

## **Hindu Chaplains: Requisite Qualifications for Professionals and Volunteers**

In lieu of not having dedicated Hindu Chaplaincy training courses in the USA, the following are alternatives that are deemed to have equivalence for the qualifications expected of Hindu Spiritual Care Providers (Chaplain). As these represent the best standard of mentored spiritual care and theological/philosophical training, a person with these credentials would be eligible for endorsement as a Hindu Spiritual Care Provider (Chaplain) by NAHCA. An approved pathway for Volunteer/Honorary Hindu Spiritual Care Provider (Chaplain) is outlined thereafter.

Disclaimer: This is a working document. These suggested qualifications are aspirational with the understanding that the credentialing opportunities listed here are very new. Institutions should be encouraged to support their Hindu chaplains in acquiring the credentials listed here as current chaplains are also working to attain these standards.

### **Professional Hindu Spiritual Care Providers**

#### Basic Qualifications

##### Undergraduate Education

- The candidate must have a Bachelors level undergraduate degree in any discipline from a University with accreditation from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation ([www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)) or international equivalents.

##### Commitment to Ahiṃsā: non-harm

- The candidate should be demonstrably committed to causing no harm - mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually - to any care recipient. Candidates will be expected to sign the NAHCA Code of Ethics, renewing it annually. The responsibility to maintain current credentialing rests upon the candidate.

##### Commitment to Dharma

- The candidate should be connected to a specific Dharma, as guided spiritual mentorship is a core criterion of the ability to provide spiritual care from a place of Dharmic depth. The surviving ancient non-Buddhist, Jain and Sikh Dharmas are: Śākta Dharma, Śaiva Dharma, Vaiṣṇava Dharma, and Smārta Dharma. Additionally, since the 19th century, Sanātana Dharma has developed multiple pathways modelled on

ancient traditions that may be seen to fulfil this purpose. Each Dharma has numerous *Sampradāyas* (denominations), and each *Sampradāya* has numerous *Paramparās* (lineages). In lieu of initiation or oversight by qualified Gurus of these traditions, it is expected that the candidate be guided by a spiritually proficient elder, parent, or another experienced member of a Dharma mentioned.

#### Commitment to Continuing Education

- The duly endorsed candidate is expected to fulfil at least 50 hours of annual continuing education to remain in good standing with NAHCA.

Recommendation 1:  
(Healthcare and Higher Education)  
Specific Qualifications

#### Clinical Pastoral Education

- A minimum of four units of CPE required for healthcare.
- One or more units of CPE recommended for higher education, or equivalent (7 years or more service as a purohita(ā)/brahmachārin/Swāmin, OR 7 years or more service in a mentored leadership capacity at a Hindu Mandir/ Hindu Community Center, AND a desire to gain at least one unit of CPE).

-AND-

#### Formal Education

- From a Recognised University, one or more of the following:
  - Doctoral degree in Hindu theology or philosophy, or 'psychology-based' areas for healthcare. Educational equivalencies may also be submitted.
  - Doctoral degree in Hindu Studies/Sanskrit/Indology, Education, Psychology or equivalent for Higher Education.
  - MA in one of the subject areas above.
  - Graduate degrees that do not fall into the disciplines described above may be considered but should be evaluated according to the standards established in the [BCCI Theological Education Equivalency program](#).

OR

- From Traditional Educational Sources
  - Yoga Teacher Training (1000 hours or more)

- Vedānta Teacher Training (Ācārya level or higher)<sup>1</sup>
- Gurukulam Training (Ācārya level or higher)

## Recommendation 2

(Higher Education, Military, Corrections,<sup>2</sup> Community, etc.)

### Formal Education

- From a CHEA accredited University
  - A MA/PhD in a relevant field, such as Mental Health, Psychology, Cognitive Sciences, Social Work, Organisational Behaviour, Education, Mentorship, etc. plus<sup>3</sup>
- A certificate in Interreligious Chaplaincy (e.g. Graduate Theological Union's Center for Dharma Studies), or reasonable alternatives.

- AND -

### Clinical Pastoral Education

- Completion of 1 Unit of CPE before the end of the first year of employment (using Online CPE, for example) is expected.

