



Guidelines for Lodge Investigating Committees

The Grand Lodge of North Carolina
Ancient Free and Accepted Masons

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My Brother:

In 2015 Grand Master Douglas L. Caudle, who emphasized the importance of guarding our west gates, appointed a special committee to draft guidelines for members of investigating committees. Committee members drew on their experiences, talked with experienced Masons around the state and examined the practices of other grand jurisdictions in formulating these guidelines.

Being selected as a member of the lodge investigating committee is one of the most important assignments a member of a lodge can undertake. The recent focus on guarding our west gates comes with enormous responsibilities. Remember, we are told in our Master Mason charge that “to preserve the reputation of the fraternity unsullied, must be your constant care” and “be particularly attentive not to recommend him unless you are convinced he will conform to our rules.” The recommendation of this committee carries great weight and we must exercise with care this important duty in order to preserve our reputation in the community and peace and harmony in our lodges. The Master entrusts members of the committee with an important duty.

It is not clearly defined in our Code if committee member names should be announced in lodge. Some Lodges do and some do not. An argument for announcing names is that members may meet privately and one-on-one with a committee member to share any concerns. Our Code states that the names of the members of the Investigating Committee shall not be recorded in the minutes, (Reg. 62-2.4). The report of the Committee of Investigation must be reported in the minutes in accordance with Reg. 67-6, which clearly specifies that the character of the report (favorable or unfavorable) shall not be recorded in the minutes.

The following information and guidelines are intended to aid committee members in performing this important task. Members must become thoroughly familiar with Chapter 67 of The Code and lodges should conduct periodic training sessions with members willing to serve in this important function. Do not wait until your appointment to become familiar with this information. A thorough investigation gives us a better chance of guarding our west gate.

Look well to the West!

Fraternally,

Special Committee on Investigating Committee Guidelines

Choosing members of the Committee:

- Choose responsible members as you would when appointing officers of the lodge or members of a degree ritual.
- Members should represent the craft well.
- They should be experienced and knowledgeable of lodge workings. (Avoid appointing more than one newer member to the committee due to their lack of Masonic knowledge. One newer member is acceptable to gain experience.)
- Members should be well spoken with good communication skills.
- Dress for the part. Business casual should be the minimum dress code. This not only sets the tone for the meeting with the petitioner but implies proper minimum dress code for the future lodge meetings and degrees.
- Meet as a total committee if possible!
- NEVER sign N.C. Official Form 19 without meeting with the petitioner. If you cannot fulfill your role as a committee member ask the Master to replace you on the committee. Do not delay the process by your inability to meet with the petitioner.

Prior to the meeting with the petitioner:

- The chairman (appointed by the Lodge Master) should assume the leadership role in the investigation process.
- Ask the lodge secretary to see the background report issued by the Grand Lodge of North Carolina.
- Interview the petitioner's recommenders. Ask why they recommended him and why they feel he would make a good member. What is their relationship to the petitioner? How well do they really know him? If the recommender has known the petitioner for only a short period of time a more thorough investigation will be necessary.
- Review the NC Form 17, Petition for Degrees, of the petitioner.
 - Does he meet the requirements of Reg. 66-1, Petitioners Qualification found in Appendix 1 of this document?
 - Is he married or single? This will determine if family members will be present during the investigation process.
 - Does he list any physical restrictions that need to be approved by the grand lodge? If so, explain to him that the local district officer will meet with him to confirm that the lodge being petitioned can support his needs, or whether another lodge in the area would be more accessible.
 - What is or was his occupation?
 - Address of his residence and business if applicable.
 - What was his response to the question about criminal records?
 - Is he a military veteran?
- Make an appointment when the petitioner and his family, if applicable, are available at his home. It is critical that the family support this new adventure in their lives! If you sense that the petitioner does not want his family in the interview or does not want to meet at his home, ask his recommenders what might be driving this decision.

- If the petitioner is concerned about an investigating visit or a background check as part of the process it should raise a red flag. A worthy candidate should be receptive to a thorough interview process.
- Do not overlook any of the references no matter how difficult it may be to reach them.
- Ask references if they knew they were listed as a reference.
- Ask references about their relationships to the petitioner (friend, co-worker, relative, neighbor?).
- Ask each reference about the petitioner's reputation in the community, workplace, etc.
- Carefully observe if the answers from the references are clear or if they give the appearance of evasion.
- Carefully observe if the reference has any hostile feelings about the fraternity.
- If a business owner, check the Better Business Bureau for a rating of his company. This may reveal issues of character.
- Review social media for posts that offer glimpses into the petitioner's personality, interests and character.

