



# HOW TO APPLY FOR A LAW ENFORCEMENT JOB

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Listed below are the general qualifications for sworn law enforcement jobs. Each department or agency may have some slight differences in their hiring requirements. Some departments require that you pass a polygraph test while other departments do not administer the test.

## **Federal Law Enforcement**

- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Minimum age is usually 21.
- Possess a valid driver's license.
- Have a 4 year college degree  
Or
- 3 years of investigative experience.
- No felony convictions.
- Willing to work anywhere in the U.S.
- Pass a written entrance test.
- Pass an oral interview.
- Pass a background investigation.
- Pass a polygraph test.
- Pass a psychological evaluation
- Pass a medical examination.
- Pass a physical fitness test.
- Vision must be correctable to 20/20.

## **State Law Enforcement**

- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Minimum age is usually 20 or 21.
- Possess a valid driver's license.
- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Possess 60 college credits.
- No felony convictions.
- Willing to work anywhere in the state.
- Pass a written entrance test.
- Pass an oral interview.
- Pass a physical agility test.
- Pass a background investigation.
- Pass a polygraph test.
- Pass a psychological evaluation
- Pass a medical examination.
- Vision must be correctable to 20/20.

## **Additional Information On The Qualifications**

### **Citizenship**

Most agencies require that you be a U.S. citizen. It does not make sense that you could not be a U.S. citizen yet you enforce the laws of the United States. However, there are a few local police departments that do not require U.S. citizenship as long as the applicant has a work visa or green card.

### **Age**

The minimum age is usually corresponds to the law that you have to be a certain age in order to carry a firearm.

Federal criminal investigator jobs, series 1811, (FBI, Secret Service, etc.) have a maximum entry age of 37. By law, all criminal investigators must retire at age 57 with 20 years of service. Therefore, one must be less than 37 years-of-age when applying to meet the 20 year requirement. Applicants who possess prior federal criminal investigator experience may be eligible to apply for a job beyond the age of 37.

### **Education**

A four year college degree in any field of study will qualify you for most federal, state and local law enforcement jobs.

In lieu of a degree, most federal agencies will accept three years of responsible work experience. Each agency can determine what they consider to be qualifying experience. For example, the Secret Service wants you to have three years of criminal investigative experience. Three years as a police officer will not necessarily qualify you with them. Whereas, the U.S. Marshals Service will accept you without any law enforcement experience as long as you have three years of supervisory experience.

Most state and local law enforcement departments require an applicant to have some college credits, usually around 45 - 60. Some require an Associate degree while other require a four year degree.

### **Felony Convictions**

If you have a felony conviction, you are not eligible to apply for any sworn law enforcement position. Under federal law and most state laws, a convicted felon cannot possess a firearm. Also under federal law, if you are convicted of a misdemeanor crime involving domestic violence such as spousal abuse you cannot possess a firearm and therefore cannot become a police officer.

## **City And County Law Enforcement**

- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Minimum age is usually 20 or 21.
- Possess a valid driver's license.
- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Possess 45 college credits.
- No felony convictions.
- Pass a written entrance test.
- Pass an oral interview.
- Pass a physical agility test.
- Pass a background investigation.
- Pass a polygraph test.
- Pass a psychological evaluation
- Pass a medical examination.
- Vision must be correctable to 20/20.

### **Written Entrance Test**

Most departments have a written entrance test. 70 percent is usually passing but will probably not get you the job since some departments give their test on a regular basis and only hire the top scores. The test is usually a general aptitude test and does not ask questions about the law.

In addition to the written test, some departments give a video test. The video portion of the testing is based on law enforcement related scenarios that focus on quick judgement and common sense. You watch the video and then answer multiple choice questions as to what you would do. All of the answers can be derived without prior police training or experience.

### **Physical Fitness / Agility Test**

Most departments give a physical fitness / agility test to determine your strength and endurance. This may consist of push-ups and sit-ups performed in one minute time period, a sit and reach flexibility test, a 1 - 2 mile run, a bench press test, a stair climbing test, carry or drag a weight a certain distance, a vertical jump, climbing over a low wall, push test and a balance test.

