**FAQs**

**What is the FBI?**

The FBI is an intelligence-driven and threat-focused national security organization with both intelligence and law enforcement responsibilities. It is the principal investigative arm of the U.S. Department of Justice and a full member of the U.S. Intelligence Community. The FBI has the authority and responsibility to investigate specific crimes assigned to it and to provide other law enforcement agencies with cooperative services, such as fingerprint identification, laboratory examinations, and training. The FBI also gathers, shares, and analyzes intelligence, both to support its own investigations and those of its partners and to better understand and combat the security threats facing the United States.

**What is the mission of the FBI?**

The mission of the FBI is to protect the American people and uphold the Constitution of the United States.

**What are the primary investigative functions of the FBI?**

The FBI’s investigative authority is the broadest of all federal law enforcement agencies. The FBI has divided its investigations into several programs, such as domestic and international terrorism, foreign counterintelligence, cyber crime, public corruption, civil rights, organized crime/drugs, white-collar crime, violent crimes and major offenders, and applicant matters. The FBI’s investigative philosophy emphasizes close relations and information sharing with other federal, state, local, and international law enforcement and intelligence agencies. A significant number of FBI investigations are conducted in concert with other law enforcement agencies or as part of joint task forces.

**What does ‘FBI’ stand for?**

‘FBI’ stands for Federal Bureau of Investigation. “Federal” refers to the national government of the United States. “Bureau” is another word for department or division of government. “Investigation” is what we do—gathering facts and evidence to solve and prevent crimes.

**When was the FBI founded?**

On July 26, 1908, Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte appointed an unnamed force of special agents to be the investigative force of the Department of Justice. The FBI evolved from this small group.

**Who is the head of the FBI?**

The FBI is led by a Director, who is appointed by the U.S. President and confirmed by the Senate for a term not to exceed 10 years. The current Director is Christopher Wray.

**How is the FBI organized?**

The FBI is headquartered in Washington, D.C. The offices and divisions at FBI Headquarters provide direction and support to 56 field offices in big cities, more than 350 smaller offices known as resident agencies, several specialized field installations, and more than 60 liaison offices in other countries known as legal attachés.

**How many people work for the FBI?**

The FBI employs approximately 35,000 people, including special agents and support professionals such as intelligence analysts, language specialists, scientists, and information technology specialists. Learn how you can join us at FBIJobs.gov.

**Is the FBI a type of national police force?**

No. The FBI is a national security organization that works closely with many partners around the country and across the globe to address the most serious security threats facing the nation. We are one of many federal agencies with law enforcement responsibilities.

**How accurately is the FBI portrayed in books, television shows, and movies?**

Any author, television script writer, or producer may consult with the FBI about closed cases or our operations, services, or history. However, there is no requirement that they do so, and the FBI does not edit or approve their work. Some authors, television programs, or motion picture producers offer reasonably accurate presentations of our responsibilities, investigations, and procedures in their story lines, while others present their own interpretations or introduce fictional events, persons, or places for dramatic effect.

**Where is the FBI’s authority written down?**

The FBI has a range of legal authorities that enable it to investigate federal crimes and threats to national security, as well as to gather intelligence and assist other law enforcement agencies.

**What does the FBI do with information and evidence gathered during an investigation?**

If a possible violation of federal law under the jurisdiction of the FBI has occurred, the Bureau will investigate. The information and evidence gathered in the course of that investigation are then presented to the appropriate U.S. Attorney or Department of Justice official, who will determine whether prosecution or further action is warranted. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, evidence is either returned or retained for court.

**What does the FBI do with persons it arrests in the course of an investigation?**

A person arrested by the FBI is taken into custody, photographed, and fingerprinted. In addition, an attempt often is made to obtain a voluntary statement from the arrestee. The arrestee remains in FBI custody until the initial court appearance, which must take place without unnecessary delay.

**What authority do FBI Special Agents have to make arrests in the United States, its territories, or on foreign soil?**

In the U.S. and its territories, FBI special agents may make arrests for any federal offense committed in their presence or when they have reasonable grounds to believe that the person to be arrested has committed, or is committing, a felony violation of U.S. laws. On foreign soil, FBI special agents generally do not have authority to make arrests except in certain cases where, with the consent of the host country, Congress has granted the FBI extraterritorial jurisdiction.

