

Managing Applicant Disputes



by Helen Caravati

This article focuses on “Best Practices” for handling applicant disputes related to consumer reports used in the screening process. When disputes occur, you want to have a defined process and be sure that you are pointing your applicants in the right direction.

What do I tell my applicant when they think something is wrong?

1. Remain Calm. The FCRA (Fair Credit Reporting Act) requires that all disputes be addressed within 30 days, but they are typically resolved much faster.
2. Determine the item they are disputing. Are they questioning an item on their credit report, criminal background check, or eviction history? More information on this is below.
3. Supply the necessary documentation. Your screening provider can help provide you with proper forms and instructions. They will probably need the following items:
 - A “Dispute Notification Form”
 - A copy of a government issued ID
 - A copy of any documentation indicating that the record(s) in question are incorrect.

What part of the report are they disputing?

The first, and most important thing to do when an applicant raises a dispute is determine exactly what the applicant is questioning. Below are the most common disputes and how they can be addressed:

1. Inaccurate Credit Report Information

The credit bureaus maintain a very high level of accuracy, but occasionally errors are present on individual files. In the instance that an applicant believes there is incorrect information on their credit report they should be directed to file a dispute with the credit bureau(s) in question. Once a dispute is filed, the credit bureau(s) will conduct a fair investigation in order to determine if revisions are necessary. It can take several weeks for this process to be completed, but the bureau must respond to the dispute within 30 days.

2. Inaccurate Public Records (Criminal and Eviction Searches)

Public records are not quite as consistent and straightforward as credit reports, and this reality leads to more disputes. In this situation, your screening provider can provide your applicant with a copy of all public records found during the screening process. If the applicant believes this information to be false, they should obtain the supporting documentation from the appropriate court/jurisdiction. Once a dispute is resolved, your screening company should update the applicant’s file, notify the property about the changes, and send the updated information to the data provider.

We know that applicant disputes can be time-consuming and sometimes difficult, but it’s an essential process to instill consumer confidence, comply with FCRA, and sometimes turn qualified applicants into residents!

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