well to keep people safe from harm.

Example

Nritta Kids is a dance charity with lots of parent volunteers. Some of those parents chaperone groups when they go on trips or assist in teaching the dance sessions. Others write letters to local businesses for donations which go directly to the charity. Applying the three principles, Nritta Kids decide the first group of activities present a higher risk to children. Steps therefore include DBS checks and making sure these volunteers attend safeguarding training. The second group represent the charity but have no contact with children. Steps include a short talk on the overall code of conduct, limits of their role and the approach the organisation takes to safeguarding.

- If you work regularly with children you can use this step-by-step guide to safer recruitment. It also has links to the legal guidance for different parts of the UK:

This factsheet has been adapted, with minimum changes, from a series of free, online, high-quality factsheets, practical tools, podcasts and videos to promote a good safeguarding culture in charities that were developed collaboratively by an NCVO-led partnership (<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding>).

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/safer-recruitment/> (from NSPCC Learning)

- If you provide services focused on adults at risk, such as care provision, then this information about regulated activity with adults at risk may be helpful: <https://www.anncrafttrust.org/resources/safe-recruitment-process/> (from Ann Craft Trust).
- If you work with volunteers, use 'safeguarding for volunteer managers' which covers safer recruitment in more detail and explains other aspects of keeping your volunteers safe: <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/steps-to-a-safer-organisation/choosing-staff-volunteers-and-trustees/choosing-staff-and-volunteers>

Understanding the roles

Firstly, you must clearly set out responsibilities for a role. A role description helps you decide the level of risk involved and what steps you'll take when recruiting. This is a mixture of following legal rules and making judgement calls.

The role description helps everyone be clear what's expected of the person.

Example

Pick it up! is a house clearance charity with five employees who visit houses. Their role is mostly fetching and carrying items – but when the job description is written down, customer service is included. The charity notes that those customers could often be adults at risk. They add safeguarding to the role description and create a new induction and training process focused on a Code of Conduct and recognising signs and symptoms of abuse in adults at risk.

Interviews and references

It's essential to get to know people before you bring them into your team, whether they're staff or volunteers. A two part approach works best. Start with an interview or chat so you can form your own opinions, then get references from others so you can check the opinions you formed.

Interviews also offer a chance to discuss safeguarding so the people understand your organisation's commitment to safeguarding and what's expected. Talk about your organisation and its values when you recruit new staff or volunteers, so people entering the organisation know what's expected.

Example

Our Town is a not-for-profit voluntary organisation set up to lobby the council about traffic problems in their town. Their volunteers work days and evenings in pairs to observe key road junctions. They decide that as there is unsupervised work at night with volunteers of different ages and different life experiences, there are some potential concerns regarding safety. They hold a short telephone interview and ask

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for references for new volunteers. Interview questions cover whether the volunteer understands their policy on bullying and sexual harassment.

Checking criminal records

A key element of safeguarding is knowing when to check the criminal history of a potential employee or volunteer (known as disclosure and barring checks in England and Wales). For some roles (called regulated activity) you must, by law, request a check. For other roles you are allowed to make a judgement call as to whether it's appropriate and proportionate to do so. For other roles, the level of check you can ask for is limited depending on what they do and how they are supervised.

If you decide to get checks, you must also be ready to know how to respond to the results. Under the law on rehabilitating offenders, you must only take into account offences that are relevant to the role you have available when deciding whether someone should join your organisation.

- For a simple overview, Use the Knowhow NCVO guide to checking criminal records: <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/checklists-training-and-other-support/specialist-guides/getting-started-with-criminal-records-checks>
- If you take any checks you should also use this guide to working with people with a criminal history (produced by Unlock): <https://recruit.unlock.org.uk/>
- If you need a check to be processed on your behalf you could use Disclosure Services (NCVO preferred supplier): <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/trusted-suppliers/supplier-list/2301-disclosure-services-dbs-criminal-record-check-services-supplier>

Getting people started

The time when an employee or volunteer first joins you is an opportunity to make sure they understand how your organisation does safeguarding.

Make sure you have an induction session or process where new staff and volunteers learn about key elements of safeguarding. This should include your code of conduct and the procedures they are most likely to need.

Example

Friends of Picture Park organises one big litter picking event a year. The Friends want to work with anyone who turns up on the day so they advertise that children must come with a parent or carer. They run a short session when people arrive. This session covers the Code of Conduct for the event and makes sure everyone knows who the key volunteers are to go to for help.

Next, you need to think about the right training for new staff and volunteers. Training should give a general overview of how your organisation does safeguarding and then be tailored for specific roles.

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Example

Vale Kickers is a football club for 4-7 year olds. Parents are asked to stay and watch the sessions rather than leave the children. This reduces a lot of their safeguarding risk. However, the club realise that many of the parents are also adults at risk and the children are very vulnerable. They send one of their volunteer coaches on a session on family safeguarding run by the local authority. That coach then explains the training to all new volunteers. When the authority runs the training again, more coaches will attend.

Next Steps

- Contact Northumberland CVA for information on Safeguarding training and information available locally. Email: enquire@northumberlandva.org.uk
- View Knowhow NCVO's selected training providers:
<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/checklists-training-and-other-support/training>
- Read about how to continue to support staff and volunteers as they work in your organisation in safeguarding day-to-day:
<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/steps-to-a-safer-organisation/safeguarding-day-to-day>

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