

# Security Clearances IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

## A Four Step Process

1. Receive the job offer.
2. A **basic background check** of the individual's criminal and credit histories is conducted. This includes a review of law enforcement records, verification of education, past employment, and citizenship. *Being honest is more important than having a spotless record.* Past mistakes will be considered on a case-by-case basis, but false or missing information will generally disqualify you for a job.
3. A **more intensive clearance investigation** begins *once the offer has been made.* The agency will send you the Standard Form 86.
4. The agency uses the information gathered to decide whether to grant a clearance. About 90% of background investigations go through one agency, the Office of Personnel Management, but the hiring agency makes the ultimate decisions about the job offer and granting clearances and therefore dictates how long these steps will take.

## Tips for a Smooth Experience

- Ensure your package is complete with properly rolled fingerprints.
- Follow up after a reasonable interval (roughly a month) if you have not heard back.
- It may be possible to work for the agency in a **non-sensitive position** (also referred to as a "low public trust") while you wait for the security clearance. Ask your agency for details.
- Prepare in advance: know the kinds of questions that will be asked of you as you seek to get a security clearance. See the Standard Form 86 (SF86) on OPM's website at [http://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf\\_fill/SF86.pdf](http://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/SF86.pdf)
- Keep track of where you live and a contact who knew you when you lived at each place. This is especially important if you study abroad, because it's often hard to reestablish contact with someone overseas if you no longer have up-to-date contact information.
- Consider a summer internship with an agency that requires a security clearance. If you need a security clearance after graduation, getting an updated clearance will be considerably faster than the initial investigation. Note that such internships generally have deadlines before November 1.

### JOB'S THAT REQUIRE A SECURITY CLEARANCE

A wide variety of jobs require a security clearance such as:

- Foreign Service Officer, State Dept. [careers.state.gov/officer/faqs/index.html](http://careers.state.gov/officer/faqs/index.html)
- Intelligence positions- CIA, FBI, Coast Guard, etc. [www.dni.gov/who\\_what/members\\_IC.htm](http://www.dni.gov/who_what/members_IC.htm)
- The Department of Defense has many civilian, non-intelligence positions [www.goddefense.com/others.html](http://www.goddefense.com/others.html)
- HR positions at many agencies and other jobs that require access to sensitive personal data like social security numbers require a security check.

NOTE: If a position requires a security clearance, it usually requires U.S. citizenship, and may even mean renouncing dual citizenship.

### SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVELS

1. **Top Secret**
  - a. Applied to information that reasonably could be expected to cause *exceptionally grave* damage to the national security if disclosed to unauthorized sources. Reinvestigated every 5 years.
2. **Secret**
  - a. Applied to information that reasonably could be expected to cause *serious* damage to the national security if disclosed to unauthorized sources. Reinvestigated every 10 years.
3. **Confidential**
  - a. Applied to information that reasonably could be expected to cause damage to the national security if disclosed to unauthorized sources. Reinvestigated every 15 years. The vast majority of military personnel are given this very basic level of clearance.

Visit OPM's Web site for more information: [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov)

Find out more about security clearances: <http://www.makingthedifference.org/federaljobs/securityclearances.shtml>



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## What do Investigators Look At?

Federal jobs that involve access to sensitive information often require a security clearance.

### International Experience and Contacts

"Candidates with dual citizenship, those who have traveled, studied, or lived extensively overseas, or who have foreign contacts, a foreign-born spouse, immediate family members or relatives who are not citizens of the United States" may face a longer clearance process.

[www.careers.state.gov/specialist/join/index.html#8](http://www.careers.state.gov/specialist/join/index.html#8)

International experience and foreign language skills, for example, are often major assets in applying for federal jobs. The clearance process is only longer because the investigation is taken overseas.

### Drug Use

Drug use can affect your chances of getting a security clearance, but it is not an automatic disqualifier. Check the agency website for details on their particular drug policy.

For example, details on the FBI's drug policy (one of the most stringent): [www.fbijobs.gov/52.asp](http://www.fbijobs.gov/52.asp)

### Financial History

Signs of financial irresponsibility in your past can complicate and prolong the security clearance process. Bankruptcy is an obvious sign, but even things like gambling can cause trouble.

### Disciplinary Record

Disciplinary infractions will be viewed in light of your overall record. Investigators are interested in assessing your moral character and trustworthiness. Disciplinary sanctions in college are not an automatic disqualifier for a security clearance.

#### SECURITY CLEARANCE TIMELINE

The process and time it takes varies for each position and depends on each individual's background. You may have heard stories from friends about the long security process, but OPM is constantly working to shorten the time. Talk to your agency to better understand how long the total process is likely to take for you.

As of September 2008, OPM estimated it took an average of 120 days to complete the entire security clearance process.

#### FIND AND APPLY FOR FEDERAL JOBS AND INTERNSHIPS ONLINE

**MakingtheDifference.org** provides valuable information and resources about job and internship opportunities in the federal government. On the site you'll find more information about federal agencies, an overview of the benefits of federal service, a directory of federal internships, "hot jobs" and "cool internships," tips for finding and applying for federal jobs, and much more. Plus, you'll see how federal employees are making the difference every day.

**USAJOBS.gov Jobs** is a great place to begin your job search. It is administered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the federal government's human resources agency, and has a regularly updated list of federal job openings. You can also build your resume and learn about the federal jobs that best match your interests.



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