



# National Recreation and Park Association

## *NRPA Has Set the Bar for Background Checks*

Hard lessons learned demonstrate that not every person who is willing to serve as a volunteer or paid staff should be provided this opportunity. After ten years of surveys, focus groups, staff research, debate, and study, NRPA created the **Recommended Guidelines for Credentialing** outlining the best practices in conducting a comprehensive national criminal background check for park, recreation, and conservation agencies.

### **Q. Do the recommended guidelines meet the test of due diligence?**

A. The guidelines have been reviewed and approved by over 600 city and county attorneys and meet the due diligent requirements of employment screening. In addition, these guidelines meet the CAPRA Standards for agency accreditation.

### **Q. Our current background check policy is to run fingerprints. The NRPA Recommended Guidelines for Credentialing uses Social Security numbers. Why?**

A. The primary goal of the **NRPA Recommended Guidelines for Credentialing** is to implement a consistent approach to screening among all parks, recreation, and conservation professionals in every state. And, to ensure staff and volunteers are validated as respectable, law abiding people with nothing in their background anywhere in any state that would pose a threat or present a risk.

**Without verification of identity, to continue the process is futile.** To conduct a proper, due diligent background check the FIRST step must be to verify the person is in fact who they claim to be. There are only two primary and court tested methods of verifying an applicant's identity for the purpose of employment screening: **collecting fingerprints** and **tracing social security numbers**. While the common assumption is that fingerprinting is the fail safe method, after exhaustive study of both methods, the NRPA concludes that the best outcome for this industry is through the social security trace with added steps that would maximize effectiveness and reduce errors.

### **Q. It has been a long standing practice that we have relied on fingerprints alone to determine identity because no two people have the same set. Why would social security numbers be better?**

A. It would be inaccurate to say one method of identity verification is "better" than the other. Again, there are only two methods to verify identity and restricting the option to only one limit the agency's ability to take full advantage of both methods and to apply the most appropriate method to meet the specific needs of the agency.

**Q. Isn't it a fact that by using the fingerprint method we will obtain everything we need to know about a person's background?**

A. Fingerprinting gives only a partial story behind someone's background. There are a number of serious misdemeanors and other disqualifying offenses that result in many police jurisdictions issuing only a citation to appear in court to address the charges. **Because the offender was not jailed, no fingerprints were taken!** However, utilizing a social security number trace coupled with a county courthouse search (non fingerprint) reveals these offenses and case outcomes including charges, court dispositions, and sentencing. All this information is essential to determine if the individual qualifies to be appointed as paid or unpaid staff.

**Q. What are some offenses that would not result in fingerprints being taken but could potentially be considered by an agency as a disqualifying offense?**

A. Examples would be people that are issued for citations in prostitution stings and other sex offenses such as indecent exposure. Many larger police agencies will issue citations only for these crimes and the person is not arrested.

**Q. If a person receives a citation to appear in court to address the charges, regardless of the outcome of the case, aren't they fingerprinted when they appear and the prints then added to the FBI database?**

A. No, persons appearing in court are usually not finger printed unless they are booked in to jail. If case is handled without jail (as is the usual) then no finger prints will ever be taken.

**Q. When looking at both methods of identity verification specifically for conducting background checks on volunteers serving parks, recreation, and conservation what are some considerations that were given to recommend the social security trace over fingerprinting?**

A. The primary considerations given to the social security trace method over fingerprinting include:

- The cost - State and federal fees over and above equipment and manpower
- The inconvenience, intrusiveness and is intimidating to many volunteers
- The impracticality - In many cases it can take weeks to obtain results
- The access - The NCIC (FBI) database is not available to Parks and Recreation agencies in every state
- The imperfection - 1 in 7 criminal records never make it to the NCIC database
- The inadequacy of information - May provide arrest numbers only with no details on crime or disposition - I.e. person matching fingerprint arrested 2 times - prompting a complete criminal records check with additional costs to be conducted to obtain the necessary information to qualify or disqualify this person

**Q. In your research did you look at California LiveScan before deciding on using Social Security numbers?**

**A.** Yes and the California LiveScan system came up short in our definition of “comprehensive” only revealing records associated with:

1. Crimes relating to child abuse or elder abuse
2. Sex Offenders within the State - Not Sex Offenders outside of the State
3. Convictions or incarcerations only in the last 10 years as a result of committing theft, robbery, burglary, or any felony only in the State of California

And, not revealing other potential disqualifying offenses like assault, battery, domestic violence, drug possession, indecent exposure, and lewd conduct just to name a few.

**Q. Shouldn't our primary concern be keeping out sex offenders? We can do those ourselves for free using our state sex offender registry.**

**A.** You absolutely want to protect against appointing a known sex offender however this is one of a number of crimes a person may have in their background and therefore should never be granted the privilege of working with our most vulnerable populations. Keep in mind that sex offender registries reveal only sex offenders registered in that state, not murderers, drug dealers, etc. There is no data on sex offenders found guilty prior to the mid 1990's. The registry relies on an offender to self-report when they move to a different state. And, in many cases the registry only contains data for “high risk” or “violent” offenders when we also want to evaluate anyone who has a propensity to commit a sex offense before hiring them as a paid or unpaid staff member.

**Q. Have there been any statistics reported on what the NRPA background check system has found?**

**A.** Monthly statistics are kept on the program by SSCI, the NRPA Operation TLC<sup>2</sup> program provider. The accumulative annual results for 2010 among 94 park, recreation, and conservation agencies conducting their background checks through SSCI were:

- 19,495 checks
- Number of criminal records found – 2,960(15.2%)
- Number of Disqualifying Offenses - 747

**Disqualifying Offenses**

- *Sex offenses* – 28
- *Felony offenses and felony violence* – 264
- *Misdemeanor violence, drug, alcohol and other (past 5 years)* - 455

Another revealing statistic is that 13% of those disqualified had committed their offense **outside** of their state of current residence. A “State Only” check would have allowed 97 of them to fall through the crack.

**Q. If we revisit our current policy and consider following the NRPA Recommended Guidelines for Credentialing, what other facts should we take into account?**

**A. The NRPA Operation TLC<sup>2</sup> *Making Communities Safe* Background Check System:**

- At \$18.50 each to our members is less than most “State Only” background checks
- Verifies that the individual is who they claim to be
- Identifies their current and past addresses to determine the appropriate jurisdiction where any charges against the individual would have been adjudicated.
- Conducts a thorough County/State record search to capture all misdemeanor and felonies in the jurisdiction that the individual has the longest and most current residency
- Conducts a National Criminal Record Search through The National Background Directory™ with over 535 million records of criminal data from all 50 states, including Guam and Puerto Rico.
- Conducts a Sex Offender Registry search in all 50 States and the District of Columbia
- Provides our members with an Online Data Management system to submit new requests, retrieve results and review the status of a background check in progress
- Returns results in 48 to 72 hours
- Provides expert complimentary consultation from policy development through implementation
- Contested Results – Will handle any disputed results
- Transfers the liability associated with conducting the check to a third party
- Meets the most recent Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) Background Investigation Standard

For additional information [www.nrpa.org/tlc2](http://www.nrpa.org/tlc2)

Or

For complimentary consultation contact

Chris Goodman

Southeastern Security Consultants, Inc

866-996-7412

[cgoodman@ssci2000.com](mailto:cgoodman@ssci2000.com)

[www.ssci2000.com](http://www.ssci2000.com)