



# County Operations for Processing Background Screening Reports

## Frequently Asked Questions

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## General Information

### Q: What records are searched when completing a background screen using the *ISUEO package* from First Advantage?

A. There are 4 components to the *ISUEO package*:

- **Social Security Number Verification (SSNV)**  
This search matches the given social security number (SSN) against consumer credit files contained in the databases of nationwide credit reporting agencies. The credit bureaus' consumer credit files contain information provided by companies with which the consumer has had financial dealings and/or public record information collected by the bureaus from the courts. *The SSNV does not verify that the Social Security Administration issued a specific SSN to a consumer.* It does, however, help increase confidence that the SSN provided by the candidate is correct, thus increasing the confidence in the results of the other searches.
- **County seat felony and misdemeanor search**  
This searches county courts from addresses linked to the candidate for felony or misdemeanor charges incurred by the candidate. Sometimes felony records are located in a different location in the courthouse than the misdemeanor files. Because of this, our package covers up to 2 different searches in that same courthouse (if necessary) to obtain both types of files. With both the *ISUEO* and the *ISUEO (No MVR)* packages, First Advantage will use 7 years of residence history for up to 10 searches, meaning that you could have up to 10 counties ran, if the candidate has moved around a lot in 7 years. They will search up to 3 names (this is in case of a lot of alias names) and will research a period of 7 years.
- **National Criminal File Plus search**  
This searches 350 million+ records in proprietary databases of criminal convictions and includes sex offender registries records across all 50 states plus Washington, DC. When ordered, this search finds “developed names” which are any names associated with the candidate’s social security number.
- **Motor Vehicle Records (MVR) check**  
This checks the driving record to ensure the candidate has a valid driver’s license. Additionally, it screens for driving violations including moving violations, accidents, driving under the influence of drugs/alcohol, among other violations.

The *ISUEO (No MVR) package* includes the above items minus the MVR check. It is only to be used in limited circumstances (see question “*When should I use the ISUEO (No MVR) package?*” for more details.).

### Q: Why does the criminal records search only go back 7 years?

A: Seven years is the industry standard for due diligence. In exploring whether to consider a longer span of years, First Advantage provided IECA with the difference in “hit” rate (identification of criminal charges) between the 7-year and 10-year scopes. There was nominal difference between the two search scopes. Increasing the scope would increase the cost of the background screening by nearly 30% with little return for the extra expense.

**Q: Are there other screenings or searches that our county should do in addition to the background screening from First Advantage? For example, should we check the state sex offender registries or the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Abuse or Dependent Adult Abuse registries?**

A: No additional searches are necessary. The National Criminal File Plus component already checks both state and national sex offender registries, so that is not necessary.

First Advantage's search process will identify individuals with a criminal conviction for child or dependent adult abuse within the past 7 years. They do not have access to the state child abuse and dependent adult abuse registries, so those registries are not searched in our current background screening process.

In considering whether the DHS Child Abuse or Dependent Adult Abuse registries should be searched by county personnel as a part of the background screening process, IECA reached out to LMC Insurance (now Assured Partners) and Whitfield & Eddy Law for input in their decision-making. They both indicated that they are comfortable with the background screening process run through First Advantage that does not include the DHS record search. It meets the standard of due diligence.

**Q: Can a county choose to check the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Abuse or Dependent Adult Abuse registries on their own?**

A: Yes, as long as they ensure they follow the proper process laid out by the DHS rules, including obtaining written authorization from the volunteer and employee candidates (this is separate from the First Advantage background screening authorization forms). They must also apply their screening policy consistently with all volunteer and/or employee candidates. First Advantage is not allowed by Iowa Code to access the DHS child abuse registry as a third party. If your county chooses to search the child abuse registry, you must submit an application to DHS to request access and explain your need for checking the registry.

