

Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority Background Check Policy

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I. Purpose of Screening

The Saying that a “bad volunteer is better than no volunteer” is untrue and dangerous, and should never be considered appropriate when selecting volunteers and employees. While parks & recreation departments and youth sports organizations across the country depend on volunteerism, failing to take any steps to screen employees and/or volunteers, places organizations, the volunteers, and most importantly, the participants at greater risk. While no screening process offers absolute assurances, we hope by implementing recommended guidelines for Background Screening from the National Recreation and Park Association to engender public confidence and lessen the risk of exposure to liability due to the lack of knowledge regarding an employee or volunteer’s background. More specifically, an effective screening process assists communities:

1. Raise public awareness of quality programs offered.
2. Make the safety of all participants, particularly the most vulnerable groups (children, elderly, mentally challenged, etc.) top priority.
3. Keep people who have a history of inappropriate behavior or who are unfit out of the organization.
4. Select the “most qualified” volunteers and paid staff for positions.

What is a Background Check? (CRIMINAL HISTORY)

A criminal background check is a manual or data base search of federal, state and/or local government files to determine if the individual applying to volunteer has had a past criminal conviction. A criminal background check must be sufficiently comprehensive to ensure that all convictions are revealed. For example, a check of records in only one state will likely not reveal a conviction that occurred in another state where the individual previously lived. A check only for child molestation convictions will not uncover a burglary or assault conviction.

Defining a “Criminal History”

“Criminal history” means a county, state, or federal criminal history of conviction of a crime, whether a misdemeanor or a felony, that indicates the employee/volunteer poses a threat to the physical safety of participants or personnel, or has demonstrated that he/ she does not have the integrity or honesty to fulfill his or her duties as an employee/volunteer.

Why are they Important?

Parents enroll their children in a league fully expecting that they will be safe from harm. Conducting a criminal background check is one of several actions that administrators must take to protect their participants from abuse.

To be effective, a criminal background check must be conducted before the employee/volunteer is permitted to associate with the children and must be done annually on all employees and/or volunteers

regardless of their position or the number of years they have been involved in the league or employed by the Authority.

Anyone wishing to participate as an employee or volunteer with Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority sponsored programs or co-sponsored organization youth programs will be required to fill out an application and sign a consent/release form to have his or her “Criminal History” investigated.

Employees and Volunteers are considered anyone who serves the parks and recreation authority programs or co-sponsored youth programs in any capacity.

Consent/Release Form – each volunteer must sign and date a consent/release form to authorize a background investigation.

II. The Screening Process

Since park and recreation departments and youth sports organizations are responsible for maintaining safe environments within their programs, they must be aware of the potential risks and safeguards to protect participants and the community in which a program operates.

It is recommended that volunteers be considered with the same scrutiny as paid staff and be recruited, screened, trained, supervised and evaluated with the same rigor as paid staff. The law does not differentiate between paid vs. volunteer staff.

Therefore, NRPA recommends that all employees and volunteers be screened. The time, energy, and financial investment of prevention strategies such as conducting a proper background screening, represents a fraction of the impact incidents such as sex abuse, violence, neglect or other crimes and abuses can have on participants, organization and community.

Recommended Screening Guidelines

Social Security Validation

Reveals the state and year the Social Security Number was issued. Verifies the applicants name with their given social security number. This helps to eliminate the possibility of false names and/or information.

Address History Trace

The address history trace determines the appropriate jurisdictions in which to perform a comprehensive search. Verifies the current address and identifies any previous address of every volunteer.

Criminal Record Search

County criminal records are hand searched at the county level. The standard county level search includes the most recent 7 year history. State criminal records are searched through State level repositories. Some State searches include up to a 25 year history.

Sex Offender Registry

Search of 50 State and/or County repositories for known sex offenders.

Motor Vehicle Record (MVR)

An MVR is conducted via an on-line tool through the Georgia Department of Motor vehicles. Such searches can be conducted in three, five and seven year increments. This search provides a historical report of all vehicle violations, to include drug and alcohol violations for the pre-determined time frame. Such searches should be conducted as part of the job offer and annually thereafter.

