

# ISKCON SEATTLE INITIATION GUIDELINES

Version 2026



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This Initiation Charter establishes the standards, processes, and governance framework for spiritual initiation at **ISKCON Seattle (Vedic Cultural Center)**. It is intended to provide clarity, consistency, and transparency for devotees aspiring for First (Harināma) and Second (Brahminical) Initiation, as well as for the temple bodies entrusted with guiding and evaluating their readiness.

Initiation is recognized as a sacred and serious spiritual commitment, requiring sustained sādhana, regulated conduct, scriptural understanding, and steady engagement in devotional service. Accordingly, this Charter emphasizes preparedness, personal responsibility, and gradual spiritual development, while safeguarding the integrity of initiation standards and temple culture.

This document defines:

- A structured pre-initiation pathway for newcomers
- Clear eligibility requirements for First and Second Initiation
- Multiple regulated service-based qualification tracks
- Governance safeguards, including grounding seva, onboarding, and service accountability
- Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to ensure timely, fair, and transparent processing

The framework herein is designed to balance compassion with discipline, mercy with qualification, and individual spiritual aspiration with institutional responsibility. Its purpose is to ensure that initiations conducted through ISKCON Seattle are spiritually stable, culturally sound, and aligned with long-term devotional growth—for the benefit of the aspirant, the temple community, and the mission entrusted to this center.

## 2. PRE-INITIATION SYSTEM FOR NEWCOMERS

### Purpose

To provide a structured, compassionate, and progressive framework for newcomers, the Vedic Cultural Center has established four tiered pathways for pre-initiation preparation.

# Four-Tier Pathway

## Tier 1: Bhakti Explorer | Śraddhāvān

- Attends Discover Yourself/Gita Class, Bhakti Studio, Kirtans, Sunday Feast
- Learns basics of philosophy
- Engages in occasional seva across one or more areas, such as food truck service, farm seva, prasadam serving or festival support
- No expectations regarding vows or lifestyle

## Tier 2: Bhakti Practitioner|Kṛṣṇa-sādhaka

- Chanting 4–8 rounds
- Starting to follow some principles
- More regular attendance
- Developing spiritual friendships
- Guided by informal mentors

## Tier 3: Bhakti Aspirant | Śrīla Prabhupāda Āśraya

- Chanting 8–12 rounds
- Demonstrating steady improvement
- Regular mentor meetings
- Sadhana logs and personal goals
- Consistently engaged in one or more seva

## Tier 4: Initiation Candidate | Guru Āśraya

- Fully meets initiation standards
- Chanting 16 rounds

- Following 4 principles
- Active in seva and sanga

## Rationale

This avoids premature initiation and ensures newcomers progress safely.

# 3. HARINAM INITIATION (FIRST INITIATION) REQUIREMENTS

Harināma Initiation (also known as First Initiation) is the formal process by which an aspiring devotee is accepted as a disciple under a bona-fide ISKCON initiating guru, in accordance with ISKCON Law (Chapter 7) and relevant GBC resolutions. It establishes the disciple's commitment to devotional service and obedience to the disciplic succession under the guidance of the Governing Body Commission (GBC). The preparation for Harināma Initiation consists of two sequential stages of six months each, designed to ensure readiness and qualification for initiation.

## First Six-month period

1. Take shelter of Srila Prabhupada as your instructing guru and chant his Pranams
2. Chant **16 rounds daily** and strictly follow the **4 regulative principles**
3. Maintain steady sadhana and develop a steady service relationship with Srila Prabhupada
4. Maintain a healthy and respectful relationship with the temple community.
5. Complete the reading of **Srila Prabhupada Lilamrita** (by Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami).
6. Attend and pass the **Founder-Acharya Course**.
7. Complete the reading of **Bhagavad-Gita As It Is (with purports)**.  
This reading is compulsory from the **Advent of Bhagavad-Gita**
8. Attend and pass the mandatory **ISKCON Disciples course**
9. Develop a relationship with the initiating spiritual master **of your choice**  
(If you are pressured into making a choice, raise this promptly with the Initiation Committee)

10. Engage in temple seva on a weekly basis, minimum 1 hour per week
11. End of Six-month period: send formal e-mail to Initiations Committee (IC) at [initiations@vedicculturalcenter.org](mailto:initiations@vedicculturalcenter.org) for intent to aspire
12. Arrange a formal written confirmation letter from your Spiritual Master for IC

## Second Six-month period

1. Chant your initiating Spiritual Master pranams (If applicable)
2. Continue chanting **16 rounds daily** and strictly following the **4 regulative principles**
3. Increase steady sadhana and develop a steady service relationship with your spiritual master
4. Increase **temple seva** to a **minimum of 2 hours per week**
5. Complete the reading of **Srimad Bhagavatam Canto 1 (with purports)** and **Nectar of Devotion** (Till Chapter 19 at minimum)
6. Learn the **Guru Ashtakam** (To be recited without help of a book as per ISKCON Law)
7. Send formal mail to [initiations@vedicculturalcenter.org](mailto:initiations@vedicculturalcenter.org) to appear for **1st initiation interview** (In-person)
8. At the end of a successful interview sign the **1st initiation oath**
9. Receive formal **recommendation letter** from IC
10. Request **1st initiation** from your spiritual master by sending the letter of recommendation
11. If initiation is not conducted in ISKCON Seattle, receive letter of approval from ISKCON Seattle Temple Presidents and IWC and update IWC once **1st initiation** is formally completed

# 4. BRAHMINICAL INITIATION REQUIREMENTS

## MULTI-PATH BRAHMINICAL QUALIFICATION SYSTEM

This system recognizes the diversity of devotees' natural strengths and services while upholding **uniform brahminical standards** of character, conduct, sadhana, and responsibility.

