



OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

SECURITY CLEARANCE TIPS

Organizations Requiring a Security Clearance

- U.S. State Department www.state.gov
- U.S. Agency for International Development www.usaid.gov
- Department of Defense www.defense.gov
- National Nuclear Security Administration www.nnsa.energy.gov
- Intelligence Positions
www.cia.gov
www.fbi.gov
www.uscg.mil
- Private Sector Businesses and Contractors (as necessary)

According to <http://veteranresources.taonline.com/security-clearances/>, experts project that a security clearance can increase your salary anywhere from \$5,000 to \$15,000, and in some cases, even more.

Level of Security Clearances

Confidential

Also known as a "public trust" clearance, this is the simplest security clearance to get. This level typically requires a few weeks to a few months of investigation. A Confidential clearance requires a National Agency Check with Local Agency Check and Credit Check (NACLIC) investigation which dates back 7 years on the person's record and must be renewed with another investigation every 15 years.

Secret

A Secret clearance, also known as Collateral Secret or Ordinary Secret, requires a few months to a year to fully investigate. Poor financial history is the number-one cause of rejection, and foreign activities and criminal record are also common causes for disqualification. A Secret clearance requires a National Agency Check with Local Agency Check and Credit Check (NACLIC) and it must be re-investigated every 10 years.

Top Secret

A Top Secret or "TS" clearance is often given as the result of a Single Scope Background Investigation, or SSBI. In general, these afford one access to data that affects national security, counterterrorism/counterintelligence, or other highly sensitive data. A TS clearance can take as few as 3–6 months to obtain, but more often takes 6–18 months. The SSBI must be renewed every 5 years.

The Four-Step Process to Obtaining a Security Clearance

1. Receiving the Job Offer

Receiving the job offer is the first step, wherein the agency has approved you to the post, on the condition that you can successfully pass the investigations and clearances to receive the security clearance.

2. Basic Background Check

A basic background check is conducted and usually consists of criminal and credit history, as well as law enforcement records, verification of education, past employment, and citizenship. Past mistakes are considered on a case-by-case basis, and remember that being honest is more important than a spotless record.

3. More Intensive Investigation

This will begin once the offer has been formally made. At this point, the agency will send you the Questionnaire for National Security Positions (Standard Form 86) for you to fill out and return so the investigation may begin.

4. Agency Grants Approval

After a careful review of the information gathered, the decision is made on whether or not to grant the clearance. While most background investigations will go through the Pentagon and the Department of Defense (this change will be incorporated over the next three years, as of June 2018, when the Pentagon takes over background investigations from the US Office of Personnel Management), the hiring agency makes the ultimate call on granting or not granting the clearance.

What Investigators Look At

International Experience and Contacts

While international experience and foreign language skills are generally major assets in applying for federal jobs, they can lengthen the clearance process significantly, due to the fact that the investigation must go overseas, not necessarily as a disqualifying factor. Other factors that lengthen the process include: dual citizenships, a history of traveling, studying, or living abroad, foreign military service, foreign contacts, a foreign-born spouse, or having relatives who are not citizens of the United States.

Drug and Alcohol Use

Drug and alcohol use can have an adverse effect on obtaining a security clearance, although it is not an immediate disqualifier. It would be wise to check the website of the specific agency to which you are applying to read the details on their drug use policy.

Financial History

Financial irresponsibility can be seen as an issue and prolong the process to earning the clearance. While a few conditions, such as bankruptcy, are obvious flags, smaller issues such as gambling have the potential to cause some issues.

Personal and Criminal Conduct

Infractions on a disciplinary record are viewed in context of the overall history. What investigators are interested in is assessing your moral character and trustworthiness. Disciplinary sanctions in college are also not automatic disqualifiers. Other matters investigated include use of information technology systems, psychological conditions, and outside employment or personal activities.

For a full list of investigative guidelines, including conditions that could either raise concern or mitigate concerns, review the Adjudicative Guidelines for Determining Eligibility for Access to Classified Information located on the State Department's website.

Tips for Making the Process Smoother

- Review the Standard Form 86, as well as the Guide for the Standard Form (SF) 86, and begin compiling information such as complete names, addresses, telephone numbers, and dates of birth for relatives going back at least 10 years.
- Carefully review your packet for completeness before sending it, with properly rolled fingerprints.
- Follow up after a reasonable amount of time (approximately one month).
- Keep track of where you live and of contacts who knew you when you lived there.

Other Resources

- **ClearanceJobs.com**
www.clearancejobs.com/security_clearance_faq.pdf
- **Cleared Jobs**
<https://clearedjobs.net/>
- **USAJobs**
<https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/faq/job-announcement/security-clearances/>
- **Department of State – Security Clearance FAQs**
<https://www.state.gov/m/ds/clearances/c10977.htm>
- **How to Get Security Clearance for Employment**
<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-get-security-clearance-for-employment-2059604>
- **Guide for the Standard Form (SF) 86**
<https://nbib.opm.gov/e-qip-background-investigations/standard-form-sf-86-guide-for-applicants.pdf>
- **The United States Intelligence Community – Intelligence**
<https://www.intelligencecareers.gov/icapply.html>
- **US Office of Personnel Management***
<https://nbib.opm.gov/about-us/about-investigations/investigation-process/>
<https://www.opm.gov/faqs/topic/investigate/index.aspx>

* As of June 2018, the US Federal Government is beginning a three-year transition for security clearance (background) investigations from the Office of Personnel Management to the Pentagon and the Defense Department. <https://www.apnews.com/842ed23d2315406892e04bbf7cd48bb4/Pentagon-to-take-over-security-clearance-checks>

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