

The 2020 Security Clearance Compensation Survey

While the demand for cleared talent continues to skyrocket, most employers aren't offering significant pay increases to aid retention, with salary figures relatively flat and the vast majority of cleared respondents reporting they're willing to make a move, according to the results of the 2020 Security Clearance Compensation Survey.

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Salary Query

Get salary estimates based on clearance level, industry type, geography, and experience at:
about.clearancejobs.com/salary/salary-calculator.

Letter from the President



Evan Lesser

President and Founder
[ClearanceJobs.com](https://clearancejobs.com)

As we put together the results of our 2020 Security Clearance Compensation Survey, the effects of COVID-19 were rolling out across the U.S. economy and workforce. It's impossible not to view the results under the lenses of our new normal, as the unemployment rate spikes and many in the workforce—including government employees and contractors—feel the effects of mandatory telework, furloughs, a plummeting stock market and rising unemployment.

While much has changed in the overall economy in the short time since we conducted this survey, the resilience, capacity, and passion of the cleared workforce is a constant. National security leaders have worked to ensure classified work continues to move forward despite every challenge, and the majority of cleared workers have been able to remain on the job—with some transitioning to 50% office schedules or adjusting to performing unclassified work at home.

Salary figures for cleared professionals are still largely dependent on industry, location and vocation—with cleared professionals in high-demand fields like software development and systems engineering requiring top salaries. The number of cleared job openings continues to far outpace the supply of

cleared talent, and defense industry employers are largely relying on poaching cleared talent in order to fill openings—hence the high figure—73% of respondents—who reported being with their current employer for less than five years, a figure 6% higher than the 2018 survey. Cleared employers know it is incredibly hard to find cleared talent, and even harder to keep them.

With candidate retention clearly of critical importance—81% of respondents in the 2020 survey reported they were at least somewhat likely to change jobs in the coming year—it's likely cleared candidates in the coming year may be slightly less likely to make a move than the survey indicated. Contract and government workers are likely to remember how their employer cared for them—or failed to—as the coronavirus altered everyone's version of what a normal workday or workplace looks like.

It's clear from the majority of respondents who have no plans to leave the cleared industry there is an unquantifiable commitment to the vital work cleared workers do every day. It has never been about the money, and always about the mission—and in uncertain times, today's cleared workforce continues to work tirelessly to ensure the mission gets accomplished—regardless of the location or challenge.

Overview

Security clearance total compensation averaged \$96,515 for 2020. That's just 3.4% higher than the average total compensation reported by respondents in 2018, the last year ClearanceJobs administered a comprehensive salary survey. The majority of respondents (38%) reported modest increases of 3% or less, and just 16% of respondents reported increases above 5%.

The D.C. Metro (DC-MD-VA) continues to dominate, both in terms of the number of respondents and in

average compensation. Average total compensation in the D.C. Metro was \$107,233, compared to the rest of the country, at \$96,515.

Frequent job change is the new normal—73% of respondents had been at their jobs for less than five years and 81% of candidates reported they were at least somewhat likely to change jobs in the coming year.

Compensation by Clearance Level

Intelligence community security clearances continue to pay out the highest average total compensation, at \$127,216—that's more than \$50,000 greater than the lowest paying security clearance, a Department of Defense confidential clearance.

TOTAL COMPENSATION BY CLEARANCE

	TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF RESPONDENTS	% CHANGE FROM 2018
Confidential	\$74,395	0.5%	-3%
Secret	\$83,491	36%	5%
Top Secret	\$103,692	12%	2%
Top Secret/SCI	\$103,170	36%	4%
DoE (Q or L)	\$110,071	2%	7%
Intel	\$127,216	5%	4%
DHS	\$92,087	2%	-5%
Public Trust	\$80,918	3%	2%
Other Government Agency	\$98,590	4%	2%

Compensation by Polygraph Level

Polygraphs continue to pay—largely because the majority of security clearance holders do not have them. The 24% of respondents who possess a polygraph report average compensation of \$110,465 for a counterintelligence polygraph, \$111,150 for a lifestyle or full-scope polygraph—compared to \$92,128 for those who do not possess a polygraph.

