

## Considerations Before Hiring a Private Investigator

- Most people or companies considering hiring a private investigator (PI) or certified fraud examiner (CFE) have never done so or may be making decisions while highly emotional. Regardless, consumers should give such a decision careful thought and thoroughly consider the circumstances before hiring an investigator and the potential liabilities of not conducting an appropriate investigation.
- Prior to contacting a PI/CFE, a person or company should be able to specifically articulate during a consultation what they want an investigator to do for them and what are their expectations for a “deliverable.” A free consultation may provide a company with an opportunity to determine how to best proceed when an internal investigation may be required. Once the decision is made to consult with an investigator, discuss the case with them, to include what you want to know and what your expectations are.
- A reputable licensed PI should provide a free consultation and a reasonable estimate of the cost. They will likely require a retainer before conducting the assignment. The PI should readily provide options and inform you if your goals and finances are realistic for the case. If the PI cannot provide this information, you may want to look elsewhere. Once you are in agreement with a PI, a written contract may be drawn up that specifically states what will be done, estimated costs, deadlines, fees, type and frequency of report(s), so that no significant issues are left unknown.
- A client must understand that a PI provides an independent, non-bias professional service-and their findings may not always be the client’s preferred outcome.
- A person should know how much money they can afford to spend, total. Additionally, consumers may want to first check on the PI (or agency) and ensure they are licensed to conduct investigations in Washington.



- PIs come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, inquire about your PIs background during the consultation. Professional investigators usually associate with one or more reputable professional associations and these networks can be a valuable asset to resolving investigations. Although a PI may not disclose past clients as references due to confidentiality, they should be able to provide information regarding their licensing, professional certifications and professional investigations experience.
- Many investigations require a specific skillset, such as analyzing computers, performing forensic accounting, or applying technical counter-surveillance measures. No investigator is qualified to handle every type of investigation and the more complex the case, such as a corporate fraud, may require a “team” approach. Advancements in technology have “complicated” investigations, and at the same time, made more information available. A professional PI will advise you during the consultation if he has the expertise required, if he can assemble a qualified “team” or he may suggest a direct referral to another licensed, specialized professional.
- A PI may not legally wiretap, obtain cell phone toll records through use of a pretext, obtain financial records without a court order, pull credit reports without a signed authorization or hack into someone’s email or social media account such as Facebook.
- Washington State requires private investigators to carry liability insurance and some require a surety bond. You should not use the services of a PI unless he or she also has insurance coverage for ‘Errors and Omissions.’ Before hiring a PI, inquire about proof of insurance.
- Like attorneys, most PIs charge an hourly rate like attorneys, and these rates may vary depending on location and expertise. The more specialized the investigation, the higher the rate and ultimate cost of the investigation.