

Background checks



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Following the 2013 interest-arbitration award issued by the panel chaired by Arbitrator Shyam Das, which created the non-career city carrier assistant (CCA) position, newly hired CCA letter carriers were required to submit to a background check called the “special agency check with inquiries” (SACI). This is consistent with the requirements outlined in *Handbook EL-312, Employment and Placement*; the Postal Service’s resource regarding employment, placement, and assignment of career and non-career bargaining employees. The SACI consists of checks of employment history for the past five years, criminal background and other clearance and suitability

investigations. Passing the SACI was necessary to secure initial employment with the Postal Service as a non-career employee.

Upon conversion to career status, employees who had already passed the SACI background check were then required to pass yet another background check called the “national agency check with inquiries” (NACI). This too is outlined in *Handbook EL-312*. The NACI is similar to the SACI. It consists of employment history, criminal background, other clearance and suitability investigations and residence verifications. Although both the SACI and the NACI involve many of the same checks, the NACI is more restrictive.

The requirement to pass a SACI background check upon initial hiring and then being required to pass the NACI background check upon conversion to career unfortunately resulted in a few instances where letter carriers initially passed the SACI but subsequently failed the NACI when they converted to career. After the failed NACI, the Postal Service took steps to separate these individuals from employment; however, NALC was able to resolve these issues on a case-by-case basis and keep those individuals employed.

Another issue with requiring employees to obtain a second background check occurred when the Postal Service forced some individuals to have fingerprinting completed off the clock, and at times incur an expense to complete the NACI. Of course, NALC filed a national-level grievance over this issue. In early 2015, the parties resolved the case by agreeing that time spent by CCAs to obtain fingerprints necessary to complete the additional background investigation is to be done on the clock and the Postal Service would be responsible for any costs.

In late 2015, the Postal Service notified NALC of its intent to begin a phased elimination of the use of the SACI for non-career applicants, and begin requiring those individuals to complete a NACI instead. With this change, those who initially passed the NACI when first hired they would not need to pass another background check upon their conversion to career status. By August 2016, the SACI had been phased out for the entire country.

Phasing out the SACI didn’t solve all of the problems, however. The results of a NACI can take quite some time to be provided to the Postal Service. In some instances, new letter carriers completed the NACI paperwork, finished all of their training and were working in their assigned office before the results of the background check came back. For those who did not pass, the Postal Service separated them from employment, even after they already had been working for several weeks.

Also, the Postal Service has not updated *Handbook EL-312* to reflect its new requirement for non-career applicants to pass the NACI, rather than the SACI, to gain employment. This outdated manual has created some confusion in the field when carriers have been separated for failing the NACI. Since the manual still incorrectly states that newly selected non-career applicants are subject to passing the SACI rather than the NACI, when carriers are separated for unfavorable NACI results, local branches file grievances based on the outdated *Handbook EL-312* language.

Recently, the Postal Service notified NALC that all new bargaining-unit applicants would be fingerprinted and be issued either a favorable interim NACI or a favorable complete NACI prior to their PS Form 50, Notification of Personnel Action being processed. Once a conditional job offer is provided to a prospective employee, he or she will receive an email link to initiate the background investigation process. The background investigation will provide an interim NACI result. If the result is favorable, the prospective employee will be able to conditionally onboard and begin working pending a full NACI result, provided all other eligibility and suitability conditions are met. If an interim NACI is not favorable, the candidate will not onboard unless and until the NACI is finalized with a favorable result. Hopefully this will help reduce or eliminate situations in which a new employee ultimately fails the NACI after already onboarding.

Branches should be aware of the above information and understanding that the NACI is the appropriate background check for career and non-career employees alike. It is yet to be determined how the pre-screening will pan out, but if you see problems in your installation, please inform your national business agent.