

Process Server Vetting Guide

How to verify credentials, avoid bad service, and protect against dismissal

- ✓ State licensing and certification requirements explained
- ✓ Step-by-step credential verification process
- ✓ 10 red flags that indicate an unreliable process server
- ✓ Sample vetting questionnaire you can send to providers

Understanding Process Server Licensing

Process server licensing requirements vary dramatically by state. Some states require certification exams, background checks, and bonding. Others have no requirements at all — any person over 18 who is not a party to the case can serve papers. Understanding your state's requirements is the first step to hiring a qualified server.

State Licensing Categories

Category	Description	States
State certification required	Must pass state-administered exam, background check, and/or complete training program	Texas, Arizona, Montana, Oklahoma
County/court registration required	Must register with local court or county clerk; may require background check	California, Florida, New York City, Illinois, Nevada
Minimal requirements	Must be 18+, not a party; no exam, registration, or background check required	Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, many others
Sheriff / constable only	Some jurisdictions require or prefer law enforcement service for certain document types	Varies by document type and jurisdiction

- **Texas:** Process servers must be certified by the Judicial Branch Certification Commission (JBCC). Requires completing a 7-hour civil process course, passing a written exam, background check, and paying a \$100 application fee.
- **Arizona:** Registration with the Arizona Supreme Court required. Applicants must be 21+, Arizona resident for 1 year, pass a written exam, and clear background check.
- **California:** No statewide license, but process servers who serve 10+ papers/year must register in their county of residence or principal place of business. Registration fee ~\$75.
- **Florida:** Certified process servers must pass state and national criminal background checks (including fingerprinting), complete a training course, and obtain certification from the chief judge of their circuit.
- **New York City:** Process servers operating in NYC's 5 boroughs must hold a DCWP (Department of Consumer and Worker Protection) license. Fee ~\$100; expires May 31 of the next odd year.

Professional Credentials & Associations

Voluntary Professional Credentials

Credential	Issuing Body	Requirements
NAPPS Membership	National Association of Professional Process Servers	1+ year in process serving profession; adherence to NAPPS Code of Ethics
PROServer Certification	NAPPS	Advanced designation for experienced servers; requires demonstrated knowledge of service rules
CSSO (Certified Special Service Operator)	State-specific programs	Varies by state; typically requires training + exam
Bonded / Insured	State or voluntary	Surety bond protects clients against server misconduct; E&O insurance covers errors

NAPPS membership is voluntary but meaningful.

NAPPS members agree to a Code of Ethics, carry E&O insurance, and are subject to a complaint process. Non-members have no such oversight. When choosing between two servers at similar rates, prefer the NAPPS member.

Background Check Verification

Check Type	What It Covers	Why It Matters
State criminal history	Felony and misdemeanor records	Server credibility; court testimony if service is challenged
National criminal history (FBI)	Federal and multi-state records	Required in FL, TX, AZ; recommended everywhere
Civil court records	Prior lawsuits, judgments	Indicates business disputes or prior misconduct claims
Process server complaint history	Prior complaints with courts or NAPPS	Pattern of defective service or ethical violations

How to Verify Credentials

Step-by-step verification process

Ask the server for their state certification/registration number and expiration date (in states that require it).

Verify state certification through the relevant authority:

- Texas: JBCC online lookup (txcourts.gov/jbcc)
- Arizona: Arizona Supreme Court process server registry
- California: County clerk's office where server is registered
- Florida: Chief Judge's office in the server's circuit
- New York City: DCWP license verification portal

Check for NAPPS membership at napps.org. Search by name and location.

Request proof of E&O insurance and surety bond (if applicable). Policy limits should be at least \$100,000.

In states with no licensing requirements, ANYONE over 18 can serve papers. This makes vetting even more critical — you're relying entirely on the server's track record, references, and professionalism.

Ask for 2-3 attorney references and contact them. Ask specifically about: (a) completion rate, (b) timeliness, (c) quality of affidavits, (d) communication.

Review a sample affidavit of service. A well-crafted affidavit includes: date/time/location of service, physical description of person served, method of service, and is properly notarized.

10 Red Flags of an Unreliable Process Server

1 **No proof of licensing/registration.**

In states that require it, failure to produce a current certification or registration number is an automatic disqualifier.

