

**JOB READINESS · UNDERSTANDING BACKGROUND CHECKS**

# Handout 1: Understanding Background Checks

**Student Handout**

## Overview of Background Checks

1. Often a standard part of the hiring process to verify a job seeker's information.
2. States and cities may have different laws regarding background checks, and when they can be conducted.
3. Employers may select different reports depending on:
  - Their needs
  - The nature of the job you're applying for
  - Where the job is located

## What is a Background Check?

1. Collection and inspection of public and private records by individuals and organizations
2. It can include verifying:
  - Criminal records (federal, state, county, and city)
  - Credit history
  - Employment history
  - Education history (high school, university, etc.)
  - Social media profiles
  - Driving records
  - Medical records (restrictions apply)

## What Can You Expect from an Employee Background Check?

1. Employment background checks are used by all kinds of organizations for all kinds of jobs.
2. While some aspects of an employee background check can occur at any time, most are commonly requested once a conditional job offer is made.
3. Most commonly performed to verify one's:
  - Criminal records
  - Employment history
  - Identity

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## What Else Should You Know About an Employee Background Check?

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1. 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. Additionally, employers cannot ask about arrests that did not result in a conviction, sealed or expunged records, or first-time minor misdemeanor offenses like minor traffic violations.
2. As a job seeker, you won't necessarily know or have access to the background check report the employer receives.
3. Background checks **are not always accurate**. If you have a criminal record, it may be helpful to obtain your Criminal Offender Record Information (also known as a CORI) to know what is listed (i.e., sometimes records get sealed or expunged, but reports still show them.)
4. Background checks, depending on what's on them, can cause an employer NOT to offer you a role OR fire you after you've started working. Note that Employers are only required by law to provide you with a copy of your background check if they take adverse reaction against you on the grounds of your background. To take adverse reaction means to use the findings from a background check to make a negative employment decision. If you are turned down for a job on the grounds of your background report, the employer is required to share with you the name, address and phone number of the reporting company and you have a right to a free copy of the report from that company if you request it within 60 days of the employer’s decision.

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## How to Prepare for a Background Check

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1. Review your social media profiles and check your privacy settings to verify who has access to see your posts. Consider editing or removing content that would be seen as concerning by an employer.
2. Keep good records of your academic history and past employment.
3. Get copies of your records (e.g., credit score, driving record).
4. Let your professional references know they may be contacted.
5. 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](#).

## **Your Knowledge of Criminal Record**

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1. You can request a copy of your CORI online.
2. You should be familiar with:
  - Date (of disposition/outcome of case)
  - Disposition (i.e., did it result in conviction, acquittal, or dismissal)
  - Specific offense (felony/misdemeanor)
  - Sentence and date completed