

LAW ENFORCEMENT CAREER TIPS

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Career Fair

- Dress appropriately – this is your first impression
- Come prepared to ask the agency representatives' questions (ex. How many people are you hiring? How long is the hiring process? What are the benefits that your agency offers (including salary, retirement, health care, etc.)? Etc.) Have these questions written and be prepared to write their responses.
- Collect any material the agency may offer for further review.
- If you know which agencies will be attending, check them out (web site) prior to the Career Fair so you can focus your questioning or even decide if you are interested in that particular agency.
- Ask for a contact person if you have any further questions (perhaps get the representative's card since you have already established initial contact).
- If the agency is testing the day of their visit, be prepared to take the test. Find out as much as you can about the testing procedure prior to their arrival (ex. What you need to bring; are there study guides for the tests, etc.)

Application Stage

- Most law enforcement agencies have a lengthy hiring process. Depending upon the agency, the process may take up to one year; so be patient.
- **Written application** – some agencies have a two tier written application process. The first application is merely an interest form and will include your personal information (name, address, phone number, etc.) and perhaps some information regarding your references. The second application is quite lengthy and very time-consuming (about 60 pages) and will include personal information, previous/current employment (including all part-time jobs), previous/current places you have resided (if you have moved frequently, this may be a challenge); previous drug/alcohol use; previous thefts (if you have ever taken anything that did not belong to you at work or elsewhere); other previous criminal acts (whether you had been caught or not); previous traffic citations; financial debt, to name just a few. Do not leave any questions blank – if it is not applicable, state so. Otherwise the agency may believe that you are hiding something. It would be wise to make a copy of the completed form prior to sending it in since other agencies will use similar forms; you will now have a guide to work from (if the form is to be completed electronically, make sure you back it up and keep an electronic folder for all applications).

- **Written exam** - most agencies will have some form of a written exam. They are usually 2 hours long and include general knowledge that focuses upon reading comprehension, analytical skills, math skills (some agencies may have questions that include basic algebra, geometry and trigonometry – I have not seen any tests that go beyond that), map directions (you will be provided information based upon a scenario and will be asked the most efficient route to take – know your east from your west!) and recall (Agencies use a variety of methods for recall. Some provide you information via the mail and ask you to read the material prior to your testing date for later recall. Others may show you a brief video clip the day of the exam and later ask you questions regarding what you observed). The written exams are designed for high school graduates. College students who have difficulty with the exams often attempt to look too deeply into the questions. It is very basic and is not designed to trip you up; however, it is a weeding-out tool for many agencies.
- **Physical agility tests** – some agencies may provide the physical agility test the same day as the written exam (providing you pass the written test). The physical agility test may include: running (either 100 yard dash or long distance running that needs to be completed within a set time period); agility course (may include running through obstacles, climbing ropes, etc.); dragging a 160 pound dummy a certain distance; push-ups, sit-ups/crunches, pull-ups, dips, etc. The number and time period for completion of each activity will be noted. Dress appropriately (gym clothes).
- **Background check** – each applicant who makes it to a certain stage will have a background investigator assigned to him/her. The background investigator will use the application form as a starting point in their investigation. Once again, depending on the agency, this may be a lengthy process. Expect the investigator to speak to people well beyond your initial references, including neighbors, roommates, previous boyfriends/girlfriends, employers, teachers/professors, etc. Additionally, investigators may check web pages, blogs, Myspace, Facebook, etc. You would find it wise to place only appropriate material on internet access sites!
- **Psychological examination** – most law enforcement agencies will have the applicant complete a psychological examination that may include the latest MMPI or a similar instrument. This is to determine your mental suitability for law enforcement.
- **Polygraph examination** - many law enforcement agencies (but not all) will have the applicant submit to a polygraph examination. Many of the questions will be based upon the background investigation and the background application form you completed earlier. Some of the questions may include: your honesty during the application process (including the completion of the application forms); questions regarding your loyalty to the U.S.; previous criminal (and non-criminal) activity, including drug use, thefts, lying, drinking behavior; etc. The most important thing to remember during the polygraph is to tell the truth. Do NOT go in there and try to “beat the polygraph.” After all, the investigators already know the answers to their questions (from your background check). Assume the investigator was thorough – if you are hiding something, they will know.

- **First oral interview** – This is usually a panel interview where the members of the panel will ask questions to the candidate to determine “fit” within the organization. Often the questions posed are hypothetical situations ascertaining the candidate’s judgment/discretion. For instance, “you are an off-duty police officer and you arrive at a party and observe your friends smoking marijuana. What would you do?” The most important thing in this process is to be consistent and decisive. There may not necessarily be a right and wrong answer (although one answer may be better than another). Most oral interviewers will ask why you wish to join their agency; what contributions can you make to their organization; what are your strengths /weaknesses, etc. Be prepared to ask the panel intelligent questions at the end of their questioning. This will show your interest in their agency.
- **Physical exam** – This is usually performed by a doctor hired by the law enforcement agency to determine if you have any pre-existing illnesses/injuries that may prohibit or hinder you from completing the job functions (ex: color-blindness, back injuries, etc.).
- **Final oral interview** - This is pretty much a conditional offer and the interview is usually a one-on-one interview with a high ranking agency official (ex: police chief). Here, they want to ascertain your commitment to the agency and to determine your career goals.

