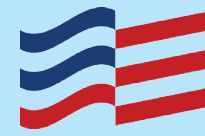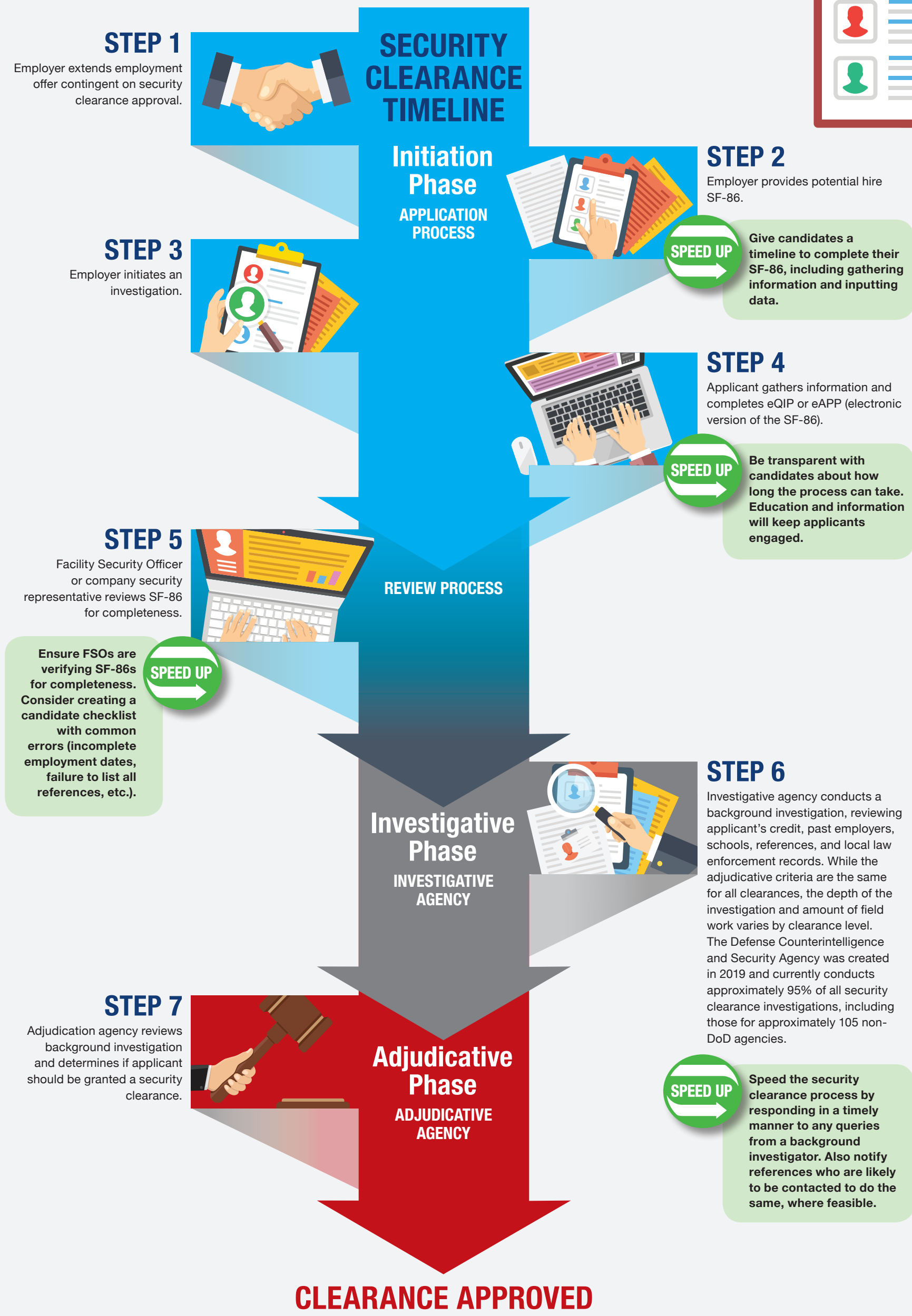# STEP-BY-STEP
SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS

ClearanceJobs®

Companies interested in hiring candidates for security-cleared positions have to wait out an often lengthy background check and approval process. What can employers do to shrink that period?

SECURITY CLEARANCE TIMELINE

Initiation Phase
APPLICATION PROCESS

STEP 1
Employer extends employment offer contingent on security clearance approval.

STEP 2
Employer provides potential hire SF-86.

SPEED UP Give candidates a timeline to complete their SF-86, including gathering information and inputting data.

STEP 3
Employer initiates an investigation.

STEP 4
Applicant gathers information and completes eQIP or eAPP (electronic version of the SF-86).

SPEED UP Be transparent with candidates about how long the process can take. Education and information will keep applicants engaged.

REVIEW PROCESS

STEP 5
Facility Security Officer or company security representative reviews SF-86 for completeness.

SPEED UP Ensure FSOs are verifying SF-86s for completeness. Consider creating a candidate checklist with common errors (incomplete employment dates, failure to list all references, etc.).

Investigative Phase
INVESTIGATIVE AGENCY

STEP 6
Investigative agency conducts a background investigation, reviewing applicant's credit, past employers, schools, references, and local law enforcement records. While the adjudicative criteria are the same for all clearances, the depth of the investigation and amount of field work varies by clearance level. The Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency was created in 2019 and currently conducts approximately 95% of all security clearance investigations, including those for approximately 105 non-DoD agencies.

SPEED UP Speed the security clearance process by responding in a timely manner to any queries from a background investigator. Also notify references who are likely to be contacted to do the same, where feasible.

Adjudicative Phase
ADJUDICATIVE AGENCY

STEP 7
Adjudication agency reviews background investigation and determines if applicant should be granted a security clearance.

CLEARANCE APPROVED

IMPORTANT FACTS TO KNOW ABOUT THE SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS

Processing time for a security clearance is primarily dependent on the type of clearance, the agency, and the absence or presence of significant unfavorable information.

Under the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) federal agencies are required to complete the fastest 90% of all initial clearances (Secret and Top Secret) in an average of 60 days (not counting the 10 or 12 days required for case submission). In reality, since 2013 average processing times have hovered anywhere from 200-500 days, with complex cases frequently taking well over a year.

The 2020 National Defense Authorization Act created new processing milestones of 30 days or fewer for a Secret clearance and 90 days or fewer for a Top Secret clearance, to be met by December of 2021, for the fastest 90% of all security clearances.

WHAT IT ALL MEANS – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

SF-86
Standard Form 86: Questionnaire for national security positions. Used as the basis for determining an individual's access to classified information.

FSO
Facility Security Officer: Responsible for maintaining the security of a facility, including the screening of security-cleared employees.

eQIP
Electronic Questionnaire for Investigation Processing: Current interface used to fill out forms needed to begin background investigation.

eAPP
The Defense Information System Agency's replacement for eQIP. Trials have begun within some government agencies.

JPAS
Joint Personnel Adjudication System: Security clearance system of record used to track investigations and eligibility.

DISS
Defense Information System for Security: The Defense Information System Agency's replacement for JPAS.