

Sheriff

The county's own law enforcement office: patrol, the jail, the courthouse and the paperwork nobody else serves.

TYPICAL PAY

\$76,210

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$48k to \$115k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

County patrol cars, the county jail, courthouses, rural roads

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or equivalent** Grade 12
 The legal minimum nearly everywhere. Keep your record clean from now on: the background investigation covers drugs, driving, debt, employment and social media.
- 2 Reach the minimum age** 0 to 3 years
 Most offices hire sworn deputies at 21. Some hire jail staff or dispatchers at 18, which is a common way to fill the gap and get inside the building.
- 3 Apply and survive the screening** 6 to 12 months
 Written test, fitness test, oral board, deep background investigation, a polygraph in some states, then medical and psychological screening. Most applicants do not finish it.
- 4 Academy and field training** About 1 year
 A state-certified academy of roughly six months, then several months riding with a training officer who grades you every shift.
- 5 The badge on the door, much later** 10 years or more
 Becoming the sheriff means winning a county election, usually for a four-year term, normally after many years as a deputy, sergeant or chief deputy.

Pros and cons

- + Paid from the first day of training, with no degree and no debt
- + A pension and benefits that private work rarely matches
- + Wide variety: patrol, jail, courts, civil process, rescue
- Long waits for backup in rural counties, and genuine danger
- Shift work that wrecks sleep and strains relationships
- The jail assignment is indoors, stressful and hard to escape early on

Optional boosts

Patrol. Corrections. Civil process. Court security and prisoner transport.

Good to know

The job title is about a thousand years old

Sheriff comes from the Old English shire reeve, the king's officer in a shire. It crossed to the American colonies with English law and is one of the oldest continuously used public offices in the country.

Almost every county elects one

There are about 3,000 counties in the United States, and in nearly all of them the sheriff is elected by voters rather than appointed. A handful of places, including some consolidated city and county gove...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers (33-3051.00)
 National Sheriffs' Association
 Texas Commission on Law Enforcement
 California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training

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/sheriff>



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