During the meeting:

- The chairman should assume the leadership role in the investigation process.
- Be courteous even if you share different opinions.
- One committee member, preferably the chairman, should briefly share with the petitioner/family what masonry means to him. Keep the focus on masonry, not on committee members.
- Briefly explain our Masonic charities and their mission.
- Stay on topic. Do not wander into irrelevant or lengthy stories.
- Emphasize that we are not a religion but we do require belief in a Supreme Being, with obligations to which we are held accountable. Would this interfere with their faith?
- Does the home life appear to be happy?
- Does the lifestyle and surroundings give the appearance that they can afford membership?
- Encourage questions by the petitioner and family.
- Make sure the petitioner and family members know what is expected of members and the time required to progress through the three symbolic degrees, including meetings with his coach during the coaching process.
- Make sure the petitioner and family know that our fraternity does not offer benefits or insurance coverage.
- The chairman should allow time for all committee members to participate.
- Does the petitioner make you feel welcome? Is his language clean? Does he express any signs of prejudice or bigotry?
- Does the spouse seem interested or does she express reservations?
- Consider having one of the committee members observe the reactions of the petitioner and members of his family when questions are being asked.

- Keep the spouse involved during the interview. Do not ignore or treat her questions as less important. Her non-verbal reactions may be of significant importance in determining her support of his potential membership.
- Make sure the spouse/family know about opportunities for them to participate in lodge activities as well as in other organizations the member may choose to join. Give her the last opportunity to ask questions before concluding the interview.

Note: Some jurisdictions recommend a non-favorable recommendation if the family does not support potential membership. We suggest that under these circumstances the committee meet with recommenders and discuss withdrawing the petition until circumstances are more favorable.

Freemasonry should not be a divisive force in potentially unstable family relationships.

Questions for consideration:

(Questions must be asked in a fair and non-discriminating manner)

1. Why are you seeking membership in our fraternity? What do you think our fraternity is all about?
2. When did you become interested in joining?
3. In addition to those who recommended you for membership, do you know any other Masons?
4. Do you have family members who are or were Masons?
5. Are there Masons who have made a favorable impression on you?
6. Why are you petitioning at this time in your life?
7. Did our requirement of a background check cause you any reason for concern?
8. You understand from our application that we require a belief in a Supreme Being for membership. Are you aware that our membership is open to all faiths and that we are not a religion? Will that be an issue for you? Are you a member of a faith that might be opposed to your membership in our fraternity?
9. Do you understand that religion and politics are not to be discussed in lodge meetings?
10. Are any family members potentially opposed to your membership in our fraternity?
11. How do you enjoy spending your leisure time?
12. Would your current occupation allow you to attend meetings? What other expertise or skills do you possess?
13. Are you a member of other organizations, and will they interfere with you ability to be an active member in our fraternity? Are any of these institutions opposed to membership in our fraternity?
14. Do you understand that our fraternity does not offer benefits such as unemployment or health insurance or burial coverage? Were you expecting financial benefits from membership?
15. Our lodge's annual dues are \$ _____. Will this financial commitment be a hardship to you or your family? Do you consider yourself prompt in meeting your other financial obligations?
16. Do you understand that you are required to pass a unanimous ballot to obtain membership?

17. Are you aware that you will be required to commit a significant amount of time working with a coach memorizing catechisms?
18. Do you support charitable organizations as your budget permits? Our lodge supports statewide Masonic charities and local causes and our members contribute time as well as money to charity. Will this be a hardship on you or your family?
19. What questions do you have?
20. Do you have any reservations about submitting your application? Do you fully understand the commitments and requirements of membership?

Questions/subjects to avoid:

- Do not directly ask a petitioner about specific religious affiliation (including what church he attends). Feel free to ask about his memberships in community organizations.
- Do not ask questions that might be interpreted political in nature.
- Do not ask questions that might be interpreted as sexual or ethnic in nature concerning the petitioner or his family.

