



SPECIAL AGENT FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How are special agents assigned to offices and how often are special agents rotated in their assignments?

Flexibility is key at the FBI. You must be prepared and willing to be assigned according to the needs of the FBI. All agents must sign and adhere to a mobility agreement, which states that as a special agent, you accept the possibility of transfer as a condition of your employment. However, once assigned to a field office, new special agents are generally not transferred unless they request voluntary transfer, apply for management positions, or transfer as a result of an emerging or existing critical need.

Upon graduation from the FBI Academy, you will be assigned to one of the FBI's 56 field offices or satellite offices. Roughly one-third of new agents get their first choice.

Ultimately, the mission comes first. While field office position vacancies take priority over all transfer request decisions, the FBI bases transfers on SA office preferences, seniority, budget considerations and mission needs. If an agent's top choice is New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco or San Juan, Puerto Rico, they will have an excellent chance of getting that preferred office assignment. It's also worth noting that, on average, an SA transfers just twice during a 20-year career.

What is the age requirement for applying?

FBI special agents have a mandatory retirement age of 57. In order to achieve the required 20 years of service for retirement, special agents must enter on duty no later than the day before their 37th birthday. Applicants must apply for the special agent position

prior to their 36th birthday to allow adequate time to complete the Special Agent Selection System (SASS). The FBI may disqualify applicants at any time during the process if it is determined that they will reach age 37 before appointment.

Potential exceptions: Applicants with certain prior federal law enforcement service, applicants who are current FBI employees, or preference eligible veterans may qualify for an age waiver.

Are waivers available for applicants 37 and older?

Per Public Law 93-350, enacted July 12, 1974, the Attorney General and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) set the date immediately preceding one's 37th birthday as the last date for original entry on duty as a law enforcement officer in the Department of Justice.

Waivers are available for preference-eligible veterans who have been discharged or released from active duty from the Armed Forces under honorable conditions (honorable or general discharge). The Member 4 copy of the DD-214 and, in the case of service-connected disabilities, a copy of the SF-15 "Application for 10-Point Veterans' Preference," as well as other applicable documentation to confirm Veterans' Preference eligibility, must be submitted at the time of application.

Military retirees at the rank of Major, Lieutenant Commander or higher are not eligible for preference in appointment unless they are disabled veterans. This does not apply to reservists who will not begin drawing military retired pay until age 60.

Current FBI employees are eligible to apply prior to their 39th birthday and must be appointed and assigned to the FBI Academy no later than one day preceding their 40th birthday.

Age waivers for preference-eligible veterans will be requested only after they successfully complete all phases of the Special Agent Selection System (SASS) and have been favorably adjudicated/cleared for hire. Preference-eligible applicants must still pass all other components of the SASS, including the FBI Physical Fitness Test (PFT) and fitness-for-duty requirements.

More information can be found on our [military and veterans page](#).

Is there a waiver of the bachelor's degree if an applicant has military service?

No. All special agent applicants must have a minimum of a bachelor's degree or higher from a U.S.-accredited college or university.

Will having uncorrected vision or laser surgery disqualify me from applying for the special agent position?

Distant visual acuity, corrected or uncorrected, must meet FBI standards. Special agent applicants need to have at least 20/20 vision in one eye and not worse than 20/40 vision in the other eye. If an individual has a satisfactory history of wearing soft contact lenses for more than one year, and is able to meet correction to 20/20 in one eye and no worse than 20/40 in the other eye, safety concerns are considered mitigated and applicant processing may continue.

If an applicant has had laser eye corrective surgery, a six-month waiting period is required prior to beginning New Agent Training. Applicants must also provide evidence of complete healing by an ophthalmological clinical evaluation.

The policy for color vision allows continuation of applicant processing if those who fail initial color

vision screening are able to successfully complete the Farnsworth D-15 color vision test.

For more information, see our [special agent physical requirements page](#).

How long does the FBI special agent application process take?

The special agent application process generally takes at least one year and often longer, depending upon annual federal funding levels and hiring goals.

The Special Agent Selection System (SASS) – Phase I and Phase II Testing – is based on an applicant's individual competitiveness.

In addition to the Phase I and II testing process, the PFT, the background investigation, and medical evaluation will affect the length of the application process. Each of these items can take a considerable amount of time to complete if an applicant has lived in several areas, has extensive foreign travel, or has held several jobs.

For more information, visit the our [special agent eligibility page](#) to ensure all information needed has been gathered ahead of time.

What kind of training do FBI special agents receive?

All special agents will spend their first 16 weeks at the FBI Academy in Quantico, VA, where they participate in intensive training. During their time at the FBI Academy, trainees live on campus, participate in a variety of training activities and study a wide variety of academic subjects. The FBI Academy curriculum also includes intensive training in physical fitness, defensive tactics, practical application exercises, and the use of firearms.

Over the course of an agent's career, the FBI provides additional training opportunities to keep

them updated on the latest developments in the respective specialty fields.

See more information on the FBI's [training page](#).

Do I need to have a law enforcement or military background to apply to become an FBI special agent? Are certain degrees more desired by the FBI?