TOTAL COMPENSATION BY POLYGRAPH

	TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF RESPONDENTS	% CHANGE FROM 2018
Counterintelligence Poly	\$110,465	16%	4%
Lifestyle or Full Scope Poly	\$111,150	8%	3%
Don't have current polygraph	\$92,128	76%	4%

Compensation by Career Level

Demand for entry-level talent remains high, with early career professionals (those with 2-5 years of experience) receiving the highest pay increase, 9%. While more entry-level professionals are receiving higher pay increases, it still pays to have experience. Senior Level Career Professionals (those with 10+ years of experience) earned an average salary of \$106,365, which is nearly double the \$57,465 earned by entry-level professionals.

COMPENSATION BY CAREER LEVEL

	TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF RESPONDENTS	% CHANGE FROM 2018
Entry Level (less than 2 years experience)	\$57,465	5%	5%
Early Career (2+ yrs experience)	\$65,199	11%	9%
Mid Level Career (5+ yrs experience)	\$79,451	24%	7%
Senior Level Career (10+ yrs experience)	\$106,365	45%	5%
Management (Manager/Director of Staff)	\$125,385	14%	4%
Executive (SVP, EVP, VP)	\$161,831	1%	6%
Senior Executive (President, CEO)	\$161,180	0%	4%

Salaries by Year with Current Employer

Most respondents—73%—reported being with their current employer for less than 5 years. That's 6% higher than the last survey in 2018, demonstrating the rise in short-term employment among cleared professionals. One quarter of respondents stated they'd been with their current employer for less than one year.

COMPENSATION BY YEAR WITH CURRENT EMPLOYER

	TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF RESPONDENTS	% CHANGE FROM 2018
Less than 1 year	\$91,942	25%	7%
1 to 2 years	\$95,419	27%	6%
3 to 5 years	\$94,507	21%	5%
6 to 10 years	\$97,230	12%	1%
11 to 15 years	\$106,312	6%	4%
16 to 20 years	\$103,187	5%	7%
>20 years	\$117,801	5%	5%

Unsurprisingly, those reporting being with their employer for one year or less reported the highest pay increase, 7%. Those employed for six-to-ten years reported just a 1% increase from 2018 to 2020. This demonstrates that when it comes to pay increases, many cleared candidates find they must either make a move to make the money—or stay with their current employer for 16+ years.

The majority of those staying with a single employer long term are members of the Armed Forces. Among those with 16 to 20 years at their current job, 55% report their employment type as 'Military (Active Duty or Reservist)', similar to those with 'more than 20 years' at 53%.



7% BUMP TO MAKE A JUMP



As the job market has shifted over the last few years, job-hopping is on the rise, and that's especially true with this audience. 81% of respondents indicate they're at least somewhat likely to make a job move in the next year, and with first-year employees receiving 7% increases, it's easy to see why. There's much less stigma associated with job hopping these days—in fact, it's almost expected.

Compensation by State

More than half (56%) of cleared respondents hail from just a few locations: Virginia, Maryland, California, D.C., Texas, and Florida. Location remains one of the greatest predictors of average compensation, with Kansas reporting the lowest average compensation, \$74,453 (a drop of 9% from 2018), and Virginia reporting the highest, \$108,030.

