

# Police checks and volunteers

*While every effort has been made to obtain the most current and accurate information about police checks in Australian states and territories, the policy environment in this area is highly changeable. Volunteering Australia does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of the following information. Volunteering Australia recommends volunteers and organisations contact their local state police force or state volunteering centre for the most up to date information about police checks in their state. This information sheet was current as at January 18 2005.*

**See also Volunteering Australia information sheets:**

- ***Screening and the volunteer recruitment process***
- ***100 point identification check***

Police checks are one tool for assessing an applicant's suitability for a volunteer role. As a volunteer, you may be asked to undergo a check for one or more of the following reasons:

- Legislative requirement. Some volunteers (often working with children) are required by law to undergo police checks.
- Funding requirement. Some government departments require volunteers to undergo police checks to satisfy conditions for funding organisations.
- Duty of care. Organisations need to do all that is reasonable to avoid harm to clients, volunteers and the organisation. Failure to do so results in liability for any harm. Risks to organisations that might be best managed through incorporating police checks include potential for abuses of vulnerable client populations and financial risks associated with volunteers handling money without supervision.
- Some insurers require police checks for staff and volunteers as a condition of providing insurance.

Police checks should be initiated by organisations rather than individuals to ensure the greatest level of accuracy and assurance. The first points of contact are usually local police stations, although practices vary in some states.

Consent must be obtained from the applicant in writing. Consent forms are available from the state police force or government body conducting checks in your state.

## Why police checks alone are not enough.

There are several reasons why organisations should implement a broad pre-recruitment volunteer screening process, rather than relying on police checks alone to screen out unsuitable applicants:

- Only people with current convictions are identified. Offenders who are not convicted of crimes will not be identified.
- Accuracy is not assured. A misspelt or incorrect name may result in an incorrect check. (Organisations can use the 100 point identification schedule to verify the applicants' identity - see Volunteering Australia information sheet *100 point identification check*)
- Police checks only include convictions up to that date – even cases presently before courts will not be included.

For more information about comprehensive pre-recruitment screening, see Volunteering Australia's information sheet *Screening and the volunteer recruitment process*.

## What about volunteers from other countries?

Currently there are no formal means by which to obtain police checks for foreign volunteers. Organisations involving overseas volunteers should manage potential risks to their clients or organisation by utilizing a broad pre-recruitment screening process in the absence of police checks.

Occasionally volunteers are able to provide police checks obtained in their country of origin.

## What about when I want to volunteer overseas?

If you plan to volunteer overseas you can obtain a national police certificate from the Australian Federal Police (AFP). You can obtain this before you leave Australia or request it from overseas.

<b>Cost:</b>	\$36
<b>Processing time</b>	approximately 10 working days

It is advisable to obtain police checks as close as possible to your date of departure.

## What happens in my state or territory

Police checks are not transferable, either between states or organisations within the same state. The exception to this rule is Queensland, where the blue card system has been designed to be transferable.

### Australian Capital Territory

National police certificates can be accessed from the Australian Federal Police (AFP).

**Cost:** \$36  
**Processing time:** approximately 10 working days

---

### New South Wales

Police checks are generally not available to any volunteers in New South Wales. A very few volunteers may be subject to police checks at the instigation of a government department funding a volunteer organisation.

Organisations working with vulnerable populations will need to carefully consider their risk management and pre-employment screening in the absence of police checks.

---

### Northern Territory

Two levels of checks are available from the Northern Territory Police:

- Northern Territory only

**Cost:** free of charge  
**Processing time:** approximately 10 working days

- National check

**Cost:** \$28. Consideration will be given to waiving fees if organisations send a letter on a letterhead stating the individual is a volunteer and receives no payment for services  
**Processing time:** up to six weeks

## Queensland

- *'Working with Children Check'*

Police record checks are mandatory in Queensland for volunteers working with children. The system is administered by the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. These checks are commonly referred to as the 'blue card' because of the card issued to volunteers. Unlike police checks in other states, the process of issuing a blue card involves checking a range of registers and disciplinary findings of professional associations.

In most cases organisations cannot accept volunteers for work while checks are pending, regardless of how often they come into contact with children or young people

There are some exceptions to the mandatory requirement for checking - for example parents volunteering at their children's school. Organisations should consult the Commissioner or Volunteering Queensland if they are in doubt as to whether a check is required.

**Cost:** free  
**Processing time:** up to six weeks (valid for two years)

### Other checks

Organisations who do not work with children, who wish to include police checks in their risk management strategies can access police checks from the Queensland Police Service.

- National police certificates

**Cost:** \$38.20  
**Processing time:** up to four weeks

---

## South Australia

National police certificates are available from the South Australian Police.

**Cost:** \$49 for employed volunteers  
Free of charge - unwaged or student volunteers  
**Processing time:** approximately 14 working days

Some organisations who work with vulnerable groups such as children, the aged, or disabled people, can access free police checks for volunteers. A range of criteria needs to be met to be eligible for these checks. An brochure explaining how to access free checks can be downloaded from the South Australian Office for Volunteers website.

---

## Tasmania

Two types of checks are available from the Tasmania Police:

- Tasmania only (can be accessed every 12 months)

**Cost:** free of charge  
**Processing time:** approximately 10 working days

- National Police Certificates

**Cost:** \$45  
\$5 for registered organisations  
**Processing time:** approximately 10 working days

Organisations wishing to obtain the discounted rate will need to register with the Tasmania Police.

Moves are underway in Tasmania to implement a *Working with children check* for most volunteers working with children. To find out up to date information on this proposal contact Tasmania's Commissioner for Children on (03) 6233 4520 or visit [www.childcomm.tas.vic.gov.au](http://www.childcomm.tas.vic.gov.au)

---

## Victoria

Police checks are available from the Victoria Police. Organisations wishing to obtain a discounted volunteer rate will need to register with the Victoria Police.

**Cost:** \$27.60  
\$12.70 for registered organisations  
**Processing time:** approximately 10 working days

Moves are underway in Victoria to implement a *Working with children check* for most volunteers working with children. To find out up to date information on this proposal contact the Victorian Department of Justice on (03) 9651 0333 or visit [www.justice.vic.gov.au](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au)

## Western Australia

- WA Volunteering Secretariat in the Department for Community Development provides national checks for approved not-for-profit organisations and their volunteers.

**Cost:** \$10

**Processing time:** approximately 10 working days

These checks indicate whether an individual's record contains a conviction or not, without detailing the conviction. If a conviction is found, it is usually appropriate to access a national police certificate to establish further details.

- National police certificates can be obtained through the WA Police. Where a conviction is present this level of check outlines the details of the conviction.

**Cost:** \$41

**Processing time:** approximately 10 working days

The Western Australian government is implementing a *Working with children check* in 2006. This system will require all people working with children, including volunteers, to undergo a national name check. Once approved volunteers will be provided with an assessment notice. The checks will be available from a new screening unit planned for the Department for Community Development.

Volunteers under 18 and parents volunteering for activities in which their child is involved will be exempt from this requirement. The checks will cost \$10 for volunteers and be valid for 3 years.

To find out up to date information on this proposal visit [www.community.wa.gov.au](http://www.community.wa.gov.au) or contact 1800 622 258.

**Volunteering Australia Inc.**  
**Suite 2, Level 3**  
**11 Queens Road**  
**Melbourne Victoria 3004**  
**Australia**

P: +61 (0)3 9820 4100

F: +61 (0)3 9820 1206

E: [volaus@volunteeringaustralia.org](mailto:volaus@volunteeringaustralia.org)

W: [www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)