

Protecting Minors

Background Screening Guide

A Guide for USC Covered Activity
Administrators



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I. INTRODUCTION



THE IMPORTANCE OF THOROUGH SCREENING

The University of Southern California (USC) is committed to providing safe environments and meaningful experiences for minors participating in university-run or -affiliated camps, programs, activities, and events, both on and off campus, and in a manner that aligns with our [Unifying Values](#) of Integrity; Excellence; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Well-being; Open Communication; and Accountability.

A critical component to upholding this commitment is ensuring that the adults entrusted with caring for minors are skilled and qualified to work with youth. Staff working in covered activities should not only be dependable, supportive, and patient; they must also practice good judgment, demonstrate an understanding of appropriate boundaries, and show a commitment to following program rules and USC's youth protection policies. A thorough screening and selection process can signify to potential applicants that you are committed to youth protection, helping you attract and identify strong candidates.

It is also important to note that not every offender has a criminal record, and by incorporating a multi-layered screening approach that goes beyond a criminal background check, you can deter unsafe individuals from applying to work with youth, including those who have sexually abused children or those who may be at risk of harming a child. It also emphasizes to participants' families that the well-being and safety of their children is your highest priority.

USING THIS GUIDE

[USC's Protecting Minors policy](#) outlines specific screening requirements that covered activity staff, including those not employed by USC, must undergo before having direct contact with minors in a covered activity. This guide is intended to serve as a resource for covered activity administrators by providing sample questions and guidance on how to implement the following additional screening measures:

- Written application
- Personal/live interview
- Reference checks

A comprehensive screening process that includes several layers of screening can help you identify the best candidates to work in your covered activity. However, it is important to keep in mind that while background screening is a critical tool in preventing abuse in youth-serving organizations, it is most effective when implemented in combination with other safeguards.

Should you have questions, contact USC's Office of Youth Protection and Programming at minors@usc.edu.

II. WRITTEN APPLICATIONS



BENEFITS OF A WRITTEN APPLICATION

A written application provides you with initial information about an applicant that can help you assess their background and interests, their qualifications for working with minors, and even help you identify potential concerns.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

Some key elements to incorporate into an application include:

- [USC's Guidelines for Interacting with Youth](#) & [USC's Protecting Minors policy](#)
- Applicant's contact information
- Previous work or volunteer experiences
- A personal statement about their interest and suitability for the role
- References (non-family members), including how they know them and their contact information

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

When reviewing an application, look for specific items that may require follow-up or further explanation. To ensure you're not overlooking any potential risks, don't be afraid to ask for more information if you notice any of the following:

- An excessive interest in working with young people (especially a certain age or gender)
- Unexplained gaps in employment or frequent moves
- Failure to complete the entire application



III. LIVE INTERVIEWS



BENEFITS OF A LIVE INTERVIEW

A live interview (in person or via video conferencing) is a chance for you to have an applicant expand on any interesting or concerning information they provided on the application. It can also help you to determine whether they have the skills needed to fulfill the role's requirements, and whether they are suited to work with minors. A good interview should also give applicants an understanding of the responsibilities of the role and your expectations related to youth protection.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions you ask during an interview can be key to understanding a person's suitability to work with minors. Here are a few questions that you can ask to gather important information about a candidate:

1. Explain why you are interested in volunteering for [program name].
2. Why do you want to work with young people?
3. Why would you be a good fit for this program?
4. Tell me about your hobbies and any similar work you have done in the past.
5. Tell me about a time you had to follow a rule, even if it didn't seem reasonable. How did you react?
6. Tell me about a time when you thought it was necessary to break a rule.
7. Describe a situation that tested your patience. How did you react?
8. Give me an example of a situation where a young person tested your patience or frustrated you. How did you handle it?
9. This next question may be difficult, but it is important for us to ask. Have you ever intentionally harmed a child?
10. Do you believe you have ever positively affected a child's life? In what way, and how do you know?
11. Tell me about a time when you had to make a difficult decision. What did you do, and why did you make the decision you did?



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

During the interview, pay attention to anything that could indicate potential problems or concerns. You might want to talk more with the applicant if you notice any of the following:

- Any indication that the applicant wants to volunteer to fulfill their own needs, not to positively affect youth
- Interests that were not on their application form
- Excessive interest in working with young people (especially of a certain age or gender)
- Poor judgment in difficult situations
- Signs that they have trouble staying calm in difficult situations
- Indications that they may have trouble maintaining appropriate boundaries while working with youth
- Defensiveness or evasiveness when responding to a direct question about inappropriate behavior/misconduct

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

To make the most of the interview process, keep these helpful tips in mind:

- When possible, conduct interviews in person (or via video conference) as it allows for more candid responses
- It is recommended that at least two people conduct separate in-person interviews to obtain a well-rounded review of the applicant's ability to work productively with youth
- Each interviewer should ask the same set of questions, though additional questions will naturally arise in conversation - this way, both sets of answers can be compared for consistency
- Document the interviews, applicants' answers, and whether any answers raised any concerns that you may want to talk more about with the applicant



IV. REFERENCE CHECKS



BENEFITS OF REFERENCE CHECKS

References should always be checked before an individual is allowed to take part in any covered activities. References can help you confirm information that the applicant provided in the application and during an interview, and they can also help you gain greater insight into an applicant's ability to work with minors.

SAMPLE REFERENCE QUESTIONS

The questions you ask during an interview can be key to understanding a person's suitability to work with minors. Here are a few questions that you can ask to gather important information about a candidate:

1. How long have you known the applicant, and how do you know them?
2. Have you observed the applicant working with youth? If so, what kinds of behavior did you observe? If not, give an example of a situation that might indicate how they would work with youth.
3. Can you give an example of the applicant's ability to relate to youth? If not, what qualities does the applicant have that would make them good at working with young people?
4. In what types of challenging situations have you observed the applicant dealing with youth? How did they react? If you haven't observed them in this type of situation, in what other challenging situations have you observed them, and how did they react?
5. Can you give me an example of a time when the applicant used good judgment?
6. Do you know of any reason the applicant should not work with the youth we serve?
7. Do you have any other comments or concerns about the applicant?



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

When you speak with references, pay attention to any responses that could indicate potential problems, as you might want to talk more with the applicant about them. These are some possible warning signs:

- The reference has known the applicant only for a short time, for example, less than six months
- The reference has not had contact with the applicant for more than a year
- The reference met the applicant only briefly
- The reference says they knew the applicant under different circumstances than the applicant indicated
- The applicant preferred in the past to work with youth unsupervised
- The applicant can be physically or emotionally abusive, or is quick to anger
- The applicant does not work well with adults
- The applicant has difficulty taking direction

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

To make the most of a reference check, keep these helpful tips in mind:

- When possible, speak with references over the phone (unless logistics require otherwise); it's easier for references to be candid in conversation than it is in writing
- Tell them about the role the applicant has applied for, and emphasize the fact that they will be working with young people
- Ask references about the applicant's suitability to work with youth in the role for which they've applied
- Use the same set of questions for all references for consistency, and be sure to keep record/note their responses - this will allow you to check for inconsistencies or contradictions between responses provided by an applicant and their references