2 **"Sewer service" history.**

Sewer service — filing false affidavits claiming documents were served when they weren't — is fraud. Check court records for any challenges to this server's proof of service.

3 **Vague or incomplete affidavits.**

Affidavits that lack specific dates, times, physical descriptions, or GPS coordinates suggest sloppy work or fabrication.

4 **No E&O insurance or bond.**

An uninsured server who commits defective service exposes your client to dismissed filings and re-service costs with no recourse.

5 **Cannot explain service rules for your jurisdiction.**

A qualified server should know the specific service methods allowed in your state (personal, substituted, posting, publication) and when each applies.

6 **Excessive failed attempts without detail.**

Multiple "unable to serve" reports without specific dates, times, and observations suggest the server isn't actually attempting service.

7 **No GPS tracking or timestamped photos.**

Modern professional servers use GPS-stamped photos and detailed notes. Servers who can't provide this evidence are harder to defend if service is challenged.

8 **Won't provide references.**

Refusal to provide attorney references is a major red flag. Experienced servers have a track record of successful service they can demonstrate.

9

Lowball pricing with hidden add-ons.

Beware servers quoting \$25-35 per serve — they often add \$20-50 per attempt, mileage, affidavit fees, and other charges that double the actual cost.

10

No communication protocol.

A professional server provides regular status updates (attempted, served, unable to locate) and is responsive to inquiries. Radio silence after assignment is unacceptable.

When Credentials Matter (Decision Matrix)

Two-column layout

HIRE A CERTIFIED/EXPERIENCED SERVER WHEN

- Time-sensitive service (statute of limitations, TRO, show cause)
- Service likely to be challenged by opposing counsel
- Evasive defendant requiring multiple attempts or stakeout
- Out-of-state or cross-jurisdictional coordination
- Service on a business entity with specific statutory requirements
- Service requiring strict compliance with FRCP Rule 4 (federal)
- High-value litigation where defective service = case dismissal
- Routine service at a verified, non-evasive address
- Service on a cooperative party who will accept papers
- Low-stakes matters where re-service is an inexpensive option
- Even here: verify the server is 18+, not a party, and will provide a proper affidavit

Cost comparison

Factor	Certified / Professional	Uncertified / Budget
Per-serve fee	\$75-\$150	\$40-\$75
Completion rate	90-95%+	60-80%
Affidavit quality	Detailed, GPS-stamped, defensible	Minimal, may be challenged
E&O insurance	Standard	Rarely carried
Professional oversight	NAPPS ethics, state board	None
Re-service risk	Low	Higher (saves money upfront but costs more if service fails)

Sample Vetting Questionnaire

Process Server Vetting Questionnaire — Send This Before Hiring

Copy and send these questions to any process server or agency you're considering. Their answers will tell you everything you need to know.

1. Licensing & Registration

- Are you certified/registered in [state where service will occur]? What is your certification/registration number?
- Are you a member of NAPPS or any state process server association?
- Have you ever had a license suspended, revoked, or been the subject of a disciplinary complaint?

2. Experience & Track Record

- How many years have you been serving process? How many serves per month?
- What is your first-attempt completion rate?
- What is your average time to complete service from assignment?
- Do you have experience serving [specific type — individual, business entity, government agency, evasive defendant]?

3. Service Methods & Technology

- Do you use GPS tracking for service attempts?
- Do you provide timestamped photos of service attempts?
- What databases do you use for skip tracing (Accurint, TLO, IRB)?
- How do you handle evasive defendants?

4. Documentation & Compliance

- Can you provide a sample affidavit of service?
- Are your affidavits notarized?
- Do you file proof of service with the court, or is that the attorney's responsibility?
- Are you familiar with FRCP Rule 4 requirements for federal service?

5. Insurance & Business

- Do you carry E&O (professional liability) insurance? What are your policy limits?

- Are you bonded?
- What is your cancellation/non-service refund policy?
- Do you provide itemized invoices with per-serve rates, attempts, and mileage clearly stated?

6. Communication & References

- How often will you provide status updates on assigned serves?
- What is your typical response time to emails/calls?
- Can you provide 2-3 attorney references?

ServeCircuit

ServeCircuit

The most comprehensive directory of process servers in the United States

Search servers at servecircuit.com