Past employment and personal reference checks

Such reference checks are utilized to confirm the truthfulness of information placed on the application for employment and should be conducted prior to a job offer being made. The result of the reference check has an effect on the hiring decision. Applicant information gathered through this process can identify a series of “red flags” instrumental to the hiring decision, to include truthfulness of the applicant, actual work history, reason for separation and so forth. The search can be conducted in-house or through a professional background search firm.

III. Who will be screened?

All employees, coaches, assistant coaches, league presidents, league coordinators, board members, officials and umpires of all Authority sponsored programs and Authority co-sponsored youth programs of the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority as well as program volunteers.

Policy:

In an effort to protect participants in organized activities through Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority or any of its co-sponsored programs, the Parks & Recreation Authority requires that criminal background checks be mandatory for all personnel. The policy requires checks on all employees, board members, umpires and organization volunteers.

Purpose:

To insure and value the safety of those who use our parks/facilities and take part in our programs, either as participants, employees or volunteers. On behalf of our employees, volunteers and those we serve, we will take sound measures in an attempt to protect them from potential harm.

All employees, volunteers, umpires, board members and advisors will be subject to background checks in the pursuit of protecting those we serve from potential harm.

No screening process can offer absolute assurances; yet, knowing the individuals background can provide more certainty that people with a history of inappropriate behavior will not have access to our participants.

Implementation:

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority will implement and administer the background screening process for Authority programs and require that co-sponsored organizations using county park facilities develop and implement a background screening process for all volunteers having dealings with participants. All co-sponsored programs will implement and partake in background checks or their co-sponsorship will be revoked by the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority. (Revocation of co-sponsorship will cease use of authority park facilities.)

Any league administrator, officer, coach, assistant coach or board member will be required to sign and date a consent/release form(s) to authorize a background investigation. Failure to consent will disqualify any volunteer from working with a league or program. All individuals must provide truthful, correct and complete information on the release. Failure to do so will result in disqualification.

A thorough background check will be conducted on any person wishing to volunteer with any function dealing with program participants.

Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation volunteers will present completed consent forms for background checks to the Parks and Recreation Human Resources Department. Consent forms will be required to be submitted and background checks completed before any employee, board member, umpire, league board member or any volunteer can work with program participants. Volunteers should give themselves at least one to three weeks to have background checks completed. It is imperative that no individual begin work with any program until the check has been completed. Doing so will result in suspension from one year activities. An authority co-sponsored organization will implement and follow similar guidelines that have been approved and adopted by the co-sponsored organization. The co-sponsored organization guidelines must be approved by the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority Board Attorney.

Once an individual has been found eligible for employment or to participate in an activity, the individual's name shall be placed on a list of individuals eligible for activities with the Parks & Recreation and its co-sponsored activities. All volunteers shall be required to notify the Executive Director of any misdemeanor/felony charges except speeding charges of more than 15 miles an hour over the posted limit incurred within 24 hours of the alleged incident. Background checks will be re-done periodically at the discretion of Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority. Should a background check reveal a pending misdemeanor or felony charge, other than a minor speeding charge, then employment and volunteer eligibility will be suspended until all charges are satisfactorily resolved.

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority will pay to have background checks completed for each applicant with the Authority. Officials used by the parks and recreation will also be required to have background checks. Coaches required to become certified through the NYSCA, should have background checks completed before taking any class.

IV. Confidentiality

To maximize the chances of obtaining honest and accurate information from an employee/volunteer during the screening process, the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority will have a third party research an applying employee/volunteer's background for authority programs. The Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority respects the privacy of all program volunteers to the extent allowed under the Open Records Georgia Law.

V. Responsibilities of Youth Co-Sponsored Programs

It will be the duty of each youth co-sponsored program to carry out the following duties of the background screening process in a timely manner. Failure to do so will result in the loss of co-sponsorship and jeopardize future opportunities.

1. Responsible for following the Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority Background Check Guidelines as specified in this policy.
2. Distribute, collect, and forward all volunteer screening forms to the authority.
3. Responsible for seeing that each team in their organization has approved volunteers for all practices and games, and that those volunteers are the only ones to be in the practice area or playing area.
4. Responsible for removing any volunteer who is not approved to perform his/her duties and those who do not meet the background screening from designated practice or playing area.