TOTAL COMPENSATION BY STATE

	TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF RESPONDENTS	CHANGE FROM 2018
Alabama	\$95,853	3%	11%
Arizona	\$86,525	3%	3%
California	\$99,743	8%	4%
Colorado	\$98,479	4%	4%
D.C.	\$107,808	7%	4%
Florida	\$89,179	7%	5%
Georgia	\$76,484	4%	-2%
Hawaii	\$92,522	2%	7%
Kansas	\$74,453	<1%	-9%
Maryland	\$104,836	8%	4%
New Mexico	\$93,392	2%	4%
North Carolina	\$80,380	3%	8%
Ohio	\$89,361	2%	4%
South Carolina	\$80,977	2%	-2%
Texas	\$86,614	7%	3%
Virginia	\$108,030	19%	2%
Washington	\$88,098	2%	5%

SALARIES SKYROCKET IN ROCKET CITY



Alabama saw the highest change in total comp, 11%. That's in sharp contrast with most other states reporting 3-4% increases. It's no surprise job competition in Alabama has been tight—Redstone Arsenal employs more than 40,000 and is a finalist to be home to the new Space Command. The FBI is also currently building a \$1 billion facility at Redstone that will soon be home to more than 4,000.



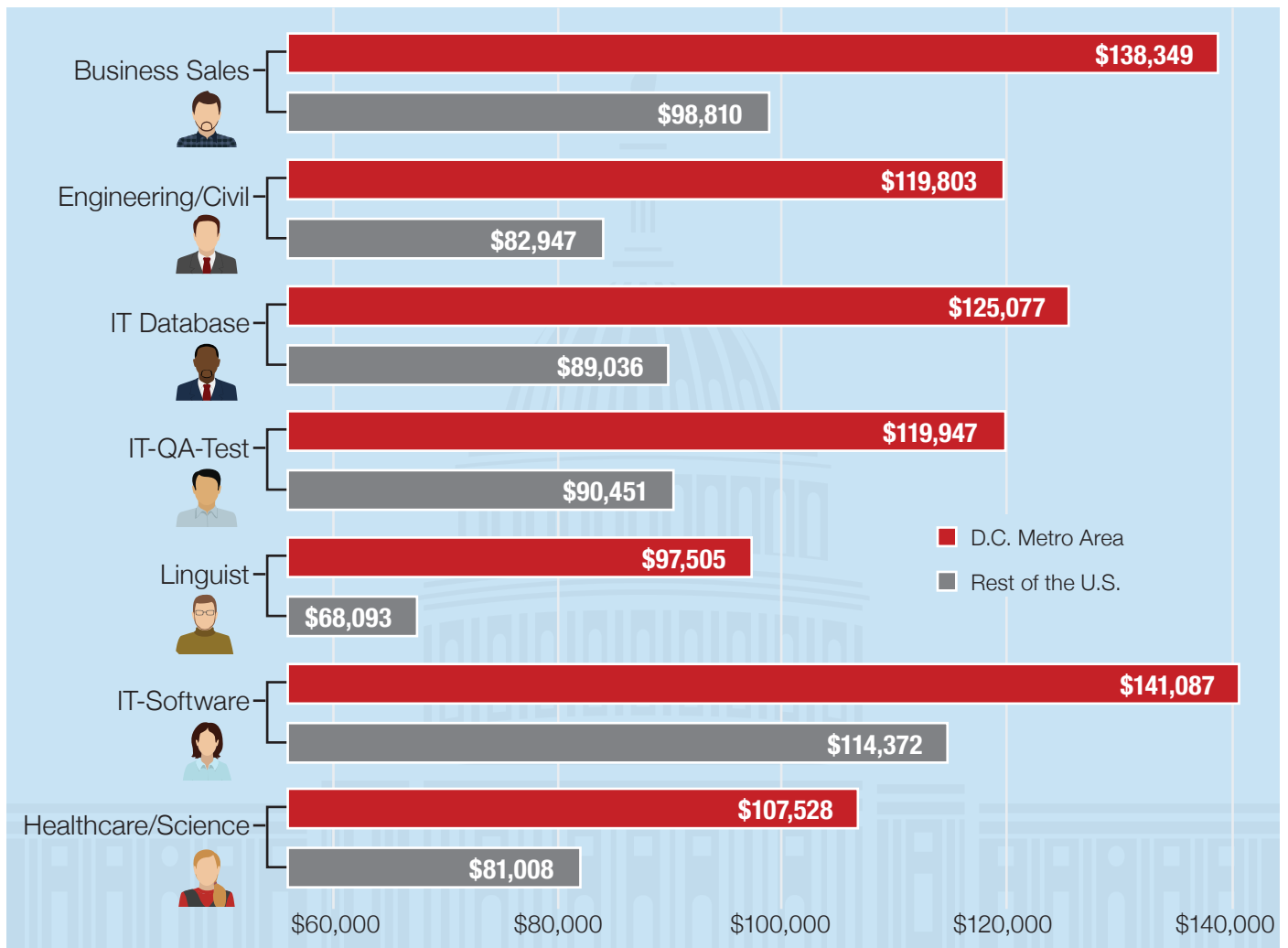
D.C. Metro vs. the Rest of the United States

