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Volunteer  
Screening  
Trends & Best  
Practices  
Report: 2016

# A Note From

## Katie Zwetzig, Executive Director, Verified Volunteers



In my years of working in the world of background screening, I have heard time and again from clients and partners that there is very limited data relating to volunteer screening and volunteer program management in general. And, what does exist is usually outdated, which is not helpful.

That's a problem. We all know that a benchmark helps us understand where we stand amongst our peers and where there might be opportunities for improvements and change. This information is essential if we want to be the best we can be. With this in mind, we set out to conduct some research of our own. We surveyed a wide range of nonprofit organizations (including our clients) who run volunteer programs to learn their thoughts and practices on volunteer screening. We also collected insights on the challenges and opportunities that they

see across their volunteer programs. So, how are your peers recruiting and retaining volunteers? What are their biggest challenges? What are their plans for the year ahead when it comes to their volunteer program?

One statistic I found noteworthy: 57% of organizations that screen volunteers screen all volunteers. Screening is not just for vulnerable populations anymore, and, as someone who realizes the true value of a background check, I'm excited about that.

Rescreening is also another hot topic, and lots of you plan to do more of it in the year ahead. Kudos on that!

This report offers some truly interesting results, insights and tips on all things volunteer-program related. Take a look and let me know how your organization compares.

**Katie Zwetzig**  
**Executive Director**  
**Verified Volunteers**  
[katie@verifiedvolunteers.com](mailto:katie@verifiedvolunteers.com)

# A Note From

## Tracy Hoover, CEO, Points of Light



About three years ago at Points of Light, we took on an effort to bring the vision of a “Volunteer Fast-Pass” to life. For many years this idea was only a wishful dream among volunteer managers: “Imagine if volunteers could get screened just once – and then they could use that background check at every organization that requires a screen in order to volunteer.” Today we are proud to partner with Verified Volunteers on the first-of-its-kind platform that empowers volunteers to own, control, and share their background check.

As we began our research into how organizations were handling this important step in the process of onboarding and managing their volunteers, we discovered real confusion in the marketplace about what goes into a “good” or quality background check. There's uncertainty as to the value organizations are

getting from this significant expense, and general frustration with the mostly cumbersome, complicated, and low-tech solutions available.

This report is a major contribution to the important process of demystifying screening in the nonprofit sector. It provides unique and fresh insights for all of us to compare ourselves to peers, and sets the table for a dialogue on best practices. Not only is the Verified Volunteers platform removing considerable friction and costs from the transaction for volunteers and their favorite nonprofits, but their deep expertise in this subject is also helping to advance our field.

Finally, the data in this report shows the important value that volunteers are bringing to the nonprofit sector – especially those making the significant commitment to serve in intensive, ongoing volunteer positions that often require a background check. It is an inspiring reminder of the power of people and how they can drive change in our communities, which is at the core of our mission at Points of Light.

**Tracy Hoover**  
**CEO**  
**Points of Light**

# Executive Summary

Volunteer Screening Trends & Best Practices Report 2016, researched and produced by Verified Volunteers, offers essential insights on the practices, challenges and concerns of organizations that rely on dedicated volunteers.

The survey, administered in May 2015, includes data from both Verified Volunteers clients and an external panel of relevant organizations, all which conduct some form of background screening on their volunteers. The responses demonstrate that despite the differences in the services each organization provides, many face similar challenges when it comes to managing their volunteer program.

## **BUDGET IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE**

It's no surprise that organizations are struggling to secure the funds needed to meet volunteer program demands. Even organizations with large annual budgets cited funding as a major concern. Managing a volunteer program consumes staff resources and it takes a reasonable budget to effectively maintain a healthy pool of committed volunteers. While every organization has different objectives and needs, the comments from respondents pointed to one common feeling – with more funds, they could make a greater impact on the community and those they serve.

## **SAFETY THE #1 REASON FOR VOLUNTEER SCREENING**

Organizations are extremely dedicated to providing a safe environment for their staff, volunteers, constituents and community. It is the primary reason why organizations perform background checks on their volunteers. While reputation, compliance and quality of volunteers were also important reasons for screening, safety was by far the highest priority.

The data contained in this report is designed to give Volunteer Managers, Executive Directors and others who are involved with volunteer programs a chance to see how they measure up against other organizations and identify ways that they can improve their volunteer program. This report explores issues beyond background screening, such as how organizations communicate with their volunteers to increase retention, and strategies for reducing the costs associated with training. By using benchmarking information to compare and analyze current practices and strategies, organizations can evolve and grow to meet the growing demand for their services.

## **EXPECTED GROWTH ON THE HORIZON FOR MANY ORGANIZATIONS**

47% of organizations expect their volunteer pool to grow within one year, and another 52% expect that their volunteer numbers will remain the same. With many organizations looking to sustain or increase the number of volunteers they rely on, significant effort will be required to recruit, train and retain. Of the organizations that project volunteer growth, nearly one-third expect to use more than 5% more volunteers next year. Increasing volunteerism and expanding program services appears to be high on the agenda for many organizations.

## **BURDEN OF SCREENING TROUBLESOME FOR ORGANIZATIONS THAT SCREEN IN-HOUSE**

The time and administration involved in screening volunteers is challenging for organizations, specifically those that conduct background checks in-house or through a government source. For the 69% of organizations that use an external third-party for screening, this was much less of a concern.

# Survey Overview & Methodology

## Background & Objectives

As an industry leader in volunteer screening, Verified Volunteers surveyed organizations to better understand their screening needs and processes. Specifically, the survey gathered data relating to seven main topics:

1. Motivation for conducting volunteer screening
2. Challenges and barriers associated with volunteer screening
3. Types of background checks conducted on volunteers
4. Types of volunteers screened
5. Confidence in screening results
6. Screening outcomes and perceived value
7. General challenges with volunteer programs

## Methodology

Results of the online survey, conducted in May 2015, are based on the responses of U.S. professionals who work for nonprofit organizations that conduct background checks on their volunteers.

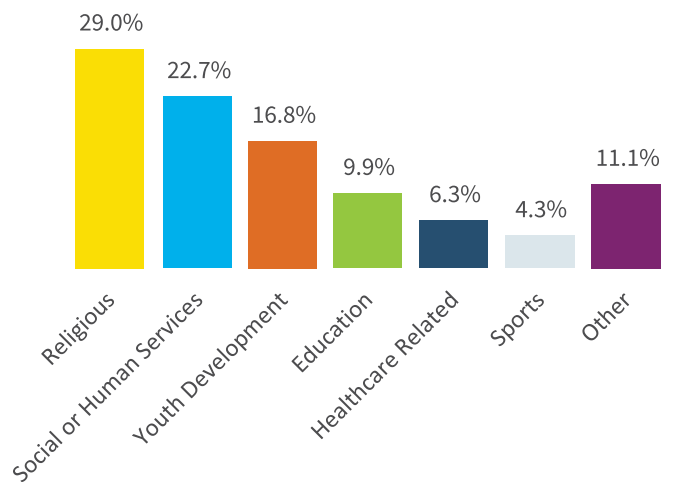
A randomized sample of Verified Volunteers clients were invited to participate in the survey as well as 201 additional professionals who oversee volunteer programs. A total of 352 respondents participated in the survey. The margin of error for the study is +/- 5% at the 95% confidence level.

Some of the survey questions allowed for multiple responses, in which case totals may not add up to 100%. Additionally, some survey answers may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

# Profile of Responding Organizations

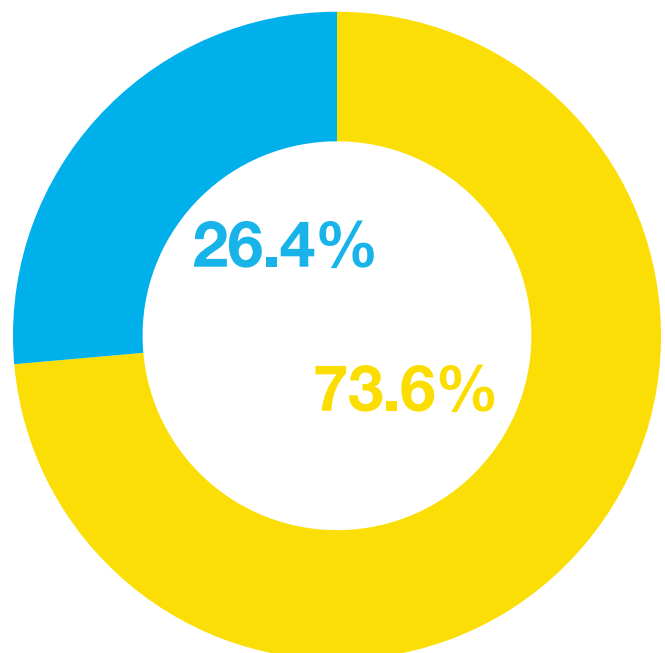
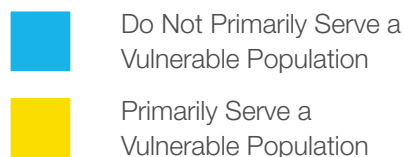
## TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

Religious organizations were the largest group at 29%, followed by Social or Human Services (22.7%), Youth Development (16.8%), Education (9.9%), Healthcare (6.3%), and Sports (4.3%).



## SERVING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

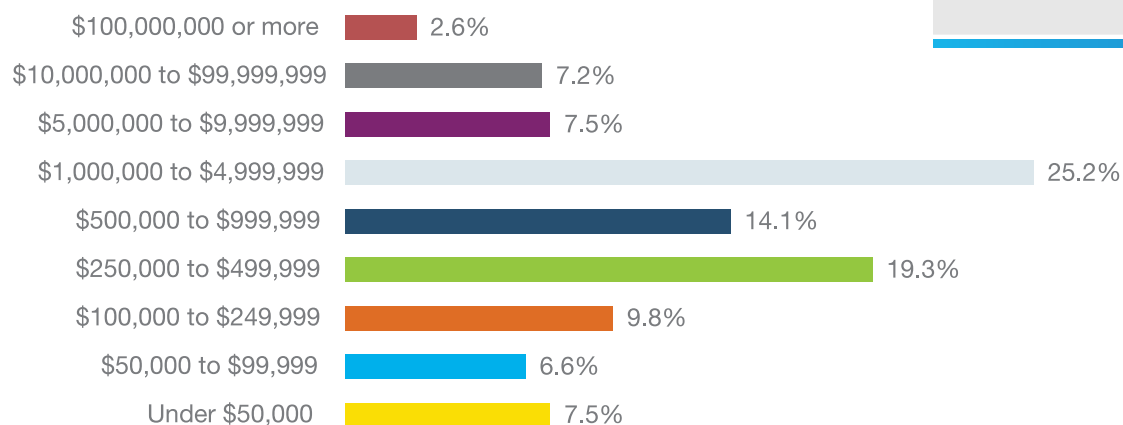
Approximately three-quarters of the organizations surveyed serve a vulnerable population, such as the elderly, children or the disabled. Nearly all organizations in the Youth Development sector say they work with the vulnerable sector. Religious organizations were least likely to say they work with these groups.



