

MASS CLEAN ENERGY CENTER **JOB READINESS ACTIVITY · UNDERSTANDING BACKGROUND CHECKS**

Understanding Background Checks

Contextualized ESOL Support Activity

ACTIVITYOral
Communication,
Critical Thinking**30-45**
minutes

UNDERSTANDING BACKGROUND CHECKS

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Objective	Students will understand the purpose of background checks, what is covered, and how to address criminal records.
Durable Skill	Oral Communication, Critical Thinking
When to Use	When students are moving on to the process of identifying and applying for jobs with a goal of securing an interview and then a job offer. Typically, this is when students are nearing the end of training and preparing to job search.
Activity Type	Individual work, Large group discussion, Video discussion
Time Needed	30-45 minutes

STUDENT MATERIALS

- Handout 1: Understanding Background Checks
- Handout 2: Vocabulary Definitions – Background Checks

Instructor Preparation**Activity Location**

- Classroom

Material Preparation

- Review the student handouts. Make one copy per student of each.

- For instructor background
 - Review the articles below:
 - [Q & A: What's Included in an Employment Background Check?](#)
 - [Can You Get a Job With a Criminal Record?](#)
 - Review the videos below:
 - [Applying for a job with a CRIMINAL RECORD](#)
 - [What Actually Shows Up In An Employment Verification Check?](#)
 - Research the laws by state regarding asking about criminal records on a job application.
 - Massachusetts information: [Guide to Criminal Records in Employment and Housing](#)
- When showing the video, [Applying for a job with a CRIMINAL RECORD](#), be sure to use closed captions and slow the speed for multilingual learners. In class, consider slowing down the video or giving time markers when to stop the video to let students write their answers. Consider providing the video to students ahead of time to preview.
- If students have employment histories of being fired from jobs and/or leaving jobs abruptly, consider showing and discussing the video below:
 - [What Actually Shows Up In An Employment Verification Check?](#)

ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

1. Introduce the topic of background checks using the bullets below:
 - A background check is a standard part of the hiring process that employers often use to verify a job seeker's information.
 - It's important to understand what information is covered in a background check and how you can best prepare for one, especially if you have a criminal record.
2. Distribute and review Handout 1: Understanding Background Checks and Handout 2: Vocabulary Definitions – Background Checks. When reviewing Handout 1, identify vocabulary that is noted on Handout 2. Explain that the vocabulary definitions are particularly helpful for those who may have a criminal record. As needed, reference the information below:
 - Under Massachusetts "Ban the Box" laws, most public and private employers are prohibited from asking about an applicant's criminal history as part of an initial written job application. Employers typically must wait until an interview or a conditional offer of employment is made before asking about a job candidate's criminal background.
 - Background checks can be inaccurate and will often include non-convictions.
 - You can challenge incorrect background checks directly with the background check company.
 - For criminal records, consult with the Massachusetts Department of Criminal Justice Information Services, or your state's Department of Public Safety. In Massachusetts, you can [request a copy of your Criminal Record Offender Information \(CORI\) online](#).
3. Explain they will now learn more about how to prepare for a background check if they have a criminal record. Show the video [Applying for a job with a CRIMINAL RECORD](#).
4. Debrief in a large group using the following questions:

- What information did you know already?
 - What new information did you learn?
 - How can this help you when applying for a job?
 - What information do you need to know about your criminal record before applying for a job?
5. Wrap-up by noting that while many employers will likely look into the history of prospective employees before offering a job, students can prepare and be ready to address any questions that may arise.

POST-ACTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Encourage students to view the video, [What Actually Shows Up In An Employment Verification Check?](#). Ask them to identify any additional questions they may have after watching the video. Then, as a class discuss and answer the questions.

Adapted from Chicago Jobs Council, Career Readiness Curriculum, 2023

ESOL Strategy Note

Use Handout 2 as a reference to support understanding of Handout 1. Since some legal and technical vocabulary may not translate directly, it is important to define unknown vocabulary words in simple sentences for multilingual learners. Modeling each term in a simple sentence gives multilingual learners a foothold before they encounter it again in context. Before showing the video in step 3, write the four debrief questions from step 4 on the board. This provides a preview of what information they will be looking for when watching the video.