ISKCON

Devotee Care

Guideline Document for the Implementation of a Devotee Care Office (DCO)

March 2022 | Version 1

BY

DEVOTEE CARE COMMITTEE

An initiative of ISKCON GBC SPT

International Society for Krishna Consciousness

Founder-Acarya: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

"THE SERVANTS OF GOD COME TO PROPAGATE GOD CONSCIOUSNESS, AND INTELLIGENT PEOPLE SHOULD COOPERATE WITH THEM IN EVERY RESPECT."

"THE LORD IS MORE PLEASED WHEN HE SEES THAT HIS SERVANTS ARE PROPERLY RESPECTED BECAUSE SUCH SERVANTS RISK EVERYTHING FOR THE SERVICE OF THE LORD AND SO ARE VERY DEAR TO THE LORD."

HDG A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Purport to Srimad Bhagavatam 1.2.16

FOREWARD

The Devotee Care Committee was instituted by ISKCON GBC in the year 2011 with the purpose that those who have come to the lotus feet of Krishna and Srila Prabhupada may positively identify themselves with ISKCON as a caring society and thus remain active in Krishna Consciousness till the last movement of their lives. The committee has been working ever since to uphold the principle of Caring for Devotees - Vaishnava Seva - as one of the three cardinal principles given by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

ISKCON DEVOTEE CARE COMMITTEE | VISION & MISSION STATEMENT	
Every devotee is spiritually happy and materially well-situated, positively identifying with ISKCON as a caring society. Each devotee : a) responsibly looks after his or her diverse needs b) can easily and successfully seek qualified help within the Society, and c) wholeheartedly extends that care to others	And to facilitate this vision, as part of the mission of Devotee Care initiative, we strive to: a) Ensure that the Vaishnava virtue of care pervades all aspects of the ISKCON Society. b) Support and provide specific care services that enhance the spiritual, emotional, physical and social well-being of all ISKCON members.

In line of this vision, the Devotee Care Directorate has identified the following 12 areas of devotee care with each of the areas now taking shape in concrete manner gradually.

1. Spiritual Life 2. Healthcare 3. Marriage, Sex & Relationships 4. Child-rearing and child-care	5. Education 6. Career and Employment 7. Financial Advice 8. Housing	9. Travel and Immigration 10. Consumer and Lifestyle 11. Legal and Civic 12. Mediation Advice

One of the most foundational value addition of the Devotee Care initiative has been the creation of “Devotee Care Course (DCC)”. The DCC is the first and foremost course in ISKCON that prepares devotees on various principles, values and action planning regarding devotee care activities within one’s community. However, along the way, we strongly felt the need to have a supplementary document that can assist the graduates of DCC in practically implementing DC initiatives within their own projects. Thus, a six

month long study was conducted that involved interviews of several DC professionals in various Yatras globally, DC course instructors and senior leaders of ISKCON who are now involved in spreading DC within various regions of the world. The outcome of all these discussions and brainstorming is this document prepared for the benefit of all current and future Devotee Care givers who are keen to setup a dedicated Devotee Care office in their respective communities. This is the first version of the document and based on feedback from all our global stakeholders, the DC Directorate is aiming to launch the extended version of this document in the near future.

With the blessings of Vaishnavas, we will continue to march ahead with new initiatives towards facilitating a culture of devotee care within ISKCON that Srila Prabhupada will be pleased with.

Sincerely,

Gauranga Das

On behalf of GLOBAL DEVOTEE CARE DIRECTORATE

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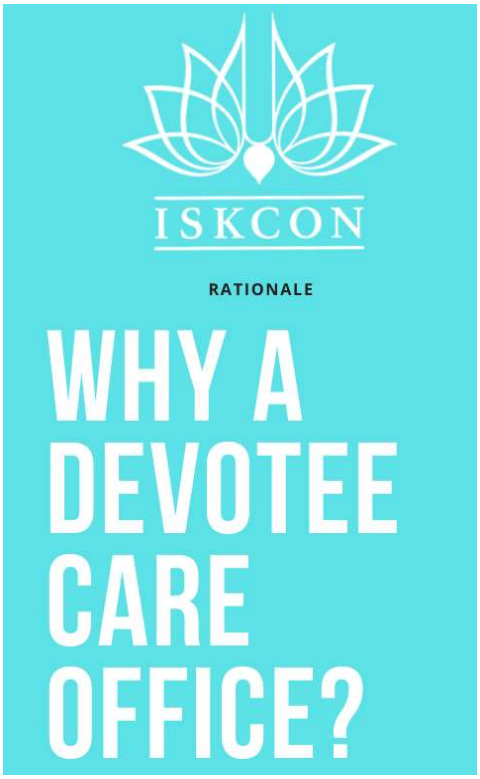
1. Introduction to the Devotee Care Office ('DCO')