The D.C. Metro (DC-MD-VA) boasts significantly higher salaries than the rest of the country, with total compensation running \$18,318 higher. However, percentage of compensation above base pay is slightly lower in the D.C. Metro than the rest of the U.S.—9%, vs 12%—which shows companies may be willing to award bonuses or other compensation above base salary to attract workers out of the higher-paying D.C. Metro.

D.C. METRO VS. REST OF U.S.

	TOTAL COMPENSATION	TOTAL BASE PAY	% COMP ABOVE BASE PAY
D.C. Metro (DC, VA, MD)	\$107,233	\$98,566	9%
Rest of U.S.	\$88,915	\$79,216	12%

Not all jobs are created equally however, and some occupations in the D.C. Metro pay ***significantly*** higher than the \$18,318 average gap.



Compensation by Occupation

Tech, management, and business sales continue to top the lists of highest paying security clearance careers. Within tech, systems engineers and software developers command the highest pay, reflecting the current market realities of a tech talent shortage and low unemployment for technical workers. Engineers and software developers have their choice of employer, and are able to command a top salary wherever they go.

TOTAL COMPENSATION BY JOB CATEGORY

	TOTAL COMPENSATION	CHANGE FROM 2018
Aerospace and Aviation	\$97,010	1%
Business - HR	\$83,477	3%
Business - Legal	\$108,593	9%
Business - Sales	\$112,371	1%
Business - Support	\$70,000	6%
Construction/Facilities	\$90,208	3%
Emergency	\$87,498	-3%
Engineering - Chemical	\$103,860	4%
Engineering - Civil	\$96,564	10%
Engineering - Electrical	\$99,353	3%
Engineering - Mechanical	\$100,860	11%
Engineering - Systems	\$127,829	4%
Finance	\$95,041	6%
Government Contractor	\$94,378	-1%
Healthcare and Science	\$90,243	6%
Intelligence	\$91,296	2%
IT - Database	\$102,981	-3%
IT - Data Science	\$112,924	2%
IT - Hardware	\$100,363	4%
IT - Security	\$109,374	1%
IT - Software	\$126,190	5%
IT - Support	\$76,930	1%
IT - Tech Writing	\$84,615	-2%
IT - QA and Test	\$106,562	8%
Linguist	\$82,838	-2%

TOTAL COMPENSATION BY JOB CATEGORY (CONT'D)

	TOTAL COMPENSATION	CHANGE FROM 2018
Logistics	\$76,213	-1%
Management	\$117,461	3%
Military and Law Enforcement	\$93,052	5%
Security	\$78,259	3%
Trainer/Instructor	\$89,302	7%
Visual and Creative	\$92,529	12%



Six Occupations with Highest Total Compensation are:



\$127,829

SYSTEMS ENGINEERING

Aerospace, Avionics, Geospatial, Modeling, Simulations, Management



\$126,190

IT SOFTWARE

Development, Web, Engineering, Management



\$117,461

MANAGEMENT

Analyst, Statistics, Math, Mining, Predictive Modeling



\$112,924

IT – DATA SCIENCE

Analyst, Statistics, Math, Mining, Predictive Modeling



\$112,371

BUSINESS

Sales/Business Development, Account Management



\$109,374

IT – SECURITY

Cybersecurity, Defense, Attack, Policy, Emergency Response, Management

When it comes to total compensation, it's likely sales-related bonuses push the total comp package higher for those business sales professionals, nudging the business legal team out of the top six highest paid occupations. IT-Security also rises above IT-QA and Test professionals when it comes to total compensation, likely tied to bonuses based on company or individual performance.