A law enforcement or military background is not required. Because of the breadth and scope of the FBI's mission, it looks for candidates with a wide variety of backgrounds, not just law enforcement or military experience. The FBI seeks special agents with any occupation that requires a college degree. Specifically, we look for expertise in physical science, computer science, engineering, architecture, law, accounting, and other disciplines that require logical analysis and critical thinking.

We're also actively seeking special agents who are fluent in critical foreign languages, as well as those with experience in intelligence and counterterrorism work. Study a field you enjoy and, after that, obtain experiences that will demonstrate your ability to master the special agent core competencies, specifically:

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Initiative
- Interpersonal ability
- Leadership
- Organizing and planning
- Problem solving and judgment

Do I have to know how to shoot a gun to apply to be an FBI special agent?

No, it is not necessary to have prior experience with firearms. All special agent trainees receive extensive training in the use and maintenance of firearms and related equipment. In many cases, the best agent trainees are those with no prior firearms experience (since they do not have any ingrained habits).

Are there different physical fitness requirements for women and men?

Although female applicants/trainees take exactly the same Physical Fitness Test (PFT) as their male counterparts, the scoring scale for each event is slightly different in order to account for physiological differences. Learn more about the [physical requirements](#).

What is a typical day like for a special agent of the FBI?

There is no such thing as a typical day for a special agent. One day you could be executing a search warrant and making an arrest, while the next you could be testifying in court. Your morning could entail catching up on paperwork in the office, while the afternoon could bring a meeting with a high-level source. No two days are ever the same for an FBI special agent.

How does the background investigation process work?

Due to the sensitive nature of our mission, all FBI positions require a Top Secret Clearance; a special agent career requires a Top Secret Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI) Clearance. Before employees can start work with the FBI, they must

undergo an intensive background investigation that includes a polygraph test, a drug test, credit and records checks, and extensive interviews with former and current colleagues, neighbors, friends, professors, etc., covering the last 10 years or as of their 18th birthday.

Are there any automatic disqualifiers?

Yes. These include:

- Non-U.S. citizenship
- Conviction of a felony (special agent candidates only: conviction of a domestic violence misdemeanor or more serious offense)
- Violation of the FBI Employment Drug Policy (please see our [employment eligibility guide](#) for more information)
- Drug use while holding a clearance
- Default on a student loan insured by the U.S. government
- Failure of an FBI-administered urinalysis drug test
- Failure to register with the Selective Service System (for males only, exceptions apply – please [click here](#) to find out more)
- Knowingly or willfully engaged in acts or activities designed to overthrow the U.S. government by force
- Engagement in prostitution or bestiality
- Failure to pay court ordered child support
- Failure to file federal, state, or local income tax returns

How much are FBI special agents paid?

All new FBI special agents will earn salaries at the GL-10 Special Base Rate for Law Enforcement

Officers (LEOs) pay grade. Applicants with no prior government service will earn a salary at the GL-10, Step 1 pay level. Applicants with prior government service (including FBI professional staff) may be eligible to receive higher steps that are commensurate with their highest previous pay, but they will not enter at higher grades.

During the Basic Field Training Course (BFTC), New Agent Trainees (NATs) will earn GL-10 salaries, plus locality pay for the Washington, D.C. area, plus availability pay (AVP), which is 25% of their basic pay (base plus locality). Upon graduation from the BFTC and assignment to their first field offices, new special agents will be paid at the GL-10 pay level, plus the locality pay that applies to their first offices of assignment, plus AVP. The [OPM website](#) contains current salary tables to allow employees to determine the locality pay rates for various areas of the country. Part-time special agents do not receive availability pay.

As an FBI employee, a special agent also receives a variety of benefits, including group health and life insurance programs, vacation and sick pay, and a full retirement plan.

How will having a family affect my career as an FBI special agent?

The FBI has several programs designed to help employees meet both their family and career goals. In addition to our normal annual and sick leave benefits, the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) permits employees to take up to 12 weeks of leave without pay for medical exigencies, including the birth or adoption of a child.

The FBI also offers a part-time program for special agents (agents must have completed the probationary period). This program allows an agent to work between 16 and 32 hours a week, providing extra flexibility to parents. In most instances, the part-time agent's revised work assignment will be determined in such a manner that appropriate

consideration is given by the Division Head to the agent's level of investigative experience, specialized assignments, GS grade, other pertinent skills and the needs of the division.

What are the opportunities for promotions and pay increases?

Special agents enter as GL-10 employees on the [Law Enforcement Government Pay Scale](#) and can advance to the GS-13 grade level in a field, nonsupervisory role. Special agents can thereafter qualify for promotion to supervisory, management and executive positions to grades GS-14 and GS-15, as well as to the FBI Senior Executive Service.

I want to be an FBI “profiler.” Where do I begin the application process?

The FBI does not have a job called “profiler.” Supervisory special agents assigned to the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) at Quantico, VA, perform the tasks commonly associated with “profiling.” Despite some popular depictions, these FBI special agents do not get “vibes” or experience “psychic flashes” while walking around fresh crime scenes. In reality, it's an exciting world of investigation and research — a world of inductive and deductive reasoning, crime-solving experience and knowledge of criminal behavior, facts and statistical probabilities.