Tips for the oral interview and other misc.:

- Dress professionally (suit for males; dress for females). You would be wise to remove jewelry, especially a tongue stud.
- Do not chew gum, candy, etc. during the oral interview process.
- Introduce yourself to all members of the oral board (with a firm handshake).
- Maintain eye contact with the members as you answer their questions (don’t look down at the ground/table; don’t fidget, etc.).
- If you do not know an answer, state so. Do not try to B.S. However, I cannot imagine a question that would be posed to include an “I don’t know” response.
- As noted above, be prepared to ask the board members questions at the end of the interview (if provided the opportunity).
- Research the agency prior to your interview. The board members may find it curious that you are asking them questions that may be readily available on their web site (or other promotional materials).
- At the end of the interview, shake hands with the members and thank them for allowing you to interview with them.
- When you return home, send a “thank-you” note to the board members. If you recall their names, use that to your advantage and thank them individually for spending time with you (as opposed to a mass e-mail).

- If you have an answering machine, you would be wise to keep your outgoing message professional (employers do not appreciate calling a potential candidate and listening to an entire musical before being provided an opportunity to leave a message. Also, speak clearly into the machine. They should not have to guess if they called the correct number (and do not leave an outgoing message that just states “leave a message,” “you know what to do,” “do it dude,” etc.).
- If you are leaving a telephone message, speak clearly and slowly. You may wish to provide the spelling of your name and *repeat* your phone number slowly. Most employers will not spend time hitting the repeat button a number of times to figure out who is calling or trying to write the phone number down one digit at a time (This holds true for whomever you are calling; not just employers).

*Each agency has its own unique process and may vary from the above. This is just a general guide to assist you through the process.

Some Local Police Agencies:

Radford Department of Police: <http://www.radford.va.us/police/>

Radford University Police Department: <http://police.asp.radford.edu/>

Christiansburg Police Department: <http://www.christiansburg.org/police/index.htm>

Blacksburg Police Department: <http://www.blacksburg.gov/police/>

Roanoke Co. Police: <http://www.roanokecountyva.gov/Departments/Police/Default.htm>

Roanoke City: [http://www.roanokeva.gov/WebMgmt/ywbase61b.nsf/DocName/\\$police](http://www.roanokeva.gov/WebMgmt/ywbase61b.nsf/DocName/$police)

Pulaski County Sherriff’s Office: <http://www.sheriffsoffice.org/>

Montgomery Co. Sheriff’s Department:

http://www.montva.com/departments/sheriff/law_enforcement.php

Other Virginia Law Enforcement Agencies:

http://crime.about.com/od/agencies/a/agencies_va.htm

Area State Police Agencies:

Virginia State Police: <http://www.vsp.state.va.us/>

Maryland State Police: <http://www.mdsp.org/>

North Carolina State Highway Patrol:

<http://www.nccrimecontrol.org/Index2.cfm?a=000003,000014>

West Virginia State Police: <http://www.wvstatepolice.com/>

Federal Agencies (see Walker, J., Burns, R., Bumgarner, J. & Bratina, M. (March, 2008). Federal Law Enforcement Careers: Laying the Groundwork. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 19, pp. 110-135.

Central Intelligence Agency: www.cia.gov
Army Criminal Investigation Division: www.cid.army.mil
Naval Criminal Investigative Service: www.ncis.navy.mil
Air Force Office of Special Investigations: <http://public.afosi.amc.af.mil>
US Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE): www.ice.gov
US Secret Service: www.secretservice.gov
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives: www.atf.gov
Drug Enforcement Administration: www.dea.gov
Federal Bureau of Investigation: www.fbi.gov
US Marshals Service: <http://usmarshals.gov>
Bureau of Diplomatic Security: www.state.gov/m/ds/
Internal Revenue service-Criminal Investigation Division: www.treasury.gov/irs/ci/
United States Postal Service: www.usps.com/postalinspectors/
Offices of the Inspector General: www.ignet.gov

Some other federal positions:

US Forest Service (rangers and special agents)
US Capitol Police (police officers)
Office of Export Enforcement (special agents)
NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement (patrol officers and special agents)
Department of Defense (police officers)
US Environmental Protection Agency (special agents)
US Health and Human Services (special agents)
Bureau of Indian Affairs (police officers and special agents)
Bureau of Land Management (police officers)
National Park Service (rangers and special agents)
Federal Protective Service (police officers, inspectors, and special agents)
Customs and Border Protection (inspectors)
US Coast Guard (security officers and special agents)
US Border Patrol (border patrol agents)
Federal Air Marshal Service (air marshals)
Bureau of Engraving and Printing Police (police officers)
US Mint Police (police officers)
US Department of Veterans Affairs (police officers)
US Supreme Court Police (police officers)
Amtrak Police (police officers)
Smithsonian Police (police officers)