



February, 2023

## Screening Policy; Vulnerable Sector Check

The Literacy Group of Waterloo Region (TLG) is committed to creating a positive and supportive learning and volunteering environment. This environment must be a culture of care, safety and personal responsibility.

Volunteer screening is an important part of TLG's commitment to a safe culture. TLG's screening includes a series of formal and informal initial and ongoing steps. TLG models its screening process around the Volunteer Canada 10 Steps of Screening. [Volunteer Canada 10 Steps of Screening](#)

As part of the screening process, all volunteers are required to complete a mandatory **Vulnerable Sector Police Record Check** or a **Criminal Record Check** depending on which role they wish to work in. The completion of this record check does not automatically mean the volunteer will be eligible for the position and will still be subject to TLG's full screening process.

Any report presented from a record check will be reviewed in order to make an appropriate decision. The details of an individual's screening report will be considered in specific relation to the duties and responsibilities of the position. **TLG will not store any VSC reports.** It is the responsibility of the volunteer to present the required document for the approval of the Executive Director or, in their absence, the Program Manager. Please note that review by the Executive Director or Program Manager may extend the screening process by up to a week. The Executive Director or Program Manager will approve the application immediately if they are able to; however, if neither is present, all VSC reports will be held securely by office administration until reviewed. Each volunteer will be asked if they would like their report returned. Upon review of the report, if the volunteer has not requested return of the document, it will be securely destroyed. During anytime when a VSC may not be handed or mailed to TLG, email scan or digital copy will be accepted. Once received, it will be processed, the date will be recorded and then the document will be deleted permanently.

The purpose of this process is to place volunteers in positions that are appropriate to their skills and interests, while providing a safe and secure learning and working environment for learners, volunteers and employees.

All volunteers will be expected to pay the \$20 for their own VSC.

## **Policy Background**

TLG greatly values and depends on the contribution of many dedicated and talented volunteers to fulfill its mission. Volunteer positions at TLG include:

1. Board of director members (Criminal Record Check)
2. Front desk receptionists (Vulnerable Sector Check)
3. One-to-one tutors (Vulnerable Sector Check)
4. Group learning assistants (Vulnerable Sector Check)
5. Group facilitators. (Vulnerable Sector Check)

Included in this are seasonal volunteers who provide support to fundraising events.

TLG works with a vulnerable sector of the population. Staff and volunteers work directly with learners that have one or multiple issues that make them vulnerable. They may:

1. Have low ESL benchmarks language levels
2. Live with mental health issues
3. Have learning disabilities
4. Have developmental talents
5. Be elderly

In addition, our volunteers may work off site at organizations where children's programs are run.

All volunteers are in a position of trust and authority similar to learner/teacher relationship.

As such, we have a duty to appropriately screen anyone who will have access to vulnerable people.

Research and experience have shown that thorough screening policies and procedures generally result in greater placement success, and fewer volunteer management issues.

TLG is not obliged to accept everyone who applies to volunteer. We also reserve the right to dismiss a volunteer, which our Volunteer Dismissal Policy outlines in more detail.

## Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Executive Director to oversee the organizational administration of this policy.

As per our Volunteer Intake Procedure, the following staff hold responsibility for the various levels of screening:

Requests, information and applications	Interviews	2 Professional Reference checks	VSC	Orientation Training	Review	Information Security
S. Oakley C. Prosser	L. McArthur S. Damon L. Mazur J. Baker S. Oakley Interview Comm.	S. Oakley	J. Baker (coordinate) S. Oakley (coordinate) C. Prosser (approve) L. McArthur (approve)	S. Damon L. Mazur J. Baker S. Oakley C. Prosser	L. McArthur S. Damon L. Mazur J. Baker S. Oakley	S. Damon L. Mazur J. Baker S. Oakley

The Police Records Check procedure will be overseen by The Executive Director

The Executive Director will screen board volunteer applicants and pass applicants onto the Interview Committee.

Administrative Assistant will screen front desk volunteer applicants.

All VSC need to be completed at request of The Literacy Group of Waterloo Region and also be completed within 3 months of the start of volunteering. All VSC must be renewed every 3 years.

If anything appears on the check, the Executive Director, or the Executive Director and the Board Chair, as appropriate, will do a risk assessment based upon the criteria outlined in #7 below. In keeping with TLG Privacy Policy, results from the risk assessment will be kept strictly confidential.

## Document Retention

TLG will not retain any version (original or true copy) of the VSC or regular Police Record Check.

## **VSC Completed Outside of Waterloo Region**

If an applicant volunteer's local police authority does not recognize TLG to complete a VSC, TLG will continue to consider their application.

The applicant must provide a recent (1 month) VSC that can have another organization recognized and/or be completed by an authority other than Waterloo Region Police. The VSC provided must however:

1. Be a VSC completed by a Canadian authority OR by the Federal Police recognized in the country of origin which can be found [here](#).
2. Have been obtained to support a similar group of clients served by TLG
3. Not show any tampering or of illegible quality
4. Have clear details of providers contacts

All VSC are received and read in confidence and decisions are made with the goal to keep learners, volunteers and staff safe. All VSC approvals are subject to Executive Director decision and may involve the tutor working with a non-vulnerable volunteer or (if relevant) during a time where other staff are present within the office.

