

Chapter 2

PEACE OFFICER AND PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHER BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION DIMENSIONS

Job-relatedness is the cornerstone of every lawful, effective candidate screening procedure. The demonstrated necessity of every pre-employment inquiry for evaluating the skills, abilities, and attributes required for effective job performance is critical to ensuring that those selected are qualified, and serves as a strong defense against allegations of unfairness or discrimination.

Job-relatedness, or “validity,” is characteristic of selection procedures that are derived from an analysis of the job and its requirements and demands. POST has conducted repeated statewide job analyses on both peace officers and public safety dispatchers. In conjunction with the creation of this manual, job analytic data on these two positions were reanalyzed in order to derive a new set of essential attributes of peace officers and public safety dispatchers. Many sources of information were reviewed and reanalyzed, as described in **Appendix A**, [“Development of POST Background Investigation Dimensions.”](#)

Based on these analyses, one common set of background dimensions was created for peace officers and public safety dispatchers. These ten dimensions are listed in [Table 2.1](#). Commission Regulations [9053\(b\)](#) and [9059\(b\)](#) stipulate that the ten background dimensions shall be considered in the conduct of every peace officer/public safety dispatcher investigation. The dimensions are organized into five major categories (Moral Character, Handling Stress and Adversity, Work Habits, Interactions with Others, and Intellectually-Based Abilities).

Although these background investigation dimensions were selected based on their specific amenability to assessment during the background investigation, a number of them are also evaluated elsewhere in the selection process. For example, “Integrity” is assessed at several other pre-employment stages, such as during the hiring interview and psychological screening. This redundancy is intentional, as it serves to highlight the interdependence of these selection criteria as well as enhance the measurement accuracy of important peace officer and public safety dispatcher character attributes.

Each dimension includes a behaviorally based definition and description, along with a set of indicators for use by background investigators in evaluating candidates against these attributes. Note, however, that specific thresholds of acceptability (e.g., number of allowable moving violations) are not included. The establishment of tolerance levels is an agency’s prerogative, and may well vary between peace officers and public safety dispatchers.

Although it is not necessary for each background report to include a separate evaluation of the candidate on each of the ten dimensions, they should serve as points of focus for the background investigation itself, as well as for issues to be considered when preparing the final report.

Agencies are strongly encouraged to establish standards associated with such issues as criminal convictions, thefts, illegal drug use and other criminal conduct, and driving history. If these issues have not been addressed, background investigators are faced with the need to continuously consult the chain of command every time they encounter negative information. This slows the process and may expose the department to liability in the event that inconsistent and/or inappropriate standards are applied.

Investigators must also exercise caution not to impose their own personal beliefs and/or prejudices as the benchmark against which to measure character, especially if the agency has not defined its own standards. To be defensible, agency standards must be job-related and consistent with business necessity; moreover, overly demanding selection requirements further reduce an already-shrinking applicant pool.

No amount of standard-setting, however, will eliminate the need to make case-by-case judgments based on specific facts presented by each candidate's background. Rarely is one fact a sufficient basis for disqualifying an individual; rather, it is generally necessary to investigate the circumstances surrounding each fact in order to make an educated assessment of the candidate's suitability, taking into consideration such factors as:

- The patterns of past behavior and specific combinations of fact and circumstances,
- The consequences if past undesirable behavior occurs again or becomes generally known,
- The likelihood of recurrence of the undesirable behavior,
- The relevance of the past behavior to the job demands and requirements,
- The length of time between the particular undesirable act and the application for employment, with consideration given to the intervening behavior of the candidate, and
- The legal rights of the candidate.

The use of these dimensions in organizing and supporting the investigators' observations and findings is discussed in [Step 9](#), Report and Background Packet Preparation in **Chapter 4**, "The Background Investigation."