### Qualification Framework

- The applicant must have received First Initiation.
- Completion of the **Mandatory Scriptural Competency Track** is required for all candidates.
- In addition, candidates must **meaningfully complete minimum two (2) or more** of the five approved Brahminical Qualification Tracks listed below for the period of 3 years after first initiation.
- “Meaningful completion” implies sustained engagement, demonstrated responsibility, and satisfactory assessment by the relevant service authorities.
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Each qualification track is presented in a **fully described format** to ensure transparency, consistency, and clear expectations.

Individual tracks may be **overseen by designated service leads**, while overall qualification evaluation remains subject to the temple's initiation governance process.

## Scriptural Competency Track - Mandatory For All

### Purpose

To cultivate scriptural literacy, philosophical depth, and the ability to understand, articulate, and apply *Vaiṣṇava siddhānta* in daily life. This mandatory track ensures that all devotees develop a strong intellectual and spiritual foundation, supporting steadiness in devotional practice, purity of conduct, and faithful adherence to Srila Prabhupada's teachings.

### Examples of Valid Engagement

The following are illustrative (not exhaustive) examples of qualifying engagement:

- Completion of **Bhakti Śāstrī**
- Regular attendance at **Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam** classes
- Systematic reading of core ISKCON scriptures, including:

- *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*
- *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*
- *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*
- *Nectar of Devotion*
- *Nectar of Instruction*
- Participation in mentor-led discussions demonstrating comprehension
- Ability to relate scriptural principles to practical devotional life

### Required Competencies

A devotee completing this track is expected to demonstrate:

- Foundational understanding of Vaiṣṇava philosophy and siddhānta
- Ability to clearly explain basic philosophical concepts when asked
- Truthfulness, nonviolence, and self-control in behavior and speech
- Intellectual honesty, humility, and willingness to learn
- Consistency in hearing (*śravaṇam*) and reading (*svādhyāya*)
- Completion of Bhakti-sadacara course (online or onsite)

### Service Commitment Criteria

In alignment with GBC emphasis on knowledge as a qualification for brahminical responsibility:

- Completion of **Bhakti Śāstrī** is mandatory
- Ongoing, regular attendance at Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam classes
- Sustained personal reading and study under guidance
- Demonstrated application of scriptural principles in conduct and service
- Any significant gaps in study or class attendance should be reviewed by the preaching working committee

### Required Certifications

A devotee must complete the following:

- **Bhakti Śāstrī Certification (From VIHE or designated authority) which includes systematic study of following books and write tests on each chapter for all books**
  - *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*
  - *Nectar of Devotion*
  - *Nectar of Instruction*
  - *Śrī Īsopaniṣad*
- **Vaiṣṇava Etiquette Course (Bhakti Sadachara course - onsite/online)**
- **Deity Worship at home with course completion certificate (PWC training)**

### Certification Authority

As per GBC standards, the Initiation Committee, in consultation with Preaching Committee and Pujari Committee shall:

- Verify completion of required certifications
- Review comprehension and steadiness through mentor feedback

- Assess alignment of knowledge with behavior and devotional conduct
- Confirm fulfillment of this mandatory track as part of the initiation review process

### **Rationale**

Srila Prabhupada emphasized that brahminical qualification rests upon knowledge and realization:

*“Brahmana means he must know Brahman.”*

Scriptural competency:

- Protects devotees from philosophical deviation
- Ensures personal stability and clarity in devotional life
- Supports responsible service, leadership, and preaching
- Forms the intellectual and ethical backbone for all other service tracks

This track is **mandatory for all devotees**, as scriptural knowledge is essential for sustaining Krishna consciousness individually and collectively within ISKCON.

## **Track 1 — Deity Department Service**

### **Purpose**

To train devotees in the principles of Deity worship. In *Bhakti -sandarbha* (283–84), Srila Jiva Gosawami describes the importance of deity worship and initiation (Diksha) ) as follows: “It is Srimad -Bhagavatam’s opinion that the process of deity worship is not actually necessary, just as the specific prescriptions of the Pancharatra and other scriptures do not have to be followed. The Bhāgavatam enjoins that even without practicing deity worship one can achieve the complete success of human life by any of the other devotional processes, such as simply offering oneself at the Lord’s feet for His protection. Nonetheless, Vaishnava following the path of Sri Narada and his successors endeavor to establish a personal relationship with the Lord by receiving the grace of a bona fide spiritual master through initiation, and in this tradition the devotees are obliged at the time of initiation to begin engaging in deity worship.

“Although deity worship is not essential, the material conditioning of most candidates for devotional service requires that they engage in this activity. When we consider their bodily and mental conditions, we find that the character of such candidates is impure and their minds are agitated. Therefore, to rectify this material conditioning the great sage Narada and others have at different times recommended various kinds of regulations for deity worship.”—Madhya 15.108

### **Principles of deity worship**

Effective deity worship is based on:

- 1) Cleanliness & punctuality (purity)

- 2) Exemplary character and behavior
- 3) Training and education
- 4) Sound spiritual practices (good sadhana)
- 5) Preaching spirit
- 6) Consistency with Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions
- 7) Cultivating the mode of goodness
- 8) Seeing the deity as Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
- 9) Harmony with other services (co-operation and communication)
- 10) Balanced adherence to rules and regulations.