### **Vision**

There are no universal standards for vision. Most agencies require that your vision be 20/20 or corrected to 20/20. There is a concern that if you lose your glasses or contacts you should be able to see to perform your job. Therefore, most agencies have a minimum vision requirement without glasses. Some will allow you to have 20/200 corrected to 20/20 while others only accept 20/100 corrected to 20/20. Most agencies do allow you to have corrective surgery to bring your vision to 20/20.

### **Drug Usage**

Every department sets its own standards as to acceptable past drug usage. Generally speaking, the use of any hard drug such as heroin or LSD will disqualify you. Marijuana usage is usually acceptable if it was years ago and was limited to an experimental usage.

To apply for a job, most departments and agencies require that you complete and send to them their application form. Some may also require a letter of interest or resume. Once they receive your application they will then notify you when they are giving their written entrance test.

## **Federal Law Enforcement**

Most federal agencies require that you submit either an [612](#) (Optional Application for Federal Employment), or an SF 171 (Application for Federal Employment). The SF-171 became obsolete on December 31, 1994. You can still use the form to apply but it is no longer available in an electronic format. Some agencies will accept a resume in lieu of these forms. Some agencies will accept your application at any time. When they offer their written entrance test, they will contact you and advise you of the date, time and location they will be giving their test. Other agencies will only accept your application to a specific job announcement. If they are not giving their entrance test until next year, then they will not accept your application until they offer the test. Consequently, they will not notify you when they are giving the test. You will have visit their website on a regular basis to see what their hiring status is and to be sure not to miss out on signing up for their test.

A lot of agencies give their test through the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). OPM's is a federal agency that supports the federal government's ability to have the best workforce possible. They establish government wide policy and procedures for human resource management, act as a regulator and evaluator of agency behavior, and provide government wide services. One of those services is giving written entrance tests for some federal agencies. OPM acts as an impartial party and helps to eliminate any nepotism. When an agency is hiring OPM will give their test and then send to the hiring agency the top scores. In theory, if a person scored low on the test he would not be able to call his friends at that agency to help him out. OPM will not send his name and score to that agency until higher scoring applicants are hired first. OPM operates the website [USAJOBS](#) which lists over 20,000 federal jobs. You can search their website for law enforcement jobs that are offered through OPM as well as the individual agencies.

There are some tests you can take which will allow you to apply with several agencies. One of these tests is the Treasury Enforcement Agent Exam (TEA). The TEA exam was good for all of the agencies within the Department of the Treasury: Secret Service, Customs, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) and Internal Revenue Service (IRS). In 2003, the federal government did some reorganizing sending the Secret Service to the Department of Homeland Security and the ATF to the Department of Justice. Although they are no longer with the Treasury Department, both agencies still use the TEA exam as their entrance test.

Some agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) do not have a written entrance test. You send them your application and if they are hiring and you are qualified they will schedule you for an interview.

### **State Law Enforcement**

Most State Police and Highway Patrol offices accept applications on an on-going basis. You can usually apply online or at least find their application forms online by visiting their website. Some agencies require you to send them a letter of interest, a resume, and a completed application. Some states have a state application that you must complete. Once you apply they will notify of their testing dates and locations. These are often listed on their website.

Most states also have an employment office that will have information on state law enforcement jobs. This is similar to the Office of Personnel Management on the federal level. Larger cities may have a state employment office that you can visit. Most states will have a website that will list all of the state jobs and application procedures.

### **County And City Law Enforcement**

Most sheriff's offices and city police departments will accept applications on an on-going basis although some may only accept them when a job has been announced. You can visit these offices in person and pick up and application. For most jobs, you can also find an application form online by visiting their website. Most cities and counties have a separate human resource office that will have a listing of current openings and the application forms. In some locations, these offices may be combined providing information on both county and city jobs. The Human Resource Office usually has a website that lists available jobs. You can usually find their website by going to the city or county website and look for a link to "Human Resources."

