

How to Spend Your Background Budget

By Michael Byrd

The purpose of this article is to outline the keys to building a successful employee screening program for your organization. Since each organization is different I would encourage you to make the design of a background screening program a collaborative process. Take the time to meet with all key individuals, including your general counsel, in determining what type of inquiries into an applicant's past are suitable for your organization.

When setting up your background screening program it is crucial to review your hiring policy first. A successful hiring policy will provide a baseline on which all employees will be evaluated for hire. A successful approach is to establish background screening packages that match a specific type of job. This way, each candidate is treated fairly and your background check uncovers pertinent information to the position in which they are applying. When evaluating the various job categories it is important to ask yourself:

- Does the information I am obtaining coincide with our hiring policy?
- Does this information represent how the applicant has acted in his/her public life?
- Is the information I am obtaining "Job Related?"

In the background screening industry there are a wide variety of products available and a multitude of variations on these products (ScreeningOne offers over 25 background screening services to date). For the purpose of this article I will discuss a few key products that should be a part of any successful employee screening program.

The first place that any company should start is with a *Social Security Trace*. A social security trace is a great source of information and we consider it the "Investigative Starting Point" for any background check. A social security trace will provide three (3) key types of information:

1. Current and past addresses for an applicant which establish where to search for criminal records.
2. Alias names associated with an applicant which assists in isolating all possible records associated with the applicant.
3. Identifying potentially fraudulent information or data entry mistakes provided in the employment application. This search can verify that the social security number and date of birth match the applicant as well as obtain the correct spelling of the applicant's name.

Beyond a social security trace the second key area of focus should be criminal records. It is estimated that one in every 37 adults in the United States has been incarcerated at one time or another. In addition, criminal records are a great indicator of future behavior because of the high occurrence of repeat offenders. It is estimated that 67% of released convicts were re-arrested within three (3) years of their release date.

By taking into account the quality of the data, turnaround time, accessibility of records, and reasonable costs we recommend a *County Criminal Search* as the frontline for criminal investigations. Almost any time that an arrest and conviction is made it will be reported at the county level. Therefore a county criminal search is the most reliable and up-to-date criminal investigation. As an industry best practice we recommend a *County Felony and Misdemeanor Search* in each county the individual has lived in over the previous seven (7) years. If your business operates in an area where several counties merge you may consider conducting searches in those counties for individuals who frequent those neighboring areas. In addition to a county criminal search you should also consider a *Statewide Federal Criminal Search*. Federal Criminal records are maintained in federal courts and are not covered under a county criminal search. Federal Criminal Searches usually include federal offenses such as drug trafficking, postal offenses and fraud.

By incorporating a social security trace in your background screening program and making sure you are utilizing a county criminal search and statewide federal criminal search for your criminal records you are well on your way to designing a successful background screening program.

In evaluating products to complete your program it is important to look at each service and the potential information it provides. During your evaluation process, your background screening partner should set the expectations for each product you consider. Once you have established expectations and the limitations of each product that is available you are ready to complete your screening program.