VI. Responsibilities of the Parks & Recreation Authority

1. Distribute, collect, and record all screening forms before any volunteer work with the Authority is done.
Responsible for removing any volunteer from all duties who does not meet the background screening guidelines.
2. Responsible for communicating background check results to volunteers who do not meet policy requirements.
3. Monitor and evaluate program and make necessary adjustments when needed.

4. Enforce all policies as outlined in the Background Screening Manual. Authority to remove any volunteer who is not approved to be in the designated practice or playing area.

VII. List of Criteria for Exclusion

A person should be disqualified and prohibited from serving as a volunteer if the person has been found guilty of the following crimes:

(Guilty means that a person was found guilty following a trial, entered a guilty plea, or entered a no contest plea accompanied by a court finding of guilty, regardless of whether there was an adjudication of guilt (conviction) or a withholding of guilt. This does not apply if criminal charges resulted in acquittal, Nolle Prose or dismissal.)

Sex Offenses

Candidates will be excluded for all sex offenses regardless of the amount of time since offense. Examples include but not limited to: child molestation, rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, sodomy, prostitution, solicitation, indecent exposure, etc.

Felonies

Candidates will be excluded for all felonies, regardless of the amount of time since the offense. Examples include but not limited to: murder, manslaughter, aggravated assault, kidnapping, robbery, aggravated burglary, etc.

Candidates will be excluded for all felony offenses other than sex or violence within the past 10 years. Examples include but not limited to: drug offenses, theft, embezzlement, fraud, child endangerment, etc.

Misdemeanors

Candidates will be excluded for all misdemeanor violence offenses that have occurred within the past 7 years. Examples include but not limited to: simple assault, battery, domestic violence, hit & run, stalking, etc.

Candidates will be excluded for all misdemeanor drug and alcohol offenses within the past 7 years or multiple offenses in the past 10 years. Examples include but not limited to: simple drug possession, drunk and disorderly, public intoxication, possession of drug paraphernalia, etc.

A single DUI (Driving under the influence) misdemeanor offense could disqualify an applicant for up to 12 months. Multiple offenses under this category could lead to a 7-10 year disqualification period.

Candidates will be excluded for any other misdemeanor within the past 7 years that would be considered a potential danger to children or is directly related to the functions of that volunteer. Examples include but not limited to: contributing to the delinquency of a minor, providing alcohol to a minor, theft – if a person is handling monies, etc.

Pending Cases

Anyone who has been charged for any of the disqualifying offenses or has a case pending in court is not permitted to volunteer until the official adjudication of the case.

NOTES:

A volunteer, coach, assistant coach, umpire or board member who does not pass the background screening cannot serve the authority (concession worker, fundraisers, etc.) in any capacity.

1. Charges/convictions not listed above are reviewed on a case by case basis.
2. Traffic violations of less serious nature (speeding, moving violation, improper equipment, etc.) are not reviewed.
3. Traffic violations of a more serious nature will be reviewed by the Committee.
4. Worthless checks are reviewed on a case by case basis.
5. Suspension time from program is the time of the court date for that charge.
6. The Background Screening Process is an ongoing process and subject to review and changes at any time. Changes have been made to the exclusion criteria since inception of the program.

VIII. Questions on Information

Any person who disputes the results and would like to challenge them can do so by following these procedures:

1. Call the contracted background investigation company. They will then inform the person of the information gathered and discuss it with them. Once the information is corrected, the authority will re-run the background check to verify eligibility.
2. There is no appeal process.
3. The contacted background investigation company will provide an updated profile report to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority at which time the decision is made to allow or disallow a person to participate based on the findings and the criteria for exclusion.

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority would like to take this time to thank you for your dedication and commitment to the programs of Lowndes County. Because of citizens like you, youth are given the chance to participate and work in a recreational setting and the opportunity to learn and improve their skills.

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority is committed to making this experience a rewarding one. With the implementation of Background Screening for all employees, board members, umpires and volunteers we feel comfortable in knowing that the environment surrounding our participants is one that can offer safety and assurance for all.

