

Private Investigators - Part V

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In this article in our series on private investigators we're going to cover where private investigators get their training, how they go about getting employment, what the job outlook is for new investigators and what investigators can expect to earn.

Private investigators get their training from a variety of sources depending on what area of investigations they want to go into. For example, a person who wants to get into criminal investigation working for criminal defense or prosecution lawyers may go to a police academy first and get training as a police officer specializing in criminal investigations. Others may go to college and take up criminology or some related discipline. Those who want to become investigators for corporations may go to college and take up finance or accounting. The avenues of education that are open to one wishing to pursue a career as a private investigator are virtually limitless.

Some investigators, however, may get their training from specialized agencies that are set up for the sole purpose of training private investigators. One such organization is the National Association of Legal Investigators (NALI). This organization not only provides training but also administers written and oral exams that a person must pass in order to get certified.

So, how does a private investigator get employment once they have become certified? There are essentially two avenues they can pursue. They can either set up their own agency if they have the funds, though in most cases this is not a first option, or they can apply for a job with an existing agency. Unfortunately, most agencies are small and offer little chance for advancement. Unlike law enforcement, there are no defined ranks or steps. Advancement comes in the form of increased salary and assignments and is usually solely based on job performance. In the case of legal and corporate investigators there is the chance that one may eventually become supervisor or manager of the department.

In the most recent census of private investigators, there were about 43,000 registered in the United States. About 26% of those are self employed. Many of these hold secondary jobs as well because private investigation work can be very erratic. Sometimes there is more work than one can handle in a day and at other times the cases are hard to come by. About 27 percent of the jobs were in investigation and security services. About 15 percent of the jobs were in departments of general merchandise stores. The remainder worked in state and local government jobs.

The job outlook is good even though private investigation is a very competitive field. Many qualified people are interested in this line of work. Fortunately the demand for investigators is expected to grow very fast up until the year 2014.

For those interested in becoming an investigator and wanting to know what kind of money they can expect to make, the average salary in 2004 was about \$32,000. The middle 50% earned between \$24,000 and \$43,000. The lowest 10% earned just slightly under \$20,000. The upper 10% earned about \$58,000. The amount of money a private detective and investigator earns varies greatly by employer, specialty, and geographic area.

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