Pay Differentials by Occupation

Compensation levels above base salary vary tremendously by occupation. This year, the biggest pay differentials were in Military and Law Enforcement, earning 21% beyond their base pay, followed by Business-Sales, and Emergency, both seeing 19% bonus differentials. Careers in Construction, Intelligence, and Logistics were above average too at 17%. Average bonus differential nationwide is 12%.

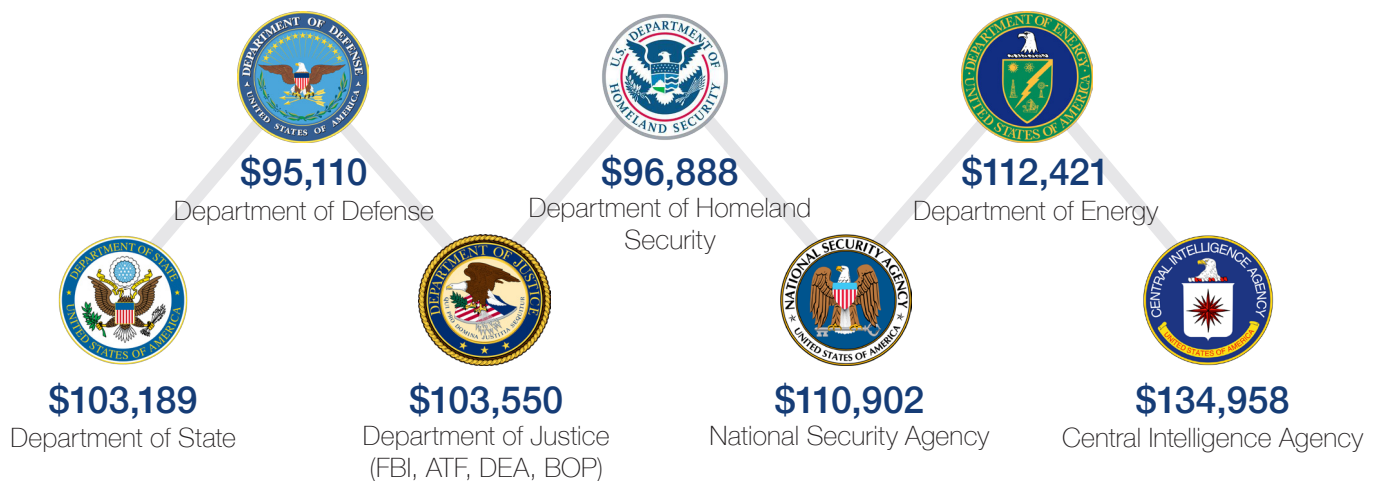
BIGGEST PAY DIFFERENTIALS BY JOB CATEGORY

	BASE PAY	TOTAL COMPENSATION	DIFFERENTIAL
Military/Law Enforcement	\$76,660	\$93,052	21%
Business - Sales	\$94,490	\$112,371	19%
Emergency	\$73,483	\$87,498	19%
Construction/Facilities	\$77,396	\$90,208	17%
Intelligence	\$78,060	\$91,296	17%
Logistics	\$65,260	\$76,213	17%

Compensation by Government Agency

Department of Defense employees, contractors and service members, which make up more than 95% of the cleared population and the majority of respondents in the ClearanceJobs Compensation Survey, have the lowest total compensation. In contrast, respondents from the CIA made up just 1% of respondents but brought home the highest total compensation, \$134,958. Working for the Department of Energy continues to pay, with average total compensation of \$112,421.

