

Dear HR Knowledge: How long should a background check take?

One of the most commonly asked questions about background checks is related to turnaround times of the results. The question is not an easy one to answer because there is such a wide variation in scope and specific elements that make up the background check. Generally speaking, a typical check takes up to two or four days barring any unforeseen complications or unusual variances. Our partners at Verified First have outlined some valuable information below so you can more effectively project the time it takes you to fill open positions:

To reduce liability, background checks are an essential part of the hiring process. Successfully passing a background check is often the final step in a candidate's journey. Employers are eager to onboard new employees through quick screening, but speed needs to be balanced with delivering accurate and thorough results.

To help employers assess their screening program and improve hiring efficiencies, it's important to understand the many aspects involved with pre-employment screening. There are many types of background screenings conducted based on industry, position, and job duties. These checks could include a criminal background check, driving record, drug testing, education verification, employment verification, and reference checks.

To allow employers to make safe hiring decisions, these checks must be conducted properly without cutting corners. Here are some examples of delays that could slow down the screening process.

1. **Limitations at the county court level.** Researching a candidate's criminal records at the county court level is one of the most effective research approaches because most crimes are prosecuted at this level. However, there is no centralized nationwide database to pull criminal records, so records must be obtained in person. Additionally, some courts mandate that research must be conducted by a local clerk, which could delay the process even further.
2. **Turnaround time from employers or educational institutions.** If a past employer doesn't quickly respond to a screening request, it will add extra time to the screening process. It's also common to expect delays when trying to verify high school education during the summer or holidays.
3. **Specific jurisdictional requirements in the area being searched.** Some jurisdictions require unique authorization forms or additional screening processes.
4. **Data entry errors or incomplete candidate information.** Even the smallest error will cause delays when your screening company needs to verify information. The most common errors are entering a wrong social security number or misspelling an applicant's name. Also, if your candidate has a common name, forgetting to provide a



middle name will increase the time it takes for your screening company to find and verify information.

5. **Special considerations for screening.** Additional factors that may delay turnaround time:

- If a position requires several different types of screenings, it will take longer to process.
- If a candidate has a history outside the United States, it requires additional time to manually check records, interview authorities in that country, and conduct in-depth research.
- Finally, if a candidate has a common name, such as John Smith, it will take longer to search because of additional records associated with that name.

Focus on the candidate experience

Although some delays may be inevitable, it's important to consider the candidate experience. Even with candidates with nothing to hide, it's natural for them to feel anxious about the background screening process. You can help them feel more comfortable through open communication about what to expect.

Let your candidates know what you are screening for and reassure them you have a process to verify that information is accurate and complete. If you encounter unanticipated delays, your screening provider should give you updates in a timely manner. An experienced background screening company will let you know what delays have come up and provide a projected timeline to resolve them.

If you'd like to learn how our partnership with Verified First improves time-to-hire and the candidate experience, [click here](#).

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