This track trains the different aspects of purity – internal and external purity. External purity means keeping our body, the surrounding environment and all the articles we offer to or use to worship the Lord clean. Internal purity means that we purify ourselves through the practice of vaidhī sādhanā bhakti. It is necessary for devotees to understand how this is essential in deity worship, and that this will be ultimately satisfying to the Lord. It emphasizes the need for Brahmanas to set an ideal example for the whole devotee community to follow. Getting educated on the mood of deity worship, being well organized, prepared and peaceful in mind (symptoms of one influenced by the mode of goodness) and finally establishing that a mature devotee appreciates the value of each devotee and their unique contribution to our society and the service of being a pujari is not superior or inferior to any other service.

(SB: 11.27.15) One should worship Me in My Deity forms by offering the most excellent paraphernalia. But a devotee completely freed from material desire may worship Me with whatever he is able to obtain, and may even worship Me within his heart with mental paraphernalia.

Deity Worship in the Temple - A devotee still troubled by material desire tends to see the world as an object of sense gratification. Such a neophyte devotee may misunderstand the Lord's supreme position and may even consider the Lord an object of his own enjoyment. Hence the neophyte must offer opulent paraphernalia to the Deity so that he may constantly remember that the Deity is the supreme enjoyer and that he, the neophyte, is simply the worshiper and is actually meant for the Deity's pleasure. In contrast, an advanced devotee, one fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, never forgets that the Supreme Lord is the actual enjoyer and controller of everything. The pure devotee offers his unalloyed love to the Personality of Godhead along with whatever paraphernalia is easily obtained. A Kṛṣṇa conscious devotee does not waver in his devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa, and even with the simplest offering he completely satisfies the Personality of Godhead.

### **Examples of Valid Service**

The following are illustrative (not exhaustive) examples of qualifying service:

- Back-altar (assistant Pujari) sevas which involve organizing, arranging and assisting Pujaris with deity paraphernalia during various sevas.
- Consistent measurable participation in assigned deity department shifts
- Arati Paraphernalia preparation

- Bhoga preparation (non-cooking roles)
- Bhoga plates offering preparation assistance.
- Aarti preparation and assistance
- Cleaning and maintenance of trays, plates, and altar areas
- Deity dress organization
- Learning and performing arati (Dressing) to HDG Srila Prabhupada
- Learn and assist the Abhishekam team (if no festivals during these periods, Participate, learn, and demonstrate Abhishekam sevas)
- Garland making and flower service
- Performing one “grounding seva” from the approved catalog
- Adherence to daily and festival deity care procedures under supervision

Training is practical and hands-on.

### **Required Competencies**

A devotee serving under this track is expected to demonstrate:

- Steadiness, reliability, and punctuality in assigned shifts
- Proper dress, personal hygiene, and adherence to altar etiquette
- Learn the various mantras, upacharas as recommended and required for deity worship.
- Respectful, humble mood in the presence of the Deities
- Ability to learn and perform specific roles accurately
- Emotional maturity and cooperative attitude toward fellow devotees
- Respect for the procedures and authority of the Pujari Department
- Various Shuddi process
- Learning of basic mantras and upacharas required for Deity worship (Training will be provided by PWC)

### **Service Commitment Criteria**

In alignment with GBC guidance on regulated, accountable service:

- Minimum commitment of **2 hours per week** in Deity Department service
- Minimum of **100 hours of service per year**
- Minimum of 3 years of sustained service (at least 300 hours) after First Initiation.
- Service should be **consistent, visible, and accountable** to the Department Head or supervising Pujari
- Any significant gaps or changes in service should be reviewed by the certifying authority

### **Certification Authority**

As per GBC standards, the Initiation Committee, in consultation with the Pujari Working Committee (PWC) shall:

- Review the devotee’s service record and consistency
- Assess character, humility, and respectful attitude toward authority
- Certify eligibility under this track

- Provide a written recommendation as part of the initiation or higher responsibility review process

### **Rationale**

Deity Department service is essential, visible, and transformative. It:

- Cultivates discipline, attentiveness, and refined behavior — core Brahminical qualities
- Reinforces steadiness, humility, and devotion in the presence of the Lord
- Provides a foundation for higher responsibilities within the temple
- Ensures that deity worship is conducted with reverence, purity, and efficiency

This track continues to remain a classical and indispensable element of temple service, nurturing spiritual growth in those engaged with dedication and sincerity.

## **Track 2 — Kitchen & Prasadam Service**

### **Purpose**

To train devotees in clean, regulated, and devotional prasadam preparation and service, recognizing prasādam as non-different from the mercy of the Lord and a foundational pillar of temple life. This track supports temple life by fostering discipline, humility, and cooperative seva, while instilling qualities expected of devotees seeking higher responsibilities within the temple community.

### **Examples of Valid Service**

The following are illustrative (not exhaustive) examples of qualifying service:

- Consistent participation in assigned kitchen or prasādam shifts
- Vegetable cutting and preparation
- Cooking assistance, as permitted by the Kitchen Working Committee (KWC)
- Pot washing and general kitchen cleaning
- Serving prasādam to devotees
- Prasādam distribution via food trucks or community events
- Post-service cleanup and sanitation
- Learning and following dietary regulations, including knowledge of what is acceptable for offering.