SALARIES BY GOVERNMENT AGENCY



Compensation by Occupational Setting

In both 2018 and 2019 federal employees received a 1.9% pay increase from the White House, making the 4% jump from 2018 to 2020 spot on for government employee survey respondents, who, on average, reported a 4% pay increase. Government contractors reported pay increases of 6%, and private business owners saw the largest pay increase, at 17%.

Respondents who had left the cleared industry and moved into an uncleared position reported a 10% increase in pay, but their overall compensation was significantly below average, at \$77,622. Why the lower figure for respondents who have left the cleared industry? It's worth noting 86% of respondents who cited they had left the cleared industry were now working outside the D.C. Metro—they no longer had the cost of living (and clearance) compensation benefits, and chose to relocate to regions as diverse as Arizona, Arkansas and Florida. They also reflect a slightly higher percentage of entry-and-early level cleared candidates, reflecting an ongoing issue for all employers—candidate retention.

COMPENSATION BY OCCUPATIONAL SETTINGS

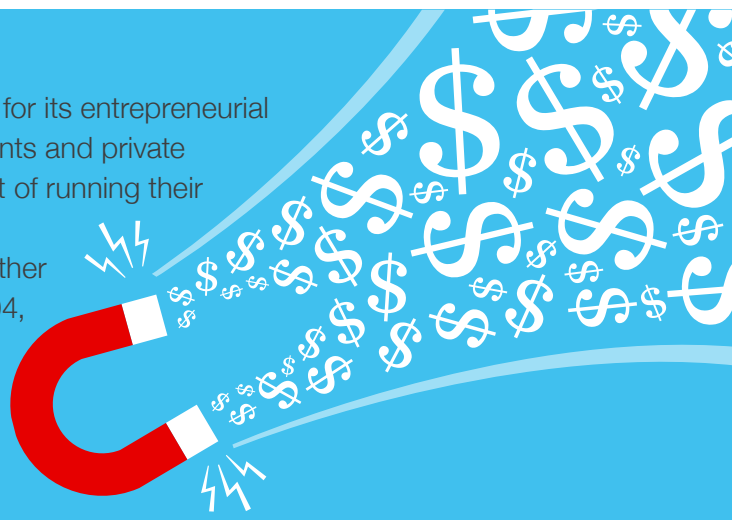
	TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF RESPONDENTS	% CHANGE FROM 2018
Government Employee	\$98,053	13%	4%
Government Contractor	\$103,902	58%	6%
Military (Active Duty or Reservist)	\$77,833	20%	2%
Independent Consultant	\$125,404	2%	5%
Private Business Owner (not a consultant)	\$98,304	1%	17%
I am employed, but no longer work in a cleared position	\$77,622	7%	10%

IT PAYS TO BE YOUR OWN BOSS



17%
increase

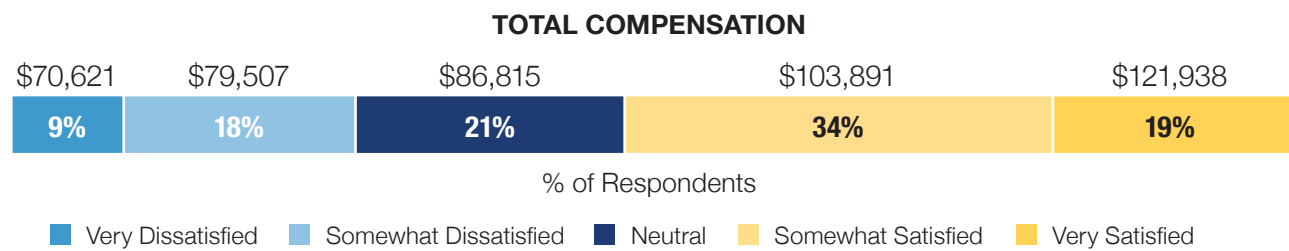
The United States is well known for its entrepreneurial spirit, and independent consultants and private business owners saw the benefit of running their own show in 2020. Independent consultants earn more than all other occupational settings at \$125,404, and private business owners (not surprisingly) got the biggest raises – 17%.



