# FAQs

#### We are often asked . . .

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**1. What does the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) do?**

The Central Intelligence Agency's primary mission is to collect, evaluate, and disseminate foreign intelligence to assist the president and senior US government policymakers in making decisions relating to the national security. The CIA does not make policy; it is an independent source of foreign intelligence information for those who do. The CIA may also engage in covert action at the president's direction in accordance with applicable law.

**2. Who works for the CIA?**

The CIA carefully selects well-qualified people in nearly all fields of study. Scientists, engineers, economists, linguists, mathematicians, secretaries, accountants and computer specialists are but a few of the professionals continually in demand. Much of the Agency’s work, like that done in academic institutions, requires research, careful evaluation, and writing of reports that end up on the desks of this nation’s policymakers. Applicants are expected to have a college degree with a minimum GPA of 3.0 and must be willing to relocate to the Washington, D.C., area. Selection for Agency employment is highly competitive and employees must successfully complete a polygraph and medical examination and a background investigation before entering on duty. The Agency endorses equal employment opportunity for all employees. For further information, see the CIA Careers page.

**3. How many people work for the CIA and what is its budget?**

Neither the number of employees nor the size of the Agency's budget can, at present, be publicly disclosed. A common misconception is that the Agency has an unlimited budget, which is far from true. While classified, the budget and size of the CIA are known in detail and scrutinized by the Office of Management and Budget and by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and the Defense Subcommittees of the Appropriations Committees in both houses of Congress. The resources allocated to the CIA are subject to the same rigorous examination and approval process that applies to all other government organizations.

In 1997, the aggregate figure for all US government intelligence and intelligence-related activities—of which the CIA is but one part—was made public for the first time. The aggregate intelligence budget was $26.6 billion in fiscal year 1997 and $26.7 billion for fiscal year 1998. The intelligence budgets for all other years remain classified.

**4. Does the CIA give public tours of its headquarters buildings?**

No. Logistical problems and security considerations prevent such tours. The CIA provides an extremely limited number of visits annually for approved academic and civic groups. A brief virtual tour is available on this Web site.

**5. Does the CIA release publications to the public?**

Yes. The CIA releases millions of pages of documents each year. Much of this is material of historical significance or personal interest that has been declassified under Executive Order 12958 (a presidential order outlining a uniform system for handling national security information) or the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act (statutes which give US citizens access to US government information or US government information about themselves, respectively). The Agency handles thousands of cases each year and maintains the CIA’s FOIA Electronic Reading Room to release this information to the public and to provide guidance for requesting information. Some released information of significant public interest or historical value is also available at the National Archives and Records Administration. Specific copies of any previously declassified records are available directly from the CIA FOIA office.

The Agency frequently releases items of more general public interest on this Web site.   The site includes general information about the CIA, unclassified current publications, speeches and congressional testimony, press releases and statements, careers information, and basic references, including the CIA World Factbook. Many  documents, including the CIA World Factbook, reports on foreign economic or political matters, maps, and directories of foreign officials are also available in hard copy; these are listed in CIA Maps and Publications Released to the Public which is also posted available from the Office of Public Affairs. Publications on this list may be purchased from the Government Printing Office, the National Technical Information Service, and the Library of Congress.  Most CIA publications are classified, however, and are not publicly available.

For more information, contact the CIA Information and Privacy Coordinator at (703) 613-1287 or the Office of Public Affairs at (703) 482-0623.

**6. Does the CIA spy on Americans? Does it keep a file on you?**

By law, the CIA is specifically prohibited from collecting foreign intelligence concerning the domestic activities of US citizens. Its mission is to collect information related to foreign intelligence and foreign counterintelligence. By direction of the president in Executive Order 12333 of 1981 and in accordance with procedures approved by the Attorney General, the CIA is restricted in the collection of intelligence information directed against US citizens. Collection is allowed only for an authorized intelligence purpose; for example, if there is a reason to believe that an individual is involved in espionage or international terrorist activities. The CIA's procedures require senior approval for any such collection that is allowed, and, depending on the collection technique employed, the sanction of the Director of National Intelligence and Attorney General may be required. These restrictions on the CIA have been in effect since the 1970s.

**7. Who decides when CIA should participate in covert actions, and why?**

Only the president can direct the CIA to undertake a covert action. Such actions usually are recommended by the National Security Council (NSC). Covert actions are considered when the NSC judges that US foreign policy objectives may not be fully realized by normal diplomatic means and when military action is deemed to be too extreme an option. Therefore, the Agency may be directed to conduct a special activity abroad in support of foreign policy where the role of the US government is neither apparent nor publicly acknowledged. Once tasked, the intelligence oversight committees of the Congress must be notified.

**8. What is the CIA's role in combating international terrorism?**

The CIA supports the overall US government effort to combat international terrorism by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating intelligence on foreign terrorist groups and individuals. The CIA also works with friendly foreign governments and shares pertinent information with them.

**9. The CIA has been accused of conducting assassinations and engaging in drug trafficking.  What are the facts?**

The CIA does neither.  Executive Order 12333 of 1981 explicitly prohibits the CIA from engaging, either directly or indirectly, in assassinations. Internal safeguards and the congressional oversight process assure compliance.

Regarding past allegations of CIA involvement in drug trafficking, the CIA Inspector General\* found no evidence to substantiate the charges that the CIA or its employees conspired with or assisted Contra-related organizations or individuals in drug trafficking to raise funds for the Contras or for any other purpose. In fact, the CIA plays a crucial role in combating drug trafficking by providing intelligence information to the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the State Department.