### **Required Competencies**

A devotee serving under this track is expected to demonstrate:

- Steadiness and reliability in service
- Cleanliness, personal hygiene, and adherence to kitchen dress code
- Respect for authority, especially the KWC leads
- Emotional maturity, humility, and cooperative attitude
- Ability to work harmoniously with other volunteers

- Punctuality and consistency, especially during festivals, Sunday Feasts, or other high-volume prasādam preparation

### **Service Commitment Criteria**

In alignment with GBC guidance on regulated and steady service prior to assuming higher responsibilities:

- Minimum commitment of **2 hours per week** in kitchen or prasādam service
- Minimum of **100 hours of service per year**
- Minimum of 3 years of sustained service (at least 300 hours) after First Initiation.
- **Regular, accountable, and visible** service under supervision
- Any significant gaps or changes in service should be reviewed by the certifying authority

### **Certification Authority**

In accordance with GBC standards, the Initiation Committee, in consultation with the KWC, shall:

- Review the devotee's service record, consistency, and adherence to discipline
- Assess character, humility, and cooperative attitude toward authority
- Certify eligibility under this track
- Provide a written recommendation as part of the initiation or higher responsibility review process

### **Rationale**

Prasādam service is direct devotional service to the Lord and His devotees. The kitchen is an extension of the altar — demanding discipline, purity, cooperation, and humility. Service in this track:

- Provides a clear, accessible path for every devotee to engage in regulated, meaningful service
- Builds steadiness, teamwork, and a positive service attitude
- Cultivates cleanliness, obedience, and time discipline — essential brahminical qualities
- Lays a natural foundation for higher responsibility in other temple departments, including Deity worship

Kitchen and prasādam service is not preliminary or inferior; it is essential, visible, and transformative, sustaining the entire temple community and nurturing spiritual growth in every participating devotee.

## **Track 3 — Temple Operations Service**

### **Purpose**

To recognize and develop devotees who take responsibility for managing and sustaining temple operational areas, in alignment with **ISKCON GBC initiation guidelines**, which emphasize

*steady devotional service (seva), good character, obedience to authority, and cooperation within the Vaishnava community.* This track supports community upliftment through organizational, educational, and management-related seva, while fostering qualities expected of candidates for initiation.

### **Examples of Valid Service**

The following are illustrative (not exhaustive) examples of qualifying service:

- Coordination and management of volunteers
- Planning and execution of VCC festivals (e.g., Holi, VegFest, Ratha Yatra, Anandamela, Diwali, Janmashtami, Gaura Purnima, and other VCC events)
- Youth leadership and mentoring programs
- Children's educational and cultural programs
- Temple finance and administrative support
- Temple audio/video and tech support

### **Required Competencies**

A devotee serving under this track is expected to demonstrate:

- Reliability and consistency in service
- Ability to inspire, guide, and motivate others
- Emotional maturity and steadiness
- Clear, respectful, and timely communication
- Effective teamwork and coordination skills

### **Service Commitment Criteria**

In accordance with GBC standards that stress *long-term, stable engagement in devotional service* prior to initiation:

- A minimum commitment of **2 hours per week** in temple operations
- A minimum of **100 hours of service per year**
- Minimum of 3 years of sustained service (at least 300 hours) after First Initiation.
- Service should be **regular, accountable, and visible** to temple leadership
- Any significant gaps or changes in service must be reviewed by the certifying authority

### **Certification Authority**

As per GBC guidance that initiation recommendations must be made by *authorized and accountable temple bodies*, the **Initiation Committee**, in consultation with the relevant **Working Committee, Department Head, or Temple Authority**, shall:

- Review the devotee's service record and consistency
- Assess character, cooperation, and attitude toward authority

- Certify eligibility under this track
- Provide a written recommendation as part of the initiation review process

### **Rationale**

The GBC emphasizes that initiation is not merely a ritual milestone but a recognition of *demonstrated commitment to Krishna consciousness, disciplined conduct, and service attitude*. Service in temple operations cultivates essential brahminical qualities highlighted in ISKCON teachings—such as responsibility, truthfulness, accountability, humility, leadership, and selfless sacrifice. These qualities reflect the expectations outlined by Srila Prabhupada and upheld by the GBC for initiation candidates.

## **Track 4 — Outreach & Preaching Service**

### **Purpose**

To expand the mission of Lord Caitanya by engaging devotees in regulated, respectful, and impactful outreach activities. This track cultivates courage, determination, compassion, and the ability to represent ISKCON values effectively, while providing practical experience in preaching and community engagement.

### **Examples of Valid Service**

The following are illustrative (not exhaustive) examples of qualifying service:

- Participation in and coordination of Harinam programs
- Book distribution at temples, festivals, and public spaces
- School and college preaching initiatives
- Organizing and leading community kirtan programs
- Conducting ISKCON philosophy classes or introductory Bhagavad-gītā sessions
- Hosting and supporting home programs for devotees or newcomers
- Performing one “grounding seva” from the approved catalog under supervision

### **Required Competencies**

A devotee serving under this track is expected to demonstrate:

- Courage and confidence in public and group settings
- Compassion and sensitivity toward all participants and audiences
- Determination and perseverance in outreach activities
- Ability to clearly and respectfully communicate ISKCON philosophy
- Representing ISKCON values through personal behavior and attitude
- Emotional maturity, humility, and cooperative teamwork

### **Service Commitment Criteria**

In alignment with GBC guidance on regulated, accountable service:

- Minimum commitment of **2 hours per week** in outreach or preaching activities

- Minimum of **100 hours of service per year**
- Minimum of 3 years of sustained service (at least 300 hours) after First Initiation.
- Service should be **consistent, visible, and accountable** to the temple Outreach Coordinator or supervising authority
- Any significant gaps or changes in service should be reviewed by the certifying authority

### **Certification Authority**

As per GBC standards, the Initiation Committee, in consultation with the Preaching Working Committee shall:

- Review the devotee's service record and consistency
- Assess character, determination, and adherence to ISKCON values
- Certify eligibility under this track
- Provide a written recommendation as part of the initiation or higher responsibility review process

### **Rationale**

Srila Prabhupada emphasized preaching as the highest form of service:  
*"Preaching is the essence."*

Engagement in Outreach & Preaching Service:

- Demonstrates practical dedication to Srila Prabhupada's mission
- Cultivates courage, determination, and compassionate communication
- Strengthens devotion by sharing Krishna consciousness with others
- Provides a visible and transformative service that expands the temple community and strengthens its mission

## **Track 5 — Cow Protection & Farm Service**

### **Purpose**

To nurture brahminical values of simplicity, compassion, responsibility, and care for animals and land. This track trains devotees in regulated, disciplined, and loving service to cows, farm animals, and agricultural work, cultivating steadiness, patience, and practical devotion.

