

## Meeting Notes from Tautoko Network Meeting

February 2019

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### Three good reasons to be checking volunteers before engaging them:

**Look after your service users:** The law says that you have a duty of care to look after those who use your services and to ensure that you don't deliberately put them at risk of harm. You need to check that a potential volunteer wouldn't create a risk to your client's health or safety.

**Look after your volunteers:** Under health & safety laws (which will apply to all organisations who have employees), you need to show that you are taking the health & safety of their volunteers, staff, clients and members of the public seriously. This would include the need to make sure that volunteers are capable of doing the work you have engaged them to do.

**Look after your organisation:** It reflects well on your organisation if your volunteers are happy and your clients are having their needs met.

### Do you have to police check or vet all your volunteers?

No, not in most situations. Police checks and/or vetting are required only if:

- It is a condition of your organisation's funding that checks are undertaken
- Your volunteers are doing work that is covered by specific legislation
- Your Board/Committee have passed a resolution that checks will be done
- Your organisation's constitution/deed requires that you check all volunteers

### What are you checking for?

You need to ensure those volunteering for you are the right fit for your organisation and for the role that they will undertake. This will generally require that you are checking that volunteer has:

- the skills/ ability to undertake the role, or the ability and willingness to learn these
- the necessary capacity/competence to undertake the tasks involved
- if appropriate, the required qualifications
- the appropriate motivation for the role
- the willingness to comply with your group's rules and processes

### Types of checks which could be undertaken:

There are a range of checks which can be undertaken. Except in instances where checking is compulsory, it's for you to decide which of those checks are relevant and appropriate for your group.

- checks with government departments – places like NZTA (for driving), police vetting, insolvency services etc
- registration checks with industry bodies if the work to be done involves specialist skills (building practitioners, chartered accountants etc)
- reference checks for previous volunteer roles

In addition to specific checks, your volunteer processes will also be likely to provide other opportunities for checking a volunteer's suitability for a particular role. These processes offer opportunities to observe, or to seek or receive feedback. These would include such things as:

- Pre-engagement interviews
- Induction
- Training
- Periodic reviews

#### Some other factors to consider before undertaking checks:

- **Collect only information you actually need to collect:** It is tempting to ask lots of questions of new applicants (such as age, gender, living arrangements etc), but ask yourself whether you actually need this information. If you don't need to do the check, don't do it. The risk of collecting more information than you actually need is that you will be acting in breach of the Privacy Act.
- **Make sure the check is genuinely needed:** When deciding what information you will collect, decide whether or not the check (and the information sought), is genuinely needed for the volunteer to perform the role and for your group to operate. If not, don't ask for this information. If in doubt, get your volunteer application forms checked.
- **Assess the level of risk:** The need for checking also relates to the level of significance of the volunteer work. If the work involves dealing with vulnerable clients or high risk activities, there will be a heightened need to undertake checks. Conversely, the need to undertake detailed checking will be lessened if the volunteer role involves low risk clients or activities.
- **Not one size fits all:** If you have multiple volunteer roles, be aware that the volunteer checks you undertake will not be one-size-fits-all. The questions asked, and the checks undertaken, should be tailored to fit the role and the work done.
- **References:** Be cautious when asking for references and when checking with referees. There are some privacy rules that apply when doing this, including rules which relate to disclosing confidential information only as and when agreed.