1.1 What is a DCO?

- DCO – Devotee Care Office – is an organized effort to encourage and inspire the implementation of Devotee Care in any of the "relevant" 12 areas and 12 recipients as explained in ISKCON GBC SPT Devotee Care Mandate as well as mentioned in the Devotee Care Course handbook
- It is a dedicated office comprised of a team of devotees with specific responsibilities concerning devotee care
- Depending on the situation of a temple, DCO may take shape of a physical space or may remain a virtual office managed by a dedicated team.

1.2 Rationale for a Dedicated Devotee Care Office | Why Set Up an Office?

Following are the reasons why a temple needs a dedicated office instead of letting devotee care be undertaken in a natural, familial manner:



Values and Principles: A DCO encourages the embedding of core values and principles of Devotee Care across various activities of the temple in a systematic manner

Responsibility: A dedicated DCO with trained and identified representatives can take responsibility to address any concerns regarding lack of devotee care in consultation with the temple leadership / management as appropriate

Organization and Resource Mobilization: A dedicated DCO can better mobilize resources towards educating every department, inspiring various leaders and the community and facilitating implementation of various devotee care initiatives

Efficiency & Specialty: A DCO supports the Temple Management / Leadership by properly creating pathways between care givers and devotees in need of care

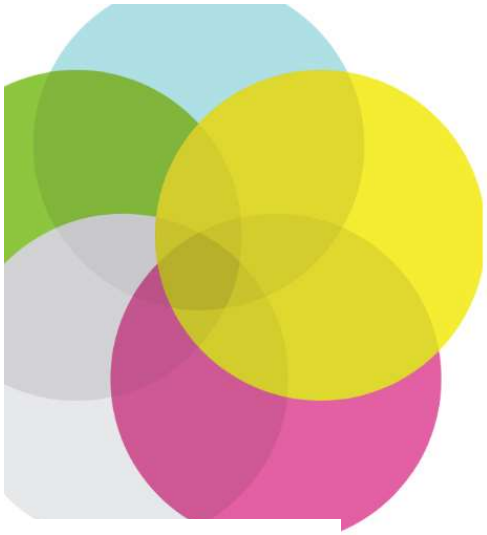
In summary, the DCO will have impact on many levels of ISKCON - individually, locally, temple wide, regionally and globally. Thus, the DCO will enhance the experience for all parties while proactively minimizing risks including devotee conflicts, congregation fallout, reputation issues, etc.

1.3 Key Prerequisite for Forming the DCO

Any ISKCON community can establish a DCO regardless of size or scale. However, a suggested prerequisite is that the temple leadership attends the DC Course before forming the DCO and that all selected members of DCO complete the course within three months of formation of the DCO

2. Scope of the work of DCO

2.1 Core Operating Principles



Principles for Every DC Office

Education: Of the various objectives, DCO especially focuses on educating varied teams in the founding principles of devotee care through systematic programs.

Viability: DCO operates in such a way to not be burdensome either financially or operationally, but rather compliment and support local projects.

Collaboration: DCO collaborates with local leadership and various departments within a temple community to maintain harmony and generate proactivity.

Facilitation: DCO should preferably not be engaged in direct project implementation, rather they should try to act as a facilitating agency in general.

Spirit of Seva: DCO imbibes the spirit of Vaishnava seva which is individual, spontaneous and voluntary.