### **Examples of Valid Service**

The following are illustrative (not exhaustive) examples of qualifying service:

- Goshala cleaning and maintenance
- Feeding, brushing, and grooming cows
- Assisting with milking procedures and protocols
- Barn and farm infrastructure maintenance
- Ox care, training, and handling under supervision
- Support for ahimsa milk programs
- Agricultural labor and farm cultivation

- Participation in festivals or special programs connected to cow or farm service
- Performing one “grounding seva” from the approved catalog under supervision

### **Required Competencies**

A devotee serving under this track is expected to demonstrate:

- Compassion, patience, and gentleness toward animals
- Responsibility and diligence in assigned tasks
- Steadiness and reliability in daily or scheduled service
- Humility, cooperation, and teamwork in farm and goshala operations
- Respect for supervisors, goshala protocols, and safety procedures
- Awareness of cleanliness, hygiene, and ethical treatment of animals

### **Service Commitment Criteria**

In alignment with GBC guidance on regulated, accountable service:

- Minimum commitment of **2 hours per week** in cow protection or farm activities
- Minimum of **100 hours of service per year**
- Minimum of 3 years of sustained service (at least 300 hours) after First Initiation.
- Service should be **consistent, visible, and accountable** to the Goshala or Farm Coordinator
- Any significant gaps or changes in service should be reviewed by the certifying authority

### **Certification Authority**

As per GBC standards, the Initiation Committee, in consultation with the Goshala or Farm Coordinator, shall:

- Review the devotee’s service record and consistency
- Assess character, compassion, and practical responsibility
- Certify eligibility under this track
- Provide a written recommendation as part of the initiation or higher responsibility review process

### **Prabhupada Reference**

*"Protecting cows is the business of the brahmanas."* — Lecture, Hawaii

### **Rationale**

Cow protection and farm seva cultivate patience, purity, and sattvic qualities foundational to brahminical life. Engagement in this track:

- Reinforces discipline, compassion, and care for all living beings
- Provides tangible, devotional connection to Krishna’s mercy in the form of cows and the land
- Develops qualities such as responsibility, humility, and steadiness
- Ensures the sustainability and ethical functioning of temple agricultural and goshala programs

# 5. GROUNDING SEVA REQUIREMENT (CULTURAL INTEGRITY MEASURE)

## Purpose

To eliminate hierarchical distinctions between temple services and to preserve the culture of humility foundational to Vaishnava life.

Srila Prabhupada emphasized:

“Sweeping the floor of the temple is just as good as worshipping the Deity.”

“The real qualification is humility.”

“Even a brahmana must be ready to wash dishes.”

In many temples worldwide, problems arise when second-initiated devotees begin to see altar seva as superior and cleaning or kitchen work as inferior. This contradicts Krishna consciousness and erodes community culture.

## Policy

All second-initiated devotees, including those in the Deity Department, must maintain at least one additional grounding seva that does not create separation from the rest of the devotee community.

## Examples of Grounding Seva

- Cleaning (temple room, hallways, bathrooms, shoe room)
- Pot washing
- Kitchen prep
- Festival setup and breakdown
- Sunday feast cleanup
- Parking service
- Trash service
- Food truck cleanup and support
- Farm/goshala cleaning

## Rationale

1. Grounding seva ensures humility is preserved even for those serving the Deities.
2. It prevents a two-class system between “altar devotees” and “other devotees.”

3. It creates unity and camaraderie among all devotees, regardless of initiation status.
4. It reinforces that all service is absolute and pleasing to Krishna.
5. It allows second-initiated devotees to set an example of humility and equality.

This requirement aligns with global best practices.

## **6. BRAHMINICAL ONBOARDING PROGRAM (POST–SECOND INITIATION)**

### **Purpose**

To ensure that devotees who receive second initiation are properly trained, disciplined, and cultured before entering altar service. Second initiation does not automatically grant competence for Deity worship. A structured onboarding program protects the Deities, the temple's reputation, and helps second-initiated devotees receive the necessary pre-requisite training that will be required to perform Deity worship. As part of this training second initiated devotees will be provided opportunities to learn various assistant Pujari services such as (not limited to) handling of all Deity paraphernalia, the right way to organize and prepare these, rendering of basic upacharas, basic mantras required for worship, mood with which we serve the lordships and timely, co-ordination and communication with Pujaris to ensure sevas are done to the highest standards. This will help preserve the dignity of worship and continue to maintain (and raise) our standards of Deity worship at ISKCON Seattle.

### **Mandatory Components -**

#### **1. Minimum 6 months training period**

Newly second-initiated devotees must undergo a supervised training program as determined by Pujari Working Committee covering:

During the first 3-month period second initiated devotees will be assigned various services (below are some illustrative examples and not an exhaustive list)

- Assisting Pujaris in the Back-altar seva for Jewelry, Dress preparation, organization and storing.
- Arati Paraphernalia preparation
- Altar etiquette
- Various Shuddi process
- Theoretical and Practical training on Brahmana attire and personal cleanliness standards
- Bhoga plates offering preparation assistance
- Deity dress organization
- Mood of service, Altar etiquette, and humility in service
- Emergency protocols and mood of Seva

Training is practical and hands-on.

