



BEYOND THE BOX

A U.S. Department of Education Resource Guide for
Increasing Access to Higher Education for Justice-Involved Individuals

College and University Self-Assessment

As part of our commitment to educational access and reducing the collateral consequences of justice involvement, the U.S. Department of Education has developed a self-assessment tool for postsecondary institutions to examine whether and how to use criminal justice information in the higher education admissions process.

Reviewing Whether and What to Ask

- Does your postsecondary institution inquire about an applicant's criminal justice involvement or conduct background checks on the application? If so, is there any reason why the inquiry cannot be delayed until later in the application process?
- At whatever point criminal history is considered during the application process, is the inquiry limited to criminal justice involvement that is relevant to the postsecondary institution or its program of study? For instance, is the inquiry subject matter-specific and limited to more recent history?
- Is there a systematic process in place for how criminal justice information is used in assessing admission once collected?
- If a student self-disclosure or background check indicates criminal justice involvement, is an applicant automatically disqualified for admission to your postsecondary institution? Or will different examples of criminal justice involvement carry different weight?
- Is there a time limit on criminal history questions?

Reliability of Criminal Justice Information

- If your postsecondary institution conducts background checks, is the information being collected from a reputable source with current data?
- If your postsecondary institution conducts background checks, do students have the opportunity to review the accuracy of information collected?
- Are prospective students given the opportunity to explain past criminal involvement?
- Is this information used in combination with other factors to allow for a holistic review of applicants?

Necessity of Criminal Justice Information for Admissions

- Is this information used exclusively to determine admissions decisions? Or is this information used to inform financial aid, housing, or other decisions?
- If this information is used for nonadmissions related decisions, is it possible to delay the collection or consideration of this information?

Protection of Student Privacy

- Is there a systematic way to ensure criminal history is securely stored in order to maintain an individual's privacy?

Staff Capacity to Meaningfully Use Criminal Justice Information

Are admissions and other personnel trained on how to use criminal justice information?