

White Paper

The Importance of Background Screening for NonProfits

An Updated Briefing

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Are our most vulnerable populations at risk?

Vulnerable populations can include the poor, the elderly, the disabled, as well as those isolated by culture, language or geography. They are also at-risk children, family members separated from one another in a disaster; they are the homebound, tourists and even animals.

These vulnerable populations increasingly rely on the 1.47 million nonprofit organizations in the United States¹ to deliver the programs and services that increase their quality of life and in some cases are essential to their survival.

Fundamental to our nation's nonprofits' ability to deliver these services to vulnerable individuals are volunteers. According to "Volunteering in the United States, 2007"², the number of volunteers continues to remain high. This survey reports that 60.8 million people, or 26.2% of the U.S. population, volunteered at least once between September 2006 and September 2007. The Corporation for National and Community Service predicts that by 2010, 75 million people will volunteer with nonprofit and service-drive organizations across the country.

With the large number of volunteers providing services directly to our most vulnerable populations, the risks to those persons and the nonprofits for whom they deliver services remains high.

How real is the risk?

LexisNexis®, a leading provider of background screening services to the nonprofit sector, recently updated an audit of screenings completed between 2002 and 2007.

This audit found that from the more than 3.7 million background screenings completed during this five year period, **over 189,000 individuals with at least one criminal conviction attempted to gain employment or volunteer with a nonprofit organization.**

Offenses revealed in the 2007 audit include:

- Over 2,700 Registered Sex Offenders
- 3,900 Sex-related crimes
- 37,400 Drug related offenses
- 651 Murder convictions

LexisNexis Cares

Using the positive power of information to help society with our unique abilities through technology donations, strategic nonprofit partnerships and volunteerism.

This briefing is based on an in-depth study of background screenings conducted by LexisNexis across the nonprofit sector from 2002 – 2007.

Where do people in the U.S. volunteer?

Top Organizations For U.S. Volunteers:

Religious
Organizations..... 34.8%

Educational &
Youth-serving
Organizations..... 26.2%

Social &
Community Service 13.4%



For more information contact:

LexisNexis® Screening Solutions at 1-800-590-8535 or risk.lexisnexis.com/screening

The audit revealed that the hit rate for the nonprofit sector is 5.06%. This means that for every 100 individuals who were screened, more than 5 of them were found to have prior criminal convictions. This number remained almost unchanged from a prior audit conducted by LexisNexis in 2005.

Appendix A provides a list of the top ten offenses found by LexisNexis during this audit.

What steps can a nonprofit take to protect the people they serve?

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 99.1 adults³. With over 2.3 million American adults incarcerated, the national prison population has nearly tripled in the past 20 years.

This sobering trend further underscores the necessity of thoroughly screening all applicants for employment and volunteer positions with our nation's nonprofits.

Nonprofits must be diligent when hiring and recruiting their paid and volunteer staff and conduct comprehensive background screenings. A key component of these screenings is a nationwide background check. National background checks with the LexisNexis National Criminal File access over 200 million criminal records from all 50 states.

Nationwide background checks are critical because many individuals were convicted of crimes in states or counties that are different from their current place of residence.

Key Audit Findings

- Each day, 144 individuals with criminal records applied for employment or a volunteer opportunity with a nonprofit.
- Every 11.5 hours, a registered sex offender attempted to obtain a position at a nonprofit.

Value of the LexisNexis National Criminal File

This table represents criminal convictions that were found by LexisNexis from 2005 – 2007 that occurred outside the applicants' current state of residence.

If the nonprofits had simply performed local searches, these hits may not have been revealed.

APPLICANT'S CURRENT STATE OF RESIDENCE	PERCENTAGE OF OUT-OF-STATE HITS
California	64.8%
Florida	55.2%
Georgia	63.8%
New York	92.1%

Current Events

Since 2002, when LexisNexis began the VolunteerSelect PLUS program, background screening has become accepted as a best practice for nonprofits across the country. However, just as many nonprofits continue to rely on less comprehensive methods for selecting their volunteers or staff. As a result, many continue to put the clients they serve, the assets of their organizations and the overall reputation of the nonprofit itself at risk.

Consider these two recent news stories.

- A performing arts school in the Midwest was forced to close its doors following over \$90,000 in thefts by a volunteer, from acts including bad check writing, forgery, grand theft, and money laundering. The volunteer had served time in prison twice before in two adjacent states for money-related convictions and also had three prior convictions within his current state of residence, before he was given access to money by the school.⁴
- A girl's basketball coach in the Pacific Northwest was arrested for felony sexual molestation of a child in his program. The coach had a misdemeanor conviction less than six years prior to his most recent arrest. The program relied upon local, fingerprint based checks that failed to find the lower-level "peeping tom" conviction in his past.⁵

Conclusions

While the majority of individuals who seek volunteer or employment positions with our nation's nonprofits do so out of a desire to serve, the audit results and current events presented in this briefing are intended to draw attention to a growing problem facing nonprofits: how to balance the needs of their organizations while remaining vigilant about the risks some individuals pose to the safety of the clients they serve.

While employing a convicted criminal as a staff member or allowing them to volunteer does not mean the organization is necessarily at risk, nonprofits should develop sound policies for interpretation of criminal history results and remain aware of the recidivism rates for crimes, particularly for violent or sex-related crimes.

Examples to be aware of include:

- Sexual offenders are four times more likely to be arrested for another related crime after their release from prison as are other types of offenders.⁶



VolunteerSelect PLUS is LexisNexis innovative, market-leading background screening service providing comprehensive services at deep discounts to 501c(3) organizations and churches throughout the United States.

For more information on LexisNexis nonprofit services, partners and resources to help mitigate risk, please visit www.LexisNexis.com/nonprofit.

- Individuals with poor driving records or a history of D.U.I. convictions may be strong volunteers, but roles where driving is required may create unnecessary risks for a nonprofit.

By remaining aware of the risks that individuals can bring to their organizations and developing simple but thorough background screening programs, nonprofits can protect themselves and continue to provide the critical services the most vulnerable members of our society rely upon.

APPENDIX A

Top Ten Criminal Offenses

1. DWI/DUI
2. Theft/Larceny
3. Simple Worthless Check/Bad Checks
4. Drug Possession⁷
5. Assault
6. Burglary
7. Sex Related Crimes (including rape)
8. Disorderly Conduct
9. Criminal Trespass
10. Forgery

1 NCCS Data Web, <http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/NCCS/Public/index.php>. The National Center for Charitable Statistics.

2 Current Population Survey (CPS), <http://www.bls.gov/cps/>. U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics.

3 "One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008." The Pew Charitable Trusts, Pew Center on the States. <http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/One%20in%20100.pdf>

4 (2008, February 28). Charter school volunteer is sent to prison, The Toledo Blade. Retrieved March 10, 2008, from Google.com.

5 Boyce, David. (2006, January 25). Basketball coach in molest case had prior 'peeking' conviction, The Almanac, Menlo Park, California.

6 "Criminal Offender Statistics" <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/crimoff.htm>. Last Updated November 2003. The Bureau of Justice Statistics, a component of the Office of Justice Programs in the U.S. Department of Justice.

7 Drug Possession combines crimes associated with possession of marijuana, possession of cocaine, possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia.

For more best-practices on employee screening or help determining the right screening criteria and automated tools, contact LexisNexis® Screening Solutions at 800-590-8535 or risk.lexisnexis.com/screening

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