Some departments may utilize an outside company to collect the applications and administer the test. This information will be listed in the job announcement posted on the city or county website.

## **FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT JOBS**

A federal police officer is tasked with enforcing federal law. There are over 70 federal law enforcement agencies. Some of these agencies employ uniformed police officers who provide security and conduct foot patrols around federal property. Other agencies hire criminal investigators sometimes called special agents who conduct investigations. By law, each agency has certain duties and responsibilities. Any federal law enforcement officer can arrest someone who committed a federal crime. However, the investigation of that crime would be turned over to the agency that is responsible for such matters.

Listed below are some of the more popular agencies and positions along with their job description. You can visit their website and see if they are hiring by clicking on the "Agency Links" in the left hand column.

### **Air Force Office of Special Investigations - Special Agent**

The Air Force Office of Special Investigations is the Air Force's major investigative service. Many of their Special Agents are civilian personnel who provide professional investigative service to commanders of all Air Force activities. AFOSI's primary responsibilities are criminal investigations and counterintelligence services. They identify, investigate and neutralizes criminal, terrorist, and espionage threats to Air Force and Department of Defense personnel and resources. They focus on four priorities:

### **Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives - Special Agent**

ATF is a principal law enforcement agency within the United States Department of Justice dedicated to preventing terrorism, reducing violent crime, and protecting our Nation. Special Agents are responsible for investigating violations of federal law relating to firearms, explosives, arson and alcohol and tobacco diversion. These investigations involve surveillance, participation in raids, interviewing suspects and witnesses, making arrests, obtaining search warrants, and searching for physical evidence. They prepare criminal investigative case reports and testify for the government in court or before grand juries.

### **Border Patrol - Agent**

The priority mission of the Border Patrol is preventing terrorists and terrorists weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, from entering the United States. Their primary mission is the detection and apprehension of illegal aliens and smugglers of aliens at or near the land border. The Border Patrol is specifically responsible for patrolling nearly 6,000 miles of Mexican and Canadian international land borders and over 2,000 miles of coastal waters surrounding the Florida Peninsula and the island of Puerto Rico.

### **Capitol Police - Officer**

The United States Capitol Police has the mission of providing security for the United States Capitol Building. Their main focus is in protecting life and property; preventing, detecting, and investigating criminal acts; and enforcing traffic regulations throughout a large complex of congressional buildings, parks, and thoroughfares. Additionally, they are responsible for protecting Members of Congress, Officers of the United States Senate, United States House of Representatives, and their families.

### **Central Intelligence Agency - Security Protective Officer**

The mission of the CIA's Security Protective Service is the protection of Agency personnel, facilities and information through the enforcement of Federal Laws and Agency Regulations. This is an entry-level armed and uniformed position. Officers are required to work eight-hour shifts to include weekends and holidays and may be directed to work overtime.

### **Coast Guard Investigative Service - Special Agent**

The Coast Guard Investigative Service is a federal investigative and protective program established to carry out the Coast Guard's internal and external criminal investigations; to assist in providing personal security services; to protect the welfare of Coast Guard people; to aid in preserving the internal integrity of the Coast Guard; and to support Coast Guard missions worldwide. Special Agents are full-time civilian criminal investigators hired from qualified civilian applicants.

### **Customs and Border Protection - Officer**

Customs and Border Protection Officers are on duty at our nations international airports, seaports or land border crossings. These ports of entry are the front line of defense against terrorist intrusion, as well as criminal activities, such as drug smuggling, money laundering, undocumented entry of individuals, weapons trafficking, smuggling of prohibited goods and a host of customs violations. CBP Officers interact with the traveling public arriving from overseas, as well as inspecting luggage and airborne cargo in international airports. This is an armed uniformed position.

### **Defense Criminal Investigative Service - Special Agent**

DCIS Special Agents conduct investigations in the Department of Defense (including the military departments) as the Inspector General considers appropriate. They ensure U.S. warfighters have the best and safest equipment to accomplish their mission. Special agents combat terrorism by working with Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies as part of Joint Terrorism Task Forces throughout the United States. This is a civilian law enforcement position.

