Cybervetting Peace Officer Candidates Survey Results
March 2022

The Cybervetting Peace Officer Candidates Survey was sent to department heads and background investigators in March 2022. The primary purpose of the survey was to determine the current use of cybervetting (e.g. social media searches) in background investigations; however, it also provides information on and by whom, the type of searches conducted, if departments have current cybervetting policies, and relevant comments. There were 206 respondents to the survey.

Note: All responses to "other" and/or in the comments section have been summarized. The number listed in parentheses is how many respondents provided a related comment.

1. Rank:	Responses (N=206)	
Agency/department head/executive staff	80	38.83%
Second level of supervision or above	11	5.34%
Supervisory/management staff	43	20.87%
Line level/administrative staff	7	3.40%
Background investigator – in-house staff	36	17.48%
Background investigator – third-party contractor	29	14.08%
Other (specify)*	9	4.37%

*Respondents indicating "other" identified themselves as lieutenant (2), sergeant (1), corporal (1), detective agency (1), recruitment coordinator (1), background/vendor manager (1), analyst (1), and administrative assistant (1).

2. POST Region:	Responses (N=206)	
Region 1 (Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa, Solano, and Sonoma Counties)	21	10.19%
Region 2 (Alpine, Amador, Colusa, Butte, El Dorado, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Yolo, Yuba)	21	10.19%
Region 3 (Sacramento and San Joaquin)	23	11.17%
Region 4 (Calaveras, Fresno, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Stanislaus, Tulare, Tuolumne)	19	9.22%
Region 5 (Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco)	29	14.08%
Region 6 (San Benito, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, Monterey)	35	16.99%
Region 7 (Inyo, Mono, Riverside, San Bernardino + LASD)	24	11.65%
Region 8 (Kern, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura + LAPD)	18	8.74%
Region 9 (Los Angeles - excluding LAPD and LASD)	27	13.11%
Region 10 (Imperial, Orange, San Diego)	26	12.62%

3. Approximate number of peace officers in the department: *(NOTE: Investigators who conduct backgrounds for multiple departments were asked to mark N/A)*		Responses (N=206)	
	Less than 25	54	26.21%
	25 - 50	40	19.42%
	51 - 100	34	16.50%
	101 - 250	29	14.08%
	>250	21	10.19%
	N/A	28	13.59%

Cybervetting Peace Officer Candidates Survey Results
March 2022

4. Approximate number of peace officer backgrounds conducted annually:

	Responses (N=206)	
Less than 21	121	58.74%
21 - 50	43	20.87%
51 - 100	22	10.68%
101 - 200	7	3.40%
>200	13	6.31%

5. Candidates are routinely cybervetted during the background investigation (e.g., social media searches are conducted):

	Responses (N=206)	
Yes	175	84.95%
No	31	15.05%

6. Sources/resources used in cybervetting candidates include?
(NOTE: respondents could select multiple)

	Responses (N=167)	
General search engines (e.g., Google, Yahoo)	152	91.02%
Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram)	148	88.62%
Video sharing platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube)	98	58.68%
Blogs/microblogs (e.g., Twitter)	78	46.71%
Online forums (e.g., Reddit, Quorum)	38	18.56%
Paid or subscription services (e.g., Guardian or similar background vetting agency)	25	14.97%
Other (specify)*	18*	10.78%

*Respondents identified third party contractors (9); general public searches (4); eSoph (2); TLO (2); and CLEAR Reuters Search (1).

7. Social media searches are conducted primarily by:
(NOTE: respondents could select multiple)

	Responses (N=167)	
Third-party (contract) background investigator	103	61.68%
In-house background investigator	91	54.49%
Online subscription service (e.g., department subscribes to a service that provides social media results)	9	5.39%
Other (specify)	--	n/a

8. Social media search results are verified for accuracy through:
(NOTE: respondents could select multiple)

	Responses (N=162)	
Direct discussion with the candidate	142	87.65%
Comparison with other provided information (e.g., PHS, reference responses)	131	80.86%
Detection of deception examination (e.g., polygraph)	49	30.25%
Other (specify)*	8*	4.94%

*Respondents identified results are also verified by outside vendors (3); unknown (2); asking for account names and listing them in background (1); public profile search (1); and going through their social media with them during the background interview (1).