# Organizations

## ANNUAL BUDGET

More than half of nonprofit organizations have an annual budget of less than \$1 million. Approximately one-quarter have a budget between \$1 million and \$5 million. Youth Development organizations have the highest budgets, while Religious organizations have the lowest



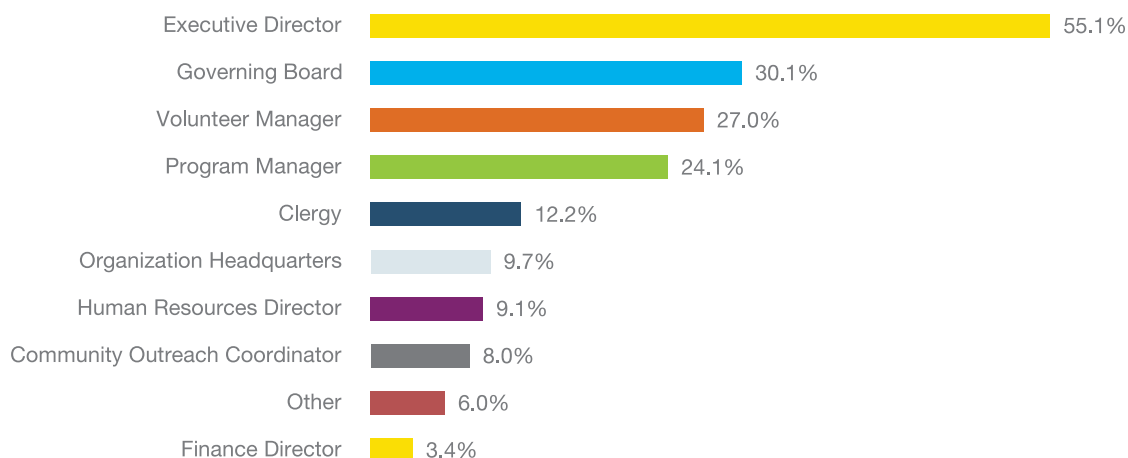
## TWEET THIS STAT

50% of nonprofits have an annual budget less than \$1 million – where does #VolunteerScreening fit? @VerifiedVols



## KEY DECISION MAKERS

In over half of organizations, the Executive Director is responsible for key decisions. The governing board, Volunteer Managers and Program Managers are also influential when it comes to important decisions regarding the organization and its volunteer program.

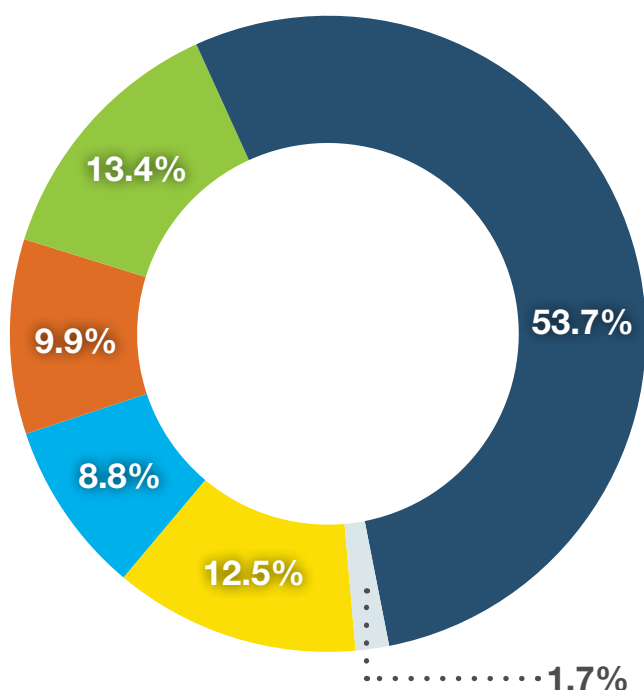
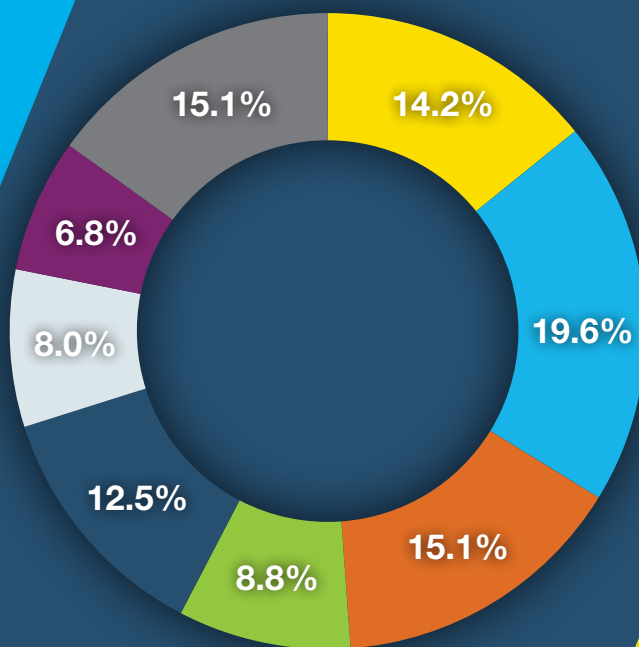
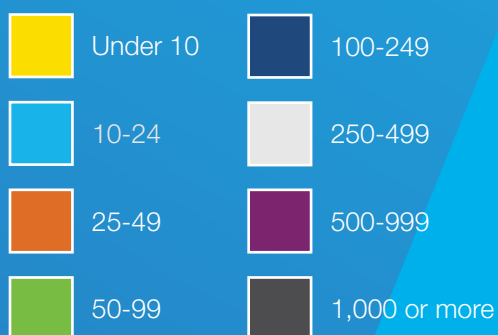


# Organizations

## APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

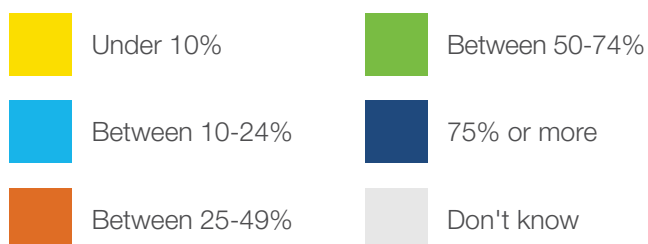
Almost half of respondents have fewer than 50 volunteers in their location. Surprisingly, 15.1% have 1,000 or more volunteers in their location.

The average (mean) number of volunteers serving the local office is 300. Religious organizations typically have the fewest volunteers in their pool, while those in the Youth Development sector have the highest average.



## STAFF COMPOSITION

When asked to consider all paid employees and unpaid volunteers across their organizations, over half of respondents indicated that unpaid volunteers make up 75% or more of their staff. On average, an organization's staff is comprised of 58% volunteers.

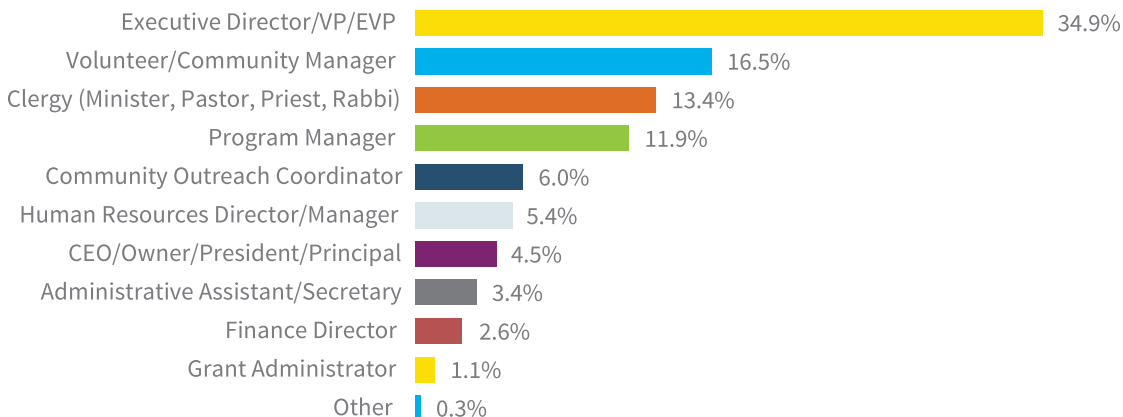




# Respondents

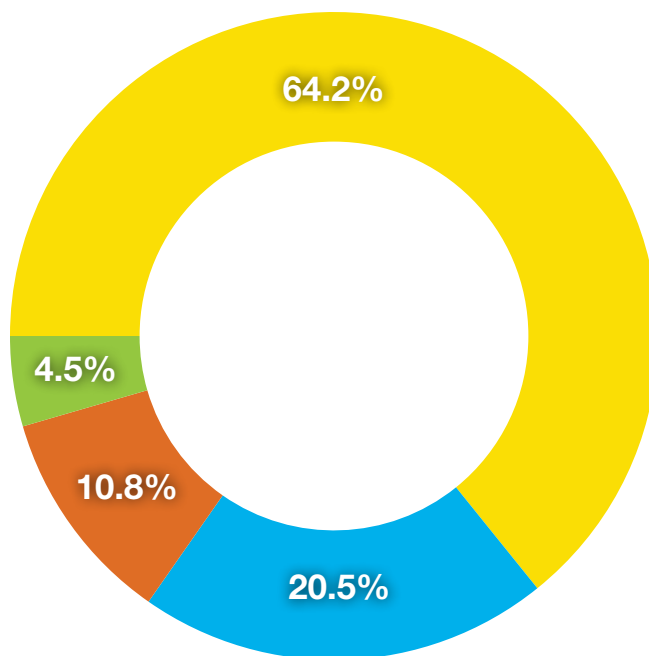
## JOB TITLE

Over one-third of respondents are in executive roles within their respective organizations. Other common job titles include Volunteer/Community Manager (16.5%), Clergy (13.4%) and Program Manager (11.9%).



## POSITION TYPE

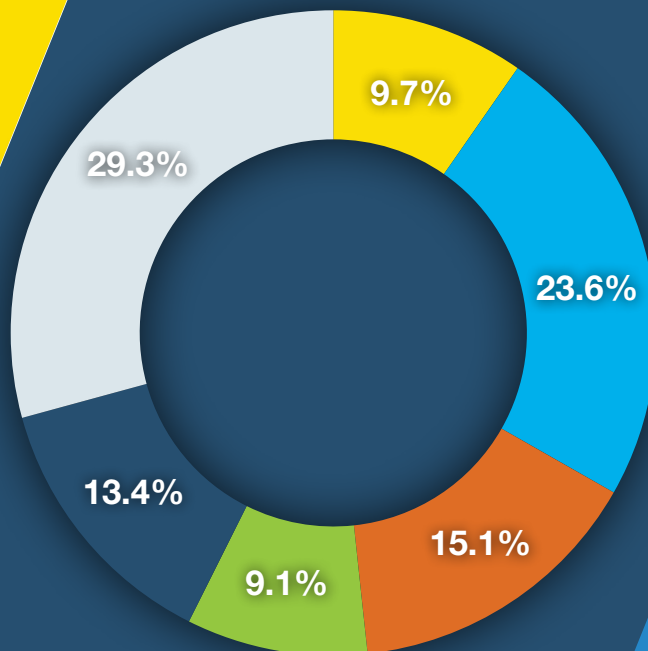
The majority of respondents are considered upper management. Only 1 in 5 is in middle management and 1 in 10 is in lower management.



# Respondents

## TIME IN CURRENT ROLE

Nearly half of respondents have been in their current role for less than five (5) years, while almost 30% have been in their role for ten (10) or more years.



## AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

The most common responsibilities of respondents include Volunteer Recruiting (83.2%), Volunteer Training (81.5%) and Volunteer Program Management (78.1%). Other job functions include PR/Marketing/Communications (65.3%), Finance/Budgets (61.9%), Development/Fundraising (61.1%), Human Resources (48.3%), Employee Recruiting (46.3%) and Advocacy (43.5%).