Salary and Job Satisfaction

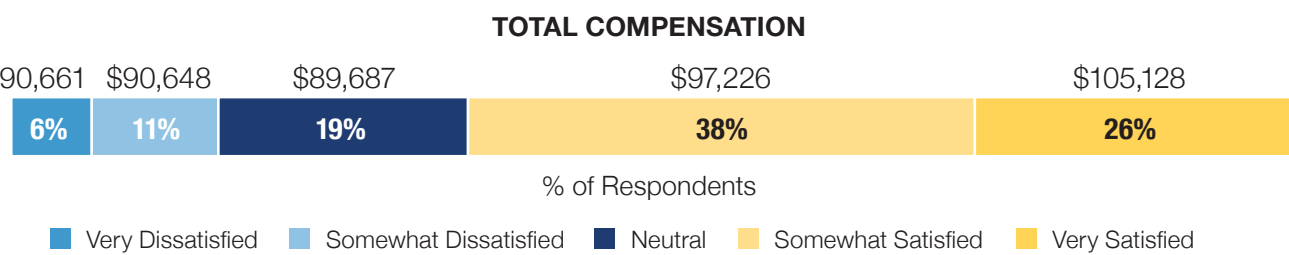
The majority of cleared professionals remain satisfied with their salaries—53% reported being very or somewhat satisfied, compared to 27% who are very or somewhat dissatisfied. The salary differential between those who are ‘neutral’ and ‘somewhat satisfied’ with their compensation is \$17,076.

SALARY SATISFACTION



And while the past two years have brought increased competition for cleared talent, low unemployment and a hot job market, the percentage of cleared professionals who report being satisfied with their jobs remained largely the same in 2018 and 2020. Cleared respondents were moderately satisfied with their jobs, with 64% very or somewhat satisfied, and 17% very or somewhat dissatisfied. As has previously been the case, job satisfaction is not clearly correlated with compensation, although those with the highest compensation report the highest job satisfaction. The difference between those who are somewhat satisfied with their jobs and neutral is \$7,539.