### **Department of State Diplomatic Security - Special Agent**

Diplomatic Security Special Agents are federal law enforcement officers who serve worldwide. Overseas, special agents advise ambassadors on all security issues and coordinate all of a mission's security programs. Special agents spend a substantial portion of their careers abroad serving at diplomatic posts. In the United States, agents investigate passport and visa fraud and protect the Secretary of State and visiting foreign dignitaries.

### **Drug Enforcement Administration - Special Agent**

DEA Special Agents enforce the controlled substances laws and regulations of the United States of America. They bring to justice organizations - including those with ties to terrorism - and their principal members, who are involved in the growing, manufacture or distribution of illegal drugs. This is often done by infiltrating these criminal organizations.

### **Environmental Protection Agency - Special Agent**

The United States Environmental Protection Agency's charge is to protect human health and the environment. Special Agents in the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance investigate and analyze environmental crimes. They also fulfill their mission by identifying, preventing and reducing noncompliance with environmental statutes.

### **Federal Bureau of Investigation - Special Agent**

FBI Special Agents are responsible for conducting sensitive national security investigations and for enforcing over 300 federal statutes. Agents work on matters including terrorism, foreign counterintelligence, cyber crime, organized crime, white-collar crime, public corruption, civil rights violations, financial crime, bribery, bank robbery, extortion, kidnapping, air piracy, interstate criminal activity, fugitive and drug-trafficking matters, and other violations of federal statutes.

### **Federal Protective Service - Special Agent & Officer**

The United States Federal Protective Service is part of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. FPS is charged with providing the vast federal communities controlled by General Services Administration with the necessary levels of protection to safeguard their tenant federal agencies and their people. Its personnel have full law enforcement authority to respond to criminal incidents and emergencies. Many of their officers are in uniform and perform traditional police services. They also maintain a small force of plainclothes special agents to investigate crimes occurring on federal properties.

### **Fish & Wildlife Service - Special Agent & Refuge Officer**

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service plays a pivotal role in safeguarding some of this nation's rich natural resources such as fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats. Special Agents are trained criminal investigators who enforce wildlife laws throughout the United States. They conduct investigations which may include activities such as surveillance, undercover work, seizing contraband, making arrests, and preparing cases for court. They often work with other law enforcement authorities. Refuge law enforcement officers protect wildlife from poaching and ensure the safety of visitors to the national wildlife refuges.

### **Immigration and Customs Enforcement - Special Agent**

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. Their mission is to protect America and uphold public safety by targeting the people, money and materials that support terrorist and criminal activities. Special Agents enforce the nation's customs and immigration laws by investigating the smuggling of illegal aliens and contraband.

### **Internal Revenue Service - Special Agent**

The law enforcement branch of the IRS has the mission to serve the American public by investigating potential criminal violations of the Internal Revenue Code and related financial crimes. Special Agents find criminals or crimes by tracking money. They are first and foremost investigative accountants. No matter what the source, all income earned, both legal and illegal, has the potential of becoming involved in crimes which fall within the investigative jurisdiction of the IRS Criminal Investigation.

### **Marshals Service - Deputy U.S. Marshal**

The primary mission of Deputy U.S. Marshals is to ensure the safe conduct of judicial proceedings and protecting federal judges, jurors and other members of the federal judiciary. The Marshals Service is the federal government's lead agency for conducting investigations involving: escaped federal prisoners; probation, parole and bond default violators; and fugitives based on warrants generated during drug investigations.

### **Naval Criminal investigative Service - Special Agent**

NCIS is the primary law enforcement and counterintelligence arm of the United States Department of the Navy. Special Agents works closely with other local, state, federal, and foreign agencies to counter and investigate the most serious crimes: terrorism, espionage, homicide, rape, child abuse, arson, and more. NCIS is the Navy's primary source of security for the men, women, ships, planes, and resources of America's seagoing forces. Special agents travel the world and may even be stationed aboard a ship. This is a civilian position that does not require you to join the Navy.