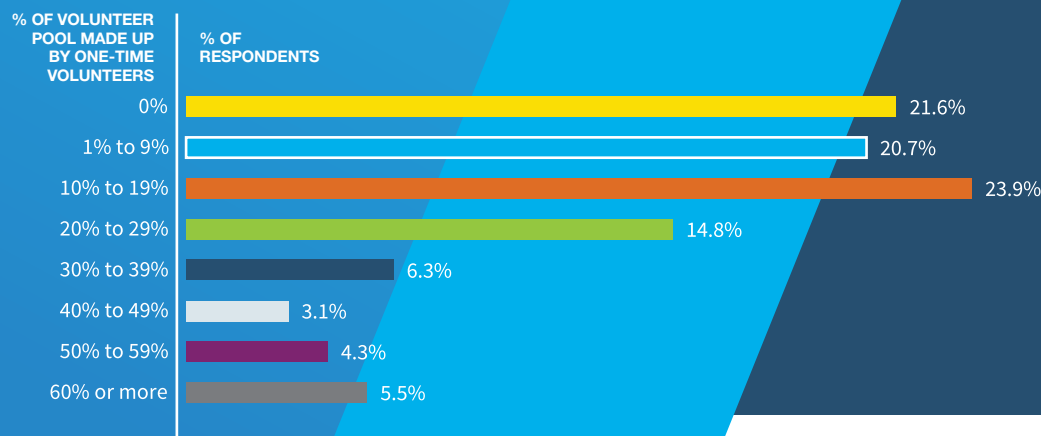
# Volunteers

The average volunteer pool consists of one-time volunteers (16%), infrequent volunteers (22%) and frequent volunteers (61%). Most volunteers return regularly or sporadically to assist the organization. Frequent volunteers contribute an average of 29 hours per month, regardless of the type of organization.

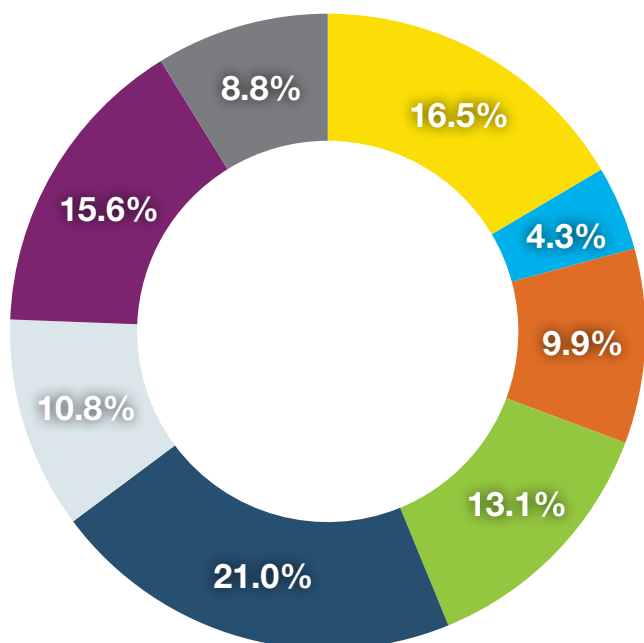
## ONE-TIME VOLUNTEERS

For two-thirds of organizations, one-time volunteers account for less than 20% of their volunteer pool. The average (mean) is 16%.

### PERCENTAGE OF ONE-TIME VOLUNTEERS IN THE POOL



The number of hours that one-time volunteers spend per activity varies widely; however, the average is approximately 8 hours.



### HOURS SPENT PER ACTIVITY BY ONE-TIME VOLUNTEERS

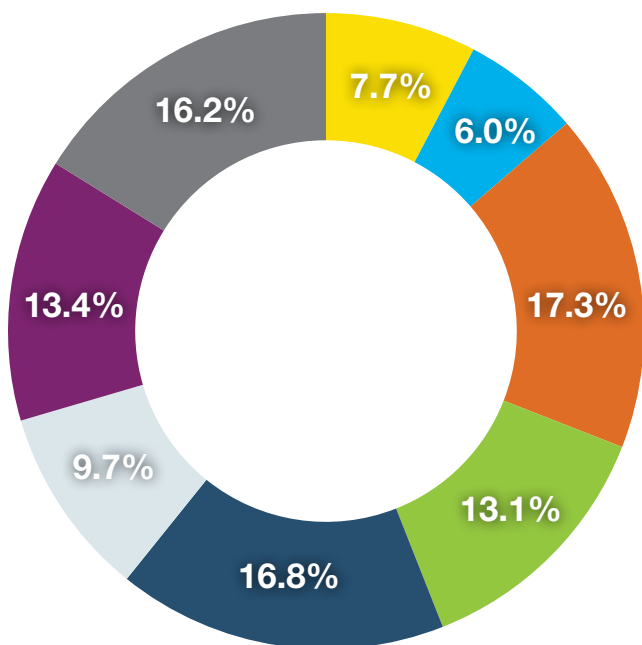
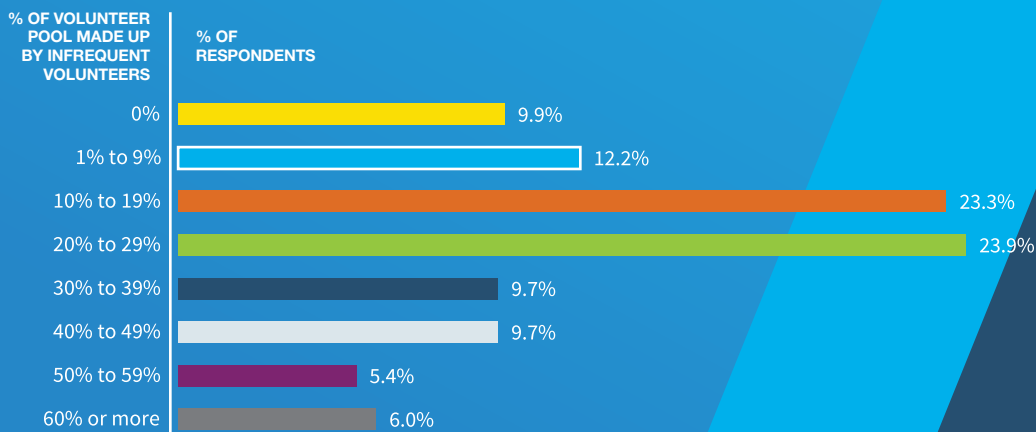


# Volunteers

## INFREQUENT VOLUNTEERS

Infrequent volunteers are defined as those who volunteer on a casual basis or from time to time. For the majority of organizations, infrequent volunteers account for less than 20% of their volunteer pool. The average (mean) is 22.8%.

## PERCENTAGE OF INFREQUENT VOLUNTEERS IN THE POOL



## HOURS SPENT PER ACTIVITY BY INFREQUENT VOLUNTEERS



# Volunteers

## FREQUENT VOLUNTEERS

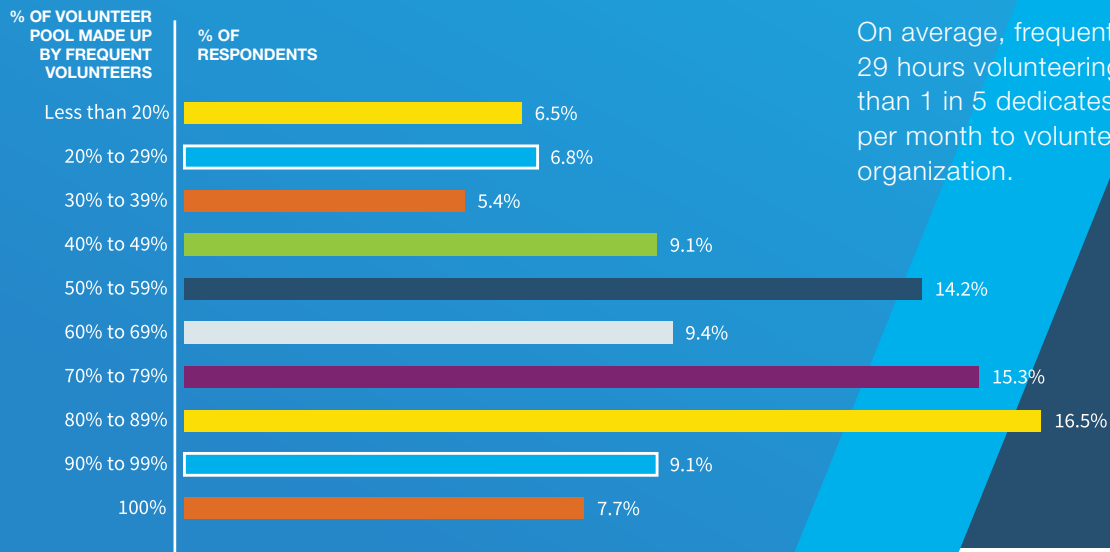
Frequent volunteers make up the majority of the volunteer pool, with an average (mean) of 61.2%.

### TWEET THIS STAT

Those who #volunteer regularly dedicate an average of 29 hours per month. @VerifiedVols

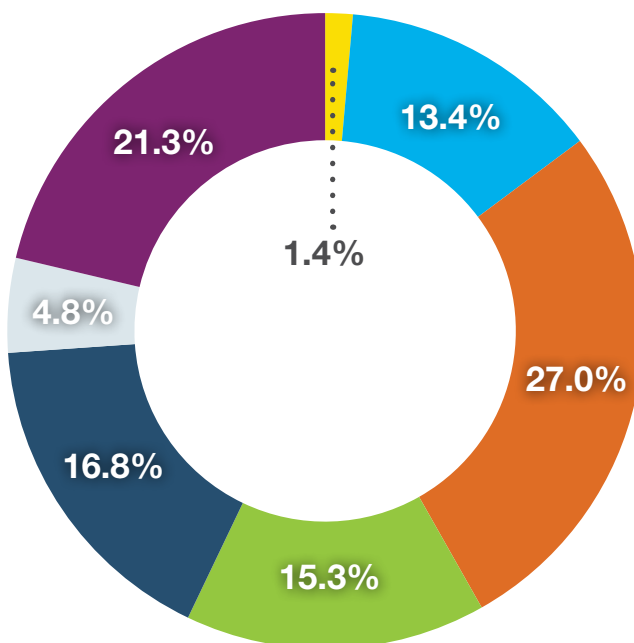
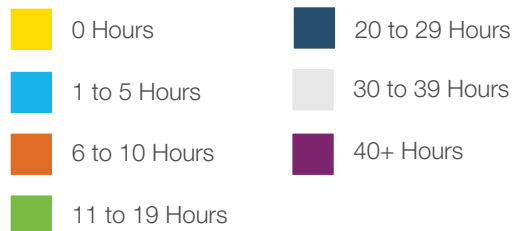


## PERCENTAGE OF FREQUENT VOLUNTEERS IN THE POOL



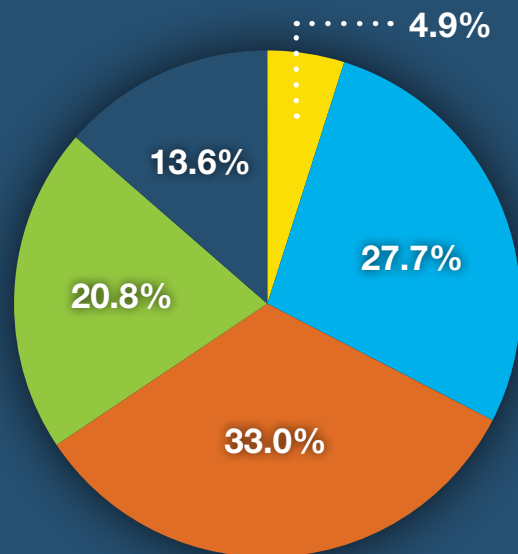
On average, frequent volunteers spend 29 hours volunteering per month. More than 1 in 5 dedicates 40 or more hours per month to volunteering with the organization.

