CAREER KIT

ICE Agent Career Kit: 90-Day Action Plan

How to Become an ICE Agent

2026-11 edition

Inside: at-a-glance summary · step-by-step path · costs & requirements · 90-day action plan · documents checklist · exams · interview questions · resume bullets · common mistakes · 13-week tracker · resources

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SECTION 1

At a glance

ICE hires law enforcement staff through two main jobs: Deportation Officers in Enforcement and Removal Operations and Criminal Investigators, called Special Agents, in Homeland Security Investigations. You must be a US citizen, meet the age rule (generally under 40 for officers and under 37 for HSI agents, with veteran and federal law enforcement waivers), pass a background check and fitness test, and complete paid training at FLETC. Expect roughly 6 to 12 months from applying to graduation, at no cost to you; the BLS median for detectives and criminal investigators was $93,790 in May 2025.

Timeline	6–12 months from application to academy graduation (background checks vary from 2 weeks to a year)
Typical cost	$0–$500 (training is paid; costs are travel, medical forms and fitness prep)
Education	Bachelor's degree or qualifying specialized experience, depending on grade
License	None; federal law enforcement authority after FLETC training and a background investigation
Median pay	$93,790 per year (BLS, detectives and criminal investigators; ICE pay follows the federal GS scale)
Job outlook	+3% (2025–35) for police and detectives overall; federal openings depend on appropriations

SECTION 2

Step-by-step path

1. Decide between Deportation Officer and HSI Special Agent

Time: 1 week

Deportation Officers in Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) locate, arrest and remove people who are subject to removal orders, and manage cases. Special Agents (Criminal Investigators) in Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) investigate crimes such as trafficking, child exploitation, financial crime and smuggling. Pay grades, age limits and training differ, so read the ICE careers page for each before applying.

2. Confirm you meet the basic eligibility rules

Time: 1 week

You must be a US citizen, at least 21 at the closing date for most law enforcement jobs, hold a valid driver's license, be eligible to carry a firearm, and have registered for Selective Service if you are a man born after December 31, 1959. ICE lists the last day to be referred for HSI agent jobs as the day before your 37th birthday, and requires officers to enter on duty before their 40th; waivers exist for preference-eligible veterans and some current or former federal civilian law enforcement officers. A felony conviction bars HSI work.

3. Build a qualifying resume

Time: 1–2 weeks

Entry grades are tied to education or experience. A bachelor's degree can qualify for the lower grades; GL-7 and GL-9 postings ask for one year of specialized experience, such as investigations, interviewing, evidence work or report writing. Build a resume of at least two pages that lists every job with the employer's address, dates and hours per week, because ICE reviews only the first two pages.

4. Apply during an open USAJOBS announcement

Time: 2–8 weeks · Cost: $0

ICE accepts applications only while a vacancy announcement is open on USAJOBS. Create a profile, attach your resume and answer the occupational questionnaire. Veterans may receive 5 or 10 preference points. HSI also uses an online assessment with a writing skills test and a situational judgment test, followed by a proctored writing and logical reasoning test; passing scores are good for one year.

5. Train for the fitness and medical requirements

Time: 8–12 weeks · Cost: $0–$300

HSI's physical fitness test runs in order: 32 sit-ups in 1 minute, a 220-yard sprint in 47.73 seconds or less, 22 push-ups in 1 minute and a 1.5-mile run in 14 minutes 25 seconds or less. Deportation Officer applicants take a shorter screening test (kneel and stand, push-ups and a step test), but the same physical standard applies before graduating from FLETC. Have your doctor complete the ICE medical form during hiring.

6. Complete the background investigation, drug test and polygraph if required

Time: 2 weeks–12 months · Cost: $0–$300 (travel)

ICE designates these jobs as sensitive. The investigation covers at least the past 10 years and takes about three months on average, though it can run from two weeks to a year. A drug screen is mandatory and paid for by ICE. Applicants may be asked to take a polygraph. Be fully honest on your security forms; omissions end more applications than old mistakes.

7. Attend paid training at FLETC

Time: 2–6 months · Cost: $0 (salaried)

After a final job offer you go to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers in Georgia. HSI Special Agent basic training is about 22 weeks, combining the Criminal Investigator Training Program and HSI Special Agent Training. Deportation Officers complete an ERO basic law enforcement program; postings give lengths from about 50 days to 13 weeks, so check your announcement. Some officers also complete Spanish language training.

