



The Mountaineers Youth Policies for Youth in Adult Programs FAQ

From: Becca Polglase, Education Manager

To: Volunteer Leaders

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Background

The Mountaineers has established new policies, training and procedures for volunteers who work with youth who participate in adult programs. The Mountaineers Board, staff and volunteers recognize that allowing youth into adult programs has significant benefits for the youth and The Mountaineers. In fact several famous and notable climbers learned to climb as a youth in an adult program- Jim and Lou Whittaker, John Roskelley and Mike Gauthier to name a few. They credit their participation in adult programs as a major factor in the success of their training and an influence on their future career and life direction. As such, the purpose of these new practices is NOT to discourage youth participation, but to ensure that the proper practices are in place for both youth and adult leaders, so both can have a safe and positive experience. From a risk management perspective, these new practices are imperative. Our goal is to minimize burden to the volunteer leader, but it does require a few extra steps be completed by the volunteer leader before a youth can participate in an adult program. For the benefit of the youth, we hope you will work with us to learn and adopt these new practices and also offer feedback on ways we can streamline or improve the process.

Why are we doing this?

With the explosive growth of our youth programming we took a hard look at the policies and practices we have to protect kids across our organizations in youth programs and in adult programs. It was determined that we need to institute updated practices and policies to meet the standard of care established by other organizations that serve youth. We researched best practices from organizations such as Boy Scouts, YMCA, Boys and Girls club and Girls on the Run. We gained a better understanding of what the risks are in working with youth and how we can better protect both youth and our leaders. We have developed a new set of practices that we feel will provide the proper level of protection while trying to minimize burden to volunteers. Our recent research and learnings have revealed the need for these practices and while they will clearly protect youth, they also protect our volunteer leaders by giving them the information needed to work safely and effectively with youth and avoid accusations of misbehavior.

What does this mean for Committee Chairs?

If you do not currently allow youth in your program or work with youth in an adult program it won't affect you. However, if you would like to encourage youth participation and work with youth then you need to ensure that your leaders and regular volunteers are Qualified Youth Leaders. We recommend that Committee Chairs become Qualified Youth Leaders so that they can help their leaders understand the process.

What is a qualified youth leader?

A qualified youth leader is a leader who is qualified to work with youth either in our youth programs or in our adult programs.

What do I need to do to become a qualified youth leader? What will the process be for getting qualified?

Becoming a Qualified Youth Leader is a simple, four-step process.

1. First, download a copy of the Working with Youth Manual by [clicking this link](#) and opening the document titled "**Board Policy Youth Manual Nov 2012.pdf**". Or pick up a hard copy of the manual at the Mountaineers Program Center in Seattle or Tacoma. Read this manual carefully.
2. Email Becca Polglase beccap@mountaineers.org and let her know that you would like to become a Qualified Youth Leader.
3. **You will receive an email from DocuSign** indicating that there is a form waiting for your signature. This form confirms that you have read the Working with Youth Manual and gives us your authorization to complete a background check.
4. After we receive your signed and submitted form, **you will receive an email from TalentWise** asking you to enter your personal information into the background check system. This should take no more than 5 minutes. Communications from TalentWise may refer to "credit reports," "pre-employment screening," or your "application." We can't change their terms, but we interpret "pre-employment" as "pre-volunteering" and "application" as "volunteer registration". Please read "employment" as "volunteering" and "application" as "registration." The Mountaineers will not actually request credit reports, and will not have any visibility to your credit history.

Does it need to happen every year?

No. But we will be renewing background checks every 3 years and we expect volunteer leaders to reference the manual as needed to ensure they are adhering to our procedures.

When does a qualified youth leader need to be present?

For any activity that involves youth at least one qualified leader must be present at all times. Any leader who has the probable opportunity to be alone with a youth participating in an adult program needs to be qualified. Another way to think about it: at all times there must be one qualified youth leader if youth is present AND other leaders also need to be qualified if the activity is such that there is a high likelihood that the other leaders working with youth will be separated

and out of view of main group. However, when there is little opportunity for the group to disperse, then only one leader needs to be qualified. Using this principle, use your best judgment to determine who needs to be qualified and which programs require a qualified leader. When in doubt, we recommend that the main leader get qualified and we have made the process as simple as possible.