2.2 Key Result Areas / Mandate

A. Education

To train relevant care givers in

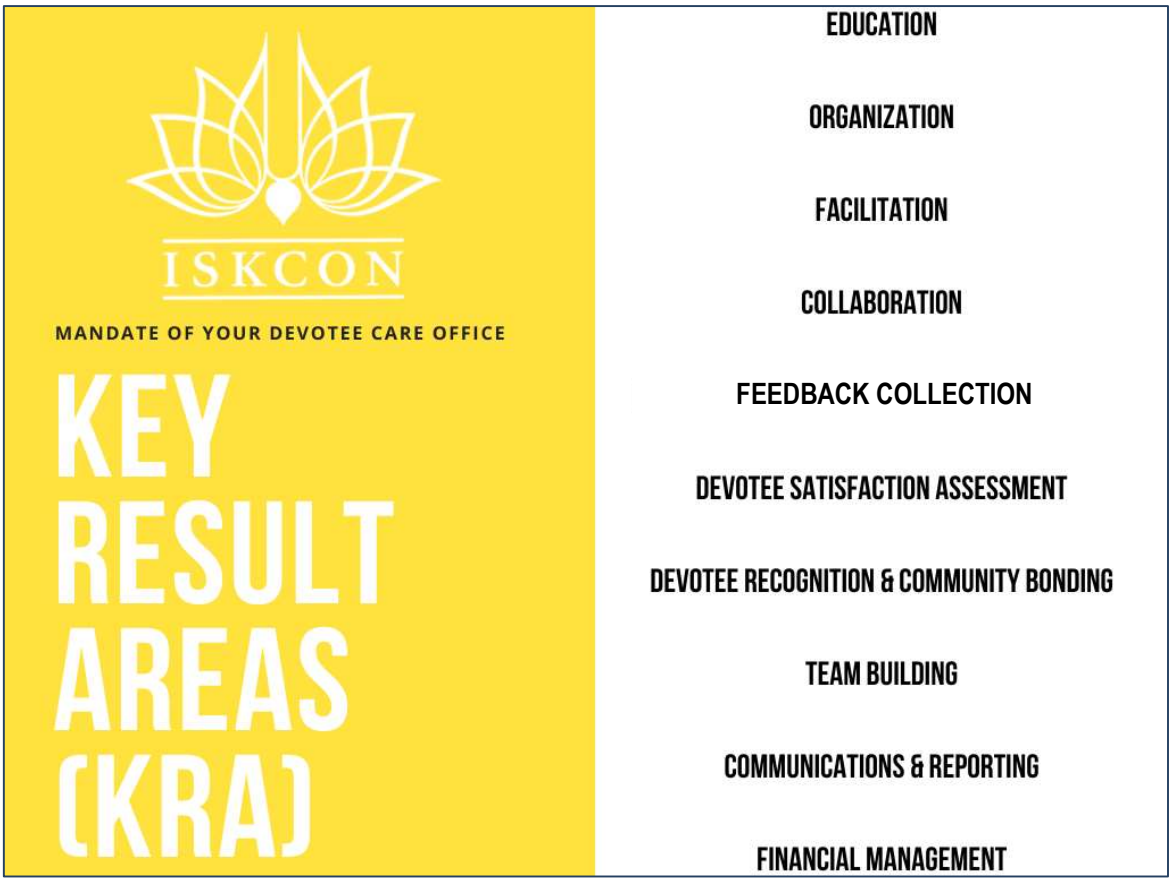
1) Primarily, DC Course and,
2) Additionally, specific DC skills (Ex. Listening skills, Counseling skills and professionalism) based on six principles and six values as detailed in the Devotee Care Course Handbook

B. Organization

To work with local leadership to establish committees/representatives to provide care in the listed areas below with a perspective of conceptualizing, handholding and handing over to the local leadership for further supervision.

1) 12 areas of devotee care namely spiritual; physical healthcare; mental and emotional healthcare; marriage, sex and relationships; child-rearing and childcare; education; career and employment; financial; housing; travel and immigration; consumer and lifestyle; legal and civic; and mediation advice.
2) 12 recipient categories namely women; brahmanas; children and youth; the elderly; cows; brahmacharis; grihasthas; vanaprasthas; sannyasis; other temple residents; leaders; and senior devotees.
3) Any others suggested by local leadership (Eg. Kitchen, Maintenance department etc.)

SNAPSHOT OF AREAS OF WORK FOR DCO



C. Facilitation

To facilitate various care initiatives with appointed DC focused committees and identified representatives as identified in Point B above, keeping in confidence various stakeholders such as local leadership, concerned devotee community etc.

