

Background Investigation Training Survey Results

October 2021

This survey was via email to POST agencies on October 12, 2021, with a respond by date of October 19, 2021. There were 96 respondents who completed the survey.

1. Rank:	Responses (N=96)	
Agency/department head/executive staff	49	51.04%
Second level of supervision or above	10	10.42%
Supervisory/management staff	26	27.08%
Line level/administrative staff	9	9.38%
Other (please specify)	2	2.08%

2. POST Region:	Responses (N=96)	
Region 1 (Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa, Solano, and Sonoma Counties)	13	13.54%
Region 2 (Alpine, Amador, Colusa, Butte, El Dorado, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Yolo, Yuba)	12	12.50%
Region 3 (Sacramento and San Joaquin)	3	3.13%
Region 4 (Calaveras, Fresno, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Stanislaus, Tulare, Tuolumne)	7	7.29%
Region 5 (Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco)	8	8.33%
Region 6 (San Benito, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, Monterey)	5	5.21%
Region 7 (Inyo, Mono, Riverside, San Bernardino + LASD)	5	5.21%
Region 8 (Kern, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura + LAPD)	12	12.50%
Region 9 (Los Angeles - excluding LAPD and LASD)	15	15.63%
Region 10 (Imperial, Orange, San Diego)	16	16.67%

3. Approximate number of peace officers in the department:	Responses (N=96)	
< 25	37	38.54%
25 - 50	18	18.75%
51 - 100	21	21.88%
101 - 250	13	13.54%
> 250	7	7.29%

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4. Peace officer background investigations are primarily conducted by: (respondents could select multiple)		Responses (N=96)	
Third party background investigators (e.g. contractors)	66	68.75%	
Staff whose secondary/ancillary duties include backgrounds	27	28.13%	
Staff whose primary duties are backgrounds	20	20.83%	
Staff who are temporarily assigned to backgrounds (e.g. light duty assignment)	3	3.13%	
Other (please specify):	5*	5.21%	

*Respondents also identified retired law enforcement officers/investigators (3), contracting out/occasionally conducting in-house (1) and use of part-time reserves (1).

5. Background investigation training required:		Responses (N=96)	
	Yes	77	80.21%
	No	19	19.79%

6. Type of training required: (respondents could select multiple)		Responses (N=77)	
POST-certified Background Investigation Course (32-40 hours)	73	94.81%	
POST-certified Background Investigation Update Course (16-24 hours)	36	46.75%	
Background Association (i.e., CBIA, CALEBI) Training (e.g., annual conference, quarterly training)	10	12.99%	
Other (please specify)	5*	6.49%	

*Respondents identified third party contractors (3), hands-on training (1), 24 hour POST update after initial training (1) as other types of training required.

7. Reasons for not requiring training: (respondents could select multiple)		Responses (N=19)	
Staffing issues (e.g., employee's absence from the department during training)	6	31.58%	
Frequency of training offered (availability of dates)	5	26.32%	
Cost	2	10.53%	
Location of training	2	10.53%	
Other (please specify)	11*	57.89%	

*All 11 respondents indicated that they utilize third-party investigators, which is why they do not require training.

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8. Probability of being able to send investigators to the following: (N=96)	Not probable		Somewhat improbable		Neutral		Somewhat probable		Very probable	
32-40 hour (4-5 day) in-person course	9	9.38%	5	5.21%	7	7.29%	31	32.29%	44	45.83%
16-24 hour (2-3 day) in-person course	6	6.25%	5	5.21%	5	5.21%	26	27.08%	54	56.25%
4-8 hour in-person training sessions taken over a period of time (e.g., once a week, twice a month)	18	18.75%	9	9.38%	12	12.50%	22	22.92%	35	36.46%
Hybrid training (combination of in-person and online)	9	9.38%	8	8.33%	15	15.63%	23	23.96%	41	42.71%
Online courses offered through the POST Learning Portal or similar platform	7	7.29%	6	6.25%	13	13.54%	10	10.42%	60	62.50%

Additional comments:

- Hybrid would help with scheduling
- Alternate formats would be beneficial for small agencies with limited resources
- Online okay for updates, not for initial
- In person is best – helps with networking; would not send to zoom training
- Any training to improve backgrounds
- Only if POST reimbursable
- Contractor expected to have met the training requirement
- Training would be incumbent upon third party vendor; internal staff conducting volunteer position backgrounds could attend shorter sessions
- Use third party investigators
- Maintain high standards for the background investigator and standard/quality of the applicant

9. Reasonable timeframe in which to complete the following training: (N=96)	No reasonable timeframe		Within 3 months		Within 6 months		Within 12 months		Immediately	
32-40 hour (4-5 day) in-person course	8	8.33%	13	13.54%	18	18.75%	48	50.00%	9	9.38%
16-24 hour (2-3 day) in-person course	4	4.17%	17	17.71%	33	34.38%	34	35.42%	8	8.33%
4-8 hour in-person training sessions taken over a period of time (e.g., once a week, twice a month)	10	10.42%	25	26.04%	21	21.88%	22	22.92%	18	18.75%
Hybrid training (combination of in-person and online)	5	5.21%	23	23.96%	24	25.00%	23	23.96%	21	21.88%
Online courses offered through the POST Learning Portal or similar platform	4	4.17%	13	13.54%	14	14.58%	17	17.71%	48	50.00%

Additional comments: (The number in parentheses represents the number of respondents for each summarized comment.)