## HOURS SPENT PER MONTH BY FREQUENT VOLUNTEERS



# Volunteers

## AVERAGE VOLUNTEER AGES



## 3 OUT OF 4

organizations agree that those who are 35 years old or younger are interested in volunteer roles that leverage the skills they have learned in school or in their jobs.

# 80%

of organizations agree that those who are 55+ years old are interested in serving the community in any capacity.

## VOLUNTEER INTERESTS AND MOTIVATION

There are many reasons volunteers offer their time and energy to a nonprofit organization. Perhaps it's a cause that's close to their heart or they are looking to give back to their community. Understanding what compels volunteers to give their time is extremely valuable when developing recruitment and retention strategies.

# Volunteer Program Management

Managing a volunteer program involves organization, dedication and a lot of hard work. There are several components to managing volunteers: recruiting, screening, training, supervising and retaining. Volunteer Managers are charged with coordinating these program elements to ensure their programs run safely and smoothly.

## COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

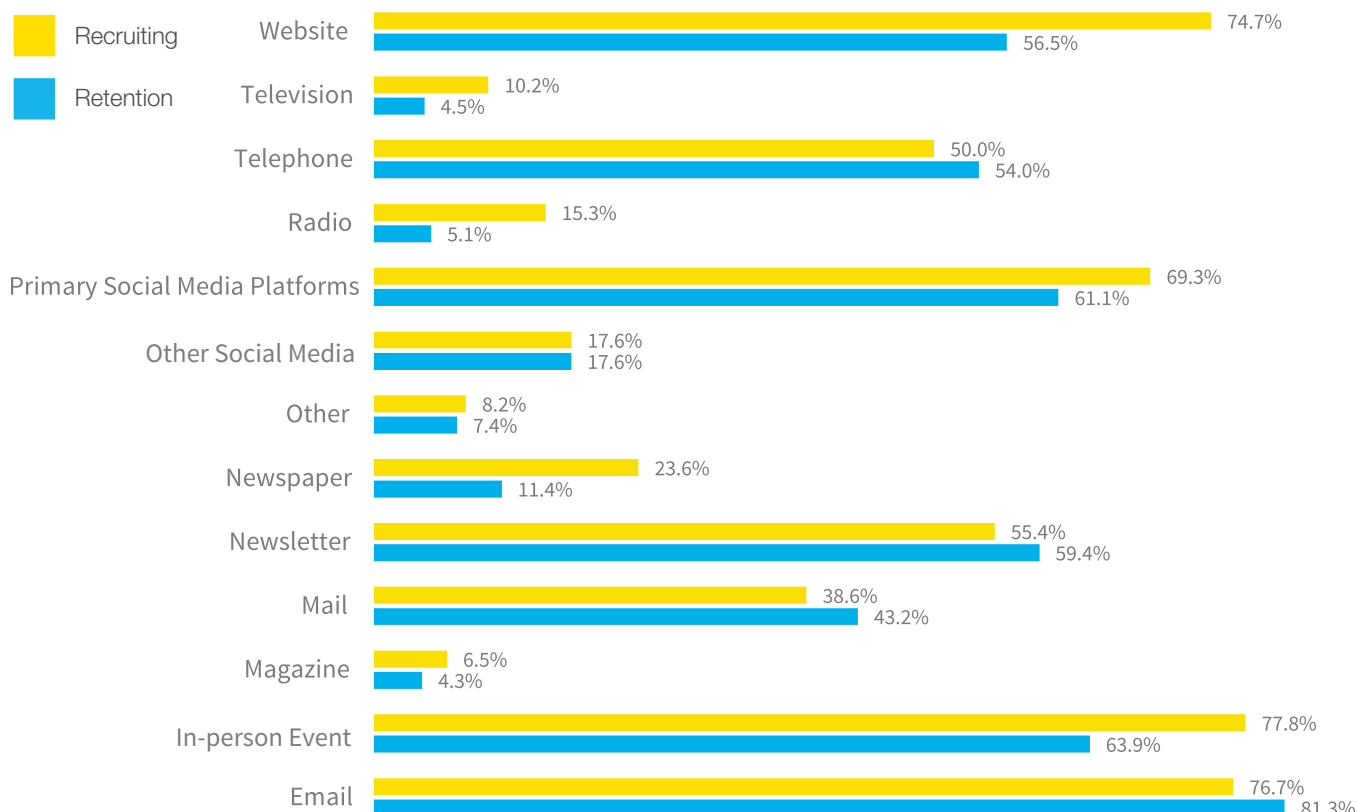
Communication is key to both recruiting and retaining volunteers. The top three communication channels used for recruiting volunteers are in-person events (77.8%), e-mail (76.7%) and websites (74.7%). Social media was also a favored option for recruitment with nearly 7 in 10 organizations turning to the popular social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.

The same three channels were used for volunteer retention; however, e-mail was used significantly more than in-person events and social media. Telephone, newsletters, mail and e-mail were used for retention more than they were used for recruitment.

Religious organizations make use of telephone communication for recruitment more than other sectors. Youth Development organizations are more active in all forms of communication for both recruitment and retention with the exception of telephone.

## TWEET THIS STAT

69% of organizations use social media to attract new #volunteers.  
@VerifiedVols

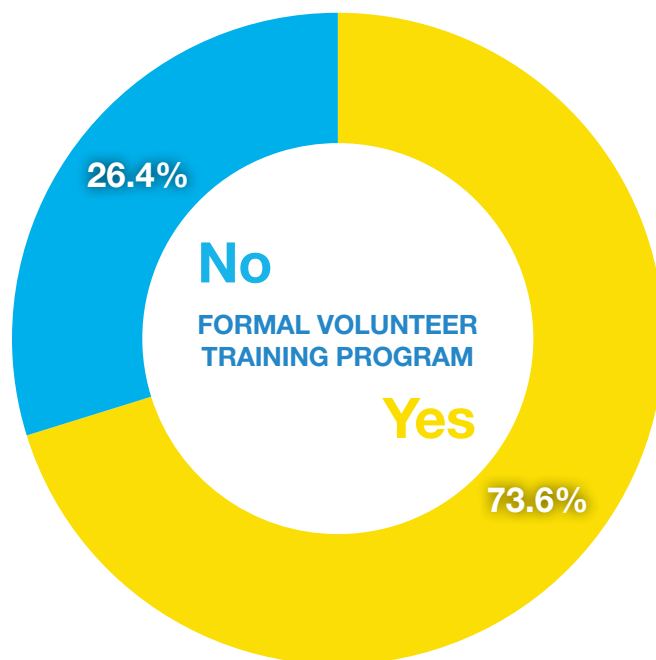
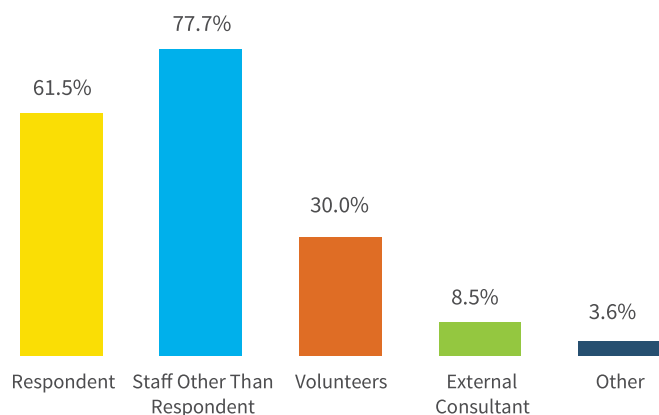


# Volunteer Program Management

## FORMAL TRAINING PROGRAMS

7 in 10 organizations have a formal training program for their volunteers. In the majority of cases, volunteers are trained by either the survey respondent or another staff member.

## VOLUNTEER TRAINERS



## THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS IN TRAINING PROGRAMS

### YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS EXCEL AT INVOLVING VOLUNTEERS IN THE TRAINING PROCESS

Youth Development organizations are much more likely to use volunteers as trainers than those in other sectors.

In fact, nearly half of Youth Development organizations rely on volunteers for training purposes.

This is significantly higher than organizations operating within other sectors, such as Religious (29%), Social Services (22%) and Other (27%).

**46%**  
YOUTH  
DEVELOPMENT  
ORGANIZATIONS

**29%**  
RELIGIOUS  
ORGANIZATIONS

**22%**  
SOCIAL SERVICES  
ORGANIZATIONS

**27%**  
OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

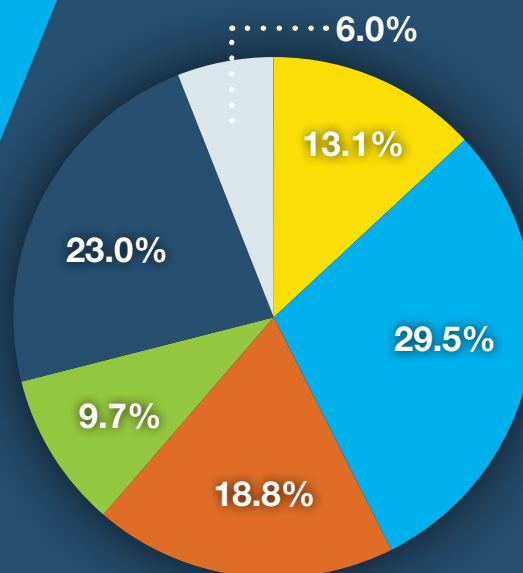
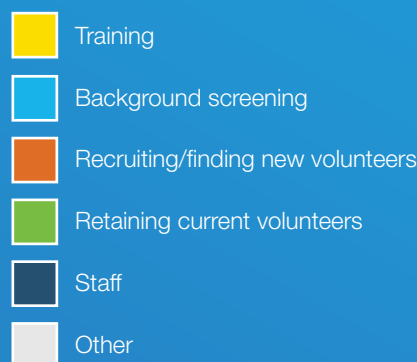


# Volunteer Program Management

## COSTLY ASPECTS OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Organizations reported background screening and staffing as the most expensive aspects of their volunteer program. Approximately 30% of respondents cited background checks as the most costly aspect.

A greater percentage of Social and Human Services organizations reported staff as the most costly part of their program compared to those in other organizations, while Youth Development organizations reported recruitment as one of their biggest budget items.



## WORDS OF WISDOM FROM SURVEY RESPONDENTS

*"One key to a successful program is allowing the volunteer to try out a new role if they are dissatisfied with the current assignment."*

With an estimated 10% of an organization's budget going to retaining current volunteers and another 19% going towards recruiting new volunteers, keeping volunteers engaged should be a top priority for most organizations. Sometimes it's a matter of thinking outside the box when it comes to retention strategies. Something as simple as offering volunteers flexibility in their roles and positions may keep them engaged.

*"We are using online training more and more."*

Training consumes about 13% of an organization's annual budget. Some organizations have chosen to forego traditional in-person training and have incorporated online components into their training program. While nothing beats having an enthusiastic and experienced staff member provide extensive training, an online option offers convenience and flexibility for the volunteer. In many cases, online training isn't enough to cover the intricacies of a position, so a hybrid approach can be used to leverage the value of both methods.

# Screening Practices

All survey respondents conduct background checks on volunteers to some degree. Organizations place the most value on criminal record checks and sex offender searches. Most organizations have a documented screening policy that applies to volunteers; however, there is still a concerning number of organizations who have not yet documented a policy or are unaware whether their organization has one. According to respondents, the primary purpose of conducting background checks is workplace safety for staff, constituents and vulnerable populations.