### **Postal Service - Postal Inspector**

Postal Inspectors are federal law enforcement agents with investigative jurisdiction in all criminal matters involving the integrity and security of the U.S. Postal Service. Postal Inspectors investigate criminal, civil, and administrative violations of postal-related laws, often using forensics and cutting-edge technologies. They execute search warrants, prepare comprehensive reports and testify in court proceedings.

### **Secret Service - Special Agent**

Secret Service Agents are charged with two missions: protection and investigation. They are authorized by law to protect the President and the Vice President along with their immediate families. They also protect former Presidents, their spouses and children of former presidents until age 16. In addition, they will protect visiting heads of foreign states and their spouses traveling with them and major Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates and their spouses. Their primary investigative mission is to safeguard the payment and financial systems of the United States. This includes investigating the counterfeiting of U.S. currency, credit card fraud, stolen government checks and crimes that involve financial institution fraud.

## **Secret Service - Uniformed Officer**

Uniformed Division Officers provide protection for the White House Complex, the Vice-President's residence, the Main Treasury Building and Annex, and foreign diplomatic missions and embassies in the Washington, DC area. Uniformed Division Officers also travel in support of the Presidential, Vice-Presidential, and foreign heads of state missions. They have specialized divisions such as counter snipers and canine.

## **Transportation Security Administration - Air Marshal**

Federal Air Marshals serve as the primary law enforcement entity within the Transportation Security Administration and are deployed on flights around the world and in the United States. Their primary mission is to protect air passengers and they closely with other law enforcement agencies to accomplish their mission. Air Marshals also staff several positions at different organizations such as the National Counterterrorism Center, the National Targeting Center, and the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Forces.

## **STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT JOBS**

Nearly every state has a State Police or State Highway Patrol agency. In some states, it may be called the Department of Public Safety. Their law enforcement officers are commonly referred to as "State Troopers." Every state has some slight differences as to the Trooper's duties and responsibilities. Listed below are some of the general differences between the State Police and the State Highway Patrol.

### **State Police**

The State Police is basically a full service law enforcement agency. They patrol the highways but are also a policing force for the majority of the state. It is not uncommon to see a state trooper patrolling a rural county road even though the sheriff's office may have jurisdiction in the same area. They not only respond to traffic accidents but they may be the first responder to any type of crime. The State Police usually have a large amount of investigative responsibilities.

### **State Highway Patrol**

As their name implies the State Highway Patrol does a lot of patrolling on the state highways. In some states, they are limited to statewide traffic services. They keep the roadways safe by enforcing the motor vehicle laws. They are considered peace officers and usually have statewide jurisdiction to enforce state law. They do conduct investigations but are sometimes limited to criminal activity on state-owned property.

Every State Police and State Highway Patrol has specialized units within their agency. Once you become a Trooper and have gained enough experience, you can usually apply for one of these positions. Here are some of the divisions that these agencies may have.

## **State Bureau of Investigation**

This is the state's version of the FBI. In some states, they are called the SBI (State Bureau of Investigation) while other state's attached the state name to the title such as GBI (Georgia Bureau of Investigation). These are plainclothes agents who investigate criminal and civil cases within the state's jurisdiction. A lot of their work involves investigating illegal narcotics, apprehending fugitives and enforcing the anti-terrorism laws. They usually report to the state's Attorney General and in some cases the Governor.

## **Crime Scene Specialists**

Using state-of-the-art crime scene equipment, these agents are responsible for identifying, collecting, forensically examining and preserving physical evidence at crime scenes. This may include fingerprints, drug analysis, toxicology, hair samples, fiber samples and firearms.

## **Anti-Terrorist Team**

This unit focuses on subversive organizations such as white supremacist groups operating within the state. They will also investigate terrorist acts such as bombings and threats.