## **Costs and Billing**

**Q: What is the cost of a background screening report?**

- The current First Advantage fee for the standard ISUEO package is \$27.44 + \$11.30 for an Iowa Motor Vehicle Records (MVR) search for a total of \$38.74. The ISUEO package includes a county seat felony and misdemeanor search, national criminal file search, social security verification, and a motor vehicle report (MVR). A national and state sex offender registry search is included in the national criminal file component. The additional \$11.30 fee is paid to the state of Iowa for the record check. Screenings initiated through the Profile Advantage platform (where the candidate enters their own information) are billed at the same rate as those initiated through Select Advantage (where the county staff member enters the information from a paper form completed by the candidate).
- The ISUEO package cost includes up to three (3) versions of a person's name and up to ten (10) county courthouse searches. If more than three (3) names are selected to be searched there will be an additional fee of \$6.62 for each name above the three (3) names included in the package cost. Additional fees may be also incurred if the search exceeds ten (10) courthouse searches. To keep costs down, you may wish to limit your search to addresses

from the last 7 years (rather than accepting all generated addresses suggested by the First Advantage system).

- Some courts and agencies (including those within Iowa) charge an additional fee to access their records. First Advantage will then bill those additional charges to the account which initiated the search (referenced as Access Cost in the bill). A listing of Source Access Fees can be found on the [Background Screening page](#) under the Resources heading and Financial Information accordion.
- If a criminal record comes up in the initial search, First Advantage will verify that record with the court before returning the results. There is a \$4.00 court search fee for each court in which criminal records need to be verified (i.e., If criminal record occurs in two different counties, there will be an \$8.00 charge for court search fees.)
- The MVR fee is included on the county monthly invoice from First Advantage. Note: When using a non-Iowa driver license the MVR fee could be higher or lower than the Iowa \$11.30 fee as it varies from state to state.
- Some states only allow an MVR search on employees and not volunteers through First Advantage or other third-party vendors. In such cases you will want to select the “ISUEO (No MVR)” package which does not include an MVR search. You will also need to access the specific state’s Motor Vehicle department to complete an MVR search (see answers to *When should I use the ISUEO (No MVR) package?* and *How do I conduct a driving record search for a volunteer from one of the above states?*).
- An Education Verification check is \$7.02/institution you are verifying. Standard practice is to verify the institution from the candidate's highest level of education. The education verification is generally not necessary in volunteer screening.

### Q: How are we billed?

A: Each county will receive a monthly invoice from First Advantage for orders processed. The First Advantage invoice may include additional fees incurred by First Advantage (e.g. when searching other state court records, they may have an additional fee that is not included in the ISU Extension and Outreach (ISUEO) package price).

### Who should be screened – and how often?

#### Q: Who needs to be screened?

- A:
- **All** volunteers ages 14 and older
  - All county staff
  - Prospective hires – before they sign a contract

#### Q: Who does not need to be screened?

- A:
- Independent contractors (ex: fair judges)
  - Invited speakers/presenters
  - Extension Council members (unless they are also volunteering)
  - Volunteers under age 14

- 4-H members aged 14 and older whose volunteer service is an opportunity for expanded leadership within their 4-H experience (see guidance below for more details)

**Q: How do we determine if a 4-H member is volunteering as an outgrowth of their leadership experience (and not in need of a background screening)? What protocols should be put into place to ensure a safe environment when utilizing teen 4-H members as volunteers?**

The Iowa 4-H Program would consider many of the things asked of teen 4-H members an opportunity for expanded leadership within their 4-H experience. 4-H members are still 4-H members, with increased responsibility and decision-making. Helpers at one-time programs or workshops are sometimes determined by the 4-H member who is available on the given day or interested in the topic. Teens may even teach part of the workshop as leadership within the project area. Ask if this fits into a 4-H member's 4-H experiences. If so, this is expanded leadership. If the volunteer service is outside of that 4-H experience, then they would be considered an Extension and Outreach volunteer and should follow the background check protocols outlined in the next question and answer.

Do not assume that a teen has the same abilities or the same level of decision-making as an adult. Minors should always be supervised by Extension and Outreach personnel (or adult volunteers), so as not to allow an opportunity for those with ill intent to have an opportunity to act on it. Two-deep adult leadership is still advised as a best practice.