- Use third party investigators (3)
- Training depends on staffing (2)
- Training should be completed prior to performing backgrounds (2)

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10. Summarization of comments for challenges departments would encounter, if training was mandated.

The number in parentheses indicates the number of respondents to each summarized comment.

1. Staffing issues (7)
2. Use third party investigators (5)
3. Consecutive course easier for small departments (3)
4. Multi-session courses would be difficult (3)
5. Course availability (3)
6. In person training preferred (2)
7. Cost (2)

11. Summarization of comments relevant to mandating background investigation training. The number in parentheses indicates the number of respondents for each category, followed by the summarized comments.

General Comments on Training Mandate (7)

1. Training already mandated; no effect
2. Should standardize training for all investigators; including update training
3. Should mandate for background investigators and supervisory staff
4. Mandate updates and/or conferences to ensure currency in training
5. If online training is provided, would have internal staff take the training
6. Alternative training and online considerations would be helpful with limited resources
7. Use primarily contractors; send administrative sergeant to BI training; agree with vigorous background process and chief making hiring decision

Concerns with Training Mandate (4)

8. Concern over additional mandate, in light of current requirements/other legislative mandates (2)
9. Cost and availability of courses (2)

Verification of Hiring Standards (4)

10. More POST visits to verify standards are met
11. Backgrounds not an issue; quality candidates are the issue. If negative findings, POST should review background prior to hire
12. The time to make informed selections is early in the background process. After a candidate is hired then there is too much risk
13. Agency liability and getting the best person to fit your agency

Background Investigator Skills and Knowledge (4)

14. Concerned with compliance with government code; changes will affect third party investigations
15. Concern with lack of knowledge of investigators; special skills involved
16. The backgrounder should have good English grammar and be prompt
17. Setting high standards for background investigators will lead to high quality hires

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12. Importance of knowledge and understanding of each area in conducting comprehensive background investigations. (N=96)

	Not at all important		Low importance		Neutral		Somewhat important		Very important	
POST regulatory requirements	1	1.04%	0	0.00%	1	1.04%	5	5.21%	89	92.71%
Relevant state and federal laws	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	11	11.46%	85	88.54%
Documentation requirements	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	1.04%	10	10.42%	85	88.54%
Conducting candidate interviews	0	0.00%	1	1.04%	2	2.08%	10	10.42%	83	86.46%
Identification of valid documents	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	4	4.17%	11	11.46%	81	84.38%
Procedures for conducting backgrounds	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	2.08%	20	20.83%	74	77.08%
Conducting source (e.g., reference, neighbor) interviews	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	7	7.29%	20	20.83%	69	71.88%
Report writing and organization	1	1.04%	0	0.00%	5	5.21%	24	25.00%	66	68.75%

Converting the above ratings to a 5-point scale with 5 being very important and 1 being not at all important, the mean importance ratings for each of the knowledge areas are as follows:

Knowledge Area	Importance Rating
POST regulatory requirements	4.89
Relevant state and federal laws	4.89
Documentation requirements	4.88
Conducting candidate interviews	4.82
Identification of valid documents	4.80
Procedures for conducting backgrounds	4.75
Conducting source (e.g., reference, neighbor) interviews	4.65
Report writing and organization	4.60

13. Other knowledge areas identified by respondents as important to conducting background investigations are listed below. The number in parentheses indicates the number of respondents, followed by summarized comments.

Social media/internet searches (9)

General Background Investigator Knowledge and Skills (9)

1. Doing more than bare minimum to avoid mediocrity and diminishing standards
2. Background investigators with extensive experience in criminal investigations is important
3. Having prior investigations experience is important
4. Professionalism of investigator; some respond to applicants unprofessionally.
5. Timeliness and follow-up
6. Knowledge of the positions for which the investigation is being conducted and knowledge of the department and community which will be served
7. Knowledge of resources and contacts within organizations to help gather information and expedite the process
8. Identifying the skillset and disposition of applicants to be coached and trained
9. Discrimination and Harassment, Equity and Inclusion, Civil Rights, etc.

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Reference/Employment Checks (5)

10. Previous employment history, especially laterals. Training in what can and cannot be asked or investigated
11. Personnel file review from prior agencies (if applicable)
12. Home visit, in person review of prior police service records
13. Risk management issues with past law enforcement agency employers
14. Secondary reference importance

Candidate Attributes and Selection (4)

15. Nuances between candidate "non-select" and disqualification. Regulatory requirements
16. Character; Liability; Integrity; Communication Skills
17. Identification of personal attributes in early stages of the investigation
18. Cultural differences, expectations, and definition of "successful" within each culture

Interviews (4)

19. Conducting family/reference interviews
20. Interview techniques
21. Previous employer interviews and structured background discrepancy interview
22. Being able to conduct a good interview without interrogating

Miscellaneous (4)

23. Case law updates
24. Standardization for definition of terms used in background
25. Background tab order
26. Out of state police officer requirements