Table 2.1
SUMMARY OF POST BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION DIMENSIONS
FOR PEACE OFFICERS AND PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHERS

MORAL CHARACTER	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honesty • Impartiality • Trustworthiness • Protection of Confidential Information • Moral/Ethical Behavior 2. Impulse Control/Attention to Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe Driving Practices • Attention to Safety • Impulse/Anger Control 3. Substance Abuse and Other Risk-Taking Behavior
HANDLING STRESS AND ADVERSITY	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Stress Tolerance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Attitude and Even Temper • Stress Tolerance and Recovery • Accepting Responsibility for Mistakes 5. Confronting and Overcoming Problems, Obstacles, and Adversity
WORK HABITS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Conscientiousness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependability/Reliability • Personal Accountability and Responsibility • Safeguarding and Maintaining Property, Equipment, and Belongings • Orderliness, Thoroughness, and Attention to Detail • Initiative and Drive • General Conscientiousness
INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Interpersonal Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Sensitivity • Social Interest and Concern • Tolerance • Social Self-Confidence/Persuasiveness • Teamwork
INTELLECTUALLY-BASED ABILITIES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Decision-Making and Judgment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situation/Problem Analysis • Adherence to Policies and Regulations • Response Appropriateness • Response Assessment 9. Learning Ability 10. Communication Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral Communication • Written Communication

MORAL CHARACTER

1. **Integrity.** This involves maintaining high standards of personal conduct. It consists of attributes such as honesty, impartiality, trustworthiness, and abiding by laws, regulations, and procedures. It includes:
 - ✓ Not **abusing the system** nor using one's **position for personal gain**; not yielding to temptations of bribes, favors, gratuities, or payoffs
 - ✓ Not bending rules or otherwise trying to beat the system
 - ✓ Not sharing or releasing **confidential information**
 - ✓ Not engaging in **illegal or immoral activities** — either on or off the job
 - ✓ **Honest and impartial** in dealings with others both in and outside the agency
 - ✓ Not condoning or ignoring unethical/illegal conduct in others
 - ✓ **Truthful and honest** sworn testimony, affidavits, and in all dealings with others

INDICATORS:

- Dishonesty in the hiring process, including:
 - deliberately misstating or misrepresenting identifying information or qualifications, whether orally or in writing
 - misleading any person involved in the pre-employment screening process by misstating, misrepresenting, or failing to completely answer questions
 - inaccuracies or deliberate omissions in applications, Personal History Statements, or any other documentation required as part of the pre-employment process used to help determine the candidate's suitability for employment
 - any other act of deceit or deception
- Lying about past mistakes or oversights
- Fraudulently reporting or other abuses/misuses of employer leave policies (e.g., sick leave, vacation, bereavement leave)
- Abuses privileges and benefits of the job (e.g., overtime, use of supplies, equipment, internet access)
- Involved in the sale or distribution of illegal drugs
- Engages in inappropriate sexual activity (e.g., prostitutes, sex with minors, etc.)
- Evidence of perjury, signing of false affidavits in any criminal or civil proceeding, falsification of official reports including statements, narratives, property documents, evidentiary documents, giving incomplete or misleading information to supervisors
- Cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty
- Attempting to induce others to give false information
- Association with those who commit crimes or otherwise demonstrate unethical/immoral behavior

- Commits illegal or immoral activities that would be offensive to contemporary community standards of propriety
- Commits crimes against employers — arson, burglary, stealing (goods, money, or services) — which would amount to a felony
- Conviction(s) of any criminal offense classified as a misdemeanor under California Law, especially as an adult
- Having an outstanding warrant of arrest at time of application for job or throughout the hiring process
- Admission of having committed any act amounting to a felony under California Law, as an adult
- Admission of any criminal act, whether misdemeanor or felony, committed against children, including, but not limited to: molesting or annoying children, child abduction, child abuse, lewd and lascivious acts with a child, indecent exposure (except acts of consensual unlawful intercourse accomplished between two minors, unless more than four years difference in age existed at the time of the acts)
- Actions resulting in civil lawsuits against the candidate or his/her employer
- Committing acts that, had they been detected, would have resulted in prosecution and conviction and would have automatically disqualified the candidate.

While Employed in a Position of Public Trust:

- Conviction of any offense classified as a misdemeanor under California Law while employed as a peace officer (including military police)
- Admission of administrative conviction of any act while employed as a peace officer, including military police, involving lying, falsification of any official report or document, or theft
- Admission of administrative conviction or criminal conviction for failure to properly report witnessed criminal conduct committed by another law enforcement officer
- Accepting or soliciting any bribe or gratuity while in a position of public trust
- Embezzlement of money, goods or services while in a position of trust

- 2. Impulse Control/Attention to Safety.** Avoiding impulsive and/or unnecessarily risky behavior to ensure the safety of oneself and others. It includes thinking before acting, taking proper precautions, keeping one's impetuous, knee-jerk reactions in check, and behaving in conscious regard for the larger situation at hand.