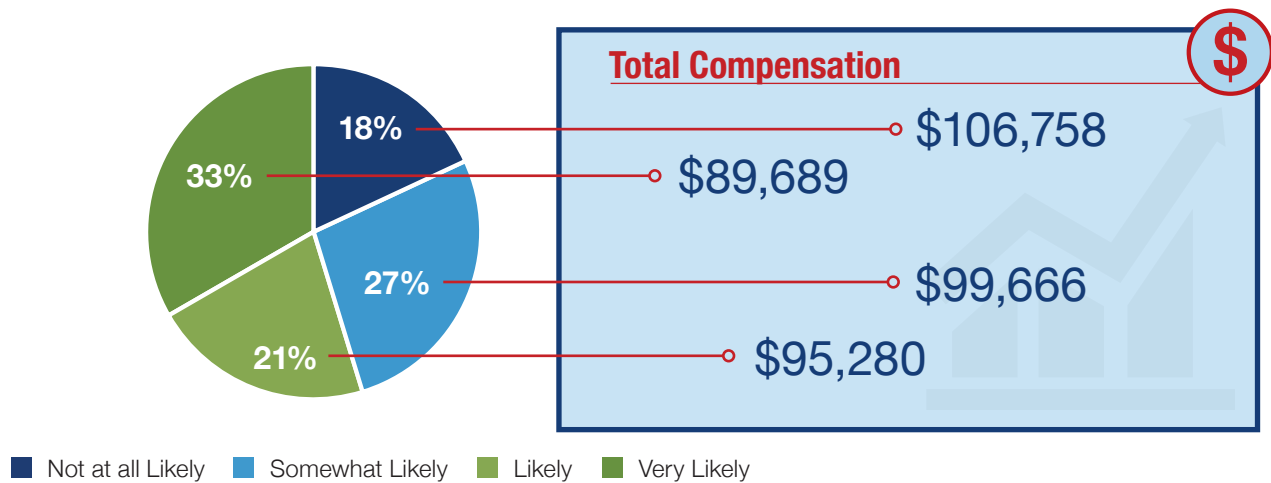
JOB SATISFACTION



Likelihood of Changing Jobs or Leaving the Cleared Industry

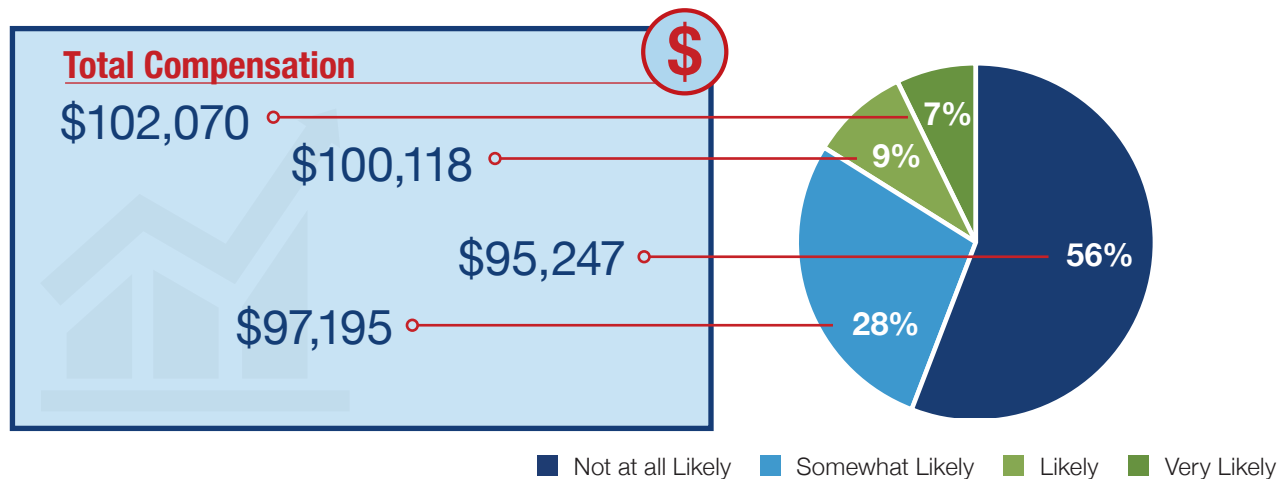
81% of respondents said they were at least somewhat likely to change their jobs in the coming year, down 3% from 2018. The difference in total compensation between those very likely and not at all likely to change jobs was about \$17,000 in 2020.

LIKELIHOOD OF CHANGING JOBS AND/OR EMPLOYERS



However, when it comes to the likelihood of leaving the cleared industry, most respondents (56%) reported they were not at all likely to leave the cleared industry in the next five years. Only 16% reported being likely or very likely to leave. Because salaries are higher for respondents likely to leave the cleared industry, this could indicate that salaries matter more to this group, and they could feel their earning potential is restricted by remaining in the cleared industry.

LIKELIHOOD OF LEAVING THE CLEARED INDUSTRY



Conclusion

2020: UP AND OUT

The coming year looks to be an extension of career trends we've already seen with job change largely seen as the path to higher compensation, and cleared professionals certainly open to new opportunities. The good news? Cleared professionals do not appear to be leaving for

greener pastures and greenbacks in the private sector, but are motivated by non-compensation related factors such as location (hence the lower compensation among those who have left the cleared industry).

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Important Information About Our Survey



The 2020 Security Clearance Jobs Compensation Survey was administered online by ClearanceJobs from October 18, 2019 through February 3, 2020. A total of 24,249 completed questionnaires were obtained. The survey captured 2020 salary (base and total compensation) for United States security-cleared personnel. By definition all respondents included in this analysis have an active or current security clearance issued by the United States federal government, are employed, and reported compensation figures between \$18,000 and \$300,000. Also note that there was a one-year gap between survey years (no survey was conducted in the interim year), so the differences reported herein are between 2018 and 2020.

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