

Screening Made Easy

For ISKCON NA Centers & Projects The How-To Guide for Conducting Background Checks

Who to Screen?

All ISKCON leaders (GBCs, gurus, temple presidents, project directors and managers etc.) are obliged to follow the guidelines for screening **those who live on ISKCON property and serve with our temples, schools, farms, and other projects.**

ISKCON law February 1998

The Central Office will develop systems and policies for hiring/ screening throughout ISKCON (**who stays in our ashrams, works for us, teaches in our schools, and becomes an initiated disciple**). Such screening will be mandatory for all ISKCON centers, educational projects, etc...

ISKCON Child Protection Policy and Operational Guidelines, page 30

Management Responsibility:

Employ appropriate screening and evaluative techniques to assure the fitness of all residents, clergy, personnel and volunteers serving in positions of trust, including CPO clearance, with a strong recommendation that criminal background check and contacting references are carried out.

ISKCON Child Protection Policy and Operational Guidelines, page 10

How to Screen?

There are three essential components:

1. Obtaining a written application
2. Conducting background checks:
 - a) CPO clearance;
 - b) Criminal record check;
 - c) Contact references (e.g., work, personal, internet search, social media check)
3. Interview the applicant

This is the CPO recommended process for screening residents, employees, management and volunteers who serve in positions of trust at ISKCON centers or projects.

1. Written Application

The written application collects information for immediate and long-term use. A sample application designed for a variety of needs is available from the CPO.

Make sure all information is complete on the application before moving on to the next step.

* If someone is unwilling to go through the background check process it may be a sign of concern.

2. Conducting a Background Check

It is important to do a comprehensive background check on all residents, employees, and volunteers who serve in positions of trust and authority. This is done with information gathered from the written application.

a) Child Protection Office Clearance

To obtain CPO clearance, the devotee in charge of screening for your temple/center /project can go to this link and submit the 5 pieces of information below: <https://forms.gle/huy7o8RmotL8V4aV7>
Do not give this link to the applicant. It is for management use only.

- 1) Initiated Name/ AKA
- 2) Legal Name
- 3) Age/Date of Birth
- 4) Initiating Guru's Name (when applicable)
- 5) Country of Origin (where they are from)

ISKCON CPO records will be checked to see if there has been a child maltreatment complaint or case regarding the applicant. You, the person in charge of screening who has submitted this request, will receive an email reply from the CPO with the result.

b) Criminal Background Check – domestic or international

Your temple/project can set up a branch account through the NACPO with Trusted Employees. The base package includes searches of: national criminal records; county court documents for the address(es) you provide; the national sex offender registry; and Social Security number verification. You can add other items if you want such as DMV if the applicant will be driving temple vehicles.

Information required to conduct the domestic criminal background check:

- 1) Legal Name
- 2) Birth Date
- 3) Address history - 7 years minimum
- 4) Social Security Number - use for this check only then delete from your records, unless they are an employee and you need to retain it. If the applicant wants to put in their own SS# there is a link to do so.
- 5) Signed consent to run the background check

All of this information is on page 1 and 4 of the sample application provided by the CPO.

- Background checks run through a branch account with the CPO (using one county) cost approximately \$20 per person within the U.S. Additional counties may add to the cost depending on the county. The more extensive the search the more complete your results so adding counties is recommended. Please note some counties, e.g. in N.Y. and Hawaii charge significantly more to run criminal background checks. You can get a list of those who add fees from Trusted Employees.
- International background check costs vary per country as does the information needed to perform the check. Trusted Employees is set up to do both domestic and international checks. Contact them directly when running an international check.
- Generally the applicant pays the cost, unless the temple/center/project chooses to absorb this cost.
- This investment of time and money into reducing liability is minuscule compared to the potential financial and spiritual costs to your project and ISKCON if someone abuses a child, steals, or creates any number of other disturbances that could have been prevented by implementing these simple steps to make an informed decision about who you are engaging in service.

- You may choose to use a company other than Trusted Employees to run criminal background checks for your center if you prefer however, make sure all items listed above are included in the package you get. Setting up a branch account for your temple through the CPO is an option that provides you benefits such as direct access to your criminal background checks at a low cost, enables transfer of this responsibility to someone else at your center seamless, and more.

c) Contacting References

References should be non-relatives that the applicant has served/worked under or with, such as a supervisor, temple manager, team leader or department head. Call at least 3 references. It is ideal if you speak with someone you trust who knows the character of the applicant.

Temple management needs to be aware of the history of those serving in trusted positions or living on ISKCON property. Friends and relatives are not appropriate references. The guru of the applicant may not be in a position to give the kind of candid information the temple/project management requires.

The internet is also a place to gather information about the applicant, e.g Google search, social media.

3. Interview the Applicant

Talking with the volunteer/employee directly helps you ascertain their nature and ensure the arrangement is a good fit for both the center and the applicant. This is an opportunity to go over information given in the written application and discuss questions, concerns, interests and expectations on both sides.

Taking the time to talk can result in fewer problems or misunderstandings later, a more harmonious service relationship in the long run, as well as more productivity. Rather than simply putting the person in where you need help, there can be a view to placing the applicant in service according to their strengths, abilities and interests while simultaneously avoiding any ill-fitting service position.

Designate someone to do interviewing of applicants

Interviews generally take place in the presence of 2 parties. The designated devotee(s) should speak with anyone wanting to stay at an ISKCON center.

If it is for a single night, the person should be able to provide some references. If the devotee or guest is allowed to stay overnight, basic information: name, address, phone number, etc..., should be obtained, as well as making a photocopy of their driver's license or other identification. It is always good policy to check with ISKCON CPO to find out if there has been any complaint or case regarding the individual. *See CPO Clearance above.*

ISKCON centers are not hotels or crash pads. They are private property. Management has the right to decline overnight stay to anyone, whether it is because they did not give notice ahead of time, did not pass the check or are not a good fit for your center.

A non-discriminatory screening policy is essential. Screening old and young, new or known, male or female, etc... is the most appropriate and effective standard. Selective screening weakens the system, can cause devotees to feel singled out and can diminish the faith devotees have in its efficacy.

* During the adoption of this process, established members of ISKCON have the opportunity to set the example of raising the bar to a more responsible way of handling employees, volunteers and residents through their own compliance with this policy. Their cooperation and participation is appreciated.

If there is someone with experience in Human Resources at your temple, this service may be a good fit for them to help your temple with this process. Reasons for screening extend beyond child protection concerns.

*** **Social Security Numbers***** For the security of the applicant, it is strongly advised **NOT** to keep Social Security numbers on file. Block out after use. It is intended for one time use, unless needed for employment purposes by the center.

All applications should be kept in a locking file cabinet or password protected site for reference of important personnel information and for future reference in the event an issue/complaint/allegation arises.

Questions? Contact the Child Protection Office at 352-575-0780 or Info@SafeTemple.org.