While programs across the country depend on volunteerism, failing to take the initial steps to screen leaves organizations, volunteers, and most importantly, our participants at great risk. While no screening process offers absolute 100% assurance, any steps taken in a screening process offers you more confidence that you are aware of your volunteers' background.

Volunteer in Youth Sports

Job Description for Football Coach

Organization: Valdosta-Lowndes County Youth Football

Description of Responsibilities:

Applicant will be expected to work with the Parks & Recreation and his or her team to teach the game of football to registered participants.

Applicant will keep the child's best interest at heart.

Applicant will be expected to follow Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority policies and procedures, local league rules and association rules.

Applicant will attend scheduled games.

Applicant will attend league meetings when called to do so.

Applicant will teach and display the highest standard of sportsmanship at all times.

Desired Qualifications: Applicant should have a working knowledge of the game of football. Playing experience and past coaching experience are desirable.

Time of Day Availability Required: Applicant will be available in the evenings and on Saturdays for practices, games and meetings.

Volunteer in Youth Sports

Job Description for Softball Coach

Organization: Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority Girls Softball.

Description of Responsibilities:

Applicant will be expected to work with the Parks & Recreation and his or her team to teach the game of softball to registered participants.

Applicant will keep the child's best interest at heart.

Applicant will be expected to follow Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority policies and procedures, local league rules and association rules.

Applicant will schedule or follow league scheduled practices.

Applicant will attend scheduled games.

Applicant will attend league meetings when called to do so.

Applicant will teach and display the highest standard of sportsmanship at all times.

Desired Qualifications: Applicant should have a working knowledge of the game of softball. Playing experience and past coaching experience are desirable.

Time of Day Availability Required: Applicant will be available in the evenings and on Saturdays for practices, games and meetings.

Volunteer in Youth Sports

Job Description for Baseball Coach

Organization: Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority Baseball

Description of Responsibilities:

Applicant will be expected to work with the Parks & Recreation and his or her team to teach the game of baseball to registered participants.

Applicant will keep the child's best interest at heart.

Applicant will be expected to follow Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority policies and procedures, local league rules and association rules.

Applicant will schedule or follow league scheduled practices.

Applicant will attend scheduled games.

Applicant will attend league meetings when called to do so.

Applicant will teach and display the highest standard of sportsmanship at all times.

Desired Qualifications: Applicant should have a working knowledge of the game of baseball. Playing experience and past coaching experience are desirable.

Time of Day Availability Required: Applicant will be available in the evenings and on Saturdays for practices, games and meetings.

Volunteer in Youth Sports

Job Description for Youth Basketball Coach

Organization: Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority Youth Basketball

Description of Responsibilities:

Applicant will be expected to work with the Parks & Recreation and his or her team to teach the game of basketball to registered participants.

Applicant will keep the child's best interest at heart.

Applicant will be expected to follow Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority policies and procedures, local league rules and association rules.

Applicant will schedule or follow league scheduled practices.

Applicant will attend scheduled games.

Applicant will attend league meetings when called to do so.

Applicant will teach and display the highest standard of sportsmanship at all times.

Desired Qualifications: Applicant should have a working knowledge of the game of basketball. Playing experience and past coaching experience are desirable.

Time of Day Availability Required: Applicant will be available in the evenings and on Saturdays for practices, games and meetings.

Volunteer in Youth Sports

Job Description for Youth Tennis Coach

Organization: Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority Youth Tennis

Description of Responsibilities:

Applicant will be expected to work with the Parks & Recreation and his or her team to teach the game of tennis to registered participants.

Applicant will keep the child's best interest at heart.

Applicant will be expected to follow Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority policies and procedures, local league rules and association rules.

Applicant will schedule or follow league scheduled practices.

Applicant will attend scheduled matches.

Applicant will attend league meetings when called to do so.

Applicant will teach and display the highest standard of sportsmanship at all times.

Desired Qualifications: Applicant should have a working knowledge of the game of tennis. Playing experience and past coaching experience are desirable.

Time of Day Availability Required: Applicant will be available weekday mornings and in the evening for practices, matches and meetings.

Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation

Contact Information

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Disclaimer:

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority background check policy is a working document. Therefore, we reserve the right to make updates and changes to the policy as such updates and changes are deemed necessary.