**Are FBI Special Agents permitted to install wiretaps at their own discretion?**

No. Wiretapping is one of the FBI’s most sensitive techniques and is strictly controlled by federal statutes. It is used infrequently and only to combat terrorism and the most serious crimes. Title 18, U.S. Code, Section 2516, contains the protocol requiring all law enforcement officers to establish probable cause that the wiretaps may provide evidence of a felony violation of federal law. After determining if a sufficient showing of probable cause has been made, impartial federal judges approve or disapprove wiretaps. The approving judge then must continue to monitor how the wiretap is being conducted. Wiretapping without meeting these stringent requirements and obtaining the necessary court orders is a serious felony under the law.

**What is the FBI’s policy on the use of deadly force by its Special Agents?**

FBI special agents may use deadly force only when necessary—when the agent has a reasonable belief that the subject of such force poses an imminent danger of death or serious physical injury to the agent or another person. If feasible, a verbal warning to submit to the authority of the special agent is given prior to the use of deadly force.

**If a crime is committed that is a violation of local, state, and federal laws, does the FBI “take over” the investigation?**

No. State and local law enforcement agencies are not subordinate to the FBI, and the FBI does not supervise or take over their investigations. Instead, the investigative resources of the FBI and state and local agencies are often pooled in a common effort to investigate and solve the cases. In fact, many task forces composed of FBI agents and state and local officers have been formed to locate fugitives and to address serious threats like terrorism and street violence.

**If an individual is being sought by local police for committing a crime, what assistance can the FBI render to locate the fugitive?**

A “stop” will be placed against the fugitive’s fingerprints in the FBI’s Criminal Justice Information Services Division. Local police will be notified immediately upon the receipt of any additional fingerprints of the fugitive. The fugitive’s name and identifying data also will be entered into the National Crime Information Center, a computerized database that is accessible to law enforcement agencies nationwide. Any agency that inquires about this individual will be informed of his or her fugitive status. In addition, the FBI may obtain a federal arrest warrant and attempt to locate an individual who flees prosecution or confinement if there is reason to believe the person has traveled across a state line or left the country.

**If a child is missing and possibly kidnapped, but no interstate transportation is known, will the FBI begin an investigation?**

Yes. The FBI will initiate a kidnapping investigation involving a missing child “of tender years,” even though there is no known interstate aspect. “Tender years” is generally defined as a child 12 years or younger. The FBI will monitor other kidnapping situations when there is no evidence of interstate travel, and it offers assistance from various entities including the FBI Laboratory.

**What is the FBI’s policy on the use of informants?**

The courts have recognized that the government’s use of informants is lawful and often essential to the effectiveness of properly authorized law enforcement investigations. However, use of informants to assist in the investigation of criminal activity may involve an element of deception, intrusion into the privacy of individuals, or cooperation with persons whose reliability and motivation may be open to question. Although it is legally permissible for the FBI to use informants in its investigations, special care is taken to carefully evaluate and closely supervise their use so the rights of individuals under investigation are not infringed. The FBI can only use informants consistent with specific guidelines issued by the attorney general that control the use of informants.

**Are informants regular employees of the FBI?**

No. Informants are individuals who supply information to the FBI on a confidential basis. They are not hired or trained employees of the FBI, although they may receive compensation in some instances for their information and expenses.

**If a citizen gives information about a potential crime to the FBI and there is a question on whether a federal violation has occurred, who in the government decides?**

The FBI may investigate in order to obtain sufficient facts concerning the allegation. If there is a question as to whether or not a federal violation has occurred, the FBI consults with the U.S. Attorney’s office in the district where the alleged offense took place.

**Can I obtain detailed information about a current FBI investigation that I see in the news?**

No. Such information is protected from public disclosure, in accordance with current law and Department of Justice and FBI policy. This policy preserves the integrity of the investigation and the privacy of individuals involved in the investigation prior to any public charging for violations of the law. It also serves to protect the rights of people not yet charged with a crime.

