



NATIONAL SCREENING BUREAU

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Screening means casting a net of protection,
by Kelly Durie

Protect your congregation; church and community from irreparable harm by making sure your volunteers and employees are who they say they are.

Churches are not absolutely liable for every injury that occurs on their premises or in the course of their activities. Generally, they are responsible only for injuries that result from their negligence. Churches that have been sued usually were accused of either not providing adequate supervision or not properly screening prospective workers and volunteers.

Each congregation needs to assess its own risks and develop its guidelines for screening workers and volunteers. But being selective may open doors to discrimination lawsuits. There should be, in writing, a process of selection or rejection based on certain pre-set guidelines.

Some feel that it is a violation of their privacy to have a criminal background check done on them, but a background check is becoming the norm in our society. When you apply for a job, most employers will perform a criminal and credit background check to make sure they hire the right person for the job, and to carry out their due diligence.

Everyone working or volunteering should fill out and sign an application form. Ask the applicant for their date of birth, Social Security number, driver's license number and the issuing state, and their signature. Ask for their complete previous addresses. Without all this vital information, full criminal searches and Social Security traces cannot be executed. Make sure you get their authorization for a full investigative report including criminal records, driving records and information provided by credit bureaus, if necessary.

The task of screening applicants is a serious assignment. Your job is to protect children and others from an employee or volunteer who is dishonest or dangerous, or who has a past history of criminal, destructive or dangerous behavior. If you fail, innocent people will be harmed, perhaps damaged for life, and the church may be ruined financially by litigation.



When reviewing an application form, look for omissions. Studies show that most omissions are deliberate. Missing information can give clues about what the applicant does not want you to know. For example, failure to list a former supervisor's name may mean the applicant doesn't want you to talk with their former supervisor.

There are different kinds of background checks - from simple personal references to full criminal background checks, driving records, and Social Security verification. If you want to only see if an applicant has criminal activity in one state, then you are not carrying out your due diligence. Currently, there are 37 states that can be searched for criminal activities and 38 states for their sexual offender registries.

Why should you conduct a Social Security number and date of birth verification? Because some people who plan a deceptive act know how to beat the system. They know that to run a criminal background check, all a company needs is a name and a date of birth - any name and any date of birth. Most likely, nothing will be found with that applicant. However, if you do a simultaneous investigation on a subject that includes searching criminal information, Social Security verification and date of birth verification, then you have done the most in-depth search possible. Identity verification is extremely important; make sure your applicants are who they say they are.

Perpetrators are looking for easy access to vulnerable youth, children, elderly and handicapped, and often, just sensing that your church or organization has a strict screening process in place is enough to send them running away.

National Screening Bureau will be happy to assist your church in developing a comprehensive screening program to protect your children, congregation, and community from irreparable harm. You can reach us at todd@NATSB.com