## **Canine Unit**

If a Trooper stops a vehicle that he suspects may be transporting drugs, the canine unit may be called to have a dog search the vehicle. If the dog alerts, this gives the Trooper probable cause to search the vehicle or at least detain the vehicle and driver until a search warrant can be obtained. Dog may also be used to detect explosives and to search an area for suspect who may be hiding.

## **Polygraph unit**

Personnel from this unit will administer polygraph examinations for the State Bureau of Investigation. They will also assist other law enforcement agencies who do not have a polygraph examiner.

## **Governor's Detail**

The State Police and Highway Patrol are usually responsible for protecting the governor and other dignitaries. A detail may be stationed at the governor's residence as well as a detail traveling with the governor.

Most states have other law enforcement jobs that are not a part of the State Police or State Patrol. Some states may have the careers listed below. In some cases, they may be a division of the State Police while others may be their own agency.

## **Alcohol Law Enforcement**

The primary mission of the ALE is the enforcement of state laws governing alcoholic beverages, drugs, and tobacco. Agents sometimes work undercover to ensure business are not selling alcoholic beverages and cigarettes to minors. They also perform any law enforcement duty assigned by the Governor.

## **Capitol Police**

Capitol Police Officers are usually in uniform and perform a wide range of police duties in and around the state's capitol. They will expedite traffic flow around the Capitol, investigate accidents, and assist visitors to the capitol complex. They also provide interior security at the capitol and sometimes at the Governor's residence. To assist in performing their duties, they may utilize bike patrols and trained police dogs.

## **Environmental Police Officer**

This agency has the power to enforce the laws and regulations pertaining to fish and wildlife as well as fresh water wetlands and the forests. They often work in the state parks and game preserves. They also enforce the boating and water safety laws.

## **Secretary of State Police**

The Secretary of State Police is responsible for the regulation of businesses involved in the sale of motor vehicles and vehicle parts. They protect the consumer of fraudulent motor vehicle transactions throughout the state.

## **CITY POLICE JOBS**

### **Police Officer**

City police officers are responsible for enforcing the law within the city limits. New officers usually spend time on the street patrolling a certain area of the city. This may be in a car, on a motorcycle or bicycle or on foot. A city police officer probably experiences more diverse situations than any other law enforcement officer. This is because they can encounter nearly every type of criminal activity. They may respond to a burglary in progress, a domestic dispute, a shooting, a kidnapping, a suicide, etc. Even though we think of some crimes as being strictly a federal crime such as bank robbery, the first officers responding to the bank's alarm will not be the FBI. It will probably be the city police officer who is closest to the bank. Police officers are also responsible for providing public assistance, answering calls related to traffic incidents and other emergencies, collecting, preserving and maintaining evidence, serving arrest warrants, and performing other related activities as needed or required. They are usually required to work various shifts including the weekends.

After several years on the job, officers are eligible for a promotion to the rank of sergeant, lieutenant, detective, etc. They can also apply for a specialized unit. Listed below are some of the more common divisions that most departments have.

- Homicide
- Robbery
- Burglary
- Fraud
- Computer Forensics
- Juvenile
- Sex Crimes

- Polygraph Section
- Motorcycles
- Canine
- Bicycle
- Foot Patrol
- Crime Prevention
- Bomb Squad

### **Town Marshal**

Some cities have a Town Marshal's Office. This may be in lieu of a police department or in addition to the city police. Some small towns which only have one or two law enforcement officers will refer to them as marshals rather than city police officers. However, there are towns which will have a Marshal's Office that employs 30 or more sworn Deputy Marshals.

In some cities, the Marshal will function as the Chief of Police. He reports to the Mayor and Town council. The Marshal and his deputies are responsible for the enforcement of those provisions of the Town Code including zoning ordinances, the preservation of law and order, and the protection of life and property. In some cities, the Marshal's Office provides court services to the Municipal Court. This includes providing security at the courthouse, serving subpoenas issued by the court and collecting any fines owed to the court.

For additional information visit: [www.policejobsinfo.com](http://www.policejobsinfo.com)