

Center for Spiritual Living Tucson

Background Checks

Policy Statement - Criminal Background Checks

Center for Spiritual Living Tucson provides spiritual tools that improve lives and make the world a better place. One of those tools is responsible stewardship. Therefore, anyone who comes into contact with money or finances or works with anyone in the congregation who is a child, elderly, or otherwise vulnerable, will be screened and pass a criminal background check, prior to working in these functions. CSLT is committed to a policy of zero tolerance for sexual or physical abuse of children and the vulnerable.

What is a Background Check?

There are three elements of an effective background check:

1. a criminal background check
2. obtaining at least 3 confidential references
3. a personal interview

Public and private records can be searched once applicant consent is given. Each of these three elements helps identify whether an individual has anything in his/her background that would pose any danger to children or the vulnerable. While no background screening is perfect, these 3 elements, when combined together, help a ministry demonstrate that it has used reasonable care and diligence in selecting those who serve.

All CSLT employees, staff and volunteers are required to pass a criminal background check, which includes Social Security Number Verification, National Criminal Search and Sexual Predator/Offender Registries Search. The other two elements and the child safety training (referred to below) are optional.

Why Do Background Checks?

Spiritual Centers have a moral and legal obligation to provide a safe environment. Therefore, knowing whether a potential volunteer has been involved in criminal activity (such as drug or other substance abuse, reckless behavior, dishonesty, theft, or dangerous and violent behaviors) allows the Center to determine if a volunteer is appropriate for a volunteer role. The public, the courts, and regulatory agencies expect extra vigilance during the selection process of those dealing with the infirm, the elderly, and children, all three of whom are considered vulnerable. Providing a safe environment for all attendees, or those served, naturally follows suit.

A ministry that serves those who are vulnerable has the obligation to exercise "due diligence" with regards to protecting its constituents. By performing background checks the ministry is...

- putting up a safeguard at the "doorway" of the organization that will, in most cases, scare off sexual predators, and
- offering peace of mind to discerning parents when choosing a spiritual community, by knowing the ministry is being pro-active in trying to protect the children.

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One benefit of background checks is an increased quality of volunteers. The screening process discourages applicants who are trying to hide something and increases applications from people who want to work in a safe and respectful environment.

An Invasion of Privacy?

Some people feel that background checks are an invasion of privacy. In fact, background checks are responsible stewardship for the organization. Just like airport screenings, this does not mean that the Center doesn't trust everybody who would come on board. Instead, it would be foolish not to use available technology to cheaply and easily screen and identify those few who could inflict harm.

It is important to ask oneself: "What if I were in a vulnerable situation? Would I trust my Center to take care of my privacy? Would I want my Center to make sure anyone who comes into my house or cares for my child does everything it can to protect me and mine?"

Background Checks Address Special Concerns of Non-Profits

Unlike their for-profit counterparts, non-profits often have a corps of volunteers who represent their organization and their respective causes in the eyes of the public. Indeed, in many cases there is little difference in the eyes of the public or the law between employees and volunteers who perform essential functions of an organization. Therefore, volunteers should be screened just as carefully as employees who would be performing similar roles.

Anyone who handles confidential personal information potentially places her/his Center at significant risk for negligence. Courts have repeatedly upheld the idea that organizational leaders have a duty to exercise reasonable care in utilizing individuals who, because of the nature of their role, may pose a threat to the public.

Regarding Access to Residences and Living Quarters

Centers with volunteers who have access to residences and living quarters have a moral and legal obligation to ensure a safe environment for its constituents. Knowing whether a potential volunteer has been involved in criminal or other inappropriate activity allows the Center to determine if an individual is suitable for this type of service.

Child Safety Training

To succeed in the goal of protecting a ministry and its constituents from the risks of abuse and allegations of abuse, child safety training is also available. Understanding the basic principles of sound child protection and procedures is a sound beginning for youth volunteers. Child Safety Training is available to accomplish this task. This training is designed to accomplish two main objectives. First, protecting the Center and its volunteers from inadvertently putting themselves in a position where they could be subject to a false claim of abuse. Following effective procedures will prevent such situations from arising. Second, children will be better protected against potential

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abusers when sound procedures and training are in place. Equipping all those who serve - employees, staff, and volunteers with sound training will lead to an atmosphere of appropriate vigilance in which children will be protected against perpetrators.