During the second 3-month period second initiated devotees will be assigned additional services (below are some illustrative examples and not an exhaustive list)

- Learning and performing Arati to HDG Srila Prabhupada
- Dressing HDG Srila Prabhupada
- Various Shuddi process
- Handling of various sacred items including preparation and clean-up of fire sacrifice items.
- Learn and assist the Abhishekam team (if no festivals during these periods, Participate, learn, and demonstrate Abhishekam sevas)
- Learning of basic mantras and upacharas required for Deity worship (Training will be provided by PWC)

Training is practical and hands-on.

### **Service Commitment Criteria**

In alignment with GBC guidance on regulated, accountable service:

- Minimum commitment of **2 hours per week** in Deity Department service
- Minimum of **50 hours of service during the 6-month training period** (Electronic logging required)
- Service should be **consistent, visible, and accountable** to the Department Head or supervising Pujari
- Any significant gaps or changes in service should be reviewed by the certifying authority

## **2. Final Evaluation**

At the end of training, **an evaluation is conducted by the Pujari Working Committee**. This evaluation will determine whether the devotee is ready to join the existing Roster. If not ready, clear written feedback and a supplementary training plan are provided.

### **Rationale**

This system:

- Protects the sanctity and standards of worship
- Ensures uniform adherence to protocol
- Prevents cultural misunderstandings
- Supports new brahmanas in adopting correct behavior
- Maintains Seattle's adherence to global ISKCON standards

# **7. NO DILUTION OF STANDARDS**

## **Principle**

ISKCON Seattle welcomes and honors the mercy of initiating gurus. However, the temple may not dilute or bypass initiation standards on the basis of mercy alone.

### **Srila Prabhupada's Instructions**

“Initiation means to accept the rules and regulations.”

“Better to wait than to take initiation prematurely.”

“The temple management must ensure that candidates are fully qualified.”

### **Policy**

- Temple leaders must confirm readiness before recommending initiation.
- Guru mercy may inspire accelerated mentorship — not exemption from standards.
- The IC may expedite support but may not bypass core requirements.
- If a guru expresses desire to give initiation, Seattle responds cooperatively:

“Yes Maharaj, we will help your disciple meet all required standards so that the initiation is stable and spiritually safe.”

### **Rationale**

This protects:

- The disciple
- The guru
- The temple
- The integrity of Srila Prabhupada's mission

## **8. FAMILY OR SPOUSAL CONSENT FOR INITIATION**

In accordance with ISKCON Law and the resolutions and directives of the Governing Body Commission (GBC), initiation is an individual spiritual commitment. Eligibility for initiation shall be determined solely on the basis of the aspirant's personal qualification, including sādhana, character, doctrinal understanding, and readiness to accept the vows of initiation.

No provision of ISKCON Law or GBC policy requires spousal permission, written consent, or authorization as a condition for initiation. Accordingly, marital status or spousal approval shall not be construed as a prerequisite, condition, or impediment to initiation.

While ISKCON upholds the Vaiṣṇava principles of mutual respect and harmony in family life, any pastoral guidance offered to support such harmony is advisory in nature and shall not constitute a formal requirement under ISKCON Law.

For **minors**, initiation requires the **explicit consent of both parents or legal guardians**, in accordance with ISKCON Child Protection policies and applicable law.

## 9. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT (SLA)

### A. FIRST INITIATION SLA

**Purpose:**

Define expectations, timelines, and responsibilities for First Initiation aspirants, ensuring consistency, transparency, and guidance.

**Scope:**

Applies to all aspirants seeking First Initiation under ISKCON Seattle, covering:

- Two six-month preparation phases
- Interviews, recommendations, and initiation coordination

**Roles & Accountability:**

- **Aspirant:** Complete all spiritual, educational, and service requirements; maintain respectful communication; submit required documents.
- **Initiation Committee (IC):** Provide guidance, track progress, conduct interviews, respond to communications, issue recommendations.
- **Temple Presidents:** Oversight and final approvals.
- **Spiritual Master:** Assess readiness and accept initiation.

**Phase 1 – First Six Months:**

- Chant 16 rounds daily; follow 4 regulative principles.
- Take shelter of Srila Prabhupada and chant his pranams.
- Maintain steady sadhana, respectful temple relationships.
- Complete readings: *Srila Prabhupada Lilamrita*, *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*.

- Complete Founder-Acharya & ISKCON Disciples courses.
- Perform ≥1 hour/week temple seva.
- Develop relationship with initiating Spiritual Master.
- Report any pressure in guru selection to IC.

**End-of-Phase Actions:**

- Email intent to IC.
- Submit confirmation letter from Spiritual Master.

**IC SLA:**

- Acknowledge within 7 days; provide guidance within 14 days.
- Inform Temple Presidents about the applicant

**Phase 2 – Second Six Months:**

- Continue chanting and regulative principles.
- Chant pranams of Spiritual Master.
- Increase sadhana and service (≥2 hours/week).
- Complete readings: *Srimad Bhagavatam Canto 1, Nectar of Devotion* (Ch.1–19).
- Memorize *Guru Ashtakam*.
- Request in-person First Initiation interview.

**Interview SLA:**

- Scheduled within 30 days
- Share the outcome to Temple Presidents and Applicant with 7 days

**Post-Interview & Initiation:**

- Sign First Initiation Oath.
- MC Chair or Vice Chair (in case chair not available) issue recommendation letters within 14 days.
- Submit formal initiation request to Spiritual Master.
- Notify IC once initiation is completed.

**Exceptions & Escalation:**

- Delays due to health/family/service must be communicated.
- Non-compliance may cause deferment/reset.
- Unresolved issues escalated to Temple Presidents.