**Does the FBI provide arrest records at the request of private citizens?**

Yes. You can obtain a copy of your own” Identification Record”—often referred to as a criminal history record or a "rap sheet"—by submitting a written request to our Criminal Justice Information Services Division. We check various systems for any arrest records, a process that is generally known as a criminal background check. Your request must include proof of identity and payment of an $18 processing fee by credit card or by money order or cashiers check made payable to the U.S. Treasury. The FBI does not provide copies of arrest records to individuals other than the subject of the record (in other words, you cannot request someone else’s records).

**Who monitors and oversees the FBI?**

The FBI’s activities are closely and regularly scrutinized by a variety of entities. Congress—through several oversight committees in the Senate and House—reviews the FBI’s budget appropriations, programs, and selected investigations. The results of FBI investigations are often reviewed by the judicial system during court proceedings. Within the U.S. Department of Justice, the FBI is responsible to the attorney general, and it reports its findings to U.S. Attorneys across the country. The FBI’s intelligence activities are overseen by the Director of National Intelligence.

**What tasks do FBI agents typically perform?**

Our agents enforce many different federal laws and perform various roles in the Bureau, so there really is no such thing as a “typical day” for an FBI agent. Agents in our field offices, for example, could be testifying in federal court one day and executing a search warrant and gathering evidence the next. Over the course of a week, they might meet with a source to gather intelligence on illegal activities; make an arrest; and then, back in the office, talk with their squad members and catch up on paperwork. Some agents also work in specialized areas across the FBI such as training, fingerprinting, lab services, and public affairs; many also serve as supervisors or managers. Special agents are always on call to protect their country and may be transferred at any time, based on the needs of the FBI. This is not a nine-to-five career. Although the work is challenging and exciting, special agents still can spend quality time with their families.

**What kind of guns do FBI agents use?**

Agents carry Bureau-issued or approved handguns and may be issued additional equipment as needed. Those in specialized areas like the Hostage Rescue Teams may also be issued weapons that fit their duties. Agents can carry personal weapons, provided they do not violate the policies regarding firearms. Unless otherwise instructed, agents are always required to be armed.

**How old do you have to be to become an agent?**

You must be at least 23 years old at the time of your appointment. You must also be younger than 37, unless you qualify for an age waiver available to veterans. See our qualification requirements webpage for more information on what it takes to become a special agent.

**What kind of training does an agent go through?**

All special agents begin their career at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, for 20 weeks of intensive training at one of the world’s finest law enforcement training facilities. During their time there, trainees live on campus and participate in a variety of training activities. Classroom hours are spent studying a wide variety of academic and investigative subjects, including the fundamentals of law, behavioral science, report writing, forensic science, and basic and advanced investigative, interviewing, and intelligence techniques. Students also learn the intricacies of counterterrorism, counterintelligence, weapons of mass destruction, cyber, and criminal investigations to prepare them for their chosen career paths. The curriculum also includes intensive training in physical fitness, defensive tactics, practical application exercises, and the use of firearms. For more information, see our New Agent Training webpage. Over the course of their career, agents are also updated on the latest developments in the intelligence and law enforcement communities through additional training opportunities.

**How many agents have been killed in the line of duty?**

A few FBI agents have been designated as service martyrs—agents killed in the line of duty as the result of a direct adversarial force or at the hand of an adversary. In addition, other FBI agents have lost their lives in the performance of their duty, but not necessarily during an adversarial confrontation (such as in the “hot pursuit” of a criminal).

**What type of applicants does the FBI investigate?**

We conduct background investigations on all those who apply for jobs with the FBI. We also conduct background investigations on those who have been selected for jobs in certain other government entities, such as the White House, the Department of Justice, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, and some House and Senate congressional committees.

**Who can obtain the results of such background investigations?**

You can request the results of your own background investigation through the Freedom of Information/Privacy Acts. See our FBI Records webpage to learn how to make such a request. The results of our background investigations may also be given to requesting government agencies that need to determine if a person is suitable for a job or should be given access to secret government materials.

**Does the FBI mail hard copies of wanted posters on fugitives to private citizens?**

No. The distribution of FBI fugitive material is limited to authorized law enforcement and government agencies and to legitimate media and public entities where a direct law enforcement purpose is served.

**Since the FBI does not send hard copies of wanted posters to the public, is there any way I can see photographs and descriptions of current FBI fugitives?**

Yes. As part of its investigative publicity program, the FBI posts photographs and other information regarding fugitives, terrorists, kidnapped and missing persons, bank robbers, and others on our Wanted by the FBI website. The FBI’s Ten Most Wanted Fugitives, Most Wanted Terrorists, and Cyber’s Most Wanted are included.

