



A common misconception is that background reports are comprised of a single, all-inclusive search or that all search options available to include within a report are created equal. The truth is, different search types are helpful in different ways.

Take criminal records, for example. From County to Federal, Statewide to Nationwide, each search type has its own benefits and limitations.

If a background check were a sandwich, criminal searches would definitely be the “meat” of the report. Usually considered the most important component, it is crucial to choose the types of criminal searches within your report wisely to gain the most accurate, relevant, and complete information available.

Which criminal searches would best fit your needs? Here’s a simple guide to help you decide:

ONE  
SIZE  
DOES NOT  
FIT ALL

## County Criminal Searches

The most comprehensive and up-to-date information comes directly from local, county-level courthouses. Where better to find information regarding criminal records than from the originating source? Data supplied by county courts can even be current up to real-time or within hours of disposition.

The best part is, most courthouses are able to return records quickly, within 1-3 business days. There are some, however, that move at a



different pace. Certain courthouses only allow clerk searches, meaning they forbid our researchers from accessing records and, instead, perform all the searches themselves; therefore, searches may take longer in these counties than most others. Some states notorious for utilizing clerk searches include Nevada, Maine, Montana, Massachusetts, and Michigan.

County Criminal Searches are by far the best option when it comes to finding criminal records. We can search counties specified by you or utilize the Identity Verification (Social Security Number Trace) to locate all the counties an individual has lived in within the last 7-10 years (All states allow criminal records to be reportable for up to 10 years, except select states which only allow records within the last 7 years to be reported. These "Seven Year States" include: California, Colorado, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, and Washington).

There is one state in particular that does not have county-level criminal search capabilities. They do, however, offer another solution...

## + State Level Criminal Search

New York is the only state that only offers a State Level Criminal Search. Being the only statewide repository that is maintained by the state itself, it is as accurate as any County Criminal Search. The catch is, the cost for a New York Statewide Search is about 4-5 times the cost of running an individual county. That price can be a blessing in disguise if a subject has lived in more than 5 or so counties within New York throughout the last 7 years, but, from our experience, we have noticed most people tend to have lived in about 3 different counties within that timeframe.

State Level Criminal Search are available for 35 other states in addition to New York, but the information available is not as comprehensive or up-to-date as you would get from County Criminal Searches. Some states only report felonies and California specifically only reports incarceration information. Statewide searches are best used as supplements to County searches and allow you to broaden the scope of your search to potentially catch records from counties not listed in an applicant's address history. Average turn-around time for these searches is 1-3 days.

## + National Criminal Database Search

Contrary to popular assumption, National Criminal Database Searches are not all-encompassing. The information retrieved through this search is from a proprietary database that includes records from across the nation, but not all states and counties are required to report to it.



Because the information is from a database, records can be returned instantly, but any records found through a National Criminal Database Search must be verified through a County Criminal Search to confirm their accuracy. Like the State Level Criminal Search, nationwide searches are suggested as supplemental searches to potentially find records from states and counties not covered by the existing statewide or county-level searches included within a report.

## + Federal Criminal Searches

Federal Criminal charges are in a league of their own when compared to other criminal charges and are not going to be found in County or Statewide searches. Examples of Federal level charges include mail fraud, drug trafficking, kidnapping, and bank robbery. Even if someone has a “clean” record at the county and state level, they can have federal convictions, and vice-versa.

Like County Criminal Searches, Federal Criminal Searches also utilize and applicant’s address history as indicated on the Identity Verification portion of a report to determine where searches should be run; or you can specify which of the 94 federal judicial districts you wish to search. Generally, these types of searches can be completed within 1-2 days.

## = Putting it all together

Now that you better understand the differences between the four main types of criminal searches and how each can contribute to a background check as a whole, it should be easier to determine which searches meet your needs and of course, we’re always just a call away to answer any questions you may have.

Together, we can build a  
better background check,  
one search at a time.