\* See: Overview of Report of Investigation Concerning Allegations of Connections Between CIA and The Contras in Cocaine Trafficking to the United States

**10. Who oversees the CIA?  Does it act on its own initiative?**

Both the Congress and the Executive Branch oversee the CIA’s activities. In addition, the CIA is responsible to the American people through their elected representatives, and, like other government agencies, acts in accordance with US laws and executive orders.  In the Executive Branch, the National Security Council—including the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of Defense—provides guidance and direction for national foreign intelligence and counterintelligence activities. In Congress, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, as well as other committees, closely monitor the Agency’s reporting and programs. The CIA is not a policy-making organization; it advises the Director of National Intelligence on matters of foreign intelligence, and it conducts covert actions only at the direction of the President or Director of National Intelligence.

**11. Where is the Central Intelligence Agency's headquarters? Is it in Langley or McLean, Virginia?**

Technically, you could say CIA headquarters is in both. "Langley" is the name of the McLean neighborhood in which the CIA resides.

The town of McLean was founded in 1910, but before then, the area where CIA Headquarters is located was known as Langley.

In 1719, Thomas Lee purchased a tract of land from the sixth Lord Fairfax (for whom Fairfax County, the county in which McLean is located, was named), and he named it "Langley" after his ancestral home in England. Though Lee never lived on the land, the Langley area soon became home to many European settlers. A few were wealthy people whom England had granted land, and they established large plantations in the area.

During the War of 1812, President James Madison and his wife Dolley fled the British siege of Washington to the safety of family and friends in Langley. Langley was a Union stronghold in Virginia, a southern state, during the Civil War and had two forts, Camp Griffin and Camp Pierpont, which housed soldiers who helped protect Washington.

With the building of the Great Falls & Old Dominion Railroad, 1903 was a defining year for Langley. John McLean, president of Washington Gas Light Company and, later, editor of the Washington Post, and Senator Stephen B. Elkins of West Virginia collaborated on construction of a railroad which would bring vacationing Washingtonians to nearby Great Falls and provide people who worked in Washington the choice of living outside of the city. In 1906, the railroad began operating, and the population of Langley and nearby Lewinsville quickly grew. In 1910, the post offices of these towns closed and, named for the man who helped the area grow, a new post office named "McLean" was opened. In 1959, the Federal government broke ground for the Central Intelligence Agency headquarters. Construction was completed in 1961, adding another chapter to McLean's long history.

Despite the name change in 1910, the name "Langley" still lingers to describe the McLean neighborhood where the CIA is located.

Source:   
Ellis, Rafaela "A Community Called McLean"

**12. How do I cite a document on CIA’s web site as a source in my research paper/school report/term paper?**

There are many different styles for citing sources in a school paper.  Various academic communities prefer one style to another, so consult with your instructor to find out which one is preferred.

One of the most popular styles is the following:

Central Intelligence Agency.   
The World Factbook.   
/library/publications/the-world-factbook  
(date accessed)1

Heuer, Richards J. Jr.   
1999   
Psychology of Intelligence Analysis   
/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs  
/psychology-of-intelligence-analysis/  
(date accessed)1

1 Turabian, Kate L. A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing and Publishing). Chicago:  University of Chicago Press, 1996.

**13. Who is a spy?  Are there secret agents like James Bond with secret gadgets?**

A spy is someone who provides classified information about his country to another country. To clarify, CIA operations officers recruit foreign agents (you could also call them spies) who pass information to CIA. CIA operations officers do use some nifty "spy gadgets," and, while their jobs do occasionally present risks and challenges equal to the most exciting movies, for the most part, they are not nearly as glamorous or thrilling. Operations officers comprise only a small portion of the whole CIA workforce. Being an operations officer demands a forceful personality, keen intellectual ability, toughness of mind, and a high degree of personal integrity, courage, and love of country.

**14. What if I want to eventually work for CIA?**

To qualify for a position with the Agency, you must be 18 years of age, a US citizen, and a high school graduate. Our personnel requirements change from month-to-month as positions are filled and others become available. A college degree, preferably an advanced degree, is a standard requirement for overseas officers, intelligence analysts, and other non-clerical positions. Knowledge of a foreign language is also helpful. Because the Agency's personnel needs span such a broad spectrum, we do not recommend any one academic track over another.

**15. Are there student internship programs or scholarships? Where can I find information about student programs?**

The Agency has several student programs:

* The Undergraduate Scholar Program targets high school seniors who plan to major in the technical field. Students must have a minimum 3.0 high school GPA, 1000 SAT, or 21 ACT scores. Students receive tuition assistance and salary for the duration of their undergraduate course of study. Applicants must be US citizens and age 18 by 1 April of their senior year. Deadline is 1 November of students' senior year.
* In the Undergraduate Co-Op Program, college students receive paid training relating to their field of academic study. Students are expected to work three alternating semesters that include a summer. Students interested in the CIA Internship Program also receive paid training during at least two summers or a summer and semester.
* The Graduate Studies Program attracts students preparing to enter their first or second year of full-time graduate study. Graduate students work alongside experts in their field of study and usually work during the summer or on a semester basis. At least half choose CIA careers after graduation. Check out our website (www.cia.gov) for more information.

**16. Where do CIA officers work?**

 Most CIA officers live and work in the Washington, DC area. However, there are many opportunities to live and work overseas.

**17. If I were to work for the CIA, what could I expect to do?**

There are many jobs that require a wide variety of specialties. Among them: operations officer working overseas recruiting foreign agents, intelligence analyst writing intelligence reports on Russian strategic nuclear forces or Middle Eastern terrorism, information officer looking for new technologies applicable to the CIA, or a security officer.