**Should a citizen verify his or her suspicions about criminal activity before contacting the FBI?**

No. Never put yourself in harm’s way or conduct your own investigation. Please promptly report to us any suspicious activity involving crimes that we investigate.

**How does the FBI differ from the Central Intelligence Agency?**

The CIA and FBI are both members of the U.S. Intelligence Community. The CIA, however, has no law enforcement function. Rather, it collects and analyzes information that is vital to the formation of U.S. policy, particularly in areas that impact the security of the nation. The CIA collects information only regarding foreign countries and their citizens. Unlike the FBI, it is prohibited from collecting information regarding “U.S. Persons,” a term that includes U.S. citizens, resident aliens, legal immigrants, and U.S. corporations, regardless of where they are located.

**How does the FBI differ from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)?**

The FBI is a primary law enforcement agency for the U.S. government, charged with enforcement of more than 200 categories of federal laws. The DEA is a single-mission agency charged with enforcing drug laws. The ATF primarily enforces federal firearms statutes and investigates arsons and bombings. The FBI works closely with both agencies on cases where our jurisdictions overlap.

**How does the FBI interact with other federal law enforcement agencies?**

The FBI has long believed that cooperation is the backbone of effective law enforcement. The Bureau routinely cooperates and works closely with all federal law enforcement agencies on joint investigations and through formal task forces—both national and local—that address broad crime problems and national security threats. In April 2002, the FBI’s Office of Law Enforcement Coordination (now the Office of Partner Engagement) was established to build bridges, create new partnerships, and strengthen and support existing relationships between the FBI and other federal agencies, as well as with state, local, tribal, and campus law enforcement; national and international law enforcement associations; and others within the law enforcement community.

**Does the FBI exchange fingerprint or arrest information with domestic and foreign police agencies?**

Yes. Identification and criminal history information may be disclosed to federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies or any agency directly engaged in criminal justice activity. Such information also may be disclosed to any foreign or international agency consistent with international treaties, conventions, and executive agreements, where such disclosure may assist the recipient in the performance of a law enforcement function.

**What is the FBI’s policy on sharing information in its files with domestic of foreign investigative agencies or with other government entities?**

Through what is known as the [National Name Check Program](https://www.fbi.gov/services/information-management/name-checks), limited information from the FBI’s central records system is provided in response to requests by other entities lawfully authorized to receive it. These entities include other federal agencies in the Executive Branch, congressional committees, the federal judiciary, and some foreign police and intelligence agencies. The FBI’s central records system contains information regarding applicant, personnel, administrative actions, and criminal and security/intelligence matters. Dissemination of FBI information is made strictly in accordance with provisions of the Privacy Act; Title 5, United States Code, Section 552a; FBI policy and procedures regarding discretionary release of information in accordance with the Privacy Act; and other applicable federal orders and directives.

**Do FBI agents work with local, state, or other law enforcement officers on “task forces”?**

Absolutely, and we consider it central to our success today. Task forces have proven to be a highly effective way for the FBI and federal, state, and local law enforcement to join to address specific crime problems and national security threats. In law enforcement, “concurrent jurisdiction” may exist, where a crime may be a local, state, and federal violation all at the same time. Task forces typically focus on terrorism, organized crime, narcotics, gangs, bank robberies, kidnapping, and motor vehicle theft. See our Partnerships and Outreach webpage for more information. The FBI also works closely with the Director of National Intelligence and other U.S. intelligence agencies to gather and analyze intelligence on terrorism and other security threats.

**What training assistance is afforded local law enforcement officers?**

The FBI offers several training opportunities. The FBI National Academy, founded in 1935, provides college-level training to mid-level state, local, and international police officers. The FBI National Academy is in the same facility as the FBI Academy, where the Bureau trains its own employees, at Quantico, Virginia. As part of the FBI’s Field Police Training Program, qualified Bureau police instructors provide training assistance at local, county, and state law enforcement training facilities to improve the investigative, managerial, administrative, and technical skills of local officers. This training program strengthens the cooperative effort between the FBI and local agencies in protecting the public.