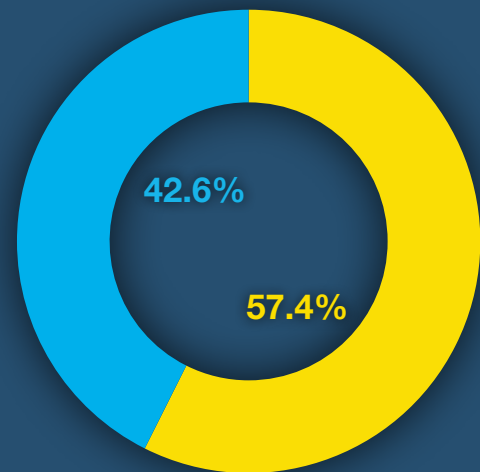
## VOLUNTEER BACKGROUND CHECKS

57.4% of organizations conduct background checks on all volunteers before they are brought on board. The remaining organizations conduct background checks on volunteers only some of the time.

Youth Development organizations were most likely to conduct background checks on all volunteers (78%).

### TWEET THIS STAT

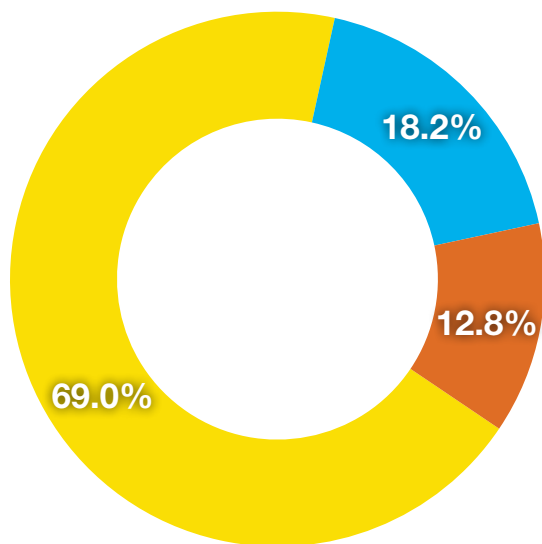
57% of organizations conduct background checks on all #volunteers.  
@VerifiedVols



All of the time



Some of the time



## HOW BACKGROUND CHECKS ARE CONDUCTED

Nearly 7 in 10 organizations use an external third-party service provider to conduct volunteer background checks. The remaining organizations use in-house resources (18.2%) or go directly to a government source (12.8%).



External Third-Party Service



Completely In-House



Direct from Government Source

### TWEET THIS STAT

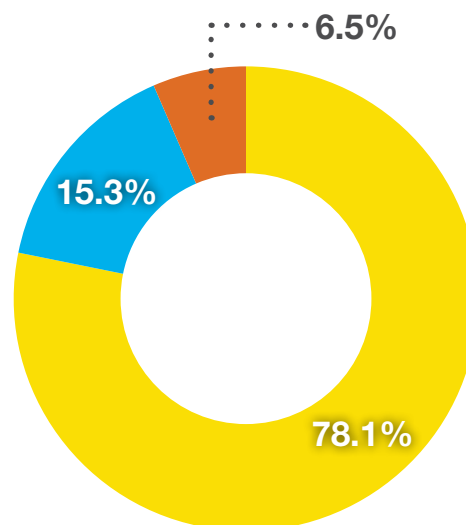
69% of organizations use a third party provider to screen #volunteers.  
@VerifiedVols



# Volunteer Program Management

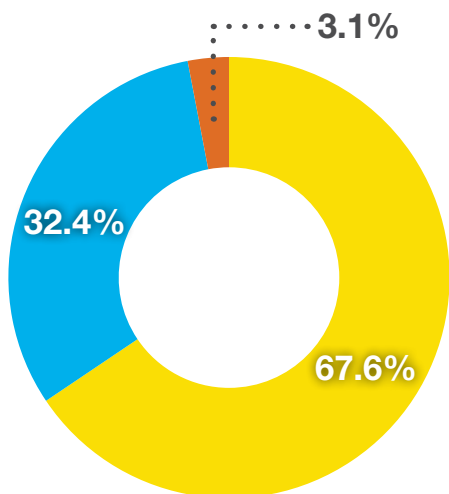
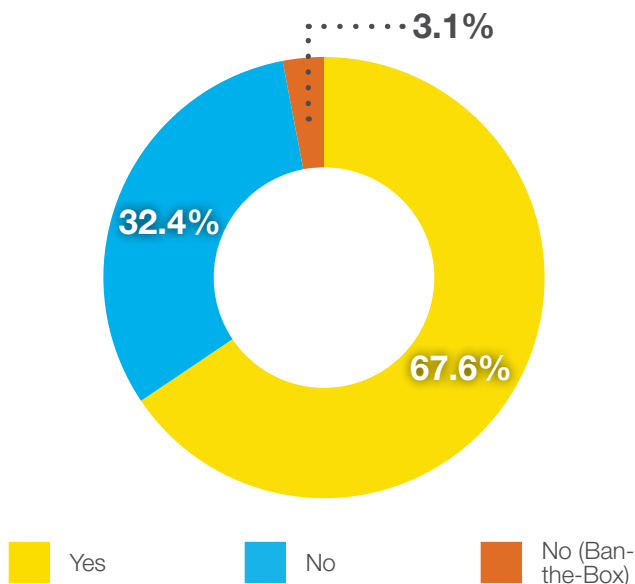
## DOCUMENTED VOLUNTEER SCREENING POLICY

The overwhelming majority of organizations have a documented screening policy for volunteers. 15.3% do not have a policy in place.



## CRIMINAL HISTORY QUESTIONS ON VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

More than two-thirds of organizations have questions regarding criminal history on their volunteer application. Only 3.1% of organizations do not ask about criminal history because their state has adopted ban-the-box legislation. Religious organizations are most likely to have criminal history questions on their volunteer application (81.8%); however, they are also most likely to perform screening in-house and may not be aware of screening best practices or local ban-the-box laws.



### ASK AN EXPERT:

*Question: Can our organization ask about criminal history on our volunteer application?*

*Answer:* There are really two parts to this question – can you ask about criminal history and should you ask about criminal history?

Over the past couple of years, a ban-the-box movement has been sweeping the nation, and jurisdictions (individual states and municipalities) have passed laws that prevent organizations from asking the criminal history question. Whether or not you are legally permitted to ask about criminal history on a volunteer application depends on your location and any applicable local laws. It is recommended that you seek advice from legal counsel if you are unsure.

If there are no laws prohibiting the criminal history question in your jurisdiction, you must decide if you should ask the question. While this decision is completely up to you, most industry experts recommend pushing the question back as far as possible in the vetting process. Additionally, if the prospective volunteer indicates that a criminal record does indeed exist, it should simply initiate a conversation and not (on its own) preclude an individual from volunteering.

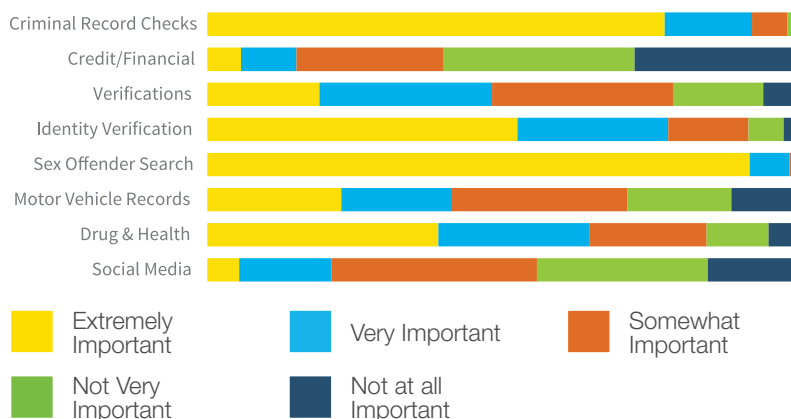
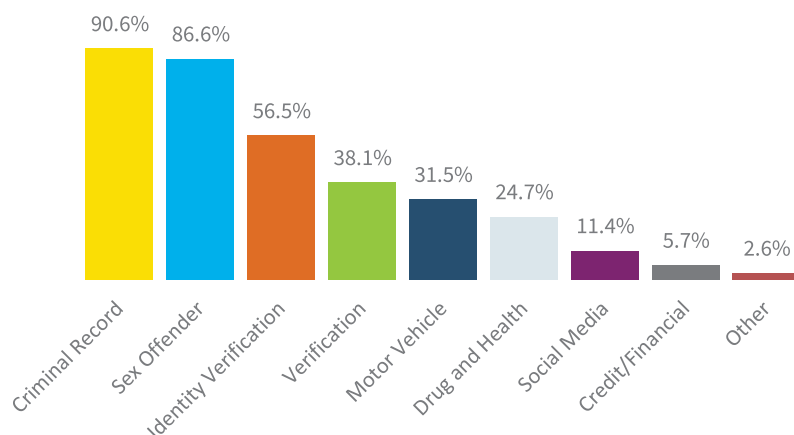
As always, if you're unsure about legislation or best practices, it is recommended that you seek guidance from legal counsel.

# Volunteer Program Management

## TYPES OF BACKGROUND CHECKS USED

On average, each organization uses four different types of background checks:

- 9 in 10 organizations conduct criminal record checks
- 86% use a sex offender search as part of their screening process
- Over half of organizations use Identity Verification
- Credit and financial checks are the least popular background check for volunteers with only 5.7% of organizations using them
- Organizations within the Social/Human Services sector are most likely to conduct Criminal Record Checks and Sex Offender searches. They are least likely to use Social Media as part of their screening strategy
- Social media is most used among organizations within the Youth Development sector



## SCREENING TIP #1:

### THERE'S ONLY ONE SEX OFFENDER SEARCH YOU SHOULD BE USING

Not all sex offender databases were created equal. In fact, there's only one search you should be using as it's the only comprehensive search available in the country.

The Dru Sjojin National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW) contains national sex offender data from sources such as the U.S. Department of Justice, and state, territorial and tribal governments.

Dependence on any other sex offender database may leave your organization and the people it serves exposed to unnecessary risk.

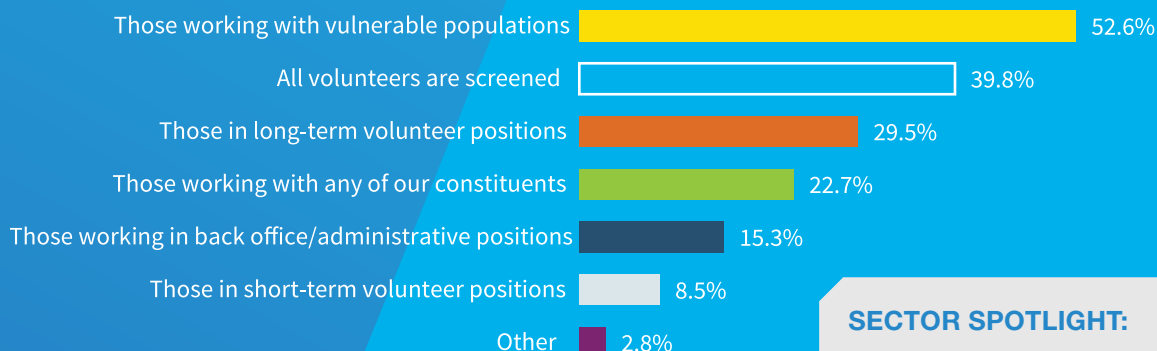
Organizations as a whole believe that sex offender searches are the most important component to the volunteer background screening process. The majority of respondents also identify criminal record checks as an area of extreme importance. Social media and credit checks are considered the least important when it comes to screening volunteers.

