Law Enforcement

Careers in Law Enforcement

People depend on law enforcement officers and detectives to protect their lives and property. Law enforcement officers, some of whom are State or Federal special agents or inspectors, perform these duties in a variety of ways, depending on the size and type of their organization. In most jurisdictions, they are expected to exercise authority when necessary, whether on or off duty.

Law enforcement officers must be able to work under a great deal of pressure, while maintaining a clear head and positive work ethic. They must be open-minded, fair, unbiased, and sensitive in order to deal with people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and lifestyles.

It’s important to realize that law enforcement jobs are not limited to investigative, police, compliance, and security positions. State and federal law enforcement opportunities are also not limited to the SBI, FBI, and CIA. Besides law enforcement officers and detectives, there are also opportunities in the supporting areas of forensics.

Law enforcement has its roots in the military, so it’s no surprise that the selection process is strict, rigid, and complex. Steps in the application process usually include written tests, a medical examination, psychological tests, extensive background checks, and a physical abilities test. This process may take several weeks or months to complete.


Applying to Federal Law Enforcement Positions

Federal Law Enforcement positions are almost always posted on the agency or department’s website. We have outlines federal, state and local agencies on the pages that follow which can help you decide which agencies are best for your interests. Depending on the organization and because of security clearances, the hiring process can take up to one year from application to hire. If you are interested in beginning a career with a federal law enforcement agency immediately after graduation, start the application process in the fall of your senior year.

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<th>FAST STATS</th>
<th>Skills</th>
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<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Median Salary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police Officer/ Sheriff’s Deputy</td>
<td>$53,210</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detective/Criminal Investigator</td>
<td>$62,110</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fish/Game Warden</td>
<td>$48,800</td>
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Federal Law Enforcement Opportunities

**Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)** houses the government’s principal investigators, responsible for investigating violations of more than 200 categories of federal law and conducting sensitive national security investigations. Agents may conduct surveillance, monitor court-authorized wiretaps, examine business records, investigate white-collar crime, or participate in sensitive undercover assignments. The FBI investigates organized crime, public corruption, financial crime, fraud against the government, bribery, copyright infringement, civil rights violations, bank robbery, extortion, kidnapping, air piracy, terrorism, espionage, interstate criminal activity, drug trafficking, and other violations of federal statutes. [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)

**Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)** acts as the principal adviser to the President for intelligence matters related to the national security. The CIA collects intelligence through human sources and by other appropriate means, using research, development, and deployment of high-leverage technology for intelligence purposes. There are four organizations within the CIA: Operations/Clandestine Service; Analysts/Intelligence; Science, Engineering, and Technology; and Support (HR, finance, etc.) [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)

**Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)** enforces laws and regulations relating to illegal drugs. Not only is the DEA the lead agency for domestic enforcement of federal drug laws, it also has sole responsibility for coordinating and pursuing U.S. drug investigations abroad. Agents may conduct complex criminal investigations, carry out surveillance of criminals, and infiltrate illicit drug organizations using undercover techniques. The DEA also has an Accounting Career Intern program. [www.justice.gov/dea](http://www.justice.gov/dea)

**U.S. Marshals Service** protects the federal courts and ensures the effective operation of the judicial system. It provides protection for the federal judiciary, transports federal prisoners, protects federal witnesses, and manages assets seized from criminal enterprises. It enjoys the widest jurisdiction of any federal law enforcement agency and is involved to some degree in nearly all federal law enforcement efforts. In addition, U.S. marshals pursue and arrest federal fugitives. [www.usmarshals.gov](http://www.usmarshals.gov)

**Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives** regulates and investigates violations of federal firearms and explosives laws, as well as federal alcohol and tobacco tax regulations. [www.atf.gov](http://www.atf.gov)

The **U.S. Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security** is the Department of State’s security and law enforcement arm. It is the only law enforcement agency with representation in nearly every country in the world. Overseas, it advises ambassadors on all security matters and manages a complex range of security programs designed to protect personnel, facilities, and information. In the United States, it investigates passport and visa fraud, conducts personnel security investigations, issues security clearances, and protects the Secretary of State and a number of foreign dignitaries. It also trains foreign civilian police and administers a counter-terrorism reward program. [www.state.gov/m/ds/](http://www.state.gov/m/ds/)

The **Department of Homeland Security** employs numerous law enforcement officers under several different agencies, including Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the U.S. Secret Service. [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov)

- **U.S. Border Patrol** agents protect more than 8,000 miles of international land and water boundaries. Their missions are to detect and prevent the smuggling and unlawful entry of undocumented foreign nationals into the United States, to apprehend those persons violating the immigration laws, and to interdict contraband, such as narcotics. [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov)

- **Immigration Inspectors** interview and examine people seeking entrance to the United States and its territories. They inspect passports to determine whether people are legally eligible to enter the United States. Immigration inspectors also prepare reports, maintain records, and process applications and petitions for immigration or temporary residence in the United States. [www.ice.gov](http://www.ice.gov)
(Department of Homeland Security opportunities continued)

- **Customs Inspectors** enforce laws governing imports and exports by inspecting cargo, baggage, and articles worn or carried by people, vessels, vehicles, trains, and aircraft entering or leaving the United States. These inspectors examine, count, weigh, gauge, measure, and sample commercial and noncommercial cargoes entering and leaving the United States. Customs inspectors seize prohibited or smuggled articles; intercept contraband; and apprehend, search, detain, and arrest violators of U.S. laws.