For camp counselors, the use of an application and interview process would be encouraged. Extension and Outreach staff may wish to use additional screening strategies such as calling references, asking behavior-based interview questions, or doing a social media check to ensure that the volunteer/employee candidate poses a low risk to our organization and those who we serve.

**Q: If a 4-H member under the age of 18 is hired for job with Extension and Outreach, should they be background screened?**

Yes. This would be considered differently than a 4-H volunteer experience. See guidance in the next two questions.

**Q: Should we run a background check on a minor (individual under age 18)?**

Yes, most minors between the ages of 14 and 18 who wish to become approved Extension and Outreach volunteers should be background screened with the consent of their parent/guardian in writing (see protocols in next question). The exception is that 4-H members aged 14 and older whose volunteer service is an opportunity for expanded leadership within their 4-H experience do not need to be background screened (see guidance in the previous question).

First Advantage is able to run the search in the same manner as is done for an adult. However, they will not report any cases from a Juvenile court, or a case that results in charges as a Juvenile. You will see results only if an applicant was charged as an adult. Extension and Outreach staff may wish to use additional screening strategies such as calling references, asking behavior-based interview questions, or doing a social media check to ensure that the volunteer/employee candidate poses a low risk to our organization and those who we serve.



Please also be aware that the social security number search will have notifications indicating First Advantage cannot verify the SSN as the candidate, due to the candidate, in most cases, not having established credit. Note that if the minor does not yet have a driver's license, you should select the "ISUEO – No MVR" package.

It is not necessary to run a background check on youth under age 13, though they should be fully supervised while they are volunteering.

Do not assume that a teen has the same abilities or the same level of decision-making as an adult. Minors should always be supervised by Extension and Outreach personnel (or adult volunteers), so as not to allow an opportunity for those with ill intent to have an opportunity to act on it. Two-deep adult leadership is still advised as a best practice.

**Q: Are there special protocols necessary in running a background check on a minor?**

It is recommended that hard copy Authorization and Disclosure forms be completed by the potential volunteer or employee, followed up by county staff data entry into the First Advantage screening system. This allows for the collection of parent/guardian consent via signature. The Direct Advantage/Profile Advantage does not prompt a potential volunteer or employee to determine the need for parental consent and should not be used.

AssuredPartners (our county insurance company) also recommends that because a background check is unlikely to yield extensive results for minors that Extension and Outreach staff might make sure they employ additional screening practices of reference checks, behavior-based interview questions, or perhaps a social media screen. Additionally, they recommend that Extension and Outreach personnel (or adult volunteers) be present and properly supervising minors who are serving in a volunteer capacity.

**Q: Are minors able to sign the Authorization and Disclosure forms?**

A: No. Applicants under the age of 18 are not allowed to sign the Authorization and Disclosure forms and need parental approval. There is a space provided on both forms for the parent signature.

**Q: If a school, scout troop, civic organization, etc. would like to volunteer as a group for Extension and Outreach, do we need to background screen each person?**

A: Yes, utilizing the guidance above with regard to screening of minors. You should NOT rely on any outside entity bringing youth volunteers to provide the background check – all should be conducted by ISU Extension and Outreach.

**Q: We are partnering with another organization to co-sponsor programming. They are recruiting the volunteers. Do we need to background screen their volunteers?**

A: When partnering with other organizations, a couple of factors come into play.

- 1) Determine who will be directing the volunteers. If an Extension and Outreach employee will direct, then they would also be considered an Extension and Outreach volunteer and should be screened and approved by the county extension council.
- 2) Determine the risk. Will the volunteers be working with vulnerable populations? Will the volunteers be working in a large group in open spaces or one-on-one in potentially more secluded locations? Does the partnering organization conduct their own background screenings? Higher risks would indicate that Extension and Outreach should screen the

partnering volunteers. Work with your regional director or youth program specialist to help determine the risk.

**Q: A person wants to help a youth leader chaperone youth on a one-day trip, do they need to have a background screening?**

A: Yes. It is required that “all approved” authorized volunteers be screened regardless of the frequency that a person volunteers. By doing so, approved volunteers will be covered by the county’s liability coverage through LMC Insurance & Risk Management.

