



white paper

**PREPARING APPLICANTS  
FOR THE BACKGROUND  
CHECK PROCESS**

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# PREPARING APPLICANTS FOR THE BACKGROUND CHECK PROCESS

For many organizations, improving the applicant onboarding experience is an ongoing goal. An often overlooked part of this effort is educating applicants about the background check process. While most applicants spend hours fine tuning their resumes and preparing extensively for the interview process, few give much thought to preparing for a pre-employment background check.

As with many things in life, being prepared is often the key to success. Helping applicants “prepare” for the background check can often eliminate surprises or snags that can stall the onboarding process.

The pre-employment background check is essentially a process of verifying information provided by an applicant. In order to conduct these verifications, information accessed through third-party databases is compared to information reported by the applicant. In many cases, the applicant is surprised when a discrepancy is found because he or she was unaware of the information made available by these third parties.

Educating applicants early in the onboarding process about these third-party data sources allows them to conduct their own research and potentially correct any inaccuracies before the background check. Additionally, the exercise of recollecting and accessing this information in advance can help applicants more accurately complete the employment application.



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Below are some simple steps that applicants can take to proactively monitor third-party sources of personal information prior to the pre-employment background check.

**1. CRIMINAL RECORDS** – U.S. Criminal records are housed in any number of local, county, state and federal courts, as well as in law enforcement and private criminal record databases. Applicants with a criminal incident in their past should contact the jurisdiction where the case was heard to make sure that public records accurately reflect the current status of the case. This is especially important if the applicant believes that a case was expunged, dismissed or otherwise removed from the public records.

Applicants can also check their own criminal history directly through the FBI’s criminal database. A search of the FBI database, which is widely viewed as the most exhaustive and authoritative repository of criminal records in the country, is the best way to determine if a criminal record exists.

To access the FBI database, applicants can visit [www.fieldprintfbi.com](http://www.fieldprintfbi.com) and choose the “personal review process.” For a \$50 fee, applicants can have their fingerprints taken electronically at a nearby location and receive their full FBI rap sheet— typically in a matter of minutes.

**IF AN APPLICANT DOES NOT WISH TO CONTACT A PAST EMPLOYER, THERE ARE OTHER METHODS AVAILABLE TO HELP RECONSTRUCT EMPLOYMENT HISTORY.**

**2. WORK HISTORY** – One of the key elements of a background check is the verification of past employment. Unfortunately, remembering all of the details of past positions isn’t always easy. There are, however, a few ways that you can coach applicants to ensure that they provide the most accurate information possible on the job application.

One way is for the applicant to directly contact their past employers to make sure the information on file matches what the applicant has in their records. If an applicant does not wish to contact a past employer, there are other methods available to help reconstruct employment history.

- Many large employers utilize The Work Number, a division of the credit bureau Equifax, to provide outsourced work history verifications on their behalf. Applicants can access this database by visiting [www.theworknumber.com](http://www.theworknumber.com) and clicking on “I’m an Employee.”
- Both the IRS and the Social Security Administration also offer services to help recreate employment history. The IRS service can be accessed at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) and searching for the Form 4506-T. To use the SSA service, applicants can visit [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) and search for the Form SSA-7050-F4. The SSA option is free.

A common mistake applicants often make is listing the wrong employer name on the application. If the applicant worked for a temporary company or a staffing firm, they need to make sure to list the name of the entity that paid them on the application. Applicants are inclined to list the company where they were placed rather than the company that actually paid them. Unless the applicant was a paid employee of a company, the company will have no record of the applicant’s employment and it could appear that he/she has provided false information on the application.



3. **EDUCATION** – If an applicant is seeking a job where a particular level of education is required, it’s likely that his/her educational history will be checked. A direct call to the registrar or records office will confirm that an applicant’s records are up-to-date and accurate. Schools and universities will sometimes withhold degrees if there are unpaid items or misapplied credits. Often, applicants are surprised to find out that their degree was not verified because of something as simple as an unpaid library fine.

Like employment verifications, many schools outsource education verifications. The National Student Clearinghouse performs more than 500 million electronic student record verifications annually. For a fee, applicants can confirm the accuracy of information stored in this database by visiting [www.mystudentcenter.org](http://www.mystudentcenter.org).

4. **PERSONAL INFORMATION** – In addition to the credit bureaus, employers use private sources that collect personal information to verify data provided by applicants, such as name, address and akas/aliases. One of those sources, Accurant, which is owned by Lexis Nexis, is touted as one of the largest databases of personal information with more than 34 billion available records. The Accurant database includes information on historical addresses and names on file; real estate transactions and ownership data; lien, judgment and bankruptcy records; and professional license information.

Prior to the background check process, applicants can access Accurant at [www.personalreports.lexisnexis.com](http://www.personalreports.lexisnexis.com) at

no cost to review their personal information on file and to request corrections/updates, if necessary.

5. **INTERNET SEARCH** – Before applying for a new job, applicants should conduct an Internet search of their own name. Many companies conduct informal Internet searches on potential hires, so it is important that applicants are aware of and consistently monitoring the information that can be found on them online. If the search returns questionable results, applicants can take the opportunity to try to clean up their online image.

6. **CREDIT REPORT** – While the vast majority of employers do not use credit report information as part of a traditional background check, credit reports are often utilized in employment decisions for financial positions or for jobs in the financial services industry. Typically, employers do not look at an applicant’s individual credit score; they consider his or her past activity. Credit histories are used to help determine if an applicant can be considered responsible and financially stable. A credit report is also helpful to identify any akas, aliases or maiden names on file.

Once every 12 months, applicants can request a free copy of each of their credit reports by visiting [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) or by calling (877) 322-8228. It is recommended that all applicants check their credit reports for accuracy on a regular basis. Applicants should be wary of other online vendors marketing their credit reports as free and subsequently charging a fee.

The website [www.annulcreditreport.com](http://www.annulcreditreport.com) is the official free credit site provided by the Federal Trade Commission.

- 7. MOTOR VEHICLE RECORD** – If the position for which the applicant is applying involves driving, it is important that his or her driving record is accurate. For a nominal fee, applicants can visit [www.dmv.org](http://www.dmv.org) to be routed to their state department of motor vehicles where they can request a copy of their own driver’s record.
- 8. EMPLOYMENT ELIGIBILITY STATUS** – Upon starting a new job, applicants are asked to complete a federal Form I-9. The Form I-9 is used to determine if the applicant is legally authorized to work in the U.S. When completing this form, applicants will be asked to produce legal documents that show their work eligibility. Applicants should make a point to secure appropriate documentation prior to the first day on the job. The Form I-9 contains a full list of eligible documents that they may present upon hire.

E-Verify is an additional tool that some employers utilize in the hiring process. E-Verify instantaneously confirms an applicant’s eligibility status with the federal government. If an applicant knows that an employer will be using E-Verify, it is a good idea for the applicant to check his or her eligibility status before applying.

Many times, applicants know whether or not they’re eligible to work in the U.S., but are sometimes surprised to find out that they do not get cleared through the

E-Verify system. A very common reason for applicant issues with E-Verify is name changes—particularly if an individual was recently married or divorced. To avoid any eligibility problems when starting a new job, applicants can check their own work authorization status for free by visiting [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov) and searching the “self-check” option.

With some proactive preparation and monitoring of third-party sources, applicants are able to provide more accurate, up-to-date information to the employer, helping expedite the hiring and onboarding process. Providing your applicants with tools and resources regarding the background check process can bring you one step closer to your goal of creating a positive applicant experience with your company.