Who needs to be background checked?

Any volunteer who will regularly have access to a youth in your program. There is a specific reason for this: criminals and *especially* sexual predators gain access to youth by building strong trusting relationships with them. There is an enormous amount of data showing clear predatory patterns. Predators, abusers and other criminals seldom commit an act during a public program. Rather they build strong trusting relationships with youth, who are then willing to meet them outside of the program, or even just ride in their car. Our volunteers are in a position of power because they are instructors. We also have such great success as an organization specifically because of the incredible relationships we build. We *value* strong trusting relationships and want to continue to do so. Therefore, we must background check anyone who volunteers enough to have the opportunity to build that relationship with a youth, regardless of how well we know them and how much we trust them. Predators and abusers are smart, and usually people we would never expect.

Note: unless a volunteer specifically asks to be background-checked only, we will send the full paperwork to become a Qualified Youth Leader. It behooves us to have as many Qualified Youth Leaders as possible within the organization, and most volunteers are grateful for the information and willing to sign that they've read the manual. However, assuming a group atmosphere where a Qualified Youth Leader is present, volunteers need only complete the background check.

My program has 30 volunteers and I can't control who is with the youth - do all 30 need to be Qualified Youth Leaders?

Probably not. This is where your judgment comes into play. The key question to ask yourself is "does this person have an opportunity to build a strong trusting relationship with this youth?" Any volunteer who is just helping one day with your course probably does not need to be a Qualified Youth Leader, unless they will specifically be working one-on-one with the youth in your program. Here are some steps that can help you manage youth in your programs:

1. Invite all of your key volunteers to become Qualified Youth Leaders. Tell them it's not a requirement, but the more you have, the more helpful that will be. You will probably find that a good number are happy to do it.
2. Identify which of your regular instructors are Qualified Youth Leaders, and ask them to make sure that one of them is with the youth (in earshot) at all times. This will help ensure that the youth builds the strongest relationships with Qualified Youth Leaders.

A common example: In a field trip where students rotate stations, put one Qualified Youth Leader in each station. When the student arrives at the station, that Qualified Youth Leader can say hello and invite the youth to work with them.

How do I know if a volunteer is a Qualified Youth Leader?

Once a volunteer has completed the process, we enter them on the website as “graduated” from Qualified Youth Leader. On your roster, you can click on the name of a volunteer, and the pop-up box will show that they’ve graduated:

Roster detail for Becca Polglase
ID: [REDACTED]
Member Status: Member

Becca Polglase
Seattle, WA, 98117

Home Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: beccap@mountaineers.org

Waiver Expires: Aug 28 2013

Enrolled In:
2010 - Avalanche Level 1 - Foothills
2011 - Basic Navigation - Seattle
2010 - Avalanche Awareness - Foothills
2011 - Outdoor Leadership - Seattle
2011 - MOFA / First Aid Equivalency - Seattle
2011 - Intermediate Climbing - Seattle

Graduated From:
2011 - Basic Climbing - Seattle
2011 - Crag Climbing - Seattle
1900 - Avalanche Awareness Equivalency - Foothills
1900 - Basic Background Check
1900 - MOFA / First Aid Equivalency - Tacoma
2012 - Qualified Youth Leader

Home Phone	Email Address	Branch
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	SEA <input type="checkbox"/>

Home Phone	Email Address	Branch
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	SEA <input type="checkbox"/>
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	SEA <input type="checkbox"/>
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	SEA <input type="checkbox"/>
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	SEA <input type="checkbox"/>
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	SFB <input type="checkbox"/>

Select/deselect group

Becca Polglase ✕
Kurt I. Williams ✕
Alkinoos Hector Vayanos ✕
Chris Chapin ✕

How do I know if a youth is enrolled in my program?

Our website has several new features to help us identify youth before a program starts.

When enrolling in an activity, we ask participants to self-disclose that they are over 18 OR have gotten prior permission from the leader:

Register yourself or another person for this activity

Are you registering for:

- Asst. Leader / Rope Leader (Waitlist)
- Participant Registration

Registrant Info

Becca Polglase
Seattle, WA 98117

Notes (if requested by leader)

I certify that I am 18 year old or older or have obtained the leader’s permission, and that I have read and understand the **Activity Preparation Guidelines**.

