



12 TIPS

FOR SPEEDING UP THE SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS



There is good news for those following the saga of personnel security and background investigations processing—the backlog of pending security clearance background investigations has been drastically reduced over the past year, and security clearance processing times are beginning to shrink, as well. Process improvements began under the National Background Investigations Bureau (NBIB) and continued under the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) are helping some simple background investigations move forward in as little as a few months.

The government is doing its part, but there is still a lot candidates, companies, and agencies can do to ensure a timely security clearance process. The first step to an improved security clearance process is understanding the three components—initiation, investigation, and adjudication. Here are some tips for helping at each step of the security clearance journey.



INITIATION PHASE

This is the phase where the security clearance is completed by the applicant and then submitted by the Facility Security Officer (FSO). By far, this is the segment of the process candidates have the most control over—complete your SF-86 well, and submit it in a timely fashion, and you may shave weeks or months off of the security clearance process. Here are five tips for a smoother initiation phase:

1 Provide complete, accurate information.

If you fail to list short-term employment, a period of couch-surfing, or other ‘irrelevant’ information, you create gaps a background investigator will be required to follow-up on.

2 List good sources.

Where possible, notify your references in advance that they may be contacted by a security officer. Don't list relatives as ‘people who know you well.’

3 Review your credit report before completing the SF-86.

Financial issues are far and above the most significant cause of clearance denial. Address inaccuracies or pay off debts before you apply for a clearance, if possible.

4 Don't submit a sloppy SF-86.

The top reasons for an SF-86 to be rejected are incomplete information, like a missing applicant or spouse's social security number or employment verifier. Make sure every field is complete, but also don't overshare. If the question asks only for information from a specific period of time, only list that—every additional data point you add will have to be verified, as well.

5 Don't lie.

It goes without saying, but don't lie on your SF-86. If you were fired from a job, just say it. Trying to hide previous employment issues or an arrest is more likely to see your security clearance denied under the ‘personal conduct’ adjudicative criteria.

COMPANIES: *Don't just rely on your applicants to fill out the SF-86 correctly. Train them, and have your FSO review the application before it's submitted.*



INVESTIGATION PHASE

You might think there is nothing that can be done to speed up the security clearance process once the application has been submitted. Think again. While the background investigation process will vary in length based on the individual's background (13 prior addresses take longer to track down than 3), an applicant can do a lot to help assist their investigation along—simply by being responsive. These four tips can help you speed up the process once the application has been submitted:

1 Review your SF-86 before the interview.

If you note missing or inaccurate information, gather the missing details and bring them to the interview, in addition to providing them to your investigator.

2 Verify your reference data.

Your investigator will be reaching out to your references in many cases. If you think you can provide additional information about how to contact these individuals (alternate phone numbers, updated addresses), have that information ready.

3 Be prepared with recent information.

If your application was submitted months or even years prior, you may have significant life changes that have happened in the interim. Whether it's a marriage, divorce, new debt or a DUI, be prepared with that information—and any mitigating details—to provide to the investigator.

4 Have supporting documentation.

While background investigators are generally not allowed to accept your paper 'evidence' during the interview, letting them know where to find it or providing the right documentation is helpful—whether it's a rental agreement or marriage license.

COMPANIES: *Be the employment verifier you wish your clearance applicants had. Have procedures in place for verifying information quickly and efficiently. Provide employees information with how to verify if a background investigator is legit.*



ADJUDICATION PHASE

The adjudication phase is where the rubber meets the road. The background investigator's case file is passed along to a trained adjudicator who considers the individual's reliability and trustworthiness with classified information, based on the 13 adjudicative criteria. Investigation timelines have been lengthy, but adjudication timelines have also been known to creep into months, or in extreme cases, years. If you find your investigation stalled in adjudication, here are three things you can do.

1 Stay in touch with your FSO.

As a candidate, staying in touch with your FSO may not move your application to the top of the stack, but it ensures you remain top of mind. FSOs should have the capacity to reach out to their government counterpart to see what the status of the investigation is.

2 Consider a Privacy Act request.

A Privacy Act request is generally not a great option for individuals who are in the midst of the security clearance process, it is an option, and worth considering if yours is one of the cases lingering for over a year. This is particularly the case if you're unable to get clear information on where you're at in the process—investigation or adjudication.

3 Submit a congressional inquiry.

Believe it or not, your Member of Congress is there to assist you with constituent services, and one of those is inquiring with federal agencies about the status of a security clearance investigation. Submitting a query to your congressman (including information about the sponsoring agency, the date your investigation was submitted, and any other supporting documentation), often is credited with moving the needle and bumping a stalled case file closer to completion.

If you think there's little to nothing you can do to speed up the security clearance process, think again. Slow moving security clearance processing often comes down to applicants with complex cases, or those who failed to take the steps to ensure their application was complete, and their investigators and adjudicators had the information they needed to make a decision.