D. Collaboration

To identify and engage experts within the devotee community as well as with potentially non-devotee experts/professionals in relevant fields (Eg. Legal professionals, psychotherapist, pre-marital training counselors etc) to support devotee care

E. Feedback collection

To assist local leadership in setting up approachable platform for community members to submit timely feedback and requests regarding devotee care as follows:

1) DCO may work with local leadership to setup platforms such as *Quarterly Open Forums* for various project leaders to publicly exchange ideas, hear feedback and requests concerning care for devotees
2) DCO may also work with local leadership in setting up Mediation & Ombudsman Office that can provide a platform for devotees to file any complaints and address any conflicts properly
3) DCO may setup and circulate dedicated email id or keep Feedback Collection Boxes as a tool to collect feedback on ongoing basis

F. Devotee Satisfaction Assessment

To help local project leaders prioritize DC activities by carrying out surveys in (at least one) of the following ways:

a) Carrying out an initial survey or census of the devotee community when launching the DC initiative.

b) Conducting follow up surveys on periodic basis, preferably every six months or as advised by the local project leaders

c) Encouraging appointed committees / representatives to setup a system of timely feedback collection within their own spheres

G. Devotee Recognition and Community Bonding

To continuously work with local project leaders, DC committees and representatives (as suggested in Point B) in creating a family culture of appreciation, respect and belonging in the devotee community.

a) Encouraging senior leaders to regularly interact with and inspire various department teams
b) Organising and celebrating special occasion for individuals (Eg. Prayer meetings, birthdays, farewell, memorials) within their own department or at centralized level, depending on the scale and size of the project
c) Annual celebrations for various departments / teams to appreciate and honour their activities with the community. (Thoughtful gifts can be distributed as appropriate)
d) Setting up a recognition system by instituting ceremonies like Sevak of the year / Sadhaka of the year/ Devotee of the year

H. Team Building

To identify and engage dedicated devotee team members as well as external stakeholders to serve the growing needs of devotee care initiatives.

I. Communication & Reporting

To connect project leaders, community members, and the DC zonal representatives through various updates, newsletters, quarterly and annual reports through various media such as emails, websites, videos, social media.

J. Financial Management

To work with local leadership in devising the most appropriate models of financial management such that DC activities do not become a burden for the project. Wherever advised by local leadership, the DCO may raise its own funds, manage the finances, budgets required to run various education, training and awareness initiatives.

3 Staffing of the DCO

3.1 Organizational Structure

1. The Devotee Care Office reports to the local leadership, which may be the Temple President or the Management Council depending on the local scenario
2. The Devotee Care Office may follow two patterns:

Hierarchal Approach

- An experienced DC Head may be appointed to lead the effort
- Additional members are engaged to directly assist the DC Head

Council Approach

- Three or more senior members from the local project community form a Devotee Care Council
- Council members could/should broadly represent at least the major sections of the local project community ie: Brahmacharis, Grihasthas, Youth etc.

3.2 Inputs on Team Building

These points need to be kept in mind while team-building as a hierarchical approach or council approach:

- There should at least one key facilitator in the team who has managerial qualities, as well as Temple management should have faith and trust in this person's abilities to carry out the initiatives."
- There should be a designated secretary who can manage agendas, minutes and general DCO coordination
- There should be one or more devotees with good interpersonal skills, especially empathetic listening skills and good amount of time at disposal to facilitate work with local leadership and various departments

3.3 Continuous Education of The DCO Team

Continuous, systematic training is encouraged for all DCO team members in the following (but not limited to):

- Listening skills
- Mediation skills
- Project Management / Administration skills
- Interpersonal & trust building skills
- Strategic Planning skills

4 Strategic Planning For The Launch Year

4.1 Needs Assessment

As detailed in Section 2, the scope of the DCO is large, therefore it is recommended that a "Needs Assessment" be undertaken to identify the priority areas of focus within the local project community.

1. In consultation with the management, surveys can be conducted covering all or some departments, to assess specific needs.
2. As required, the objective "Needs Assessment" survey can be complemented with a qualitative assessment in which a specific group may be interviewed for deeper insights

4.2 Resource Assessment

While the above assessment will provide information on the pressing needs of the community regarding devotee care, it may also be important to assess resources for planning purposes. The resource examples shared below reflect how resource assessment can impact the scope and functioning of the DCO in its launch phase: :

Space Availability	• A project with available space may establish a physical office along with a training room to conduct regular training events or an IT / Media desk for regular communication. However, if space is lacking, the DCO may remain virtual or operate in a shared space.
Skill Capital	• A project with functional experts in the community e.g. healthcare professionals, financial planners, mentors, etc. may be able to setup dedicated care teams in 12 areas. However, if such devotees are not available, the DCO may approach outside experts.
Spendable Capital	• A project with sufficient and sustained financial support can plan several innovative DC initiatives e.g. health insurance for brahmacharis, housing project for devotees, etc. In case of limited capital, the DCO may limit its initial year(s) to building awareness about DC and educating various stakeholders before facilitating any financially challenging projects.

