

Border Patrol Agent

A federal law enforcement job patrolling the land between the ports of entry, mostly in the desert Southwest.

TYPICAL PAY

\$76,210

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$48k to \$115k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 2 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Desert, mountain and river country along the borders, checkpoints, v...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
 You must be a United States citizen, hold a valid driver's license, and normally be under 40 when appointed. Veterans can get that age limit waived.
- 2 Apply and sit the entrance exam** 1 day
 Applications go through the federal hiring website. The written test covers logical reasoning, Spanish or an artificial language learning test, and an experience questionnaire.
- 3 Clear the background process** 6 to 12 months
 Physical fitness test, medical exam, drug screening, polygraph and a full background investigation. This is the slowest part and where most people drop out.
- 4 Border Patrol Academy** About 5 to 6 months
 A live-in academy in Artesia, New Mexico. Law, firearms, driving, arrest tactics, and Spanish instruction for those who need it. You are paid throughout.
- 5 Field training at your station** About 3 years
 Paired with experienced agents, then on your own. Grade increases follow each year until journeyman level.

Pros and cons

- + No tuition and no debt to enter
- + Federal pension and early retirement
- + Reaches roughly six figures within a few years
- You do not choose where you live for the first years
- Politically contested work, and the public argument follows you home
- Dangerous and emotionally heavy, including deaths in the desert

Optional boosts

Search, trauma and rescue teams. Horse, boat and off-road units. Canine handler. Intelligence and investigations.

Good to know

The Border Patrol started in 1924

Congress created it with a few hundred officers who supplied their own horses and saddles. It is now one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the country.

Spanish is taught at the academy

Agents who do not already speak Spanish get weeks of intensive language instruction as part of basic training, which is unusual for an American law enforcement academy.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers
 United States Customs and Border Protection
 Department of Homeland Security careers
 USAJOBS, the federal government hiring site

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/border-patrol-agent>



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