-AND-

### Hindu Education (any of the following):

- GTU Center for Dharma Studies Center, Graduate Theological Union, Berkley.
  - MA/PhD Hindu Studies
  - MA Interreligious Chaplaincy with Graduate Certificate in Hindu Studies
- Certificates of Completion from Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies Online for at least 7 of the courses thereby offered, full list [accessible here](#).
- From Traditional Educational Sources

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<sup>1</sup> Śāstrī is a traditional qualification typically earned after 12 years of guided study at a Gurukula. Ācārya is an additional two years of further study, equivalent to an MA in the Indian Education system. However, specific traditions may differ.

<sup>2</sup> For qualifications required for all Federally employed Chaplains (Army, Navy, Air Force, National Guard, Federal Prisons and Veterans Administration), click [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> completion of 4 units of CPE fulfils the requirement for a certificate in Interreligious Chaplaincy

- Vedānta Teacher Training (Śāstrī level or higher)
- Gurukulam Training (Śāstrī level or higher)
- Sanskrit or Classical Tamil language training (Intermediate Proficiency or Higher), e.g. Samskrita Bharati Correspondence Courses, Sanskrit as a Foreign Language, Hindu University of America, etc.
- Counselor of Hindu Tradition (CHT) completion certificate from the Hindu Community Institute

## Volunteer Hindu Spiritual Care Providers

### Basic Qualifications

#### Undergraduate Education

- The candidate must have a Bachelors level undergraduate degree in any discipline from a University with accreditation from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation ([www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)).

#### Commitment to Ahimsā: non-harm

- The candidate should be demonstrably committed to causing no harm - mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually - to any care recipient. Accountability in this respect will be demonstrated through the signing of a Code of Ethics agreed upon by NAHCA, and renewed periodically.

#### Commitment to Dharma

- The candidate should be connected to a specific Dharma, as guided spiritual mentorship is a core criterion of the ability to provide care from a place of Dharmic depth. The surviving ancient non-Buddhist, Jain and Sikh Dharmas are: Śākta Dharma, Śaiva Dharma, and Vaiṣṇava Dharma. Additionally, since the 19th century, Sanātana Dharma has developed pathways modelled on ancient traditions that can fulfil this purpose. Each Dharma has numerous *Sampradāyas* (denominations), and each *Sampradāya* has numerous *Paramparās* (lineages). These are not always institutions but are simple lines of spiritual teachers and their students. Therefore, it is better to think of them as families rather than institutions with boards and charters. In lieu of initiation or oversight by a qualified Guru of these traditions, then it is expected that the candidate be guided by a spiritually proficient elder, parent, or another experienced member of a Dharma mentioned.

## Recommended Specific Qualifications

### Mentored Spiritual Care Proficiency

- 1 or more units of Clinical Pastoral Education. If not completed by the time of appointment, this should be completed within the first year

- AND -

- 3 or more years of supervised responsibility in a spiritual care capacity.

- AND -

- Demonstrated participation in Hindu theology/philosophy study groups or courses, and commensurate practice, such as, for example, the Hindu Community Institute's Counselor of Hindu Tradition course completion certificate.

- AND -

- A letter of support from their spiritual teacher/mentor to confirm the candidate is in good standing within their community.

### Expected Competencies

- Demonstrated commitment to the NAHCA Code of Ethics.
- Demonstrated effective human relations and communications skills.
- Demonstrated knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviours necessary to provide culturally sensitive services to care recipients from all backgrounds, beliefs, persuasions, etc.
- Demonstrated knowledge of intersectional diversity sensitivity.
- Demonstrated experience with age-specific care.
- Demonstrated ability to navigate complex issues in awareness of one's spiritual care provider boundaries.
- Demonstrated ability to work effectively in a group setting.
- Demonstrated commitment to continuing education and professional development appropriate to one's position.

### Next Steps

Once the candidate has collated the relevant documentation, they should contact NAHCA at [NAHCA108@gmail.com](mailto:NAHCA108@gmail.com) to consult on the ensuing endorsement procedures.