INDICATORS:

Safe Driving Practices

- Receipt of multiple moving violations (especially for potential life-threatening acts such as reckless driving, speed contest, etc.)
- Driver in multiple chargeable collisions. Numerous moving and non-moving violations, at-fault accidents
- Instances of road rage, driving recklessly and/or at excessive speeds

Attention to Safety

- Fails to take proper precautions to minimize risks associated with hazardous activities
- Takes unnecessary, foolish risks
- Disregards risk to self or others

Impulse/Anger Control

- Overreacts when challenged or criticized
- Unnecessarily confrontational in interactions with others
- Reacts childishly or with anger to criticism or disappointment
- Disciplined by any employer as an adult for fighting in the workplace
- Admission of any act of domestic violence as an adult
- Use of verbal or physical abuse or violence toward others
- Violent assault upon another, including spousal battery, sexual battery, or other acts of violence
- Admission of administrative conviction or criminal convictions for any act amounting to assault under color of authority or any other violation of federal or state civil rights laws
- Instances of reprimands, counseling, terminations, suspensions for poor behavioral control at work

- 3. Substance Abuse and Other Risk-Taking Behavior.** This involves engaging in behavior that is inappropriate, self-damaging, and with potential adverse impact on the agency, and includes alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, sale of drugs and gambling.

INDICATORS:

- Illegal use or possession of a controlled substance while employed in any law enforcement capacity, including military police
- Drug test of the candidate, during the course of the hiring process, where illegal controlled substances are detected
- Illegal or unauthorized use of prescription medications
- Illegal use or possession of a controlled substance while a student enrolled in college-accredited courses related to the criminal justice field
- Manufacturing, cultivating, transporting, brokering, or selling any controlled substances
- Record of alcohol or drug-related incidents, including driving under the influence or such charge reduced to reckless driving, violation of open container laws or transporting open containers
- History of other problems associated with drug and/or alcohol use
- Perpetrator of domestic violence incidents

- Missed work due to alcohol use
- Alcohol use while on the job (where prohibited)
- Arriving at work intoxicated/smelling of alcohol or hung-over
- Gambling to the point of causing harm to oneself

HANDLING STRESS AND ADVERSITY

4. **Stress Tolerance.** Maintaining composure, particularly during time-critical emergency events and other stressful situations, weathering negative events and circumstances and maintaining an even temperament and positive attitude. Accepting criticism without becoming overly defensive or allowing it to hamper behavior or job performance.

INDICATORS:

Attitude and Temperament

- Worries excessively; enters into new situations with considerable apprehension
- Overly suspicious and distrusting in dealing with others
- Argumentative, antagonistic towards others, bully
- Commonly behaves with hostility and anger
- Behavior-impairing mood swings
- Badmouths employers and others
- Unnecessarily confrontational and aggressive
- Disrupts/undermines authority (fails to successfully carry out directives; shows signs of contempt by eye rolling, excessive exhaling, etc.)

Stress Tolerance and Recovery

- Comes “unglued,” freezes, or otherwise performs ineffectively when feeling overloaded or stressed
- Uncontrollable reaction to verbal abuse from others
- Reacts childishly or with anger to criticism or disappointment
- Allows personal problems and stressors to bleed into behavior on the job

Accepting Responsibility for Mistakes

- Does not accept responsibility for actions and mistakes; routinely makes excuses or blames others for own shortcomings
- Becomes excessively defensive or otherwise overreacts when challenged or criticized
- Minimizes the importance of past mistakes or errors
- Refuses to accept responsibility for mistakes or improper actions

- 5. Confronting and Overcoming Problems, Obstacles, and Adversity.** This involves willingness and persistence in confronting problems and personal adversity. It includes taking control of situations, as necessary and demonstrating hustle and drive in reaching goals.