**Q: Do we need to complete a background screening on all Master Gardeners?**

A: Yes. A background screening will be completed on all applicants for the Master Gardener program; cost of the screening is included in the registration fee.

**Q: Do we need to complete a background screening on other volunteers who help in the gardens/projects overseen by the Master Gardeners?**

A: Yes. All Extension and Outreach volunteers need to be background screened and approved by the county extension council. If the volunteers are directed by Extension and Outreach employees or Master Gardeners (who are Extension and Outreach volunteers), then they are Extension and Outreach volunteers. Background screening helps Extension and Outreach manage risk and provides liability coverage to the volunteer.

**Q: Do we need to complete a background screening of Iowa State University employees who will be serving as volunteers in our county?**

Yes. If an ISU employee is **volunteering** in their free time (not working, not being compensated) for a county program, they would be deemed a county volunteer and should be treated as such.

**Q: Do we need to complete a background screening of Iowa State University employees who will be interacting with youth as part of their job responsibilities?**

If an ISU employee **working** (not volunteering), their screen should only be managed by their employer (ISU) and the county should not take responsibility for asking or paying for the screening.

However, if they are working with youth, it’s reasonable and responsible to ask that they have been screened. If a county has questions about a staff member that is **working**, the county should email the staff member and their immediate supervisor but understand that the screening report will not be shared with the county.

**Q: Do we have to do an MVR search on a volunteer who won’t be driving with others?**

A: Yes. A background screening will be completed on all applicants regardless of whether they will have passengers in their personal vehicle. Our county insurance policy includes coverage for volunteers who are en route to extension activities as well as if transporting other participants. As a condition of insurance coverage, all volunteers who have a driver’s license must be screened. Unless an applicant does not have a driver’s license, do not skip the MVR check.

**Q: How often do we need to complete background screenings on volunteers and staff?**

A: All volunteers and staff are to be re-screened every three years.



**Q: When doing a rescreen, does the volunteer or employee need to complete new forms? Do I need to notify the volunteer or employee about the rescreening?**

A: No. When an individual signs the initial authorization form, it confirms their permission to obtain other information which may be material to their qualifications for service as a volunteer (or employee) now and, if applicable, during the tenure of their service with County Agricultural Extension Districts (CAED). Additionally, the First Advantage platform will generate any new addresses linked to the social security number, eliminating the need to collect that information.

Best practice would encourage county staff members to notify volunteers and employees prior to rescreening. This allows them the option of potentially withdrawing from their service prior to screening if they are aware of something on their record that might prohibit them from volunteering/employment. It may also ease the conversation in the event that a red flag comes up.

Example rescreening notification message:

*Our policies indicate that we run a background screening on our Extension and Outreach staff and volunteers every three years. It has been three years since we last ran your background screening and we will be doing a rescreening this week. You do not need to take any further action on your part. Please let us know if you have any questions.*

**Q: Can volunteers and new employees start work before the background process is completed?**

A: **No.** It is recommended that you not start an employee or volunteer until you receive a completed background report. First Advantage typically completes a background report in 24 – 72 hours. By waiting, you will avoid the awkward situation of potentially having to retract an offer of employment or inform a volunteer that they are no longer approved. First Advantage can turn screening requests around and have reports back to you fairly quickly. It is better to wait for a successful report before the volunteer or employee starts work. The “hiring process” can move forward after a favorable First Advantage Background Screening Series report.

**Q: Can we use the results of a background screening the applicant completed for use in an employee or volunteer role elsewhere?**

A: No. We cannot accept a background screening from any other organization to fulfill the background screening requirement for Extension and Outreach. All background screens should be completed through First Advantage using the same protocols. This ensures a consistency in screening procedures, helping to add to the due diligence our organization has in verifying a candidate's background.

