

CIA Case Officer Responsibilities

CIA case officers have many different responsibilities when it comes to acquiring information from non-US citizens with access to foreign intelligence. These non-US citizens are called agents, and they are the equivalent of a foreign spy. They gather information from their country, then report back to their handler (the CIA case officer). Here are the steps that the case officer follows:

Spotting the potential agent: Typically, case officers receive a message from another office or agency about a potential agent they should contact. The case officer then researches this person to see if they should spend time pursuing them. For instance, if the case officer is assigned to a project where they are trying to gather information about a terrorist organization in Serbia, the case officer will conduct investigations to determine a potential agent that they believe is involved in the organization and would be willing to provide the case officer with information.

Assessing the situation: In this step, the case officer must determine whether or not the potential agent they have selected has access to the information that the case officer needs. At this point, the case officer probably hasn't made contact with the agent because they are still trying to make sure that the agent has access to valuable information. If the case officer makes contact with the wrong person, it could be very detrimental to the entire investigation.

Developing a relationship with the agent: Next, case officers make contact with the agent. Typically, they don't immediately announce that they are CIA and, instead, attempt to form a relationship with the agent before they begin asking questions. For example, the case officer might get a job working at the same restaurant as the agent, or start going to the same gym as the potential agent.

Recruiting the agent: Here, the case officers are recruiting the potential agent. The case officer must convince the agent to cooperate with the United States government, the CIA, and the case officer, instead of the organization or government that they are a part of. This can be very dangerous for both the case officer and the agent if the relationship is discovered by the organization. Agents risk imprisonment, the loss of their job, reputation, or family and friends. In some cases, the agent risks their life to help America. In order to effectively recruit agents, case officers must be experts in understanding human nature, emotions, intentions, and motivations.

Handling the agent: The case officer is responsible for the agent. The case officer must make sure that the agent is reasonably safe, and is able to pass the case officer information about the organization that they are a part of. This information can help national security in America.

Getting the information from the agent: The case officer must devise a plan for acquiring information from the agent without anyone getting suspicious. For instance, it is not very common for a case officer and an agent to meet in broad daylight in the middle of town to discuss a terrorist organization's next target. The acquisition of information from the agent must be secretive in nature. This avoids anyone getting caught or hurt in the process.

Methods of Intelligence Transfer

The transfer of intelligence from the agent to the case officer is a very vulnerable point in time. If the information is intercepted, the agent and the case officer both have a lot at risk. As a result, case officers often spend a lot of time deciding which method will work best for the intelligence transfer.

Here are some examples of methods used by case officers to transfer intelligence from agents to case officers:

- Secret meetings in hidden locations.
 - Both the case officer and the agent must ensure that they are not followed to the meeting location, and that they are not discovered by other members of the organization during the meeting.
- Electronic gear that sends encrypted information to a satellite.
 - This gear could be in the form of a watch, a notepad, a pen, glasses, etc.
 - This gear can't stand out on the agent—for instance, a case officer wouldn't provide a fancy watch to an agent who has grown up poor in Iraq. The sudden acquisition of a fancy watch would alert other members of the organization.
- Invisible writing on a letter that is mailed to a specific location not connected to the case officer or the agent.
 - Invisible writing is typically included on a piece of paper with actual writing on top of it to help disguise the document.
- Microdots: Text or images substantially reduced in size to fit into a very small space, such as the period on the end of this sentence.
- Stenography: Hiding information in the pixels of an image.
 - Thousands of documents can be reduced to fit within a single pixel on an image.
- Dead drops: Information, such as documents or an encrypted flash drive, are dropped in a pre-arranged location
 - Like electronic spy gear, dead drops must be tailored to fit into the environment where the agent is.
 - Documents or flash drives can be attached to other items in the environment, such as a piece of trash in the city or a log in the forest



Dead Drops

Dead drops help case officers do their jobs. They can be safer than other methods of intelligence transfer because there is no possibility that the case officer and the agent are seen in the same location at the same time. Dead drops are still tricky because the drop must be created in a way that anyone who is looking for the drop (except for the agent and the case officer) cannot find it, and no one will accidentally stumble upon the drop, or pick it up.