REGISTER

When a youth signs up for a program, they show up on the roster as under 18.

SECRET	
Sarah Hale	SEA
Roy Richard Robertson	SEA
Amar Sagare	SEA
Jonathan Costa ** Under 18 **	SFB
Andrew Armstrong Lawson	SEA
Amy Sterner	SEA
Jeff Underwood	SEA
Lisa Remlinger	SEA
James Sonsalla	SEA

Do I have to allow youth on my trips or courses?

No. Allowing youth participation is optional but we do recognize the value of allowing youth to participate and we hope you will work with us to make it possible.

What if I don't want youth in my activity?

We respect our leaders' wishes to have activities that are for adults only. If this is the case for you, we encourage you to note in the leaders notes: "this activity is for adults age 18+"

How does a youth participant know what activities are available to them?

There are two things leaders can do to make youth aware of which activities are or are not available to them. For those who are Qualified Youth Leaders and are open to youth registering for an activity, there is a “youth welcome” option in the “other info” drop-down box when setting up your activity.

Get Outside & Explore

Learn

Conserve

Youth & Family

Community

Lodges & Centers

Volunteer

Schedule an Activity

Step 1 »

Step 2

Step 3

Step 4



Activity: Boston Basin

To view help information for a field below, click on the ? icon

Begin Date * (mm/dd/yyyy) ?



End Date *(mm/dd/yyyy)



Branch * ?

Committee * ?

Leader's Name * ?

[Find activity leader](#)

Registration Options ?

- Leader Permission Required
- Registration Through Leader
- No Registration required

Meeting Time ?

Meeting Place

Participant Capacity ?

Leader Capacity

Total Activity Capacity

Pace ?

Other Info ?

Approved for Credit ?

By choosing this, “youth welcome” will show up on the Activity Search page, so youth will know immediately that they can sign up for that activity.

If you do not want youth in your activity, we recommend that you mention “For Adults ages 18+ only” in the leader notes.

How do we handle overnight trips with youth in adult courses?

Youth may sleep with their parent or guardian but cannot sleep with any other adult in a tent. Youth must sleep alone or with other youth of the same gender when tenting. The Seattle staff is working on getting bivy sacks that can be loaned to programs that need youth to sleep solo. If the overnight trip is to a lodge, yurt or other structure youth may sleep with adults if they have their own bed-i.e. their own bunk bed in a lodge for example.

I am concerned that we may turn youth away because of lack of qualified volunteers.

It is true that leaders can decide not to allow youth in their course if they choose not to become qualified. However, our goal is not to create barriers but to institute practices that are minimal burden to the leader but will protect the youth and leader. Over time we'd like to build up a corps of qualified leaders so this will become a non issue.

If parents or guardians are present does there still need to be a qualified youth leader?

Yes there needs to be a qualified youth leader. The parent may or may not have appropriate control/supervision over the child, and the parent is not going to have any responsibility to other participants on the trip. Parents don't necessarily have training in how to protect their child. The parents may be distracted by their own activities on the trip and not be sufficiently aware of what the child is doing. The leader is still the leader and needs to have the same procedures in place, whether the parent is there or not. The parent will obviously have the last word regarding care of their own child, but the leader still needs to be qualified.

What additional responsibility is involved in being a qualified youth leader?

Any individual who works with youth needs to be aware of WA state law that requires mandatory reporting. Whenever anyone works with an individual under the age of 18 they have an obligation to report any suspicion of abuse or neglect. These requirements are WA state law and are independent of any Mountaineers policy. Our goal is to educate leaders on these requirements so that you understand what is required of you by WA state law when youth are present. This is outlined in the manual.

How does this process stack up against other organizations?

We looked at Boy Scouts, YMCA, Girls on the Run, and Colorado Mt club. This is comparable but we tried to tailor it to address the needs of our volunteer leaders and to reduce any burden to them. We are relatively unique. We were unable to find other organizations that both allow youth in adult programs and use volunteer leaders to the extent we do.

About the Background Check:

Why TalentWise?