**Q: Can the volunteer or employee applicant receive a copy of the results of their background screening?**

A: Yes, they may. There are a few options for sharing the background screening report:

1. The county staff member may provide the results directly to the candidate.
2. If the background screening order is placed via Profile Advantage (where the candidate enters their own data online), the candidate may select to receive their report when they submit their personal information. They may also log back into the system to download a report.

3. If the background screening order is placed via Enterprise Advantage (where staff enter the data), there is a checkbox that will alert First Advantage to send a report directly to the candidate once the report is complete. This must be done prior to submitting the order.
4. The applicant can contact First Advantage directly by calling 800-845-6004 to request a copy of their report.

**Q: Can we share the results of the background screening with the applicant for use in a volunteer role elsewhere?**

A: We have had some counties inquire if they may share a volunteer's background check report with another county if that volunteer also wants to volunteer in another county. We have verified with First Advantage and Whitfield & Eddy Law (Iowa Extension Council Association's law firm) that it is permissible to share a volunteer's background screening report with another county. The volunteer or employee must complete and sign the *Volunteer Request for Background Check* or *Employee Request for Background Check* form. The original request form should be filed in the county that generated the background check and a copy also needs to be on file in the county receiving a copy of the volunteer's background check report. Background Check reports **are not** to be shared outside of the ISU Extension and Outreach County Extension Council Organization.

## **First Advantage Users**

**Q: How do I set up another person in our office with the ability to process background screenings?**

A: Click on "Admin" tab, then click on "Company user List" and then at the bottom of the "User List" click on "Add New User." You can then assign them an ID and temporary password. You may also contact First Advantage Administrator at [jbaumler@iastate.edu](mailto:jbaumler@iastate.edu).

**Q: What is the appropriate number of people in a county office to have credentials to process background screenings?**

A: It is recommended that every county have at least two people that are able to process background screenings. Some counties, because of the large number of volunteers and employees, may opt to have more than two. Because of the sensitive and confidential nature of the information contained in the background reports, it is critically important that everyone handling the confidential information treat it accordingly.

## **Document Handling and Storage**

**Q: Are there certain forms or pages that I am supposed to print and file?**

A: The signed Authorization and Disclosure forms are to be kept in a locked limited access filing cabinet for 7 years after the volunteer service has ceased. When using Profile Advantage, you should print out a copy of the e-signed Authorization form, though there is no access to the Disclosure form. If a county opts to print out hard copies of the background report they too are to be filed in a secure locked file. For example, each volunteer has their own physical file folder and labeled with the person's name on the folder. It is important to separate the folders that contain sensitive

background screening information, from “working folders” that staff members use for items like correspondence, interest lists, working notes, and such.

If a county wants to avoid paper copies and chooses to store files electronically, they should work with IECA Program Assistant Julie Baumler ([jbaumler@iastate.edu](mailto:jbaumler@iastate.edu)) to set up a CyBox folder system. The Extension Information Technology (EIT) personnel have indicated that this is the most secure option for storing electronic files. Working with IECA to set up the system is ideal to maintain file access in the event that there is county staff turnover.

## Data Security

**Q: Is the First Advantage system secure? How do we know that data protocols keep our employee and volunteer data safe?**

A: Yes, the First Advantage background screening platform is very safe and secure. Due to the nature of their heavily regulated industry, First Advantage must abide by all domestic and international data security requirements as they are global provider. Additionally, First Advantage masks the social security number once entered in the system and throughout the order & report process. You may read more about the details of their privacy policy and protocols at <https://fadv.com/privacy-policy/>.

Additionally, county personnel should follow the document handling and storage guidance outlined above for all paper copies of background screening information.

**Q: How can we increase data security in the county background screening process?**

A: One of the simplest ways to increase security is to use the Profile Advantage system to complete the background systems. With Profile Advantage, the candidate will enter their own data in First Advantage’s secure platform. You will find instructions for using Profile Advantage in the [Guide to Using Profile Advantage](#) document on the [Background Screening](#) webpage.