After the drop is in place, the agent is responsible for sending the case officer a signal to let them know that the drop is in place. Here are some examples of dead drops:

Location 1:

- The agent was a member of a known terrorist organization, and the case officer was directed with the job of discovering the terrorist organization's next target so that it could be stopped. The case officer hoped to discover enough information about the target so that the members that performed the attack could be arrested at the scene.
- The case officer organized a dead drop location for the agent to place a flash drive with target information and dates.
- In this dead drop, a spike was used. The interior of the spike is hollow, which allowed the agent to place the flash drive inside the spike, then insert it into the ground. This allowed for total coverage of the entire dead drop item.
- The signal used for this drop: The agent hung up a magenta curtain on the window of their apartment. This let the case officer know that the drop was ready.



Location 2:

- The agent was a member of a foreign government that was planning an attack of U.S. military forces in Syria. The case officer was tasked to obtain intelligence about the date and location of the attack.
- In this location, the documents containing the date and location of the attack were taped to the side an empty food bag and placed underneath a dumpster.
- Typically, people pick up trash that they see on the side of the road, so the case officer didn't want to use a piece of trash that could end up in a trashcan. Instead, taping the document on the inside of a bag and placing it underneath a dumpster made it much less likely that the drop would be moved accidentally, or discovered.

Location 3:

- In this case, the agent was a very wealthy business owner that had assistants and colleagues following him around all times of the day. This business owner had information about illegal drug money laundering.
- Even though the business owner had people following him all day long, there was one location where he had a moment alone: the bathroom. The case officer advised the agent to place an encrypted flash drive with information about the money laundering in the trashcan, beneath the bag. The case officer then gained access to the bathroom and retrieved the flash drive.

Creating a Dead Drop

Follow the steps below to think like a CIA case officer and create a dead drop.

Step One: Choose a Case

Read the descriptions of each location below, then choose one location. This will be the location for which you create the dead drop.

Case 1:

- Agent: Wealthy Lawyer
- Mission: The lawyer recently held an interview with a potential client whose name has been mentioned in terrorist organizations. These organizations are known for attacks in public places, like subways and festivals.
- Location: Toyko, Japan

Case 2:

- Agent: Federal government employee
- Mission: The CIA received intelligence that federal government in this country has been planning a cyber attack on American internet servers. A breach in the servers could leak top-secret information about America's national security protocol.
- Location: Russian countryside

Case 3:

- Agent: Nurse
- Mission: The CIA has heard rumblings about illegal surgeries occurring at a hospital. Dr. Shin is a world-renowned researcher of Parkinson's Disease. The CIA wants to gather intelligence about whether or not Dr. Shin has been performing illegal surgeries on international patients and administering illegal medicine to Parkinson's Disease patients in an effort to find a cure.
- Location: Seoul, Korea

Step Two: Write a Plan for the Drop

Use the space below and on the next page to brainstorm and write a plan for the dead drop. This plan should include the exact location of the drop, when the drop will take place, and what the plan is for minimizing risk of being discovered.

- Things to think about:
 - Where will the drop take place so that other members of the agent's organization aren't suspicious?
 - Will the drop location hide the dead drop "box" effectively?
 - What features in the location can you use to your advantage?
 - What features in the location might hinder the mission?

Step Three: Plan for Creating Your Dead Drop “Box”

Read the requirements below to learn about the overall requirements for the dead drop.

- Must be designed to be well hidden and secretive.
- Must utilize features already present in the natural environment in the chosen location.
- Must be large enough to fit a flash drive or documents inside.
- Must protect the items inside of the box from weather.

Use the space below to sketch out a plan for your box.



Step Four: Create a Dead Drop “Box”

Use art supplies and building materials to create the dead drop box for your chosen location.