- **Customs Agents** investigate violations, such as narcotics smuggling, money laundering, child pornography, and customs fraud, and they enforce the Arms Export Control Act. During domestic and foreign investigations, they develop and use informants; conduct physical and electronic surveillance; and examine records from importers and exporters, banks, couriers, and manufacturers. They conduct interviews, serve on joint task forces with other agencies, and get and execute search warrants.

- **U.S. Secret Service** protects the President, Vice President, and their immediate families; Presidential candidates; former Presidents; and foreign dignitaries visiting the United States. Secret Service agents also investigate counterfeiting, forgery of government checks or bonds, and fraudulent use of credit cards. [www.secretservice.gov](http://www.secretservice.gov)

- **Federal Air Marshals** provide air security by fighting attacks targeting U.S. airports, passengers, and crews. They disguise themselves as ordinary passengers and board flights of U.S. air carriers to locations worldwide. [http://jobs.faa.gov](http://jobs.faa.gov)

The **National Security Agency/Central Security Service** is America’s cryptologic organization. It coordinates, directs, and performs highly specialized activities to protect U.S. government information systems and produce foreign signals intelligence information. A high technology organization, NSA is on the frontiers of communications and data processing. It is also one of the most important centers of foreign language analysis and research within the government. [www.nsa.gov](http://www.nsa.gov)

The **Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS)** is a team of federal law enforcement specialists dedicated to protecting the people, families, and assets of the US Navy and Marine Corps worldwide. Law enforcement specialties within NCIS include computer investigations, forensic science, threat assessment analysis, economic crimes, and electronic countermeasures. Applicants are not required to enlist in the Navy or Marine Corps or have previous military or law enforcement experience. [www.ncis.navy.mil](http://www.ncis.navy.mil)


**INTERPOL/U.S. National Central Bureau** serves as a conduit for a cooperative exchange of criminal information to help detect and combat international crime. Criminal investigations within one country which involve the citizens of another country are routed to or through INTERPOL. [www.usdoj.gov/usncb](http://www.usdoj.gov/usncb)

The **Coast Guard Investigative Service (CGIS)** is a federal investigative and protective program established to carry out the Coast Guard’s internal and external criminal investigations. [http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg2/cgis/](http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg2/cgis/)

**Environmental Protection Agency Criminal Enforcement Program** uses stringent sanctions, including jail sentences, to promote deterrence and help ensure compliance in order to protect human health and the environment. [http://www.epa.gov/compliance/criminal/](http://www.epa.gov/compliance/criminal/)

**Postal Inspection Service** fights criminals who attack the nation’s postal service and use it to defraud, endanger, or otherwise threaten the American public. [https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/](https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/)

**Food and Drug Administration Office of Criminal Investigation** conducts and coordinates investigations of suspected criminal violations of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act; the Federal Anti-Tampering Act; and other related acts. [www.fda.gov/ICECI/default.htm](http://www.fda.gov/ICECI/default.htm)

Source: [www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco) and organization websites
State/Local Law Enforcement Opportunities

**Police Officer** has general law enforcement duties, including maintaining regular patrols and responding to calls for service. They may direct traffic at the scene of an accident, investigate a burglary, or give first aid to an accident victim. In large police departments, officers usually are assigned to a specific type of duty. Before their first assignments, officers usually go through a period of training. In State and large local departments, recruits get training in their agency’s police academy, often for 12 to 14 weeks. In small agencies, recruits often attend a regional or State academy. Training includes classroom instruction in constitutional law and civil rights, State laws and local ordinances, and accident investigation. Recruits also receive training and supervised experience in patrol, traffic control, use of firearms, self-defense, first aid, and emergency response. Contact local police department for more information.

**Deputy Sheriff** enforces the law on the county level. Sheriffs are usually elected to their posts and perform duties similar to those of a local or county police chief. Sheriffs’ departments tend to be relatively small, most having fewer than 50 sworn officers. Deputy sheriffs have law enforcement duties similar to those of officers in urban police departments. Contact local sheriff’s department to apply for positions.

**State Trooper/Highway Patrol** arrests criminals statewide and patrols highways to enforce motor vehicle laws and regulations. Contact state highway patrol for more information.

**Detectives** are plainclothes investigators who gather facts and collect evidence for criminal cases. They may be employed by a police department or other organization or work privately. Some are assigned to interagency task forces to combat specific types of crime. They conduct interviews, examine records, observe the activities of suspects, and participate in raids or arrests. Detectives and State and Federal agents and inspectors usually specialize in investigating one of a wide variety of violations, such as homicide or fraud.

**State Bureau of Investigation (SBI)** is primarily known for its role in assisting local law enforcement with a wide variety of investigations, including homicides, missing persons cases, robberies, and property crimes. SBI personnel work closely with local police and Sheriffs, other state investigative agencies, and federal authorities. Each unit within the Bureau uses state-of-the-art technology to investigate, analyze, identify, and apprehend criminals. To apply for positions contact your state SBI.