



SAFE
GATHERINGS



All background checks are not created equal.

Hearing that a background check has been run on someone can provide a false sense of security. Background checks are a very good risk management tool, but can also be confusing. Are you receiving the individual's most recent and accurate information—no matter where he or she has lived?

When your organization is seeking additional security via background screenings, make sure you understand what information you are and are not receiving, and that “quick and cheap” may not be the best choice when it comes to background checks.

Some myths about background checks:

A free search on the National Sex Offender Public Website includes all sex offenders in the United States. In reality, the NSOPW provides information as provided by each jurisdiction—some of which do not report. This search can be effective when used as a supplement to other searches.

A nationwide screening provides information on all criminal convictions. The truth is, no nationwide criminal search or national background check will include all information. Many companies offer a national criminal database check, which extends the geographical area being searched, but still relies on data that may be incomplete and out-of-date. Most criminal records are stored in county courthouses across the country. In some states, counties sell their data to private firms;

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others do not. Some files are complete; others are missing file numbers, conviction dates, and other identifiers. National computer database crime searches can be helpful when used as a supplement to other searches.

Also, the majority of convictions do not appear on a national background check. While it is true that not all counties report, the majority of convictions occur at the local level and appear on county records, which provide reporting for at least the past seven years on an individual county. Running a county-level search in addition to the national level search provides a meaningful additional level of risk management.

Another consideration is that criminals are aware of this type of report, and often move to a different county or state to avoid being “found out.” Running a multi-county level background check searches all reporting counties across the United States for a 7-year period. Any reporting county with an address for the individual during this time period should show results.

We require fingerprint searches from our entire group, so we don’t need an additional check. While this type of search may be required as part of a background check, it should not be relied upon as a complete background check. Fingerprint searches show arrest records, not court cases. Charges may never even be filed, and this report does not include data on convictions.

Let’s say your volunteer had a background check five years ago when he started serving. What if he has had a conviction since then?

One background check over the course of a person’s service is “good enough.” Let’s say your volunteer had a background check five years ago when he started serving. What if he has had a conviction since then? One background check at the beginning of service is not sufficient. Regular background checks are most effective.

We are a small organization, we know our people, and we don’t need background checks. Time and time again, you see faith-based organizations in the headlines: “I never suspected it was happening in our church.”

The reality is, a combination of due diligence efforts provides the greatest chance of preventing abuse in churches and faith-based organizations. Thorough screening and high-quality background checks, along with training of staff and volunteers, gives an organization a more comprehensive and thorough level of risk management.

Being a good financial steward is a wise practice. But when it comes to safety and risk management related to the vulnerable groups you serve, be sure to balance costs alongside the levels of protection and due diligence.

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