



What Hiring and HR Managers Need to Know About Accredited Background Screening Firms

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Most hiring managers and human resource managers are familiar with certifications since many of them are certified via associations or organizations which they personally belong to. Certification, in many cases, is based on an individual passing a professional discipline or industry based examination and possessing prescribed experience as identified by the offering entity. Examples would include the following certifications:

- human resources professional - SHRM SCP, SHRM PSP, SPHR, PHR
- financial professionals – CPA
- project management - PMP®, CAPM®

Accreditation is different than certification.

Typically, accreditation is used to verify that an organization meets specified criteria as identified by the offering body to demonstrate their competence to perform specific activities. It's not a social award based on level of donation or membership, tenure in an association, or fraternizing, but based on the results of an independent organization certifying that the applying organization meets the established criteria.

Also unlike individual certification programs, accreditation is not a process that organizations simply go through once and are accredited for life. Firms are required to repeat the process after a specified number of years to ensure that they continue to adhere to the established standards.

The National Association of Professional Background Screeners (NAPBS) Accreditation program is based on the applying firm establishing that it has been an operating background screening firm for a minimum of one year, and has met all the criteria of the Background Screening Agency Accreditation Program (BSAAP) as developed by the Background Screening Credentialing Council (BSCC). This process ensures companies comply with relevant laws, ethical business practice and demonstrates a commitment to excellence.

The BSCC has developed a strict and thorough set of professional standards of specified requirements and measurements which have become a widely recognized seal of approval. Adherence to the standards demonstrate a commitment to achieving excellence and professional accountability that results in continued institutional improvement.

The BSAAP provides a detailed process for evaluating and improving internal operating procedures that every CRA, and their clients, benefit from. Accredited CRAs have made a commitment to uphold and deliver the highest level of industry standards for the following critical areas:

- Consumer Protection
- Legal Compliance
- Client Education
- Researcher and Data Product Standards
- Verification Service Standards
- General Business Practices

To become accredited, firms must demonstrate initial and ongoing compliance with the accreditation standard as prepared by the Background Screening Credentialing Council (BSCC). Compliance is demonstrated through rigorous desk and on-site audits, all of which are completed by an independent third-party auditor. To be approved for accreditation, a background screening provider has to document each of their policies and processes as required in each of the areas within the Standard and demonstrate that it adheres to best practices through both desk and onsite audits by an independent auditor.

Accreditation lasts for five years. An Interim Surveillance Audit by the independent auditor is required before the end of the third year and firms are required to recomplete the process during their fifth year of accreditation, if they wish to remain accredited.

What does NAPBS Accreditation mean to Employers?

Accreditation is a vigorous standard that takes considerable monetary and personnel commitment for a background screening firm (a.k.a. consumer reporting agency or CRA) to earn and maintain. Remember, accreditation is a company standard—not an individual standard, which means that policies and procedures are institutionalized across the enterprise, rather than residing in one or two certified employees' knowledge.

Compliance

Many of the standards are geared toward ensuring that the accredited CRA is committed to *your* compliance with legal and regulatory issues such as the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) Driver Privacy Protection Act, Federal and state discrimination laws.

Best Practices

In addition, accredited firms adhere to accreditation standards that are based on industry established best practices which in many instances go beyond many of the legal requirements.

Verified Records

Working with an accredited firm also offers employers a viable and superior option to working with a data-broker who simply offers online access to data stored in various databases. Accredited background screening firms verify information accessed by actually researching court or originally sourced records.

Information Security

Accredited agencies are required to implement written data security policies to ensure that sensitive personal identifiable information is secure.

Client Education.

One of the responsibilities of an accredited CRA is to educate clients about process requirements to help them use information appropriately and comply with the myriad of laws which impact background screening.

Business Practices.

Accredited firm staff undergo criminal background checks, are required to maintain all necessary insurance, and validate the legitimacy of clients, vendors and applicants.

Conclusion

Earning accreditation is a difficult and arduous process for background screening firms, however, employers that engage the services of one of the few elite firms accredited background screening firms stand to gain the best possible results.

Choosing an accredited firm is a cost-effective way for employers to stay informed about and navigate the maze of legal requirements that impact background screening without needing to overly invest in staff and resources. This is particularly important as we continue to see growth in FCRA lawsuits, the influx of new 'ban-the-box' legislation and numerous state or local requirements. Of course, using an accredited background screening firm is not a guarantee that you will not be sued or made a target of an enforcement action, but if you get pulled into the fray you want to have the best possible players on your team.

In the end, using an accredited background screening firm is your best bet in your effort to hire the best talent to meet your business needs and to provide a safe workplace.

Source: Much of the information in this article is based on the NAPBS accreditation information on the NAPBS web site. It was not written by NAPBS. For detailed and specific information on the accreditation process visit NAPBS.com.

About the Authors



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