## Ordering a Background Screening

**Q: When doing the background screenings, do we have to add the National Sex Offender Registry and State Sex Offender Registry components to our requests?**

A: No. The National and State Registries are part of the National Criminal Record File Plus and are included in the ISUEO package at no additional cost. **If, after selecting the ISUEO package, you also click on the individual components you will receive additional charges for each component.**

**Q: What if the potential employee or volunteer does not have a Social Security Number?**

A: In some cases, an alternate form of government ID is acceptable. For potential employees, the individual must have documentation allowing them to be employed in the U.S. (documentation that is acceptable for [Form I-9](#)). Acceptable alternate government IDs for potential volunteers include a passport, driver’s license, or other U.S.-issued government identification.

Note: The social security number is used by the Credit Bureau to develop any additional names and addresses. It impacts the criminal searches as well. A background screen run using other forms of ID will likely have a greater proportion of yellow flags. Please work with your regional director and/or the appropriate program area contact (Gail Castillo for 4-H volunteers, Alicia Herzog for Master Gardener volunteers) to determine if the volunteer can be approved for the desired role.

**Q: Can I conduct a background screen if the individual has a Social Security Number (SSN), but does not wish to disclose it?**

A: No. A social security number verification provides the most complete screening offered by First Advantage. It should always be used if the volunteer has an SSN.

**Q: I made an error in entering a Social Security Number. It appears I was charged by First Advantage for that record. How can I get refunded for errors made?**

A: Call First Advantage support services and have them delete the duplicate record to receive credit. To reach First Advantage support services, call 800-888-5773.

**Q: Do I need to conduct an MVR search on all volunteers?**

A: Yes, unless a person does not have a driver's license (in which case they are obviously not allowed to drive in their volunteer role). This is a requirement of our county insurance coverage for volunteers with extends to them driving to and from extension activities regardless of whether they have passengers. The MVR check is a critical step for our organization's risk management.

**Q: How do I handle a search if the candidate doesn't have a driver's license?**

A: You would select the ISUEO (No MVR) package when placing your order. This will allow the user to enter all the same information as the ISUEO package but will not prompt for any driver's license information.

**Q: When should I use the ISUEO (No MVR) package?**

A: Only in the following two circumstances:

1. When a volunteer does not have a driver's license.
2. When a volunteer has a current driver's license from any of the following states:
  - Alabama
  - Alaska
  - Arizona
  - Delaware
  - Kansas
  - Massachusetts
  - Michigan
  - Montana
  - Nebraska
  - New Hampshire
  - New Jersey
  - Ohio
  - Pennsylvania
  - Utah
  - Virginia
  - Washington
  - West Virginia
  - Wisconsin
  - Wyoming

***These volunteers MUST still have a driving record search conducted.*** It is just not possible through the First Advantage system, so you will need to use the process outlined below. Counties must not bypass the MVR search in a cost-saving measure as it is inherent to managing a county's liability and risk by screening volunteers.

**Q: How do I conduct a driving record search for a volunteer from one of the above states?**

A: Use the [Volunteer Driving Records Checks Not Covered by First Advantage](#) resource to find the links to each state's motor vehicle/driving record request forms as well as the estimated cost of the record request. In many instances, the potential volunteer will need to request their own records. Extension and Outreach staff may assist the volunteer in completing the forms and may use Extension and Outreach funds to pay for the record.

**Q: How do I verify the education credentials of a potential employee?**

A: You can add an Education Verification check to your screening order via the a la carte background screening options. The education check verifies a candidate's education credentials and costs \$6.54/institution you are verifying. Standard practice is to verify the institution from the candidate's highest level of education.

**Q: Can we modify the data or reporting screens of the First Advantage program?**

A: No. The First Advantage program platform is used by thousands of FABS clients in the US and other countries and can't be modified.

**Q: There is a place on the database that asks for "upload" of the authorization. Is this upload optional?**

A: Yes, it is optional. If a county chooses, though, they can upload the Authorization and Disclosure forms for electronic storage at First Advantage.

**Q: Does the First Advantage background screening include a credit check?**

A: No. Information provided by the consumer reporting agency for the criminal background check will not include a consumer credit report or credit score. However, background screenings are regulated by the Fair Credit Reporting Act.