Drug and health checks are most popular among Youth Development organizations, which can be attributed to the nature of working with impressionable minds. Youth Development organizations also place a higher importance on motor vehicle records compared to those in other sectors.

# Volunteer Program Management

## WHO GETS SCREENED

4 in 10 organizations screen all volunteers regardless of their position or how often they volunteer. Those working with vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, children, and the disabled are most likely to undergo background screening whereas those volunteering on a short-term basis (either one-time or on a casual basis) are least likely to undergo screening.



## SECTOR SPOTLIGHT:

### SOCIAL SERVICES

Organizations within the Social and Human Services sector express greater concern over protecting constituents and improving regulatory compliance than those in other sectors.

### YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Those involved in Youth Development are significantly more likely to be concerned with improving the quality of their volunteers and providing a safe environment.

## SCREENING TIP #2:

### IDENTIFY OTHER AREAS OF YOUR ORGANIZATION THAT ARE VULNERABLE

Vulnerable populations often steal the spotlight when it comes to conversations regarding background checks, but they may not be the only vulnerability in your organization. Background checks do more than protect people - they protect your assets, your reputation, and your brand.

While over half of organizations screen those working with vulnerable populations, only 15% of those in back office and administrative positions are screened. Any individual who handles finances or makes important decisions on behalf of your organization should be screened. While minor theft may not have a significant impact on your organization, severe reputational damage could put your organization's livelihood at risk.

## WHY ORGANIZATIONS SCREEN THEIR VOLUNTEERS

While each organization has different goals and objectives, most share similar reasons for screening their volunteers. The top three reasons are focused on safety and protection, while the bottom three are centered around organizational efficiency and program management.

## 6 REASONS WHY ORGANIZATIONS SCREEN THEIR VOLUNTEERS

1. PROVIDE A SAFE AND SECURE ENVIRONMENT (88%)
2. PROTECT CONSTITUENTS AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS (85%)
3. PROTECT THE REPUTATION OF THE ORGANIZATION (78%)
4. IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF VOLUNTEERS (39%)
5. IMPROVE COMPLIANCE (29%)
6. INCREASE RETENTION (13%)

# Criminal Record Checks

## TYPES OF CRIMINAL RECORD CHECKS USED

Religious organizations use an average of three different types of criminal record searches as part of their volunteer screening program, whereas organizations in the Social and Human Services and Youth Development sectors use four or more.

Most organizations that conduct criminal record checks use sex offender searches (72.4%), current county and state searches (59.1%) and nationwide or multistate database searches (51.4%). Nearly half of organizations also use local arrest records and sheriffs' offices.

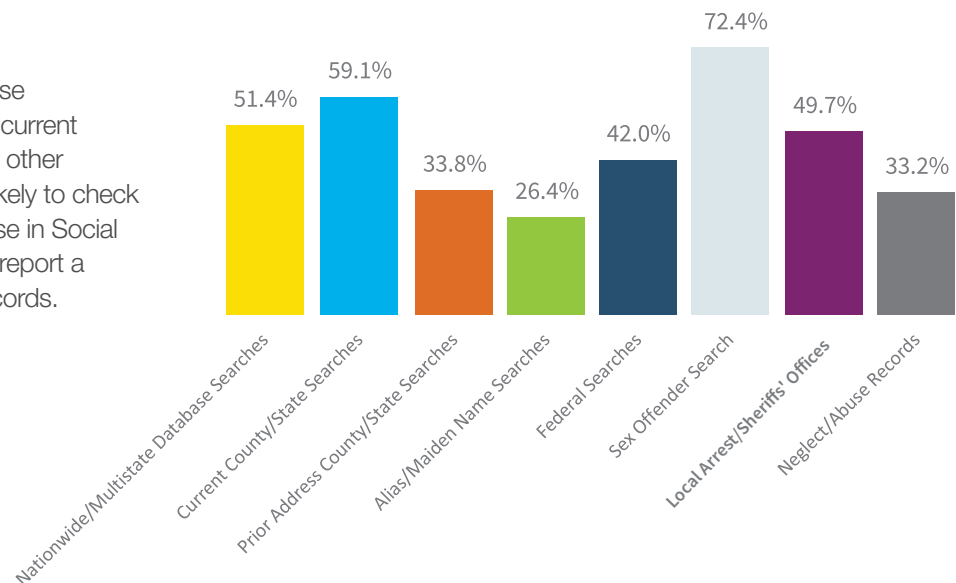
## SCREENING TIP #3:

### ONE SEARCH ISN'T ENOUGH

The biggest mistake that organizations make when conducting criminal record checks is relying too heavily on one source of information. The real value comes from several moving parts that work together to provide a more thorough look into a volunteer's criminal past.

There is no search – not even the FBI's National Crime Information Center – that contains every single criminal record. The more types of criminal record checks, the stronger and more accurate the results.

Youth Development organizations use nationwide database searches and current county or state searches more than other organizations. They are also more likely to check for aliases and maiden names. Those in Social and Human Services organizations report a higher use of neglect and abuse records.



# Criminal Record Checks

## NATIONWIDE DATABASE AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION

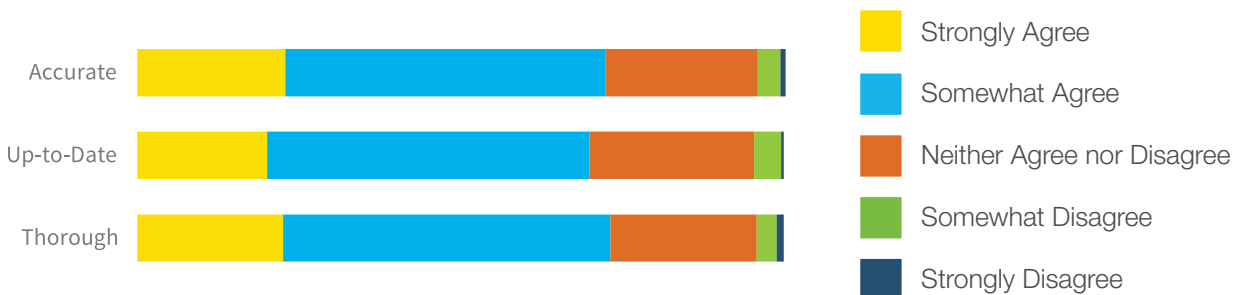
The majority of organizations (65.5%) were aware of nationwide and multistate database searches prior to completing the survey. Just over one-third of organizations were not aware of that type of search.

Over half of religious organizations were unaware of nationwide and multistate database searches. Organizations with a budget of \$500,000 or more and those that use a third-party service provider were significantly more likely to be aware of the search.

The majority of organizations feel that nationwide and multistate database searches are thorough, up-to-date and accurate. Religious organizations have the most confidence in the accuracy and completeness of nationwide database searches. On the other hand, those in the Youth Development sector have the least amount of confidence.

## ONE-THIRD

of organizations are not aware of nationwide database searches.



### SCREENING TIP #4:

#### PERCEPTION DOESN'T ALWAYS MATCH REALITY

While the majority of organizations feel that nationwide database searches are accurate, up-to-date and thorough, it is simply not the case. There are many instant nationwide and multistate database searches available, and even though some are more thorough than others, none can provide a comprehensive criminal record check. That is not to say that they do not serve a purpose. Nationwide database searches are valuable when used as one component of a criminal record check as they can help identify crimes that occur outside of the volunteer's residential jurisdiction. For example, if a volunteer committed a crime while on vacation or across state lines, the crime may not be uncovered through a traditional search of county courthouses or state repositories. Still, all hits found as part of a nationwide or multistate database search must be validated at the primary source of information (the county or state courthouse).

# Criminal Record Checks

## CONFIDENCE IN CRIMINAL DATA

Almost all organizations express some degree of confidence in the accuracy and completeness of the criminal data that is returned about their volunteers. Less than 1% of organizations report that they are not confident. Organizations that use a third-party service provider are more confident in the accuracy and completeness of criminal data than those who conduct screening in-house or directly through a government source.

## CONFIDENCE IN CRIMINAL DATA (ALL ORGANIZATIONS)



### SCREENING TIP #5:

#### BE CLEAR ON WHAT YOUR BACKGROUND CHECKS ACTUALLY INCLUDE

Many organizations from the external research panel (those who are not clients of Verified Volunteers) are confident in their criminal record checks; however, many of these organizations rely solely on nationwide database searches or other incomplete methods of screening for criminal record checks. These organizations are likely operating under a false sense of security and there is a good chance that they are missing some very significant information that puts their organization at risk.

Organizations knowledgeable about screening will tell you that you cannot be 100% confident in any criminal record check. There is no such thing as a perfect background check, so you always run the risk of missing a record when screening a volunteer. These organizations also understand that criminal record checks are more comprehensive, accurate and thorough when they are based on multiple data sources – for example, using a nationwide database to supplement county and state searches.

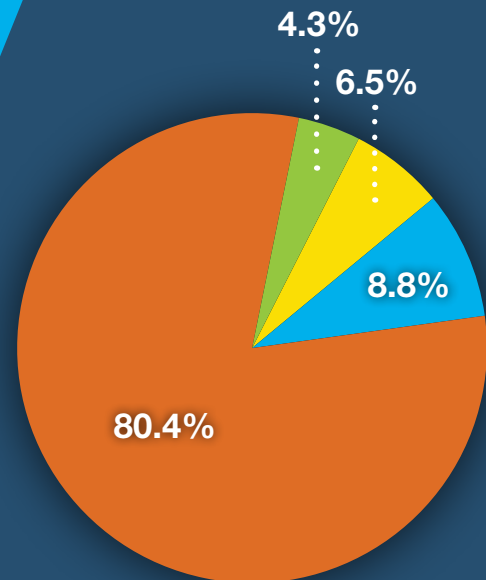
The moral of the story is always know what your background check includes – and what it doesn't.



# Criminal Record Checks

## FINGERPRINTING

8 in 10 organizations do not use fingerprinting as a component of their volunteer screening process. Approximately 15% of organizations fingerprint some or all volunteers.



## SCREENING TIP #6:

### FINGERPRINTS DON'T TELL THE WHOLE STORY

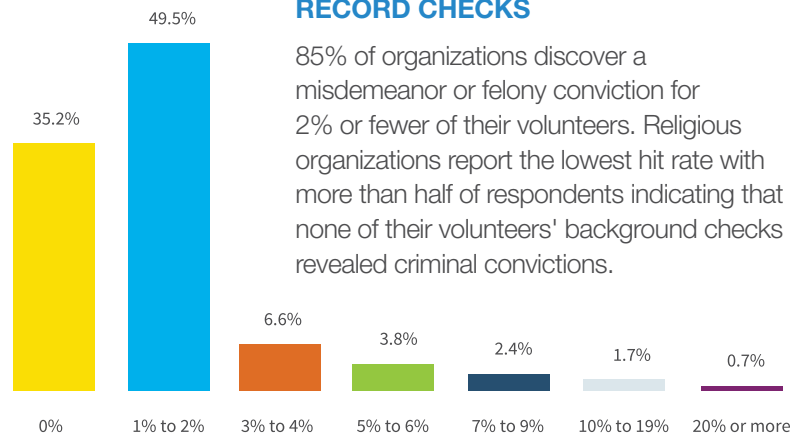
Contrary to popular belief, fingerprinting is not the most reliable criminal record check. Most organizations only conduct fingerprint checks because they are required to do so.

Fingerprint checks query the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC); however, the database is severely outdated due to administrative backlogs and errors.

