

HIGHEST PAYING LAW ENFORCEMENT CAREERS

Complete Career Guide 2025-2035

**Federal Agency Salaries • Requirements • Hiring
Projections**

FBI • DEA • Secret Service • CBP • ATF • U.S. Marshals

Table of Contents

- 1. Federal Law Enforcement Hiring Outlook 2025-2035
- 2. Top 6 Highest Paying Federal Agencies
- 3. Salary Comparison Chart
- 4. Universal Requirements
- 5. Agency-Specific Qualifications
- 6. Career Advancement & Salary Progression
- 7. How to Position Yourself for Success
- 8. Application Timeline
- 9. Additional Resources & Links

1. Federal Law Enforcement Hiring Outlook 2025-2035

The federal law enforcement landscape is experiencing a significant shift. While local police departments struggle with staffing shortages—with 65% of agencies reporting service reductions due to personnel gaps—federal agencies are expanding.

Bureau of Labor Statistics data projects 3% overall growth for police and detectives through 2034, with federal agencies demonstrating the strongest growth at 2.1%.

Key Statistics
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 826,800 total police and detective jobs nationwide (2024)• 62,200 projected annual openings through 2034• 2.1% federal law enforcement growth rate• \$77,270 median annual wage for all police/detectives• \$93,580 median wage for criminal investigators

2. Top 6 Highest Paying Federal Agencies

1. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

The FBI remains the premier federal law enforcement agency. Special Agents start at GS-10 with entry-level salaries of \$66,000-\$72,000 including locality pay. With LEAP (25% availability pay), total compensation reaches \$80,000-\$90,000+ at entry level.

- **Entry Level:** \$80,000-\$90,000 (with LEAP)
- **Experienced (GS-13):** \$97,000-\$125,000
- **Senior/Supervisory:** \$140,000-\$195,000+

2. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)

DEA Special Agents start at GS-7 or GS-9 with rapid progression—typically reaching GS-13 within four years.

- **Entry Level:** \$60,000-\$100,000 (with LEAP)
- **Average Salary:** \$137,372 (Glassdoor)
- **Top Earners:** \$235,605

3. U.S. Secret Service

Secret Service agents perform dual missions: protection and financial crime investigation. Current recruitment incentives include up to \$60,000 in bonuses.

- **Entry Level (DC):** \$80,000-\$85,000
- **Average Salary:** \$137,522 (Glassdoor)
- **GS-13:** \$117,034-\$156,755

4. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)

CBP Officers and Border Patrol Agents benefit from overtime pay structures that significantly boost total compensation.

- **Entry (GL-5 with Level 1 Pay):** ~\$62,173
- **Journey Level (GS-12):** ~\$110,776
- **Overtime Potential:** Up to \$45,000 additional

5. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)

ATF agents investigate firearms, explosives, arson, and alcohol/tobacco diversion cases.

- **Entry Level:** \$37,000-\$60,000 base
- **GS-13:** \$88,520-\$115,079 (before locality/LEAP)
- **Senior Agents:** \$130,000+

6. U.S. Marshals Service

America's oldest federal law enforcement agency offers diverse career paths including fugitive operations, judicial security, and witness protection.

- **Entry Level (GL-7):** \$38,511-\$48,708 base
- **Average Salary:** \$97,599 (Glassdoor)
- **Senior Positions:** \$150,000+

3. Salary Comparison Chart

Agency	Entry Level	Mid-Career	Senior Level
FBI	\$80K-\$90K	\$97K-\$125K	\$140K-\$195K
DEA	\$60K-\$100K	\$92K+	\$137K-\$235K
Secret Service	\$80K-\$85K	\$100K-\$130K	\$137K-\$157K
CBP	\$62K-\$79K	\$92K-\$110K	\$110K+
ATF	\$45K-\$75K	\$88K-\$115K	\$130K+
U.S. Marshals	\$48K-\$60K	\$75K-\$97K	\$150K+