While we used to run Washington State Criminal Background checks, we now know that that is not detailed enough. There is plenty of data showing that people with criminal backgrounds tend to move frequently. Thus a Washington State Criminal Background check is insufficient and a national check is necessary. There are many companies out there to provide that service, and Mountaineers staff thoroughly investigated our options, aiming for accuracy and cost-effectiveness. TalentWise, which receives glowing reviews from Big Brothers/Big Sisters, among others, conducts national criminal background checks and national sex offender checks, as well as other checks that we opt out of. Personal information is used one-time only. Prospective volunteers can contact TalentWise customer service at 1-877-893-1665, and read their privacy policies at <https://www.talentwise.com/screening/support.php?view=supportfaq>.

In order to complete the background check, I'm required to submit my Social Security number. I'm worried about identity theft. How can I be sure my information is secure?

In working with TalentWise, we opted to have them email you directly so that you can input your Social Security number straight into their system. That way The Mountaineers never has access to your SS#, thereby minimizing the number of places it goes. When entering things online, you should always be sure to check the URL. An http:// site is not secure. An https:// site is secure. When you are entering your SS# on TalentWise or anywhere else, be sure the URL starts with https://. We asked TalentWise how long they store peoples' Social Security number, and in fact they do not. Once they

run the check, they delete all but the last four digits of your SS# from their system, and only retain the results of your background check.

What records are you checking?

TalentWise runs a Social Security number check to verify that the name you entered matches your Social Security number, and also finds any other names (aliases) associated with that Social Security Number. In many cases a maiden name would be listed. This is an important step because criminals often use aliases to get access to things they otherwise would not be granted access to. TalentWise then checks all names associated with your SS# against all 50 states' (plus DC and Puerto Rico) sex offender registries. They then do the same with criminal records in all available jurisdictions in all states in the US.

Who has access to my background check information?

Your information is kept offsite in our vendor's secure data system. Unless necessary for the safety of our members, information will not be shared beyond the 2 staff people who will review it to determine if you qualify for youth leadership. They will keep their findings confidential.

Can I see my background check?

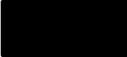
Yes! When you are entering your information in TalentWise, you have the option to click a box to receive a copy of your background check results.

What does the information The Mountaineers receive look like?

Rebecca Bronwyn Polglase Candidate View

Report: Rebecca Bronwyn Polglase		Select an Action... 	
Requested by	Marjorie Kittle The Mountaineers (206) 521-6008	Report Status	Complete
Package Title	Standard Screening Package	Request Submitted	Jun 20, 2012 3:27 pm
		Report Completed	Jun 20, 2012 3:27 pm
		Completion Time	Less than 1 minute
Report ID	63441589	Address	
Name	Rebecca Bronwyn Polglase		
Social Security Number	xxx-xx-xxxx		
Date of Birth			
	Report Contents	Complete	Status
1	SSN Trace		Success
2	Nationwide Sex Offender Registry Check		Clear
3	Multi-State Instant Criminal Check With Verification		Clear

1 SSN Trace

SSN	xxx-xx-xxxx
State Issued	
Date Issued	
Primary Name Searched	REBECCA POLGLASE
	 Success: Full name matches SSN.
AKA Results	The following AKA(s) were found for this candidate. AKAs may include maiden names, aliases, or family and household members associated with the candidate. AKAs may also reflect misspelled or fraudulent names in records.
	1. B REBECCA

2 Nationwide Sex Offender Registry Check

Search Description	We have searched for the candidate in the sex offender registries of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.
Result	Clear No records were found. Positive or false matches within a criminal search may not provide confirmation of a criminal background.

3 Multi-State Instant Criminal Check With Verification

Search Description	Using the candidate's name and date of birth, we have searched case, sentencing, disposition, and other criminal-related records for all available jurisdictions in the United States.
Result	Clear No records were found. Positive or false matches within a criminal search may not provide confirmation of a criminal background.

— END OF REPORT —

In the event that a volunteer does not clear one of the checks, the nature of their criminal records would appear on this screen.

What happens to volunteers who do not pass their background check?

Volunteers who do not clear the Sex Offender check and volunteers who have serial or violent criminal history will not be allowed to work with youth in any Mountaineers program. Failure to adhere to these policies will result in termination of that volunteer's membership. Volunteers who clear the Sex Offender check and have a criminal history that is neither violent nor serial will be dealt with case-by-case. Whatever the case, the Executive Director would have a discussion with that volunteer.