The most reliable search is one that uses multiple data sources, such as county and state searches based on address history, nationwide databases and the Dru Sjodin sex offender registry. Together, these searches cover more jurisdictions and provide organizations with the ability to get a more reliable criminal record check.

## CONVICTION RATE FOR CRIMINAL RECORD CHECKS

85% of organizations discover a misdemeanor or felony conviction for 2% or fewer of their volunteers. Religious organizations report the lowest hit rate with more than half of respondents indicating that none of their volunteers' background checks revealed criminal convictions.



## SCREENING TIP #7:

### LOW HIT RATE ISN'T NECESSARILY A GOOD THING

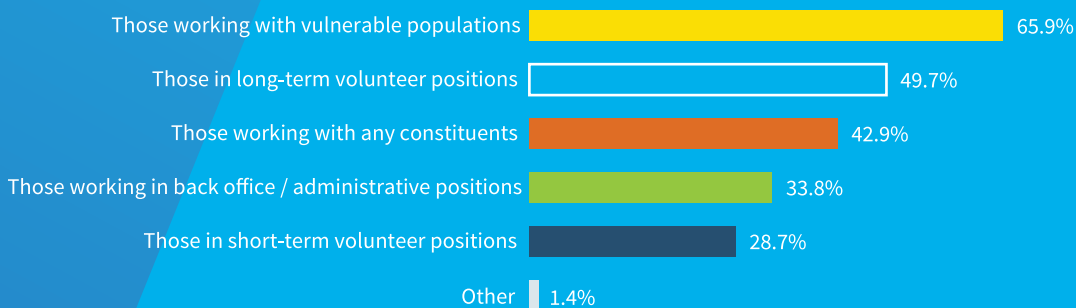
If your organization is finding fewer than 2-3% of volunteers with a criminal record, you may want to revisit your screening practices. Although a low hit rate allows you to onboard nearly every volunteer who expresses interest in your organization, it is an indication of a low quality check. As a point of reference, one in ten Americans have some degree of criminal history. You may not be looking in the right places or digging deep enough into your volunteers' criminal history. This isn't always the case, but it's good to explore all avenues with a knowledgeable and reputable screening provider that can make recommendations on how to enhance your screening efforts.

# Renewal Screening

Even if a volunteer clears a background check the first time, that doesn't mean they will have a clean record forever. Organizations should have a policy for rescreening their volunteers. The process for conducting renewal checks on volunteers may vary based on the position (i.e. for those working in the vulnerable sector or financial assets) or be time-based (i.e. annual rechecks).

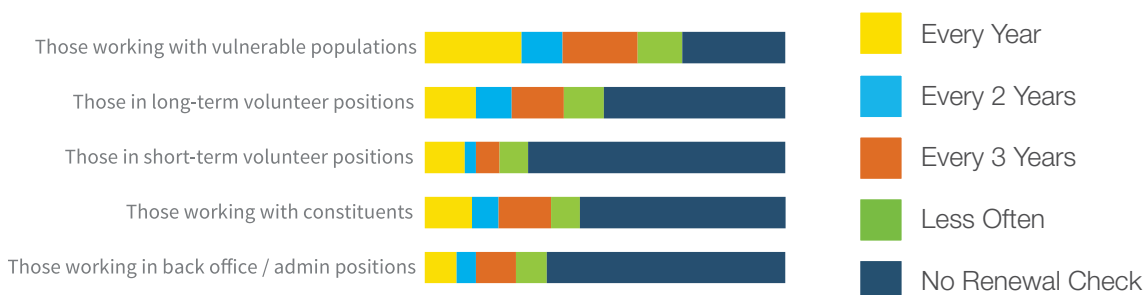
## VOLUNTEER RENEWAL SCREENING

Survey results show that those working with vulnerable populations are most likely to undergo renewal checks throughout the course of their volunteer tenure. Youth Development organizations conduct significantly more renewal checks on volunteers across all positions.



## FREQUENCY OF RENEWAL SCREENING

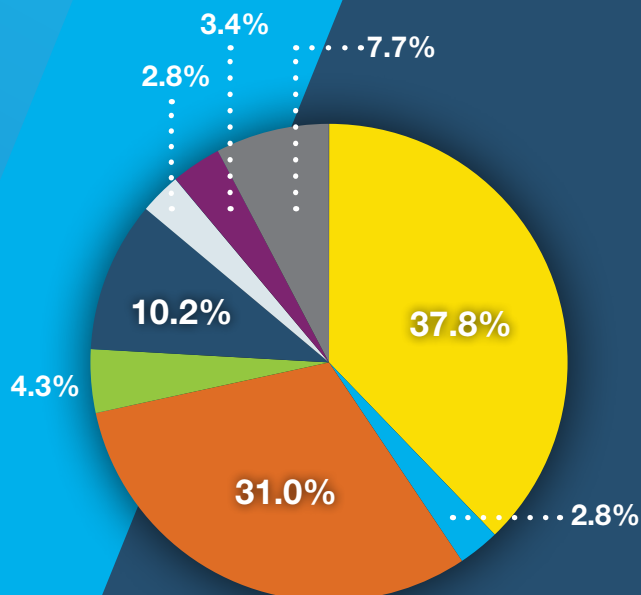
The frequency at which volunteers are rescreened varies based on the nature of the volunteer position. With the exception of those working with vulnerable populations, only half of organizations are rescreening their volunteers. Those working with vulnerable populations are screened every year (26.8%), every 2 years (11.4%), every 3 years (20.9%) or less often (12.3%). Only 28.6% of volunteers who work with vulnerable populations are not required to undergo renewal checks.



# Challenges in Volunteer Screening

The biggest concern among organizations is the time and administration spent on screening volunteers. This is especially true for organizations who conduct their background checks in-house or directly with a government source.

Organizations feel the least challenging aspects of screening are getting volunteers to authorize or complete the process (2.8%) and a poor volunteer experience (4.3%).



Another major challenge for organizations is the expense of screening or lack of budget. Youth Development organizations struggle with this challenge more than others, citing it as their greatest challenge. Surprisingly, organizations with both small and large budgets classify this as their second biggest challenge.

# Challenges in Volunteer Screening

## CLOSE-UP ON BUDGET

Almost every screening challenge facing nonprofit organizations has a solution, whether it's working with a screening provider to reduce administrative burden or adding additional searches to improve the quality of criminal record checks. The one challenge that seems difficult to solve is lack of budget – if the money is not there, it's just not there...Or is it?

Pulling more money out of thin air isn't actually as hard as it sounds, and it doesn't involve elaborate fundraising campaigns or cuts to other areas of the organization. Background checks save organizations money and can actually yield a substantial return on investment.

### Here are just some of the ways that volunteer screening saves money:

- + Lowers insurance premiums due to decreased liability
- + Protects the organization's brand and reputation
- + Maintains credibility and ability to fundraise
- + Improves volunteer retention rates and therefore decreases recruiting and training costs
- + Prevents fraud and theft committed by volunteers

Background checks offer organizations tremendous value, but if finding space in the budget is still problematic, another option is to reach out to volunteers for help. Many volunteers are happy to contribute to the cost of the background check. In most cases, volunteers care deeply about the organization they devote their time to so covering the cost of a background check isn't going to deter them from volunteering.

The Verified Volunteers screening platform offers the option to split the cost of background checks and nearly 40% of volunteers pay for all or part of their check. Those volunteers covered an average of 91% of the cost.

## FREE BUDGET & ROI TOOLS

Verified Volunteers has developed several resources to help organizations prepare their budget and calculate the return on their volunteer investment.

[Return on Investment Calculator](#)

[Sample Budget Worksheet](#)

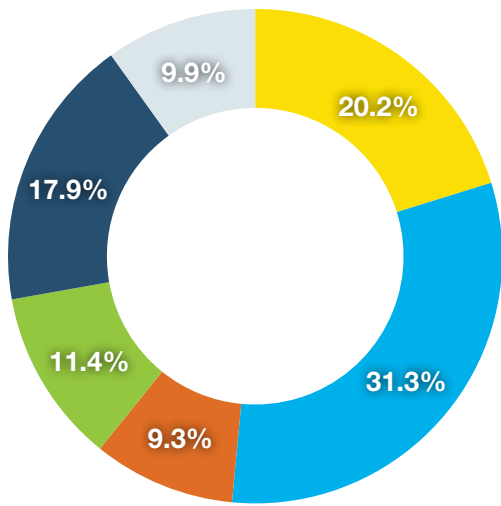
[Making the Case for Your Volunteer Program Budget](#)

## ORGANIZATIONS EXPRESS CONCERNS OVER BUDGET

Nonprofit organizations face a number of challenges from recruiting and retaining volunteers to providing services to meet the demand of the community; however, the biggest issue facing organizations is budget. Financial constraint is the number one challenge reported by survey respondents. Here's what they had to say when we asked them about the biggest issue currently facing their organization:

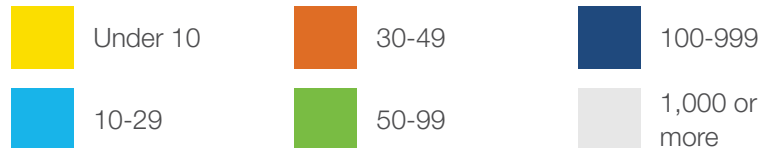
- + "Financial issues are our biggest issue. We could do so much more if grants or funds were available."
- + "Sustaining the growth financially. We are growing and our services are in demand. We pinch pennies in every aspect we can and our expenses are extremely low compared to the private sector, but fundraising sources struggle to keep up. For this reason, our volunteer budget is extremely low, which is a shame because more budget would help us create ways to improve recruitment and retention."
- + "Not enough money to do our work."
- + "Fundraising is our biggest issue. We need funds for our facility, programs, and staff."
- + "Our biggest issue is growing needs, but dwindling resources."
- + "Funding concerns – to support, retain, and recognize volunteers."
- + "Not enough money to fund public programs."
- + "Finding enough funding to be able to serve all children interested in our program."
- + "Raising money to continue our mission."
- + "We always need more funds!"
- + "Gaining the funding to expand and grow from a small program to a medium sized program."
- + "MONEY."

# Review of 2014



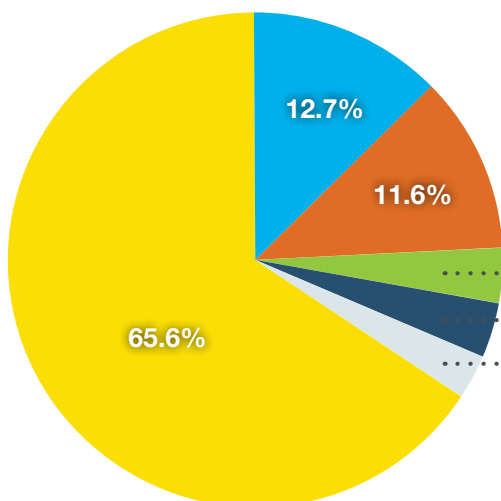
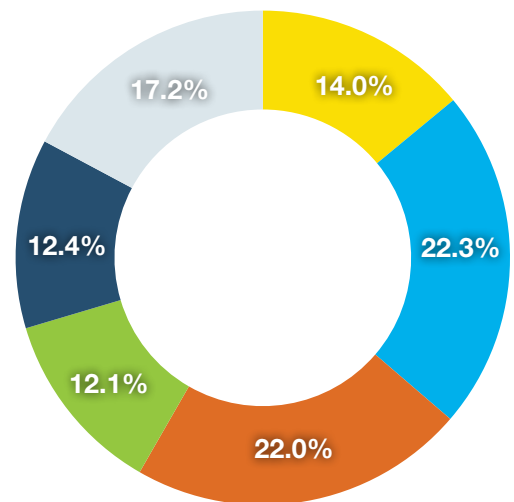
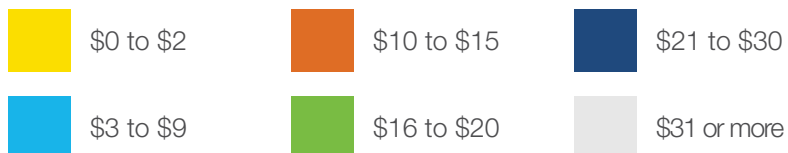
## TOTAL BACKGROUND CHECKS PERFORMED IN 2014

The total number of volunteer background checks varied widely among organizations. 8 in 10 conducted fewer than 100 background checks in 2014.



