

# Background Investigations Overview and Considerations for Law Enforcement Personnel in Alaska Native Villages



**COPS**  
Community Oriented Policing Services  
U.S. Department of Justice

# Introduction to Webinar

- During this presentation you will learn:
  - The importance of conducting background investigations for law enforcement personnel
  - How background investigations can inform hiring decisions
  - Resources for conducting background investigations
  - Basic law enforcement academy options in Alaska

# Introduction to Webinar

- COPS Tribal Resources Grant Program and COPS Hiring Grant Program Requirements
  - Background Investigations: Applicants must budget for, and if awarded conduct, background investigations for all full-time career law enforcement officers funded by the grant
  - Basic Law Enforcement Training: Applicants must budget for, and if awarded complete, basic law enforcement training for all full-time career law enforcement officers funded by the grant
- FAQs
  - [https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/2020AwardDocs/FY20Background Investigation and Basic TrainingFAQs.pdf](https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/2020AwardDocs/FY20Background%20Investigation%20and%20Basic%20TrainingFAQs.pdf)

- Presenters:

Fannie Black

Director of Programs

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Executive Director

Alaska Police Standards Council

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Sergeant

Alaska Department of Public Safety Recruitment Unit



# Why we do checks

- Protection of our community
- Respect of community members
- Respect by other public safety agencies and courts
- Reducing potential individual and agency liability
- Upholding the integrity of the law enforcement profession
- Grant requirements

# What Criteria to Use?

Before you begin hiring or screening you must determine the minimum qualifications for the position and what past conduct will eliminate an applicant.

If you don't have written standards, they can be, hard to enforce, subjective, and open the agency to claims of bias and favoritism.

Agree on your criteria then, adopt, document & share them.

Alaska has adopted minimum state standards, but they do not apply to tribal organizations or officers unless the agency chooses to use them.



# First Steps

- Set your criteria
- Obtain a written application and signed Waivers and Release of Information (ROI) forms (required). Your application process should include personal history questions that address:
  - Personal references;
  - Residence and employment history, and;
  - Criminal history questions.
- APSC has a suitable form that can be used or modified, if you wish:  
[F-3 for Village Police Officer Applicants ONLY](#)
- If applicant meets minimum qualifications and is not eliminated by information on their application begin conducting your background investigation



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# Background Resources (FREE)

- Alaska Police Standards Council:  
<https://dps.alaska.gov/APSC/Home>
- Alaska CourtView Records System:  
<https://records.courts.alaska.gov/eaccess/home.page.3>
- Alaska Municipal League: <https://www.akml.org/>
- AML Joint Insurance Agency: <http://www.amljia.org/>

# What to Look For

Past behavior predicts future behavior, *particularly* in similar environments or circumstances. This is the central theme that will run through all of your investigation efforts.

The investigator's job is to find relevant circumstances and measure how applicant behaved in those situations.

**Find evidence that shows this applicant can meet the job expectations, or that they are unqualified.**



# Steps to Consider



- Application (APSC F-3)
- Physical Fitness Test
- Oral Board Interview
- Psychological and/or Polygraph Screening
- Final Hire Approval from Decision-Maker

# Require an Application

## *Measures Attention to Detail*

A job application allows the employer to see how well the applicant can collect information and present it in a readable format, which is an essential job skill for law enforcement work. It also measures how well the applicant can read, follow directions, and meet a submission deadline.

Law enforcement agencies in Alaska use the F-3 form from the Alaska Police Standards Council, which can be found on their website:

<https://dps.alaska.gov/APSC/Agency-Forms>

## *Provides Starting Place for Investigation*

The information that is typically collected on a law-enforcement application includes prior employment, previous supervisors and co-workers, residence history, education history, criminal history and other relevant facts that you can use to begin your investigation.

It should also include email/telephone information for each individual that you can use to reach out and assess the applicant's suitability.

# Physical Fitness Test

## *An Essential Requirement of the Job*

Physical fitness is a bona fide occupational qualification for law enforcement officers.

Job analyses on law enforcement officers have repeatedly demonstrated it to be an underlying factor in determining physiological readiness to perform a variety of critical physical tasks necessary in law enforcement work.

## *Maintains Officer Wellness*

Good physical conditioning has been shown to:

- Reduce the incidence of injury and heart attack
- Enhance recovery from injury
- Improve ability to maintain good judgment and make correct decisions
- Provide options other than the use of deadly force.
- Provide an outlet for relief from stress.

# Oral Board Interview

## *Measures Communication Skills*

Most of what a law enforcement officer does is talk to people, then write it down in a police report.

Good *verbal* communication skills are the first part of this skill set, and are essential in an officer's ability to articulate their authority, elicit information from suspects, victims and witnesses, and de-escalate a conflict.

## *Measures Ability to Perform Under Stress*

An oral board interview can be a stressful test, requiring an applicant to give answers to questions they don't know in advance while presenting in front of several board members.

This is a very similar environment to what officers face every day when they respond to a call for service, don't yet know what the problem is, but will quickly be required to find a solution.

