

Volunteer Application & Background Check



INTRODUCTION:

Seattle's Union Gospel Mission (Mission) asks that all volunteers complete an application before serving. Benefits include:

- Enhanced communications for scheduling, confirming, preparing, and thanking volunteers.
- Enhanced safety, protection, and confidentiality for Mission residents, guests, volunteers, and staff. (A special focus is placed on many women, children, and youth the Mission serves, who are often the victims of domestic violence and predatory/stalking behavior.)
- Following application approval, registration to future events and activities is streamlined.
- Record keeping for volunteer services (e.g., meals, cleaning, tutoring, etc.) and hours served.
- Tracking of basic logistical information—who, what, when, & where of volunteer activities.
- Improvement of ministries and services provided to our residents and guests.
- Making the volunteer experience relational, purposeful, powerful, personal, and intentional!
- Connecting with Mission staff for scheduling, preparing, planning, debriefing, etc.
- Recruiting and matching specific volunteer skills to Mission, resident, and guest needs.
- Strengthening of Mission collaboration with other service organizations.
- Permissions to highlight, show case, and promote volunteer experiences are easily requested.

Obtaining basic volunteer information (an application profile) and completing a background check are standard practices by virtually all non-profit and service organizations operating in Washington State—schools, churches, sports teams, clubs, organizations, service providers, etc. It is a prudent, reasonable, and accepted procedure the Mission has adopted.

FAQ's:

What's the difference between applying (application) and registering (registration)?

The volunteer application is a one-time/first-time event that provides the Mission with your basic contact information, allowing us to create a volunteer profile/ID that is subsequently used by the volunteer when registering for all future events, activities, and service opportunities.

Registration occurs each time a volunteer signs up to do an actual event, activity, or service opportunity, such as: serving a meal, tutoring a student, going out on Search & Rescue, etc.

Do I need to apply AND register each time I volunteer at the Mission?

You only need to apply as a volunteer one time; this application covers any and all future Mission areas or programs where you might volunteer.

You must register for each event or activity you serve at. (if you are part of a group or serve regularly, the Mission may automatically register you, so you don't have to, but we'll let you know if this is the case!)

Why is a background check included within the volunteer application process?

We serve, rescue, and transform those in greatest need through the grace of Jesus Christ. “Those in greatest need” often include many residents and guests who are vulnerable and hurting (physically, socially, emotionally, & spiritually) during their time with us. This is especially true for many women and children. We appreciate volunteers’ understanding of our responsibility to help protect all people at the Mission.

As allowed by Washington State law, the Mission incorporates background checks into our volunteer application process to help ensure someone with an adverse history is not allowed to expose our residents, guests, staff, volunteers, and the Mission to unnecessary risk.

In addition, completing a background check concurrently with your volunteer application helps simplify and streamline your volunteer experience as well.

Will I automatically be prohibited from volunteering at the Mission if I have any adverse or negative history on my background check?

No. Each background check is reviewed and evaluated with consideration given to such things as the magnitude, timing, frequency, type of offense, and which area of the Mission you will be serving in. If negative information is disclosed in your background check, we may contact you to help review, evaluate, and determine your eligibility to serve at the present time. While it can happen, it is the exception, rather than the rule, that an individual is completely excluded from serving at the Mission.

I completed a background check at another organization or with my employer. Does the Mission still need to complete a background check as well?

Yes. As part of the Mission’s process, we must conduct our own background check. We are not allowed to rely on background checks completed by another service organization (e.g., your church, sports team, etc.).

Will the results of my background check be shared with my employer, church, or community organization?

No. The Mission’s background checks are only used by the Mission and are confidential.

Do I need to complete a volunteer application if I’m only serving one time?

Yes. We want to know you were here, even if it’s just one time.

I’m a donor. Do I need to complete a volunteer application?

Yes. We are very grateful for the multiple ways you have chosen to support the Mission. We want you to appreciate all that we do on your behalf. Protecting the Mission and its residents, guests, staff, and volunteers is one way we protect your investment with us! For very practical reasons—e.g., tracking hours—it also helps us to know who’s volunteering on any given day. Furthermore, you help set a high standard for all Mission supporters to follow!

I’m volunteering as part of a workgroup/company event. Do I need to complete a volunteer application?

Yes. Having a volunteer profile for every person helps us keep track of the “who, when, where, and how much” for all volunteers.

I'm a long-time volunteer. Do I need to complete a volunteer application?

Yes. We want to be sure we have all volunteers in our system. Updating your application profile helps ensure that our new volunteer system (software) is complete, accurate, and up-to-date.

I'm a minor. (aka: I'm just a kid!) Do I need to complete a volunteer application?

If you are 13 or older, you must complete a volunteer application.

If you are younger than 13, you can complete a volunteer application, but are not required to do so.

Having an application profile for every person registered, regardless of age, helps us keep track of who, when, and where ALL volunteers are serving. There is no question that children and youth are energetic, enthusiastic, and productive volunteers. We want to value and recognize their support. In addition, many students are now required/expected to perform community service hours for school, clubs, scholarship applications, etc.—having a volunteer profile helps assure an accurate, up-to-date record of the volunteer hours you have served.

In addition, having volunteer applications on file for all volunteers, regardless of age, assists us in managing group sizes for safety purposes. (e.g., Fire Marshall requirements limit the total number of people at certain sites, inclusive of volunteers and their young children that are attending.)

I am not going to be interacting with children, residents, or guests. Do I still need to complete an application?

Yes. While you may be serving in an area or at a time that does not have direct contact with children, residents, or guests, it is quite possible that unscheduled interactions or interactions with people from other organizations will occur. (Many of our facilities are shared with other organizations and/or programs.)

In addition, we have discovered—to our delight and theirs—that many “one-time” volunteers are quickly captured by their experience and want to return and volunteer more. So, simply put, it is more practical to have the application and background screening done the very first time any individual volunteers.

Do you provide any insurance to volunteers?

In 2016, the Mission started providing medical coverage through Washington State's Department of Labor and Industry (L&I), subject to terms and conditions of their insurance programs and provisions for volunteers. We are pleased to offer this volunteer benefit.