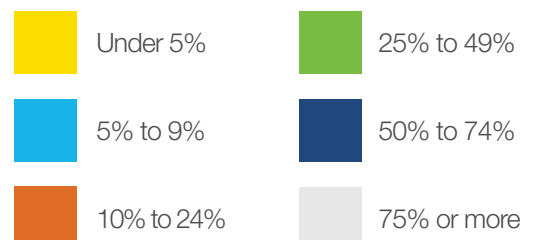
## AMOUNT SPENT ON VOLUNTEER BACKGROUND CHECKS IN 2014

The majority of organizations spent an average of \$15 or less on screening for each volunteer; however 17.2% spent \$31 or more. The result is an overall average of \$14 per volunteer spent on background check across all organizations.



## PERCENTAGE OF VOLUNTEER PROGRAM BUDGET SPENT ON VOLUNTEER SCREENING IN 2014

The majority of organizations spent less than 5% of their budget on volunteer screening. Additionally, 9 in 10 organizations allocated less than one quarter of their budget to volunteer screening.

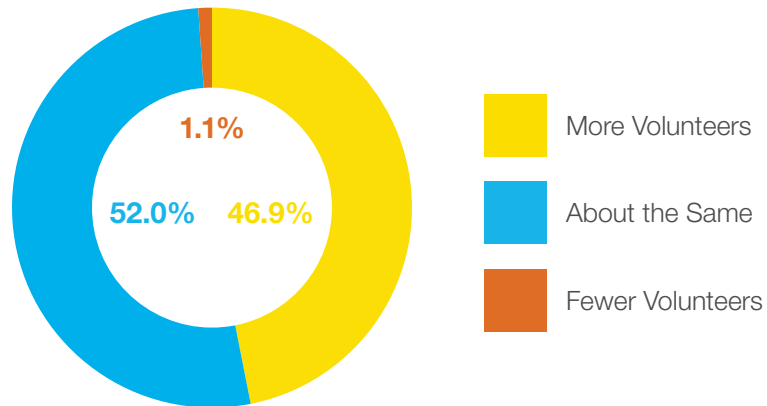


# Review of 2014

## VOLUNTEER PROJECTIONS

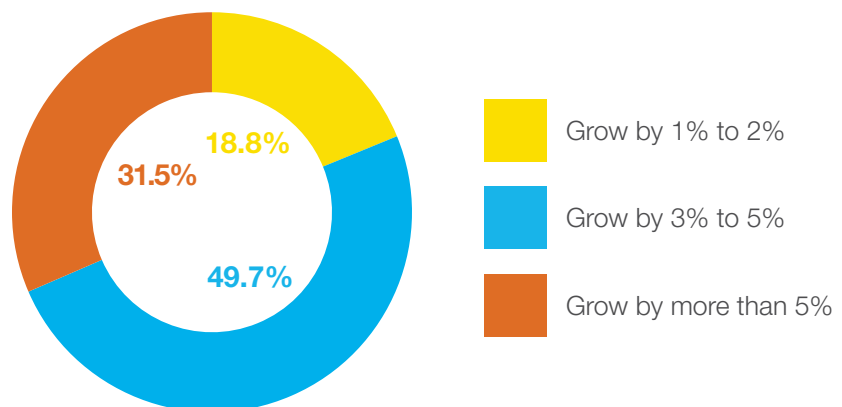
More than half of organizations expect to have the same number of volunteers next year, while 46.9% expect to increase the number of volunteers.

Only 1.1% project a decline in the number of volunteers serving their organizations.



## VOLUNTEER POOL GROWTH

Of the organizations that expect to grow their volunteer pool over the next year, approximately half expect to grow by 3% to 5%.



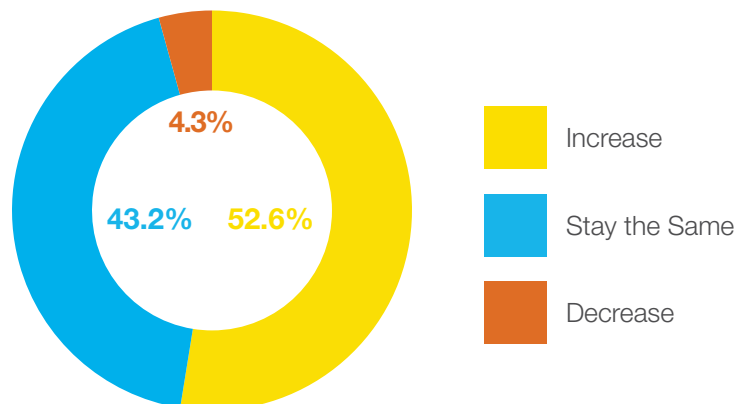
### TWEET THIS STAT



1/3 of organizations who expect to grow in 2016 project a growth rate of 5% or more. @VerifiedVols

## VOLUNTEER BACKGROUND CHECK PROJECTIONS

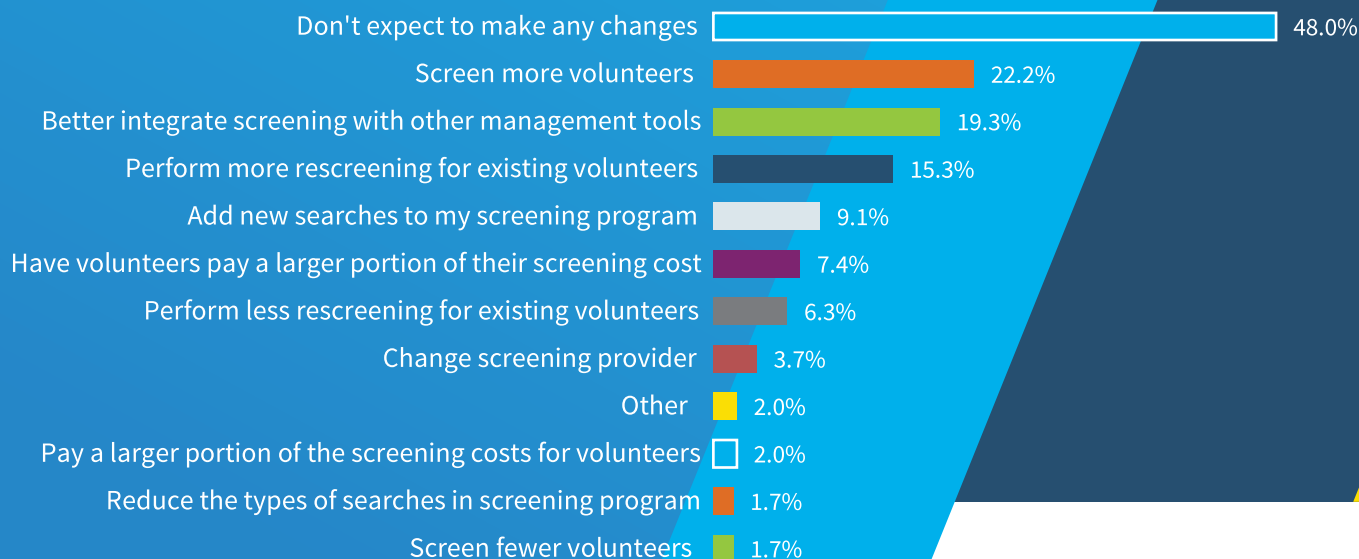
More than half of organizations expect to increase the number of background checks they conduct on volunteers next year.



# 2016 & Beyond: The Future of Volunteer Screening

## ANTICIPATED CHANGES TO VOLUNTEER SCREENING PROGRAMS

Nearly half of organizations do not anticipate any changes to their volunteer screening program over the next year. More than 1 in 5 organizations intend to screen more volunteers and approximately another 1 in 5 hope to better integrate their screening program with other volunteer management tools. Conducting renewal checks for existing volunteers who were screened in the past is also a high priority for 15.3% of organizations.



For organizations planning to make changes, the majority are centered around increasing or improving volunteer screening. In fact, the top four changes are screening more volunteers, improving integration between screening and other tools, performing rescreening and adding new searches. Very few organizations intend to reduce their screening efforts. Organizations clearly see the value in background checks and rank them high in importance for their organizations.

# About Verified Volunteers

Verified Volunteers is the only background check platform tailored to the specific needs of the service sector and the first online community to mobilize repeat, vetted volunteers. Our Volunteer Fast-Pass propels nonprofit organizations by empowering volunteers to take greater ownership of costly, time-consuming screening processes. Verified Volunteers is backed by SterlingBackcheck, one of the world's largest background screening companies, and partnered with Points of Light, the world's largest organization dedicated to volunteer service.

Find out more at:  
[www.verifiedvolunteers.com](http://www.verifiedvolunteers.com)

Connect with us at:



## Useful resources

### **On-Demand Webinar – Volunteer Screening 2016: Research Results and Insights**

This webinar reveals key research results, insights on best practices and where opportunities lie to improve the quality of your screening program.

### **Risk Management for Your Volunteer Program: 2015-2016**

Read this white paper to learn what risk management is, why it's needed for your volunteer program and how you can get started planning your organization's own risk management program.

### **To Screen or Not to Screen?**

This white paper outlines some of the common reasons you might not be screening volunteers – and why you need to start.

### **Counting the Cost of a Bad Volunteer**

Volunteers can often end up costing organizations money. This white paper offers red flags you should look out for during the onboarding process.

### **Sample Volunteer Background Check Policy**

Does your organization have a documented volunteer background screening policy? Use this sample policy to see what a comprehensive, documented approach to screening looks like.

### **Return on Volunteer Investment Calculator**

Is your volunteer program investment paying off? Use this calculator to find out.

### **Sample Budget Worksheet**

Drafting a budget for your volunteer program? This worksheet lists items that you may want to consider including.

### **Making the Case for Your Volunteer Program Budget**

This list outlines the types of metrics, data points and other considerations to present a solid case to decision-makers.

## ORGANIZATIONS LOVE VERIFIED VOLUNTEERS!

We didn't ask for feedback on our services from survey respondents, but we were overwhelmed with the number of positive comments we received during the survey. Here's what some of the respondents had to say about their experience with Verified Volunteers:

*"We love using Verified Volunteers for our background checks. It saves so much time (2 days vs. 6-8 weeks) in getting a new volunteer started and is much more thorough than our previous method."*

*"We switched over to Verified Volunteers a year ago and are pleased with it."*

*"Verified Volunteers has been great!"*

*"Our program has started using Verified Volunteers to do our background screenings, which has made the process of background checks much easier."*

*"As a sector that focuses on delivering quality service to vulnerable populations, screening is one of our priorities. The 129 member agencies of the Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies are always looking for relevant and up-to-date data on volunteer screening – and this report from Verified Volunteers provides best practices and terrific insights."*

### **Jennie Gates Beckman**

Director of Volunteer Strategy  
Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies (AJFCA)