## **B. SECOND (BRAHMINICAL) INITIATION SLA**

**Eligibility:** Must have received First Initiation.

## Qualification Requirements:

- **Mandatory:** Completion of Scriptural Competency Track (Bhakti Śāstrī, Bhagavatam classes or study, core scriptures, demonstrated understanding & conduct).
- **Additional:** Meaningful completion of 2 approved service tracks (Deity, Kitchen & Prasadam, Temple Ops, Outreach, Cow/Farm Seva).
- **Meaningful Completion:** ≥2 hours/week, ≥100 hours/year, sustained over 3 years (≥300 hours); verified humility, accountability, service responsibility.

## Application & Review SLA

- **Application Submission:**  
Devotee submits Second Initiation application to the Initiation Committee (IC)
- **Acknowledgement:**  
IC acknowledges receipt within **7 days**
- **Review Meeting:**  
IC schedules a review meeting within **30 days** to discuss readiness and next steps
- **Gap Resolution:**  
If any pre-requisite gaps are identified, IC provides guidance and corrective steps
- **Recommendation Letters:**  
Devotee submits **three (3) written recommendation letters** from initiated brahmanas
- **IC Recommendation:**  
Once all requirements are met, IC processes the application and forwards it to Temple Presidents within **30 days**
- **Temple Approval:**  
Temple Presidents review or respond within **14 days**
- **MC Approval:**  
MC Chair or Vice Chair (if chair not available) signs the recommendation letter within 7 days after response from Temple Presidents.
- **Final Step:**  
Approved applicants submit a request for initiation to their Spiritual Master

## Roles & Accountability:

- **Applicant:** Maintain sadhana, conduct, and regulated service.

- **IC:** Verify qualifications, issue recommendations.
- **Temple Presidents:** Final institutional approval.

**Review:** SLAs reviewed periodically for alignment with ISKCON Law, GBC policies, and local governance standards.

## **10.CORE RESPONSIBILITY OF IC**

### **10.1. Eligibility Review**

- Receive and review initiation applications.
- Evaluate sadhana logs, reading progress, lifestyle consistency, and service engagement.
- Conduct structured interviews with candidates.
- Identify gaps and prescribe corrective guidance.
- Maintain confidential and documented evaluations.
- Collectively recommend candidates for initiation when criteria are met.

### **10.2. Guru Communication**

- Prepare standardized candidate profiles and documentation.
- Verify that all initiation requirements are fulfilled prior to recommendation.
- Maintain a centralized log of correspondence.
- Send official recommendation letters to the guru's office.
- Coordinate initiation dates and related logistics.
- Communicate responses from the guru promptly and clearly to candidates.

### **10.3. Mentorship & Sadhana Support**

- Assign mentors from within or approved by the IC.
- Ensure regular (minimum monthly) mentor–candidate meetings.
- Guide and monitor daily sadhana and Vaisnava conduct.
- Provide philosophical, cultural, and emotional support.
- Track progress and address concerns early.
- Document mentorship feedback for committee review.

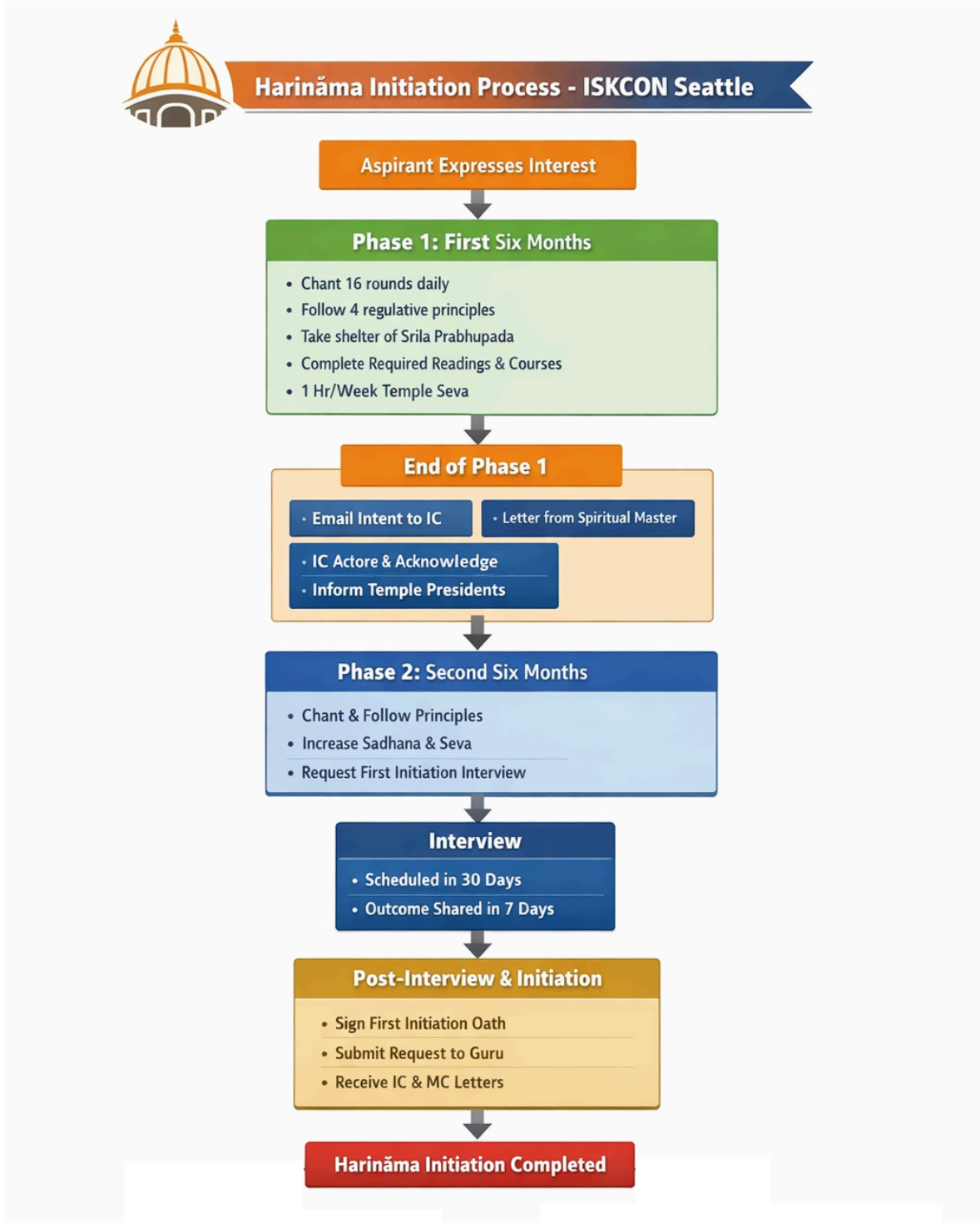
### **10.4. Composition and Decision-Making**

