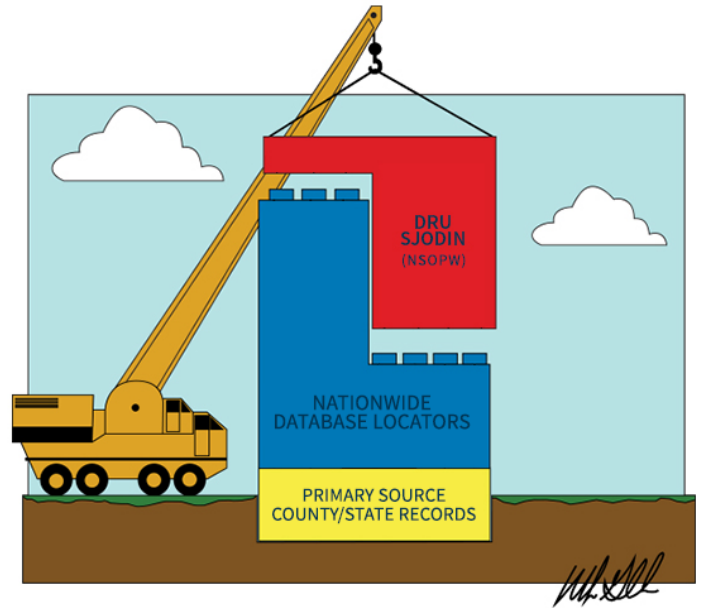


# Getting Your Volunteer Screening Right:



## USING THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE TO BUILD A BETTER BACKGROUND CHECK



Great news! Someone new is interested in volunteering with your organization. They meet your criteria and they seem to be a compatible fit. Before you welcome them to your team, you want to run a background check to confirm that they aren't too good to be true. So where do you start?

There are thousands of data sources throughout the country, including over 3,500 county databases, hundreds of state repositories, and thousands of sheriff's offices and corrections facilities. There is no centralized U.S. system that you can pull from to get comprehensive, up-to-date criminal record information from all of these sources. Instead, there are a number of screening locator tools that can be used separately or together to build a reliable background check. The more you use, the more thorough your check.

*As you read through, think of these items as building blocks. As you add more and more checks, your results become stronger and more reliable.*

### DIG DEEP ON ADDRESS HISTORY

Start where a volunteer lives. Go directly to the courthouse in their current county or state of residence – it's the only way to be certain that you have located the most up-to-date criminal records.

Accurate data from the current county or state of residence is great, but also consider these points:

- + People move. You don't want to stop with an individual's *current* place of residence. Take it back seven years to *every county or state where they have lived*.
- + People even use different names, known as alias or maiden names. Search their address history with their current name *and* any alias or maiden names they may have used or may currently be using, and then search the primary source data (county and state courthouse data) for every jurisdiction that shows up.

## FILL IN GAPS WITH NATIONWIDE CRIMINAL DATABASE LOCATORS

You have now searched each and every county and state in which your volunteer currently lives or has lived, using both their primary name and any aliases or maiden names they may have used or may currently be using. But there is nothing preventing a criminal from committing a crime one county over or even across the country. It would make sense then, for your background check to encompass *all* of the jurisdictions where your volunteer lives, works, and plays.

Make sure you run a criminal check using one or more nationwide database locators. These databases typically include courthouse data, department of corrections records, most wanted lists, and outstanding warrants. But they are far from perfect – for many reasons:

- + Nationwide databases are a snapshot in time — the information is not updated in real-time and can be months old.
- + They are also a mixed bag of records — many jurisdictions, and even entire states, don't report records at all or only submit partial records.
- + Because there is no standard for data within nationwide databases, they might contain twenty years' worth of records for some jurisdictions and two years' worth for others.

In sum, it's not uncommon for records within nationwide databases to be incomplete, inaccurate, or missing key information. Still, they can help you find records outside of the counties of residence.

Traditional nationwide databases usually rely mostly on courthouse-based **disposition** records. There is a growing trend, however, to use **arrest** record databases right from the police as a locator to find more criminal records and supplement traditional nationwide databases. This is the optimal route if you want to feel confident that records of concern are not falling through the cracks.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Use databases as a locator, but not as your ultimate source. You should ensure that your provider is validating the information at the primary source and reporting it based on the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA). This is an important step as the primary source often contains details that the database searches do not. Additionally, if you release a volunteer due to information that is not legally reportable, your organization could face legal consequences.

## FILL IN EVEN MORE GAPS WITH A SPECIALIZED SEX OFFENDER SEARCH

For an even more comprehensive search, you'll want to conduct a sex offender registry search on every volunteer applicant. The registry should be checked as a rule, but particularly if your volunteers will be working with the vulnerable sector including children, the elderly, and disabled individuals. Keep in mind that the Dru Sjodin 50 State Department of Justice Sex Offender Registry (NSOPW) is the **only** real-time, up-to-date comprehensive sex offender search. It's important to ask for the search by name as there are other national sex offender registries that contain outdated and incomplete records.

## ALL TOGETHER NOW

If you are like many volunteer programs, you'll run an enhanced nationwide database search and call it a day. Do you want to make sure you are getting the most accurate, reliable, background check report? If so, you must rely on **a combination** of screening tools. Run all of these checks for each volunteer applicant.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROVIDER

It's important to ensure that you fully understand what you are getting from your background screening provider. There are many instant and national databases that are not comprehensive and will not provide you with the level of due diligence you're looking for. If you are getting your background check reports back instantly, or paying just a few dollars, you should ask the following questions:

- + Why do my results come back almost instantly?
- + What jurisdictions does your nationwide database cover in my region, specifically my county and state? Also, how often are those records refreshed?
- + What city or state courthouses are you checking at the source on my volunteers?

Should you find out that the searches conducted are in fact instant or stale national database searches, speak with your provider or contact another provider regarding more comprehensive options. With background checks, you truly get what you pay for.

Find out more about what's lacking in nationwide database searches, what questions you should be asking, and your options for more complete, high-quality volunteer background screens.

Visit us at: [www.verifiedvolunteers.com](http://www.verifiedvolunteers.com)

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## About Verified Volunteers

Verified Volunteers helps nonprofit organizations gain confidence in the volunteers working with those they serve by delivering thorough, compliant background checks. By enabling volunteers to order, manage and share their background checks via a secure online platform, we create a community of vetted volunteers and help nonprofit organizations save time and money. Our extensive expertise in screening and compliance best practices help clients recruit the best volunteers in order to maintain a safe environment and positive reputation.

Verified Volunteers is backed by Sterling Talent Solutions, one of the world's largest background screening companies, and partnered with Points of Light, the world's largest organization dedicated to volunteer service. Visit [www.verifiedvolunteers.com](http://www.verifiedvolunteers.com).