

Guarding the West Gate

The Investigating Committee

The Criminal Background Check

- The Lodge Secretary sends the signed Authorization for Release of Information to the Grand Secretary, so a criminal background check can be completed.
- The Grand Secretary provides the results to the Lodge Secretary.
- No action can be taken on a petition until the results of the criminal background check are received by the Lodge Secretary.
- The Lodge Secretary must share the criminal background check information only with the Worshipful Master; who, in turn, will provide the Investigating Committee with the results.

Choosing the Investigating Committee

- Committee should consist of not less than three members of the Lodge, no one of whom shall have been a voucher on the petition.
- In addition, members of the Committee should:
 - Have a good understanding of Freemasonry and be able to explain it clearly and coherently.
 - Be active in the Lodge, and able to speak enthusiastically about Lodge activities.
 - Be diplomatic and prudent, and convey a feeling of warmth and understanding to the potential new member.
 - Be prepared to do a careful and thorough job and be careful observers who will present an accurate and unbiased report to the Lodge.
- It is a good idea to ensure that at least one member of the Committee is of approximately the same age as the petitioner.
- It also is a good idea to include a newer member, so he can learn the proper way to conduct an investigation.

Preparing for the Interview

- Know as much as possible about the petitioner before the interview.
- Carefully read the petition and review the results of the criminal background report.
- Talk with the vouchers.
- Set a date for the interview – preferably at his home and, if he is married, with his wife present.
- Arrive on time and be properly dressed.

Conducting the Interview

- Review the petition with the petitioner to determine that it is accurate and that nothing important has been omitted, and ask about any negative information in the criminal background check.
- Inquire about the petitioner's occupation, as well as his religious and community involvement to get a sense of the person and family and to determine that he believes in a Supreme Being and is not an atheist.
- Establish that the petitioner is of high moral character.
- Ask why he petitioned in order to determine that his motives for joining are proper.
- Inquire if the petitioner has any serious physical disabilities – so we can seek a waiver from Grand Lodge.
- Explain that while the Lodge only meets once or twice a month, there is a larger commitment of time, especially during the degree process to learn about the organization and complete the required memory work.
- Explain the fees for the petition and the annual dues so he understands and is comfortable with the financial commitment required to join a Lodge. Explain about purchasing a life membership.

Additional Points About the Interview

- Make sure all your questions are answered satisfactorily before you leave, and make sure you have answered all the questions of the petitioner and his family. If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it. Write the question down; find the answer; and, provide it to the petitioner as soon as you can.
- Don't overstay your welcome. Make the interview as brief as possible, consistent with getting all the information you need to make a proper evaluation of the petitioner.
- If possible, invite the petitioner and members of his family to a suitable Lodge function in order to introduce him to the Master and other Lodge members.

Immediately after the Interview

- Avoid taking notes during the interview.
- Meet as a committee right after the interview to compare impressions.
- Designate one member to record the observations of the Committee in preparation for reporting to the Master and the Lodge.

Reporting Your Conclusions

- If a major character flaw or an effort to deceive by providing false information on the petition is uncovered, an unfavorable recommendation is appropriate.
 - Give the petition signers the courtesy of a factual, private explanation.
 - Report an unfavorable recommendation to the Master and he can report to the Lodge that the Committee did not offer a favorable recommendation.
- If the recommendation is favorable, the Committee should be prepared to present its findings in Lodge before the vote is taken.
- Members of the Committee, along with the vouchers, should make every effort to be present when the candidate is receiving his Degrees.