**All salaries include LEAP (25%) and typical locality adjustments*

4. Universal Requirements for Federal Careers

Requirement	Details
Age	21-37 years old at appointment (veterans may be exempt)
Citizenship	U.S. citizenship required
Education	Bachelor's degree (most agencies)
Security Clearance	Top Secret clearance
Physical Fitness	Pass agency-specific fitness test
Background Check	Polygraph, drug screening, financial review
Medical	Meet vision, hearing, and health standards
License	Valid driver's license

Relocation	Must be willing to relocate
------------	-----------------------------

5. Agency-Specific Qualifications

FBI Entry Programs: Accounting, Computer Science/IT, Language, Law, Diversified

DEA: Spanish fluency preferred; prior law enforcement/military valued

Secret Service: 3.0 GPA for STAR program; no visible tattoos on head/face/neck/hands

CBP: High school diploma acceptable at GL-5; Spanish instruction provided

ATF: Firearms industry, fire science, explosives expertise valued

U.S. Marshals: Investigation experience; military/law enforcement background preferred

6. Career Advancement & Salary Progression

GS/GL Pay System:

- Each grade has 10 steps (step progression takes ~18 years)
- Entry: GL-5, GL-7, or GL-9 depending on qualifications
- Full performance (GS-12/GS-13) typically reached in 3-5 years
- Supervisory positions at GS-14/GS-15 require competitive selection

Law Enforcement Availability Pay (LEAP):

LEAP adds 25% to base salary for criminal investigators who maintain availability for unscheduled duty. This is mandatory for covered positions.

Locality Pay:

- San Francisco: ~44% adjustment
- New York, Washington D.C.: ~30%+ adjustment
- Los Angeles, Boston: ~25-30% adjustment

Retirement Benefits:

- Retire at age 50 with 20 years of service
- Pension: 25-35% of high-3 average salary

- TSP matching up to 5%
- Total retirement income can approach 80% of working salary

7. How to Position Yourself for Success

For Aspiring Professionals:

- Pursue a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, accounting, computer science, or languages
- Maintain 3.0+ GPA for competitive programs
- Build relevant experience: military, security, corporate investigation
- Begin physical training 6-12 months before applying

For Current Law Enforcement Officers:

- Leverage existing credentials and training certifications
- Pursue specialized training: financial crimes, cybersecurity
- Document federal task force experience
- Build record of complex case management

8. Application Timeline

Phase	Timeline	Activities
Initial	Months 1-2	Application submission, initial screening
Testing	Months 3-4	Written exam, physical fitness test
Interview	Months 5-6	Panel interviews, assessments
Background	Months 7-12	Background investigation, polygraph
Final	Months 12-18	Medical exam, final offer, onboarding

Tip: Monitor USAJobs.gov and apply immediately when announcements open—many close after receiving a set number of applications.

9. Additional Resources & Links

Related Articles from Owl Badges:

- [Sheriff vs Police: Understanding the Differences](#)
- [Police Ranks Explained: Complete Hierarchy Guide](#)
- [ICE Badges and Patches: Importance and Standards](#)
- [How Federal Agencies Collaborate on Investigations](#)
- [Bail Enforcement Agent Licensing Requirements](#)
- [How to Get Badge/Patch Approved by California BSIS](#)
- [Police Badges at 2025 World Series](#)

Badge Resources by Agency Type:

- [Federal Agency Badges](#)
- [FBI Badges](#)
- [Homeland Security Investigation Badges](#)
- [Police Officer Badges](#)
- [Police Badges](#)
- [Sheriff Badges](#)
- [Police Chief Badges](#)
- [Gold Police Badges](#)
- [Army Police Badges](#)
- [Shield-Style Badges](#)

General Resources:

- [All Custom Badges](#)
- [Badge Shop](#)
- [Badge Types Guide](#)
- [Law Enforcement Badges by Department](#)

About Owl Badges

Owl Badges is a leading manufacturer of custom badges for public safety and law enforcement. We provide high-quality credentials for police, sheriff, fire, EMS, security, and federal agencies nationwide.

www.owlbadges.com