Negative Publicity can Cripple a Non-Profit

Many non-profits promote important causes or serve a special constituency. Bad publicity caused by an errant employee or volunteer can severely damage that organization's reputation among its funding sources, the public, and its constituency. This negative impact on funding and reputation can cripple an organization. Background checks greatly reduce the likelihood of bad publicity.

Who is Protect My Ministry?

CSLT's background checks are compiled by Protect My Ministry, a ministry background check company. It is one of the only background check companies that offers a "true" 50 state search on sexual offenders and a free "re-verification" of records from the national criminal database. The reasoning behind the re-verification is explained in the next section.

Protect My Ministry background checks are performed on secure sites and the online systems are tucked away in secure servers and locations with offsite backups. Protect My Ministry is a Christian-owned and operated business, being 51% business and 49% ministry. This business was started as the co-owners noticed that churches did not really understand what they needed for background checks or truly what they were getting.

What about Errors?

Mistakes can and do occur in background checks. After all, the information in a background check was created, compiled, maintained, searched, and reported by fallible individuals. CSLT leadership will give applicants the opportunity to review negative information before any adverse action is taken. If errors are found on a background check, it is likely that the applicant will need to contact that source of the information (employer, school, court clerk, etc.) and request the information be corrected. Protect My Ministry will perform a "re-verification of records" and reissue the report.

How long does it take for the background checks?

Turnaround time on submitted requests is typically within two days. The industry standard is 72 hours.

Implementing a Screening Policy

Volunteer screening, including background checks is a critical part of an effective abuse & molestation risk management plan. The following guidelines (attached) are typical for a background check program:



MINISTRY MOBILIZER

Paperless Risk Management Solution

GUIDELINES	EXPLANATION	PAPERLESS SOLUTION
1. Have a written screening policy.	It should be included in any organization's policies and procedures, and communicated to everyone.	Publish your policies and obtain agreements from your volunteers online.
2. Provide job descriptions for every position.	Doing so creates boundaries for volunteers, who should be required to read, sign and date the written descriptions.	Publish your own job descriptions and obtain agreement from your volunteers online.
3. Obtain completed application forms for all positions.	Required information should include name, address, references and employers. Insist that every potential volunteer complete a form, regardless of how desperate the organization is for "warm bodies."	Collect the application forms and store them securely online.
4. Obtain a signed and dated consent form.	This informs volunteers of investigations into their backgrounds and protects an organization against potential invasion-of-privacy claims by having volunteers authorize the checks.	Collect the authorizations and store them securely online.
5. Review references and employer information.	This helps determine whether the volunteer possesses the basic necessities for a given position.	Collect references and keep notes of your discussions online.
6. Interview the applicant.	Develop a standard routine to save time and allow for consistency. Don't be afraid to ask tough questions.	Ask interview and/or screening questions online.
7. Conduct a criminal background check.	If resources are scarce, ask your coaches to help pay for background checks.	Built-in background checks. Securely collect credit card information from volunteers online.
8. Review procedures and provide continuous oversight of volunteers.	Evaluate screening results and determine what makes a particular volunteer undesirable. Document decisions, and periodically evaluate a volunteer's performance.	Background reports are reviewed and scored for you, plus get re-screen reminders.
9. Provide training for all volunteers and hold them accountable.	Make your volunteers complete the necessary training for the position and hold them accountable. For positions that involve interaction with youth they should receive Child Safety Training.	Volunteers take your online child safety training, quiz, and receive certificates of training.

A background check program following these guidelines should help to avoid any issues, and should any arise, establish a legal defense by showing that the league exercised due diligence. If you choose to manage the entire process or part of it with Ministry Mobilizer, you will save time and money.