



VolunteerMatch

VolunteerMatch Learning Center  
Advanced Practices

# Understanding Soft Risk in Volunteer Engagement

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# Agenda

- What is Soft Risk?
- Soft Risk and culture
- Identify and Minimize Soft Risk
- Help others understand Soft Risk
- Getting Started and Resources

We all think  
about hard  
risks...



And, soft  
risks don't  
sound that  
bad





But soft risks can create real and lasting challenges for your organization!

# Soft Risks are About Culture

- Lack of leadership around ethos and culture
- Groupthink and lack of self-perception
- Little or no upward communication, poor internal communication
- Top down decision making, little or no decision making or control from non-leadership roles

# Soft Risks can Happen When

- Volunteers are in the wrong role – screening policies not aligned with the work
- Training and orientation are not designed around real-life volunteer responsibilities
- Unclear where decision-making authority starts and stops
- Volunteers are poorly – or are not – supervised

# Soft Risks can Happen When

- Culture prevents correcting or disciplining bad behavior
- Policies are on paper only
- Volunteers don't have the tools or resources to find the right answer

# Minimize Soft Risk

Ensure that policies have buy-in and are enforceable

- Enforce them!

Address training and orientation outcomes

- Talk about them early and often

Outline and define each role's authority continuum

- Where does the decision making start and stop?

Provide resources and support

- What is the right answer?

# Minimize Soft Risk

## Talk about it!

- Model difficult situations or conversations
- Role play or have volunteers and paid staff switch roles

## Know who's the right person for the role

- Implement screening practices to ensure that you're making
- the right match
- Qualifications based on skills & experience

Soft risks  
don't go  
away...



# Addressing Soft Risk

- Start the conversation & create buy-in
- Identify the attitudes, actions, and behaviors that might allow soft risk
- Evaluate foundation components
- Update screening, training, and supervisory activities

# Getting Started

- Investigate where and how soft risk is happening in the work volunteers do
- Explore how the organization's culture is allowing soft risk
- Understand the role of ethics in volunteer management

# Resources & Next Steps

Soft Risk Evaluation Worksheet

Professional Ethics in Volunteer Management

<http://cvacert.org/resources-and-media/professional-ethics>

# Thank you!

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