# Psychological/Polygraph Screening

## *Verify the Information on the Application*

A polygraph screening allows the employer to verify the information given by the applicant.

Knowing in advance that a polygraph will be conducted also encourages the applicant to be truthful on the application in the first place.

## *Determine Suitability*

In ways that no other careers can, law enforcement work brings vicarious trauma, tests emotional intelligence, and requires excellent self-control.

A screening by a qualified psychologist ensures that the applicant doesn't have psychological issues that would prevent them from handling the mental aspects of the essential job duties.



# Trends

**Remember, past behavior predicts future behavior...**

LE officers hold a position of power

*How has applicant handled positions of power?*

Domestic violence?

Leadership roles in community?

Supervisory roles in prior jobs?

Involves emotional situations

*How has applicant handled emotional situations?*

First responder experience?

Demonstrates self-control?

Crisis management experience?

Requires self discipline and planning

*What has applicant shown in these areas?*

Personal finances?

Physical fitness?

Prior job performance?



**TRENDS**

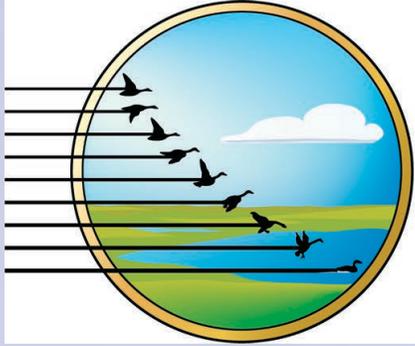
# Final Hiring Decision

Ultimately, the results of the background investigation will be given to a final authority for consideration. Because of the highly subjective nature of these decisions, it is recommended that multiple parties be included in the decision.

YOU'RE  
HIRED!



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*Yuut Elitnaurviat*

P E O P L E ' S L E A R N I N G C E N T E R

Promoting high-wage jobs for local workers through vocational training and educational opportunities

# Yuut Campus

All Public Safety students live, eat, and train on campus, including local residents.





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# Yuut Programs



- Adult Education
  - College Readiness
- Aviation Maintenance
- Construction Trades
- Driver Education
- Healthcare
- Public Safety

# Yuut Public Safety Trainings

- VPO/TPO Academies
  - 15 days
  - \$4,500 tuition, \$2,100 R/B
- VPO/TPO Advanced Academies
  - 10 days
  - \$3,050 tuition, \$1,400 R/B
- Partner with Association of Village Council Presidents





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# What We Provide



- Training on 20 Topics
- Uniforms
- Boots
- Tactical Belt
- OCS and Carrier
- Baton & Holster
- Handcuffs & Case
- Flashlight & Holder
- Digital Camera & Recorder
- Notebook for Reports



# Training Topics

- Fire Training
- Medic 1<sup>st</sup> Aid CPR/AED
- Miranda
- Arrest: When & Where
- Report Writing
- Patrol Procedures
- Rural DUI Procedures





# Training Topics, continued



- Evidence Procedures
- Search & Rescue
- Criminal Codes
- Criminal Complaints
- Search & Seizure
- Interview Techniques
- Crime Scene Investigation

- Use of Force
- Defensive Tactics
- Expandable Baton
- Juvenile Procedures
- Mental Subjects Title 47
- Protective Custody
- Domestic Violence



# Question and Answer Section

- The questions in the webinar video are from the live presentation on March 12, 2020.
- If you have any questions, please contact the COPS Office or the presenters directly. Contact information is on the final slide.



# Question 1

The question is in general related to the psychological screening aspect—its criteria, and its importance.



## Question 2

As a follow-up, is there a fee to the web-based psychological screening discussed?



## Question 3

Under the COPS grant, will the training provided by the Yuut Center be acceptable as the required training for a public safety officer?



## Question 4

Is this webinar on background investigations being recorded, and will the recording or DVD be available?



## Question 5

What steps would you recommend for tribes looking to start tribal police forces? Some villages have no local law enforcement at all and need feet on the ground to respond. What funding, training, or other considerations should tribes keep in mind for TPOs?

## Question 6

A follow-up to that last question is about opportunities to cross-deputize TPOs with VPOs or city law enforcement. Would that be advisable?



## Question 7

Did you mention what personnel action reporting is required by APSC?



## Question 8

The next question is, do the individuals have to have a high school diploma to get hired as a VPO?



## Question 9

Since one of the presenters mentioned that we can hire an applicant even if they had a criminal history with changes for becoming a better person. My understanding was that we cannot hire anyone who has had a criminal history. Is there a form that we use to hire an individual who has had criminal history?



## Question 10

The next question has come in and it's around the hiring process, and it says, can you clarify that a TPO who is currently working under the tribe cannot be hired under the COPS grant.

# Question 11

We had one final question come in around understanding the need to do background investigations for hiring public servants, and asking if there was anything that the state could do to help with this issue in a FTEP type of training.



# Closing

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For more information about the COPS Office and its resources, please visit [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov).