

Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council

Background Check Guidelines for Volunteers

Girls Scouts of the Huron Valley Council has always taken preemptive steps to ensure the safety of its membership and its program activities. In Girl Scouting, one finds the best possible adult mentors, volunteers, employees and advisors. Background checks are a necessary step to ensure that our Council has taken reasonable measures to protect our girl membership from harm. Background checks will alleviate fears parents may have about registering their daughter with a Troop/Group where the adult volunteers are unknown to the family.

Beginning in the 2003-2004 program year, all new operational volunteers will have background/criminal checks. In 2004 and beyond, returning and new operational volunteers will have biennial background/criminal checks. Operational volunteers include:

- Service Unit Managers
- Troop Services Directors
- Registrars
- Troop Leaders (01)
- Assistant Leaders (02)
- Product Sales Managers/Coordinators
- Troop/Service Unit Treasurers
- Day Camp Volunteers
- Program Volunteers

Background Information

In 1993, Congress passed the National Child Protection Act (NCPA) which addressed concerns about the qualification of those who care for members of society most susceptible to abuse. The violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 amended the NCPA to provide guidelines for appropriate safeguards by care providers and by states for protecting children, the elderly or individuals with disabilities from abuse.

Several states, including Michigan, already mandate criminal background checks for staff/volunteers of youth-serving organizations. To ensure compliance, GSUSA strongly recommends that all Councils conduct screening procedures for paid staff and operational volunteers. With this in mind, Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council has developed the following guidelines for conducting background/criminal checks of specific volunteers.

Screening Tools to Conduct Background/Criminal Checks

Historically, Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council has conducted background checks. The new procedures will be an additional precaution and will not replace the interview, application or reference checking processes. The Council will continue to conduct background checks utilizing the following four screening tools:

1. Application
Obtains personal information, work history, training and educational background. All administrative and operational volunteers must complete and submit an application to their supervisor.
2. Interview
An opportunity for obtaining additional information and/or verifying information, evaluating competencies and noting verbal and nonverbal behavior of potential administrative and operational volunteers. The interview is to be conducted by the supervisor of the volunteer.
3. References
Verifies application data and obtain information that may not surface through the application or during the interview. References may help to explain gaps of time, clarify information and/or raise follow-up questions. The reference sheets are to be completed and returned to the volunteer's supervisor.
4. Criminal Background Checks
Provides detailed information about the applicant as related to specific previous criminal offenses including but not limited to sexual offenses. Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council will use the Michigan State Police database. Only the designated staff member of Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council will conduct the criminal background check.

Operational volunteers will be appointed to their positions when all four steps are completed and meet our guidelines.

Relevant Offenses

Within the context of the mission of Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council, the offenses our organization considers relevant are a function of a specific position in which an operational volunteer will serve. For positions that require substantial direct contact with children, personal safety concerns are paramount. Therefore, the focal points of criminal history record checks for these positions are crimes against persons, especially children. Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council has taken the position that individuals should not hold positions that require substantial contact with children if their criminal records include any of the following:

- Past history of sexual abuse of children
- Conviction of any crime in which children were involved
- History of any violence or sexually exploitative behavior

Additional concerns of criminal history checks will include:

- Past history of embezzlement or uttering and publishing

Court decisions decree that screening criteria must be based upon convictions, not arrest information. Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council may, however, consider any arrest for which final disposition has yet to be rendered. This is especially true for individuals who have charges pending for which they could be disqualified if they were convicted.

The following are a list of crimes that would make a volunteer ineligible for appointment for any operational volunteer position at any time:

- Murder
- Kidnapping
- Manslaughter
- Assault crime against a minor
- Felony-level assault
- Criminal sexual conduct
- Prostitution-related crime
- Arson
- Any child abuse crimes committed against a minor victim constituting a violation of Michigan law
- Controlled substance crime

This list is not exhaustive and is meant only to provide guidance regarding the types of crimes that disqualify potential volunteers from participation.

Additionally, if a person is also convicted of the crimes of embezzlement, fraud, uttering and publishing or any other crime of theft or dishonesty, they will not be considered for any position where the volunteer would handle money.

Applicant Rights

Applicants have the right to be treated fairly and to have their privacy respected. Applicants should be given a chance to challenge the accuracy of information that an organization receives.

It is the applicant's responsibility to resolve any disputes with the criminal justice agency from which the Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council received the information. Until the Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council receives a correction from the criminal history records repository, the Council will assume that the information it received is correct.

The following steps will be taken to ensure applicant rights:

1. The applicant will complete and submit a background check release form.
2. An authorized representative of Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council will conduct the background check using the Michigan State Police Background Check Registry.
3. If the background checks are:
 - A. Positive (lacking any offenses)
 1. The Accounting Assistant will notify the Membership Executive.
 2. The Membership Executive will notify the Troop Services Director.
 3. The candidate may be appointed in a leadership/operational volunteer position.
 4. All information gathered from the Michigan State Police Background Check Registry will be immediately destroyed.
 - B. Negative (stating any offenses)
 1. The Accounting Assistant will notify the Assistant Executive Director and the Membership Executive.
 - a. The Assistant Executive Director will send a letter to the applicant:
 - i. stating the specific information obtained

- ii. explaining the reasons for not being considered for the appointment of the specific position for which they have applied
 - iii. explaining the applicant right to challenge the accuracy of the information and their responsibility to change the information
2. The individual will not be appointed as an operational volunteer as stated in the Relevant Offenses portion of this document.
3. Information gathered will be kept in a secure and confidential area for up to three years by Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council.
4. The information will not be shared with other staff, volunteers or other agencies.
5. If the concern is still not resolved, the concern may be turned over to the Chief Executive Officer who will determine a course of action. The Chief Executive Officer's decision is final.

Conclusion

Girl Scouts of the Huron Valley Council, in recognition of its responsibility to its volunteers, and in keeping with GSUSA's affirmative action policies, reaffirms its policy to ensure fair and equal treatment, in all its practices, to all persons, regardless of race, religion, color, national origin, citizenship, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status, disability, membership in any labor organization, political affiliation, height, weight and record of arrest without conviction.