



## KNOW YOUR VOLUNTEERS—REPORTS OF SCREENINGS

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Volunteer screening is in the news again. The [National Center for Victims of Crime](#) released a report on April 22, 2008 on its survey of the background screening processes of nonprofit organizations. The report, *Who's Lending a Hand? A National Survey of Nonprofit Volunteer Screening Practices*, shares the findings of the National Center for Victims of Crime's (NCVC) survey of 517 nonprofit human services organizations. NCVC's study identified the characteristics of organizations that regularly screen volunteers, the screening methods used, and the role the screening results had in volunteer acceptance (decision-making). The report is available on [NCVC's Web site](#).

The findings indicate a significant percentage of human services organizations still have limited volunteer screening protocols especially as respects criminal history records checks. It is an interesting read especially if you have volunteers or staff working directly with a vulnerable population.

The second study conducted by [ChoicePoint, Inc.](#) is [The Importance of Background Screenings for Nonprofits: An Updated Briefing](#) (April 2008). In this report, ChoicePoint shares the results of an audit of its completed adult background screenings for nonprofits conducted from 2002 to 2007. A review of 3.7 million completed background screenings identified over 189,000 individuals (5%) with at least one criminal conviction. The findings included over 2,700 Registered Sex Offenders, 3,900 sex-related crimes, 37,400 drug-related offenses and 651 murders.

While it can be argued that ChoicePoint's audit is self-serving since it is a background screening company, it does reflect the importance of background screening for certain volunteer and staff positions. However do not forget that it is just, if not more, important to provide the proper training and supervision of volunteers and employees to protect your service recipients. Also, background screenings based only on a name search can result in a false

positive — the person may have a record but by providing falsified information, the record check does not identify the person's criminal record. Therefore, background checks are just one tool that must be supported by other techniques to safeguard your organization and clients.

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