Remember our petitioner qualification requirements are clearly described in Chapter 66 of The Code and contained in Appendix 1 of this document.

After the interview:

Committee members should have a private wrap-up meeting before signing the report. If there is not a unanimous agreement on a recommendation the reasons should be discussed before a final report is submitted. Reg. 67-4.2 allows for a non-unanimous report. Questions the committee should consider before issuing their final report are:

- Does the petitioner possess sufficient knowledge and the ability to appreciate the value, doctrine and tenets of Freemasonry?
- Would his moral character reflect well on the craft?
- Is he the type of man you and other Masons want to associate with?
- Is his desire to become a member prompted by selfish or mercenary motives?
- Is his disposition such that he may generate discord among the craft?
- Does it appear he may be a financial burden on the craft and struggle to maintain his membership dues commitment?

Final thoughts on causes for concern:

- Lodge members who recommend potential members with limited knowledge of the petitioners, relying on the investigation committees to judge their character.
- Lodges focused on the number of members instead of the quality of members.
- Members who recommend candidates for the wrong reasons.

- Poor investigations that lead to members who damage our reputation.
- Masters who don't take care to appoint the right members of this important committee.
- Committees that give favorable reports on questionable petitioners to give them the benefit of the doubt or in hope that Masonry will improve them.
- Beware of petitioners who say "I just want to show others that I can belong to a good organization."

Resources reviewed in compiling this Guideline:

- The Code of The Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of North Carolina (2014)
- N. C. Official Form 19, Report of Committee of Investigation
- Guardians of the Gates, Short Talk Bulletin, Volume 2, Number 12, December 1924, The Masonic Service Association of North America
- An Aid to the Investigating Committee - Grand Chapter of North Carolina
- MasonicWorld.com – Guidelines for Investigating Committees
- Masonic Lodge of Education website – Masonic Investigative Committee
- Guidelines for Candidate Investigation Committees – Grand Lodge of South Dakota, October 31, 2007
- A Guide for Masonic Investigating Committees, Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ohio

Appendix 1

Petitioners Qualifications:

REG. 66-1 QUALIFICATIONS.

Each petitioner for the degrees in Masonry must possess certain qualifications which are as follows.

1. He must be a believer in God and in immortality. A petitioner who is unable or unwilling to express a belief in the existence of God lacks an essential qualification for the degrees in Masonry. In every such case the fee shall be returned with the information that he cannot become a Mason in this Grand Jurisdiction. [63-6; 67-8; 73-6.5; 75-8.3; 78-2.2.C; (Preamble I)].
2. He must be a man free born.
3. He must have the senses of a man, especially those of hearing, seeing, and feeling.
4. He must be of mental worth, sound mind, upright life, and good morals. [73-6.5; 75-8.3; 78-2.2.C].
5. He must possess the ability to earn a livelihood.
6. He must be not less than eighteen years of age at the time his petition is signed. The Grand Master may not waive the provisions of the law requiring an applicant for the degrees to be eighteen years of age at the time the petition is signed. (*This subdivision amended, effective January 1, 2003*)
7. He must be able to speak and understand the language of the ritual. [65-3.3; 71-24].
8. He must have resided within the state of North Carolina at least six months immediately preceding the date of his petition. [42-7.1; 42-9; 66-3]. (*This section amended, effective 1/1/2006*)
9. He must have no physical disability which would prevent him from earning a livelihood or would make him a burden or a charge upon the Craft.
10. He must not have been rejected by any regular lodge in this jurisdiction, or in any other jurisdiction recognized by this Grand Lodge, within six months immediately preceding the date of his petition. [42-16].
11. He must not be under sentence or judgment for violation of any law of the land involving moral turpitude. His right to citizenship must have been restored in the event it was lost by such conviction and sentence. [73-6.5; 75-8.3; 78-2.2.C; 86-2.28; 101-5.4.B].
12. He must not be engaged in any enterprise, business, or profession which would constitute a Masonic offense if engaged in by a Mason. [73-6.5; 75-8.3; 78-2.2.C].
13. He must not have received either an undesirable or dishonorable discharge from the Armed Forces of the United States. If separation from the Armed Forces was under either of the proceeding classifications, satisfactory evidence must be submitted to verify the discharge has been changed by legal authority to at least a General Discharge.

