



To Screen, or NOT to Screen....Shouldn't be a question!

Guest Author: Stevan P. Layne, CPP, CIPM, CIPI; Founding Director, IFCPP

I once asked a museum director if his institution did background screening on its volunteers. "Are you crazy," he replied. "If we did that, we wouldn't have any volunteers." I'm not sure if that was an indication that none of them would pass the screen, or if none of them would submit to it.

All of us recognize the many benefits a strong volunteer program brings to an institution. In many places, volunteers far outnumber paid staff. Without the work they provide, some programs could conceivably be lost. We forget, however, that volunteers are just "people." And people, given the right opportunity, steal. People, with the proper motivation, take advantage of other people...financially, physically, or even sexually. It logically follows, therefore, that any "people" brought into the workforce, regardless of whether or not they are compensated, should undergo a reasonable screening of their background and character. This is exactly the language used by the courts in examining cases of negligent hiring. We screen to protect the good people in the workforce, visitors, and other volunteers, from being subjected to or exposed to those who would take advantage of them, or cause harm.

The level or depth of the screening should be dependent on the applicant's exposure to people and access to assets. ALL applicants should undergo a thorough check for criminal histories. It should be asked on the application and verified by a records check. This may be done directly through the courts or through a professional background service.

If the applicant is serving to greet guests, has access to no keys, assets, or classes with minor children, then minimal screens may be performed. The information on the application needs to be verified. If a falsehood is discovered, the process is over and the application should be denied. This includes employment history, driving record, education, licenses or certifications held. Credit histories should be performed on all of those persons who will handle cash or accessioned artwork.

Everyone should be able to account for their time, for no less than the past ten years. You have to be somewhere....gainfully employed, in school, in the military, undergoing health care...or in prison. Some records must exist, somewhere, which verifies this existence. Women who were married and not employed should have access to tax records showing a joint return for the time period in question.

If volunteers are asked to perform certain tasks with special knowledge or education, they should be trained identically to paid employees who perform those tasks. The bottom line...Volunteers are worth their weight in gold. Just be sure they're not taking the gold with them....

*Stevan P. Layne is the principal consultant and chief executive of Layne Consultants International, a leading provider of cultural property protection advice. Steve is a former police chief, public safety director and museum security director. He is the author of *Safeguarding Cultural Properties: Security for Museums, Libraries, Parks and Zoos*, and the *Business Survival Guide*. Steve regularly presents to professional associations and has consulted with more than 400 museums and other institutions. Steve is the founding director of the International Foundation for Cultural Property Protection and responsible for the professional training and certification of more than 1,000 museum professionals. For more information visit his web site [Layne Consultants International](http://www.layneconsultants.com).*

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This workshop is designed for small museums with 10 or fewer staff (paid or unpaid) who are

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