INDICATORS:

- Displays submissiveness and insecurity when confronted with challenges, threatening situations, or difficult problems
- Fails to take action or change behavior to resolve problems or mistakes
- Multiple personal bankruptcies, having current financial obligations for which legal obligations have not been satisfied; or any other flagrant history of financial instability
- Allows debts to mount; evades creditors, collection agencies, etc.
- Past due accounts, discharged debts, late payments, collection accounts, civil judgments, and/or bankruptcy
- Fails to meet obligations (for example, auto insurance, auto registration, selective service registration, IRS requirements, child support obligations)
- Fails to exercise fiscal responsibility commensurate with income

WORK HABITS

- 6. Conscientiousness.** Diligent, reliable, conscientious work patterns; performing in a timely, logical manner in accordance with rules, regulations, and organizational policies.

INDICATORS:

Dependability/Reliability

- Fails to meet commitments to work, school, family, volunteer, or community activities
- Poor attendance; takes time off from work unnecessarily (e.g., on/near weekends)
- History of being late to work, meetings, appointments
- Misses scheduled appointment during the process without prior permission
- Excessively long breaks, returning from lunch late, leaving work early
- Fails to comply with instructions or orders
- Fails to properly prepare for meetings

Personal Accountability and Responsibility

- Is not accountable for his/her performance
- Blames others for improper actions
- Fails to analyze prior mistakes or problems to improve performance

- Disciplined by any employer (including military) for gross insubordination, dereliction of duty, or persistent failure to follow established policies and regulations
- History of involuntary dismissal (for any reason other than lay-off)
- Conducts unauthorized personal business while on duty
- Failure to exercise fiscal responsibility commensurate with income
- Past due accounts, discharged debts, late payments, collection accounts, civil judgments, and/or bankruptcy
- History of flagrant financial instability, such as multiple personal bankruptcies, financial obligations for which legal judgments have not been satisfied, etc.
- Failure to meet obligations (for example, auto insurance, auto registration, selective service registration, IRS requirements, child support obligations)

Safeguarding and Maintaining Property, Equipment, and Belongings

- Fails to safeguard property entrusted to him/her
- Fails to maintain equipment
- Loses valuable information

Orderliness, Thoroughness, and Attention to Detail

- Pattern of disorganization in work, school, etc.
- Fails to attend to details (e.g., typos, missing/incorrect information)
- Fails to attend to all aspects of projects and activities to be sure they are completed
- Motor vehicle collisions due to inattentiveness
- Overlooks or misinterprets instructions on PHS and other documents
- Fails to properly recall instructions/directions provided previously
- Cannot properly recall pertinent/important details related to personal history
- Problems at school, work, driving due to poor attention/vigilance

Initiative and Drive

- Gives up in the face of long hours or other difficult working conditions
- Fails to keep current on new rules, procedures, etc.
- Does not initiate proper action unless given explicit instructions
- Fails to ensure that the job is performed correctly
- Procrastinates
- Watches the clock rather than attending to task accomplishment
- Gives up or cuts corners when faced with obstacles
- Performs job duties in a perfunctory manner, expending minimum amount of effort

General Conscientiousness

- Resigns without notice (except where the presence of a hostile work environment is alleged)
- Resigns in lieu of termination (except where a hostile work environment is alleged)
- Holds multiple paid positions with different employers within a relatively brief period of time (excluding military, and students who attend school away from their permanent legal residence)
 - Reprimanded or counseled for poor work performance (including military service)
- Terminated or suspended from work (other than honorable discharge from military)
- Released from probationary employment status except for reduction in force
- Poor record of academic achievement

INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS

- 7. Interpersonal Skills.** This involves interacting with others in a tactful and respectful manner, and showing sensitivity, concern, tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness in one's daily interactions.

INDICATORS:

Social Sensitivity (the ability to “read” people and awareness of the impact of one’s own words and behavior on others)

- Provokes others by officious bearing, gratuitous verbal challenge, or through physical contact
- Antagonizes others
- Uses profanity and other inappropriate language
- Incidents of domestic violence, use of verbal or physical abuse, or violence toward others
- Use of physical force to resolve disputes
- Demonstrated overreaction to criticism

Social Interest and Concern (interest and concern for others)

- Bait people; takes personal offense at comments, insults, or criticism
- Evidence of inability to get along with others in work or personal life
- Makes rude and/or condescending remarks to or about others
- Source of customer/citizen complaints
- Argumentative, loner, bully

Tolerance (lack of tact and impartiality in treating all members of society)

