**Memo - June 2022**

**To**: State and Local Election Officials
**From**: U.S. Election Assistance Commission
**RE**: Removing Personal Identifying Information (PII) from a Google Search

## Introduction

Recently, there has been a rise in threats against election officials, administrators, poll workers, and others associated with conducting elections. Online harassment is especially problematic for election officials, as their personal information, available as part of the public record, is exploited and shared online to intimidate and harass. However, there are steps that election administrators and election workers can take to remove URLs containing personal information from Google search results.

Google recently announced the expansion of its personal identifying information (PII) removal process. After reviewing a request for removal, Google may remove the identified URLs containing PII from its search results. This document provides information about the program and how state and local election officials can access or seek more information about this process.

## What is Doxing (aka Doxxing)?

According to PEN America, doxing is the publishing of sensitive personal information online—including home address, email, phone number, social security number, photos, etc.—to harass, intimidate, extort, stalk, or steal the identity of a target. Short for "dropping docs," doxing was a revenge tactic among '90s computer hackers, according to HTML.com.

## What is required to be considered for content removal by Google?

According to Google, the following types of PII may be considered for removal from Google's search results:

- Confidential government identification (ID) numbers like Social Security Numbers
- Bank account numbers
- Credit card numbers
- Images of handwritten signatures
- Images of ID docs
- Highly personal, restricted, and official records, like medical records
- Personal contact info (physical addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses)
- Confidential login credentials

In addition to falling into one of the categories above, website content must also meet both of these requirements to be considered for removal:

1. The person's contact info is present.
2. The presence of:
    - Explicit or implicit threats, or
    - Explicit or implicit calls to action for others to harm or harass.

**What to do?**

An individual can initiate a request for the removal of personal information using Google's online form. The requestor will need to know the following:

- Information you would like removed
- Full name of the person whose information is online
- Contact information of requestor
- URL(s) of the webpage (s) with the offending content
- URL(s) of the Google search results page (s) that contain(s) the link(s) to the webpage(s) with the offending content
- Screenshots of the reported content
- Query terms that surface the content
- Any other additional context that would be important to support the request

Once this form is submitted, the requestor will receive an automated confirmation email as well as a notification if any additional actions are taken.

*** If you have experienced threats, harassment, or intimidation in your capacity as an election official, contact your local FBI Field Office or submit a report to the FBI at 1-800-CALL-FBI (225-5324), prompt 1, then prompt 3, or online at tips.fbi.gov. ***

Additional information about election official security, including information regarding reporting threats to the FBI, can be found at https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/election-official-security.

## Is your information available through a Google search?

Try using a variety of search terms to see if your Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is easy to find. Some items to search for include your:

**Name**

**Email**

**Date of Birth**

**Address**

**Phone Number**

**ID Numbers**

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