U.S. NONPROFIT SAFEGUARDING
Crosswalk Project

Safeguarding Quick Start

Six basic safeguards for nonprofits that serve people directly — a two-page starting point

October 2026 · Free under CC BY 4.0 · Not legal advice · info@pseacrosswalk.org

Nonprofits help people who often have nowhere else to turn — for food, shelter, counseling, or a mentor for their child. That dependence gives an organization's staff and volunteers a kind of power over the people they serve. Safeguarding is how an organization makes sure that power is not misused by its own people — and what it does when someone raises a concern.

U.S. law requires these only in certain settings, for certain groups, or under certain grants; most nonprofits decide for themselves. In a 2026 review of 100 Washington nonprofits that serve people directly, 66 showed none of the six basic safeguards below on their websites. Each safeguard below points to the free template that sets it up; **$0** means no spending, only staff or volunteer time.

Safeguard	What it looks like in practice	Where to find it
1. A written policy $0	A short policy, adopted by your board, that says the organization protects the people it serves from exploitation, abuse, and harassment by its own staff and volunteers — and how. *Example: a food bank's board adopts a four-section starter policy at one meeting.*	Policy Template (starter: Sections 1–3 and 6)
2. Clear rules of conduct $0	Written rules every staff member and volunteer signs: no sexual contact with participants, nothing exchanged for help, no private contact with children outside the program — in person or online. *Example: a mentoring program adds "no one-to-one texting with a youth participant outside the program's own channel."*	Policy Template, Section 3
3. A visible way to raise a concern $0	At least two ways for a participant, a parent, or a staff member to report a concern — one that does not go through the person providing their services — posted where services happen, in the languages participants use; anonymous reports accepted. *Example: a notice at intake with a name, a phone number, and an email.*	Policy Template, Section 6, and the Participant Charter (Annex B)
4. Background checks (fees may apply for criminal history checks)	Before anyone starts a role with unsupervised or recurring contact with participants: a free check of the National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW.gov), two reference checks that ask directly about safeguarding concerns, and the criminal history check your state or funders require. *Example: a shelter asks every reference: "Any concern about this person working with vulnerable adults?"*	Policy Template, Section 4
5. Training $0	A one-hour orientation your own staff deliver before anyone starts: the rules, the warning signs, how to report. A short refresher once a year. *Example: a 60-minute session at the next volunteer onboarding.*	Training Outlines, Sessions 1 and 2

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6. A named lead — and an alternate $0	One person the board names, in writing, to receive and act on concerns — including a report about a manager — and an alternate for concerns about that person or the executive director. *Example: the program director as the lead and a board member as the alternate.*	Policy Template, Section 6

Where do you stand? Six questions

Each question checks one of the six safeguards above, in the same order. Answer yes only if it is true today and you could show it — a document, a signed form, a posted notice.

	Question	Yes	No
1	Has your board adopted a written policy that covers how staff and volunteers treat the people you serve — not only how employees treat each other?	☐	☐
2	Does every staff member and volunteer sign rules of conduct toward participants?	☐	☐
3	Can a participant raise a concern without going through the person who provides their services — and is that way posted where services happen?	☐	☐
4	Is everyone who works directly with participants screened before they start — NSOPW.gov, two references, and the criminal history check your state or funders require?	☐	☐
5	Do all new staff and volunteers get safeguarding training before they begin?	☐	☐
6	Has the board named, in writing, a lead and an alternate to receive concerns?	☐	☐

- **If you answered yes to all six,** you have the basics. To check everything else, use the full Self-Assessment, one of the free tools listed below.
- **If you answered no to a question,** you still need that safeguard. Set it up using the template named for it in the table above, working from the top of the table down.

Next step: the full toolkit

These six safeguards are a starting point, not a complete safeguarding system. Four free tools (CC BY 4.0) add the rest, from responding to a report to records and an annual review. Download them at **pseacrosswalk.org/toolkit.html**:

- **Policy Template:** a complete safeguarding policy your board can adapt and adopt.
- **Self-Assessment:** 32 indicators to see where your organization stands (about an hour).
- **Training Outlines:** ready-to-use sessions for staff and volunteers.
- **Adopter Feedback Form:** tell us what worked and what did not.

Updates: we improve the tools over time and post every update at pseacrosswalk.org/toolkit.html, so please check back. **Feedback:** tell us what works and what is missing at info@pseacrosswalk.org, or ask for a call.

This page is not legal advice or a compliance check; have a lawyer in your state review your policy.

Sources: the Research and Baseline Study pages at pseacrosswalk.org.