- Makes hasty, biased judgments based on physical appearance, race, gender, or other group membership characteristics
- Refuses to listen to explanations of others
- Inability to recognize how one's own emotions/behavior affect situations and others
- Having been disciplined by any employer (including the military and/or any law enforcement training facility) for acts constituting racial, ethnic, or sexual harassment or discrimination
- During the hiring/background process, uttering any epithet derogatory of another person's race, religion, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation
- Makes inappropriate comments to or about others regarding personal characteristics as well as derogatory comments about specific groups (racial, gender, sexual orientation, proficiency with the English language, immigrant status, HIV/AIDS infection, religion, transgender, social status)
- Evidence of the use of derogatory stereotypes in jokes or daily language
- Sexual harassment/hostile work environment incidents

Social Self Confidence/Persuasiveness (inability and discomfort approaching individuals, and in confronting and reducing interpersonal conflict)

- Avoids confrontations at all costs
- Intimidated by others
- Minimizes or avoids interactions with others
- Escalates situations by overreacting
- Fails to diplomatically offer ideas or persuade others to adopt desired course of action
- Disruptive/challenging to authority
- Use of harassment, threats, or intimidation to gain an advantage
- Succumbs to peer pressure

Teamwork (inability to work effectively as a member of a team)

- Resents successes and accomplishments of team members
- Does not assist or request assistance from team members
- Alienates colleagues by dominating interactions and activities
- Gossips, criticizes, and backstabs colleagues and coworkers
- Fails to achieve or maintain trust with peers, supervisors, and clients

INTELLECTUALLY-BASED ABILITIES

- 8. Decision-Making and Judgment.** The ability to make timely, sound decisions, especially in dangerous, pressure-filled situations, and/or where information is incomplete and/or conflicting. Able to size up situations quickly to determine appropriate action. It also involves the ability to sift through information to glean that which is important and, once identified, to use that information effectively.

INDICATORS:

Situation/Problem Analysis

- Unable to step into a situation and figure out what probably led up to that point in time, as well as what is likely to happen as the situation unfolds
- Tunnel vision; does not see the big picture when analyzing information
- Fails to identify patterns and implications when analyzing information
- Failure to consider available information or appropriate options
- Naive, overly trusting, easily duped
- Spends too much time on minor issues; unable to set priorities

Adherence to Policies and Regulations

- Failure to consider organizational policies and regulations when making decisions
- Fails to use appropriate judgment and discretion in applying regulations and policies; cannot distinguish between the letter and the spirit of rules and laws
- Rigid adherence to rules without consideration of alternative information; needs directives to be in black and white

Response Appropriateness

- Poor judgment in knowing when to confront — and when to back away from — potentially volatile situations
- Overbearing approach to resolving problems
- Escalates problems by under or over-reacting
- Uses force when unnecessary or inappropriate
- Indecision or poor decisions when options are not clear-cut
- Paralyzed by uncertainty or ambiguity; insecure about making a decision

Response Assessment

- Unable or unwilling to make “midcourse corrections” on initial course of action when presented with new information or when circumstances change
- Fails to apply lessons learned from past mistakes

- 9. Learning Ability.** Ability to comprehend and retain a good deal of information, to recall factual information, and to apply what is learned.

INDICATORS:

- Dismissal or probation from school, or other indication(s) of poor academic performance
- Dismissal from a POST-certified Basic Academy, and no subsequent effort to improve in the deficient areas
- Pattern of making repeated mistakes when faced with similar problems and negative situations, in and outside of learning environments

- 10. Communication Skills.** Ability to make oneself understood, both orally and in writing.

INDICATORS:

Oral Communication

- Speech is difficult to understand
- Responses to questions are rambling, confused, and/or disorganized
- Expresses thoughts and emotions inappropriately through facial gesture and body language
- Discussions of topics are incomplete, inappropriate, and/or filled with a lot of unnecessary/irrelevant details
- Fails to understand both explicit and implied messages and responds accordingly
- Does not listen well, thereby missing the point of what others are saying

Written Communication

- Illegible handwriting
- Poor grammar, punctuation, and/or spelling
- Written communications are incomplete, disorganized, unclear, and/or inaccurate
- Written responses to Personal History Statement items are inappropriate, incomplete, or otherwise difficult to decipher