- The IC members shall demonstrate Behavioral maturity, Sound scriptural understanding, Balanced and impartial judgment
- Decisions regarding initiation recommendations shall be made **collectively** to minimize personal bias and ensure uniform standards.

## **10.5. Guiding Principles**

- Fairness and impartiality
- Transparency and documentation
- Consistency across all candidates
- Clear and respectful communication

# 11. PROCESS FLOW



# 12. APPENDIX

**ISKCON SEATTLE**

**OFFICIAL RECOMMENDATION FOR HARI-NAMA (FIRST) INITIATION**

*For office use only*

Center: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To: \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Diksa Guru)

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

It is my pleasure to recommend \_\_\_\_\_ for first initiation by you. To the best of my understanding, he/she has fulfilled the necessary qualifications for initiation. Specifically, during the last twelve months, he/she has been steadily engaged in favorable devotional service, has been chanting a minimum of sixteen rounds of japa daily, and has adhered to the four regulative principles.

He/she is sufficiently knowledgeable in the philosophy of Krishna consciousness and understands the structure and purpose of ISKCON in relation to initiation, as evidenced by successfully completing the examination prescribed under ISKCON Law. The candidate has accepted your shelter for at least six months.

These qualifications have either been personally observed by me or have been confirmed through reliable sources.

Your Servants,

Manage Committee

Name:

Signature:

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**ISKCON SEATTLE**

**OFFICIAL RECOMMENDATION FOR BRAHMANICAL (SECOND) INITIATION**

Center:.....

Date:.....

To (name of guru):.....

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Srila Prabhupada.

It is my pleasure to recommend.....for second initiation by you. I find that he/she has fulfilled the necessary qualifications for this initiation to the best of my understanding. Specifically, for the last Two years he/she has been engaged in favorable devotional service, rendered regularly Deity related services assigned by the Head Pujari, Non-Deity related services assigned by the Temple presidents and has chanted sixteen rounds of japa daily, and has adhered to the four regulative principles. It has been more than two years since he/she received first initiation. These qualifications have either been observed by me personally or I have heard of them from sources I know to be reliable.

Your Servants,

Manage Committee

Name:

Signature:

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**ISKCON SEATTLE**  
**INITIATION ACCEPTANCE OATH**  
(To be Completed by Candidate)

It is my sincere, voluntary and loving desire and request to be accepted by His Holiness  
..... (disciple of His Divine Grace  
Snila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada) as his initiated disciple. To clarify what this  
signifies to me and to all concerned, I make the following declarations and I HEREBY  
SOLEMNLY MAKE THE FOLLOWING VOWS:

1. I accept His Holiness ..... to be my initiating  
(diksa) and instructing (siksa) spiritual master (guru) forever, even life after life.
2. It is my desire and commitment to help His  
Holiness.....  
in his devotional service to His Divine Grace Snila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada  
and the previous acaryas in the guru-parampara.
3. I vow to follow throughout my life the instructions, etiquette, and principles prescribed  
according to Snila Prabhupada's instructions, Bhagavata-dharma sastras (Bhagavad-gita,  
Srimad Bhagavatam, Caitanya Caritamrta, etc.) and ISKCON Law in my dealings with my  
spiritual master.
4. I vow to follow the four regulative principles of avoiding the following sinful activities:  
(a) Eating meat, fish, eggs, onion, garlic and any non-vegetarian food products; (b)  
Taking all forms of intoxication including alcohol, drugs, tobacco, caffeine, coffee, tea,  
etc.; (c) Engaging in gambling, highly speculative business investments and frivolous  
sports; (d) Engaging in illicit sex in any form.
5. I vow to chant 16 rounds (16 108 mantras) of Hare Krishna Maha-mantra japa every  
day.
6. I vow that I shall follow the general and specific individual instructions given to me by  
my spiritual master His Holiness..... I accept these  
instructions as representing Snila Prabhupada's and Lord Krishna's will.
7. As an initiated disciple I understand that I am accepted as a member of and under the  
eternal shelter of the Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya-(ISKCON) disciplic succession coming  
through His Divine Grace Snila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and I vow to  
accept my further spiritual instructions and initiation from His Holiness  
..... and in such circumstances where he is not  
present in this world to give them I shall accept the same only from bona fide ISKCON  
spiritual master representing Snila Prabhupada.
8. I shall always remain loyal to ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness)  
as an extension of Snila Prabhupada and I shall avoid doing anything detrimental to the  
mission of my spiritual master and to ISKCON.

Name of Initiate: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Initiate: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place of Initiation: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Two Witnesses: (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_