Being a new Canadian Citizen or Permanent Resident does require individuals having to pass a Canadian recognized VSC. However, this position does not grant immediate access to becoming a tutor and approval still needs to be obtained from the Executive Director.

## **Volunteer Screening Procedures**

1. Determine the risk
2. Job description
3. Recruitment
4. Application
5. Interviews
6. Reference checks
7. Police Record Check
8. Orientation and training
9. Ongoing staff support
10. Follow up and evaluation

1. TLG will determine the risk for each volunteer position in our organization. We will determine the possibilities for loss or injury, and will take steps to minimize, prevent, or eliminate risk altogether. We will do a risk review each year and whenever a new volunteer position is created.

2. TLG will create and communicate job descriptions for all volunteer positions. Job descriptions will provide information about expectations, goals, activities and responsibilities; prerequisite skills and qualifications; behaviour guidelines, boundaries and limitations; and training and ongoing support.

3. Risk management principles apply to volunteer recruitment. We recognize that we must be careful about how we express our need for volunteers, and that creating a sense of urgency does not always attract the type of volunteer TLG wants or needs. TLG will ensure that our recruitment messages meet the wants and needs of our organization. Position descriptions will be kept accurate and up-to-date. Recruitment materials will state that we have a volunteer screening policy in place.

4. All volunteer applicants must fill out an application form. It will collect basic information about the applicant, and give the organization permission to do reference checks. TLG will remain up-to-date on human rights legislation and will not ask for information about characteristics that are among the prohibited grounds of discrimination such as race, ancestry, place of origin, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or disability. We do this to ensure an appropriate fit to the organization, as well as to ensure that the applicant has the basic qualifications to provide literacy support.

5. Interviews will be conducted with every volunteer applicant. The interview provides the opportunity to talk to the applicant about their background, skills and interests, as well as to convey more information about the position and organizational expectations, culture and norms. The interview will assist in determining the applicant's suitability for our program.

6. All applicants must consent to providing the names and contact information of two individuals for reference checks. References should be able to confirm the applicant's background and skills. They can include contacts made through employment, volunteering, school or other community or professional associations. Staff will use the 'Volunteer Reference Template' when contacting references.

7. Volunteer applicants will provide TLG Executive Director or Program Manager with a clear Level 3 'Vulnerable Sector' Police Record Check done within the previous 3 months and created for The Literacy Group of Waterloo Region. Any check completed not for the purpose of The Literacy Group will not be accepted. Some acceptances may apply – see **VSC Completed Outside of Waterloo Region**.

Police Record Checks provide information concerning the individual's police record including Criminal Code of Canada convictions, pardoned sexual offences and records of convictions under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Volunteers will be provided with a template guide and letter to support their application within the Waterloo Region.

Normally, an applicant shall not begin volunteering with TLG until a clear Police Record Check has been supplied. An applicant may be allowed to begin if he or she signs an Offence Declaration Form, ensuring that the verification be provided without delay and in a timely manner. Providing false or misleading information shall be grounds for rejecting or dismissing a volunteer. Volunteers working with no cleared check can only support TLG during office hours and in a secure and open environment and at permission of the Executive Director or Program Manager.

Risk Assessment - Where evidence is received of a criminal conviction or other relevant conviction, the Executive Director will consider the following factors in determining risk and an appropriate course of action:

- a) the length of time since offence(s);
- b) any involvement of children and/or sexual activity and/or violence and/or acts of dishonesty in the offence(s);
- c) the volunteer's attitude towards offence(s);
- d) any treatment, counseling or other services;
- e) other steps taken to rehabilitate;
- f) any likelihood offence(s) will be repeated;
- g) if alcohol or illegal drugs were a factor in commission of offence(s);
- h) the degree of cooperation with this investigation;
- i) if the offence(s) was committed while volunteering at TLG;
- j) the relevance of offence(s) to the volunteer duties as set out in the volunteer job description.

Approval shall be at the discretion of the Executive Director, or the Executive Director and the Board Chair, as appropriate. All decisions will be documented and retained with the file.

Volunteers who fail to provide a completed, clear police check or a signed Offence Declaration Form by the date set out by TLG may be dismissed until the check or form is received.

8. Volunteer applicants are required to attend an orientation and training session. At this session, the volunteer position, organizational goals and values, instructional activities, best practices and challenges are outlined in greater detail. Training includes online, mentoring, in-class or on- the- job instruction. Within all training, volunteers receive training on their rights and responsibilities and all required training required under AODA legislation.

9. Volunteers will have access to ongoing staff support and resources throughout their volunteer term. Staff will meet with each volunteer on a minimum quarterly basis. Volunteers may request a performance review at any time. TLG recognizes that supportive and open communication amongst all members is essential to creating a strong community.

10. All volunteers are aware of their own rights and responsibilities and are invited to complete various evaluative processes such as questionnaires and focus groups.