Appendix 2

Duty and Report requirements of the Investigating Committee

REG. 67-3 DUTY.

Each member of the Committee of Investigation shall: [Official Form 19].

1. See the petitioner for the degrees personally, unless he has *personal knowledge* of all of the petitioner's qualifications as set forth in Regulation 66-1,
2. Examine him in such manner as prudence may direct if he does not have the *personal knowledge* required in the preceding subdivision,
3. Diligently inquire into his age, character, and habits; his moral, mental, physical, and other qualifications, [66-1]
4. Ascertain whether he has resided within the state and within the jurisdiction of the lodge the prescribed time, [65-7]
5. Confer with his associate members, formulate and file his report to the lodge within twenty-seven days from the date the petition is received by the lodge, and [67-3.7; Official Form 19]
6. The members of the committee shall confer before making a report.
7. The Master may grant a Committee of Investigation more time but not more than twenty-seven days.

REG. 67-4 REPORT.

The Committee of Investigation shall make its report in writing as *favorable* or *unfavorable* unless they should find that the petitioner or applicant is not eligible or qualified as to territorial or personal jurisdiction or as to his physical condition, or other cause, *except* as to his moral qualifications, in which case they may make such further report as will enable the Master to decide upon the proper action to take on the petition or application under Regulation 67-6. [59-2.48; 62-2.3; 62-2.4; 66-2; Official Form 19].

1. All members of the committee must report.
2. If two members of a committee both report favorably or unfavorably, the Master may order a ballot.
3. A member refusing to agree with the action of the majority shall register his dissent by a minority report.
4. The Committee of Investigation shall not be permitted to incorporate into its report letters and other documentary evidence giving information upon which report is based. [68-6].
5. A lodge shall take no action on a committee's report upon a petition or an application.
6. The ballot is had only upon the *election* or *rejection* of the *petitioner* or the applicant.
7. When a petitioner for the degrees dies, or becomes mentally incompetent or otherwise disqualified before the ballot is taken, the fact shall be noted on the minutes of the lodge, and no further action shall be taken except to return the fee paid. [68-9; 71-5]. (*This subsection amended, effective 1/ 1/ 2009*)

Appendix 3

These questions from N. C. Official Form 19 should be addressed.

INSTRUCTIONS TO COMMITTEE OF INVESTIGATION;

The best interest of the Masonic Fraternity demand that a CAREFUL INVESTIGATION be made of the character, standing, and mental and physical condition of those seeking admission. It is imperative therefore that your investigation of this petitioner be thorough. These points should be observed:

1. Does each member of the committee have *personal* knowledge of the qualifications of the petitioner as set forth in Regulation 66-1? _____

(Yes/No)

If he does not have such *personal* knowledge, has he seen the petitioner in person? _____

(Yes/No)

2. You must ascertain whether or not the petitioner conforms to the physical qualifications required by *The Code*, which are: "Every petitioner for the degrees in Masonry must have no maim or deformity which shall prevent him from performing practically and substantially the candidate's part in the ritualistic work of the several degrees; and *from* performing practically and substantially when receiving and giving instruction in the ritualistic work provided that the substitution of artificial limbs or parts for portions of his natural body shall NOT satisfy this law unless they are fully under the control of the petitioner and conform to and satisfy the foregoing requirements. He shall have no physical disability which would make him a burden or a charge upon the Craft." Can he comply with this? _____

(Yes/No)

3. You must ascertain if he has resided within the State of North Carolina for one year, and within the jurisdiction of this lodge for six months, immediately preceding the date of his petition for the degrees. Does he comply with this? _____

(Yes/No)

4. You must ascertain if the petitioner is mentally qualified to receive the degrees in Masonry. Is he so qualified? _____

(Yes/No)

5. You must ascertain if he is morally fit to be received into the Craft have you done this?

(Yes/No)

6. You must ascertain if his neighbors, acquaintances, and employers believe him to have good character. Have you done this? _____

(Yes/No)

7. You must ascertain if the organizations to which he belongs may impair his usefulness to the Craft. Have you done this? _____

(Yes/No)

8. If the petitioner is asking for affiliation or restoration only, then items 1,2,and 3 do not apply, but you must ascertain if he is a Master Mason and in good standing.