5 Communication & Reporting

5.1 Guidelines on Communicating a DCO Launch

Launching a DCO is a major milestone in the maturation of any ISKCON community. Depending on the scale of the project, the project leaders could utilize the following considerations to organize a formal inauguration:

Objectives Of The DCO Launch Exercise

- To emphasize upon the commitment of the project stakeholders on devotee care within the community
- To formally recognize and thus encourage devotees taking up responsibilities related to DC
- To establish sufficient awareness within the devotee community about the presence of a dedicated team that can be approached for all devotee care related matters

Preparing For The DCO Launch

- A community's own social media platforms can be utilized to create a buzz around the upcoming launch of the DCO
- Short interviews of various leaders of the community can be undertaken and released on the various topics related to DC to set the right mood
- A manifesto / mandate can be prepared with planned activities for the launch year to gain credibility within the community
- A Contact list of devotees holding key positions in the DCO and the Mandate may be shared with the community as a reference

5.2 Guidelines on Ongoing Communication

5.2.1 Within the Community

The DCO is expected to maintain an environment of trust and credibility within the devotee community. To that end, regular communication channels need to be established by one or more ways, some of which may include:

- Monthly / Quaterly newsletters/ social media mentioning the activities of the DCO for the period under review
- Fund utilization information in case the DCO has raised funds from the temple community
- Annual Report / magazine / social media reflecting DCO achievements and goals for the next year

5.2.2 With The DC Zonal Representatives & The Directorate

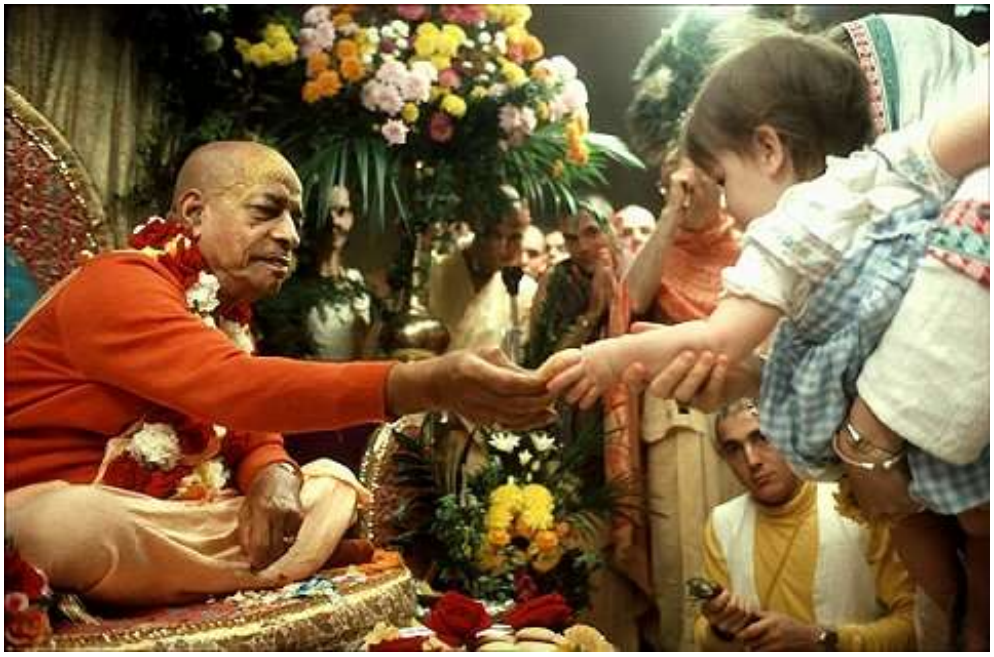
To facilitate the success of local DC teams in various ISKCON Communities, the Devotee Care Directorate has setup various zonal/national representatives. The relationship between the local DC team and Zonal DC team will be crucial to the overall success of DC mandate of ISKCON.

Support Provided by Zonal team / Directorate

- Regular feedback on various activities undertaken by local DC team
- Assistance and mediation on any sensitive matter or troubleshooting that local DC team may need in areas of DC
- Regular sharing of best practices and resources from the global communities.
- Highlighting the progress of local DC teams to zonal, national and global levels.

Expectations from the local DCO

- Regularly participate in meetings facilitated by Zonal DC team.



- Share progress and receive feedback for local DC project activities.
- Seek guidance in planning and execution to ensure that proposed DC activities are well-aligned to the priorities approved in the DC mandate by the ISKCON GBC body

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