Cybervetting Peace Officer Candidates Survey Results
March 2022

9. **Information sought during a search of social media includes:**
   (NOTE: respondents could select multiple)

	Responses (N=166)	
Immoral and/or other unsuitable behavior	162	97.59%
Bias-relevant behaviors	161	96.99%
Illegal activity	157	94.58%
Positive attributes (e.g., indicators of good character)	105	63.25%
Other (provide specific examples)*	9	5.42%

*Respondents identified other specific examples to include:
   - unknown (2)
   - affiliations with street gangs/other violent groups (2)
   - vendor-provided information (i.e., hate speech, political speech, insults and bullying, obscene language, self-harm, sexual impropriety, terrorism/extremism, threats of violence, toxic language, narcotics, drug-related images, violent images, explicit/racy images, keywords) (1)
   - checking if candidate is sharing, liking, commenting or re-tweeting above behaviors (1)
   - known/recognized associates agency has had contact with (1)
   - questionable posts/statements (1)
   - behavioral traits (1)
   - cyberbullying (1)

10. **Background information relied upon for identifying illegal activity, immoral behaviors and/or bias-relevant behaviors, includes:**
    (NOTE: respondents could select multiple)

	Responses (N=164)	
Candidate self-declaration (e.g. responses to direct questions posed during the background investigation)	158	96.34%
Direct contact with the candidate (e.g., interview)	156	95.12%
Contacts with relatives and references	154	93.90%
Contacts with developed sources (e.g., secondary references)	150	91.46%
Social media searches	148	90.24%
Other (specify)*	13	7.93%

*Respondents identified other background information relied upon to include:
   - Detection of deception examinations (e.g., polygraph) (4)
   - Law enforcement agency records checks (4)
   - Combination of any of the above/not limited to one source without support to DQ (1)
   - Candidate provided information on social media accounts and sites they browse (1)
   - Image confirmation through posts, user history, email addresses (1)
   - Would use social media sourcing more often, if trained (1)
   - Third party contractor (1)
   - All information (1)

11. **The department has a cybervetting policy (e.g., a policy specifically addressing vetting a candidate through social media):**

	Responses (N=167)	
No	121	72.46%
Yes	46	27.54%

Cybervetting Peace Officer Candidates Survey Results
March 2022

12. Criteria outlined in the department's cybervetting policy include:
(NOTE: respondents could select multiple)

Criteria	Responses (N=43)	
Applicable state and federal laws	34	79.07%
Search parameters	25	58.14%
Methods for searching	17	39.53%
Sites to be searched	11	25.58%
Other (specify)*	7	16.28%

*Respondents identified criteria in their policies to include:
- Labor Code 980/Lexipol P&P 1000.5.3 review of social media sites (3)
- Ensure impermissible info is not given to anyone in candidate selection process (2)
- Use third-party for social media review (2)
- Not compel social media passwords (2)
- Comply with privacy rights/laws (2)
- Use paid service/no specific policy(1)
- Verify/validate information (1)
- Use open sources only (1).

13. Reasons why the department does not have a cybervetting policy include:
(NOTE: respondents could select multiple)

Reason	Responses (N=119)	
Use a third-party contractor/background investigator	58	48.74%
Use a subscription service	5	4.20%
Do not conduct social media searches	5	4.20%
Other (specify)*	53	44.54%

*Respondents identified reasons for not having a cybervetting policy to include:
- Unknown (11)
- Only search open sources, general and/or public information (6)
- Have a standard operating procedure, best practices or umbrella background policy (5)
- No specific policy, but searches are conducted (5)
- Have not addressed the issue (5)
- Follow other policies/laws (e.g., Lexipol, Electronic Communications Act) (3)
- Use third party/independent background investigator (3)
- Policy is outdated/unofficial (3)
- Conduct searches solely for personal knowledge; not included in background report (1)
- Have privacy concerns (1)

14. Primary reason(s) for not conducting a social media search include:
(NOTE: respondents could select multiple)

Reason	Responses (N=26)	
Concerns over state or federal laws	16	61.54%
Lack of training in conducting social media searches	14	53.85%
Local agency policy	5	19.23%
Inability to access social media sites	5	19.23%
Other (please specify)*	6	23.08%

*Respondents identified other primary reasons for not conducting social media searches to include:
- Searches are conducted sometimes, but not all the time (3)
- Contract with third party (2)
- Will conduct searches, if required (1)

Cybervetting Peace Officer Candidates Survey Results
March 2022

15. **Additional comments relevant to cybervetting peace officer candidates, including benefits and challenges, and/or additional considerations when reviewing a candidate's social media postings:**
(NOTE: this was an optional item for respondents)

Summary of comments:

- Cybervetting is important/beneficial/should be conducted (15)
- Concerns with limits on social media searches (LC §980, private/locked accounts) (13)
- Would like training/guidance in conducting social media searches (10)
- Search only open/public sources (9)
- Concerns over candidates deleting accounts and/or "unfriending" individuals (7)
- Request permission to access to all social media, including locked accounts (4)
- Use secondary sources for validation (e.g., secondary references, polygraph, interview) (4)
- Do not conduct social media searches (3)
- Challenges identifying social media aliases/specific social networks subscribed to (2)
- Miscellaneous (3)
  - Updating PIQ to be more specific about social media activity
  - Obtain verbal direction from each department regarding cyber vetting and to what extent
  - Bias content opens door for further discussions; may not be reason alone to disqualify an applicant