SECTION 3

Costs & requirements

Estimated costs (USD)

Item	Low	High	Note
FLETC training and salary	$0	$0	Basic training is paid; you are on federal salary while you train.
Application and assessments	$0	$0	No application fee for USAJOBS postings.
Medical exam forms (doctor visit)	$0	$250	Depends on your insurance; the applicant arranges the provider to complete ICE's medical form.
Travel for testing, polygraph or interviews	$0	$600	ICE may require you to travel at your own expense for steps such as the polygraph.
Fitness preparation (shoes, gym, coaching)	$0	$300	
Relocation to your first duty station	$0	$3,000	Check whether your offer includes relocation help; not all do.
Optional language classes	$0	$500	Spanish and other languages are valued but not required for every post.
Total	**$0**	**$4,650**	

Requirements

Citizenship	US citizenship is required, and you must provide proof if selected. HSI also requires that you lived in the US, worked overseas for the federal government or served as a dependent for three of the past five years.
Age	Minimum 21. HSI Special Agents must be referred by the day before their 37th birthday, and Deportation Officers must enter on duty before their 40th birthday, with waivers for preference-eligible veterans and some federal law enforcement officers. Always read the cutoff in the current announcement.
Education or experience	A bachelor's degree or one year of specialized experience at the next lower grade, depending on the posting. Criminal justice, accounting, languages and cyber skills help.
Criminal and driving record	No felony convictions for HSI work, and no misdemeanor crime of domestic violence, which bars firearm possession under federal law. You need a valid driver's license.
Fitness and medical	Pass a physical fitness test and a medical review. You must be able to carry a firearm and keep up weapons proficiency.
Background and drug screen	A sensitive-position background investigation covering at least 10 years, a mandatory pre-employment drug test, and random testing afterward.
Mobility	You must accept any duty station offered. HSI states that first assignments are at least three years, and transfers are not guaranteed.
Selective Service	Required for men born after December 31, 1959.

SECTION 4

90-Day Action Plan

Tick each box as you finish the task. Do the phases in order; it is fine if a phase takes a little longer.

Phase 1: Eligibility and target job

Days 1–30

Goal: Confirm you qualify and choose between ERO and HSI.

- ☐ Read the ICE pages for Deportation Officer and Criminal Investigator and list the requirements you meet.
- ☐ Check your age against the 37 (HSI referral) and 40 (officer entry on duty) cutoffs and note any waiver you may qualify for.
- ☐ Pull your own driving and criminal records so nothing surprises you.
- ☐ Create a USAJOBS profile and set a saved search for ICE announcements.
- ☐ Start a fitness plan aimed at the sit-up, sprint, push-up and 1.5-mile run standards.

Phase 2: Resume and application

Days 31–60

Goal: Submit a complete, specific federal resume.

- ☐ Write a federal-format resume with job titles, employer addresses, dates and weekly hours.
- ☐ Highlight investigations, interviewing, report writing and evidence handling experience.
- ☐ Gather transcripts and veteran documents (DD-214) for preference points.
- ☐ Practice timed writing exercises for the HSI assessments.
- ☐ Apply as soon as an announcement opens, since some close quickly.

Phase 3: Testing and background

Days 61–90

Goal: Clear assessments and prepare for the background investigation.

- ☐ Take the fitness test with a timed practice run.
- ☐ Book the doctor visit for the ICE medical form.
- ☐ Build a 10-year history: addresses, jobs, schools, references, travel and foreign contacts.
- ☐ Prepare honest answers about drug use, finances and past discipline.
- ☐ Stay reachable: respond to ICE emails and calls within 24 hours.

SECTION 5

Documents checklist

Gather these early. Keep originals in one folder and scans in the cloud.

- ☐ Federal-format resume (at least two pages with required job details)
- ☐ Birth certificate, passport or naturalization papers
- ☐ Driver's license and driving record
- ☐ College transcripts or degree
- ☐ DD-214 for veterans
- ☐ 10-year address, employment and reference list
- ☐ Selective Service registration proof (men)

SECTION 6

Exams & how to prepare

HSI online assessments (Writing Skills and Situational Judgment)

What it is: Phase I online tests for Special Agent applicants; both must be passed to advance.

How to prepare: Practice clear report writing, grammar and judgment scenarios. Passing results can be reused for a year; failing means waiting a year to retest.

HSI proctored tests (Writing Skills Test and Logical Reasoning)

What it is: Phase II in-person tests taken by appointment after Phase I.

How to prepare: Practice timed writing and logic puzzles.

Physical fitness test

What it is: For HSI: 32 sit-ups, 220-yard sprint in 47.73 seconds, 22 push-ups and 1.5-mile run in 14:25, in that order with limited rest.

How to prepare: Train 4–5 days a week and time yourself on each event.

Polygraph (if required)

What it is: A pre-employment polygraph that some postings require; you may need to travel for it at your own expense.

How to prepare: Gather your history documents and answer truthfully; ask your recruiter what topics are covered.

SECTION 7

Interview questions

1. Why do you want to work for ICE?

Tip: Give a specific, honest reason tied to the mission and the legal process; avoid slogans.

2. Describe a time you followed a rule you disagreed with.

Tip: Show professionalism and respect for chain of command.

3. How would you handle a hostile or emotional person during an arrest?

Tip: Emphasize de-escalation, officer safety and legal limits.

4. Tell me about a time you wrote a report that others relied on.

Tip: Stress accuracy, clarity and deadlines.

5. How do you stay objective when you disagree with policy?

Tip: Explain that you apply the law as written and raise concerns through proper channels.

6. What would you do if a colleague broke a rule?

Tip: Show that you report through the proper channel.

7. Are you willing to relocate anywhere in the country?

Tip: Answer honestly; ICE requires mobility.

8. Tell me about your experience with investigations or interviewing.

Tip: Use a concrete case with steps, evidence and outcome.

9. How do you handle long hours and unpredictable schedules?

Tip: Discuss family planning and stamina; availability pay is part of the job.

10. Do you have anything in your background we should know about?

Tip: Disclose truthfully and briefly; honesty matters more than the incident.

SECTION 8

Resume bullet examples

Adapt these to what you actually did. Use numbers wherever you can.

- Interviewed 150+ witnesses and subjects and documented findings in written reports used in case decisions.
- Reviewed financial and shipping records to identify discrepancies across 40+ case files.
- Maintained chain-of-custody logs for evidence items with zero audit findings.
- Passed a 1.5-mile run in under 12 minutes and completed 40 push-ups in a minute as part of annual fitness testing.
- Translated and interpreted Spanish for staff and clients in daily operations.
- Managed a caseload of 60 files and met all filing deadlines for two consecutive years.

SECTION 9

Common mistakes to avoid

1. Submitting a one-page resume without employer addresses, dates and weekly hours, which can disqualify you.
2. Missing the age cutoff because you waited for the next announcement.
3. Leaving out minor items in the background forms; omissions look like lies.
4. Failing the fitness test because you trained for general fitness instead of the exact events.
5. Ignoring emails from ICE or USAJOBS, which can end your application.

SECTION 10

13-week progress tracker

Fill this in by hand each week.

Week	Focus	Done?	Notes
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			

SECTION 11

Resources, salary & disclaimer

Resources

- **ICE Careers**

https://www.ice.gov/careers

- **USAJOBS**

https://www.usajobs.gov/

- **FLETC**

https://www.fletc.gov/

- **OPM General Schedule pay tables**

https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/

Salary

Bottom 10%	Median	Top 10%
$48,160	**$93,790 per year (detectives and criminal investigators)**	$121,600

Outlook: BLS projects 3% growth for police and detectives from 2025 to 2035, with about 60,100 openings a year across the occupation. ICE pay follows the federal General Schedule by grade and locality, and HSI agents receive Law Enforcement Availability Pay on top of basic pay, so total pay often exceeds the BLS median. Hiring volume depends on federal budgets.

Source: BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, May 2025 data (the low and high figures are for all police and detectives) — https://www.bls.gov/ooh/protective-service/police-and-detectives.htm

Disclaimer. Requirements vary by state and change over time. Verify with the official sources listed. This guide is not legal or career advice.