



ClearanceJobs™



amentum

CLEARED & AT THE TOP:

2025 COMPENSATION INSIGHTS FOR

NATIONAL SECURITY EXECUTIVES





If you're holding both a security clearance and a seat in the executive boardroom, you're a part of an elite group—and the compensation data shows it. In this year's survey, we took a closer look at the highest level of cleared professionals: those working in the C-suite. These are Presidents, CEOs, CTOs, CISOs, and VPs guiding national security strategy across both public and private sectors.

With new survey questions focused solely on this leadership tier, we gained a sharper understanding of how cleared executive compensation is structured—and where it's headed.

HOW MUCH DO CLEARED EXECUTIVES MAKE?

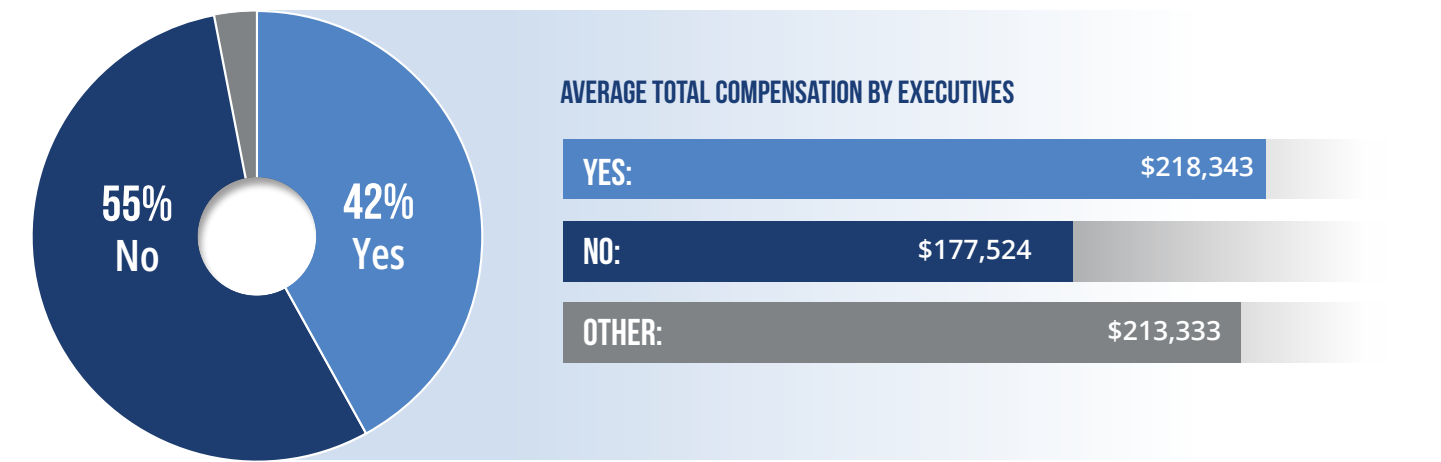
Cleared executives reported an average total annual compensation of \$195,294, a significant jump from the overall survey average of \$119,131. The median C-suite salary is even more striking—landing right at \$200,000.

That's just the base story, though. We also asked execs to break down their compensation into base salary and additional income—bonuses, stock, danger pay, and more. Not surprisingly, the base pay doesn't always tell the whole story at this level. For many, performance-based pay and long-term incentives drive real earnings growth.

When asked which components made up the majority of their income above base pay, cleared executives pointed to bonuses, stock options, and allowances or awards.

In many cases, performance-based pay and long-term incentives like equity and structured bonuses drive real income.

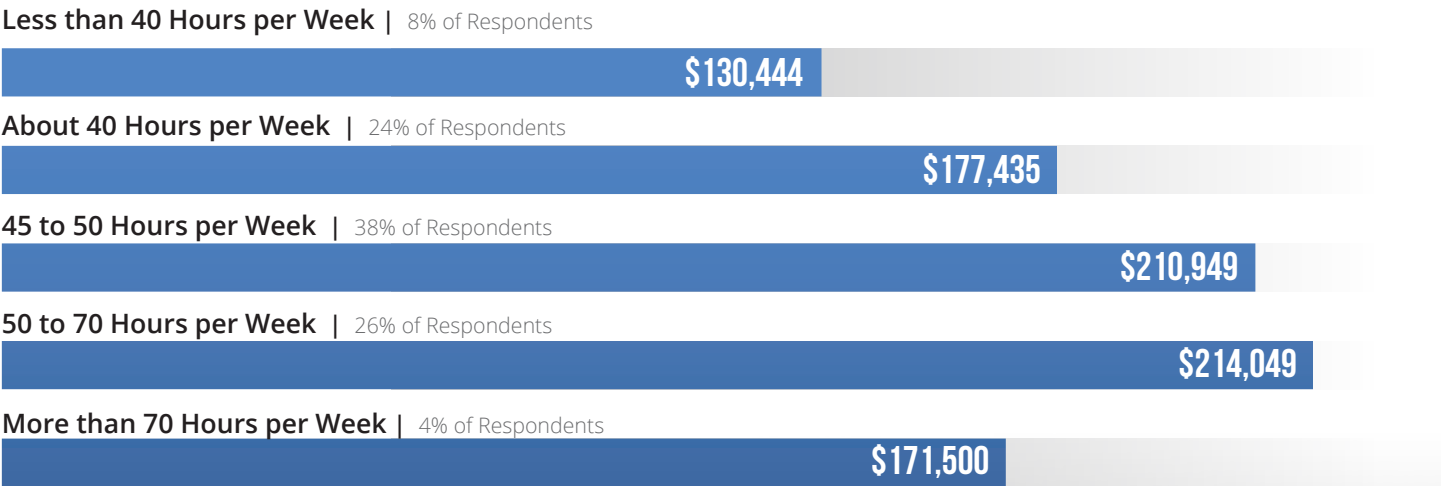
IS EXECUTIVE PAY PERFORMANCE-BASED?



A large majority of cleared executives said yes—their pay is tied to company performance. This incentive structure reflects what we see in commercial boardrooms, but it’s also gaining traction among contractors supporting the defense and intelligence communities.

In an era of tightening budgets and shifting federal priorities, cleared companies are emphasizing performance alignment at the top. That means more variability—but also more opportunity for top performers. Executives whose pay is performance-tied earn, on average, \$40K more than those with fixed salary structures.

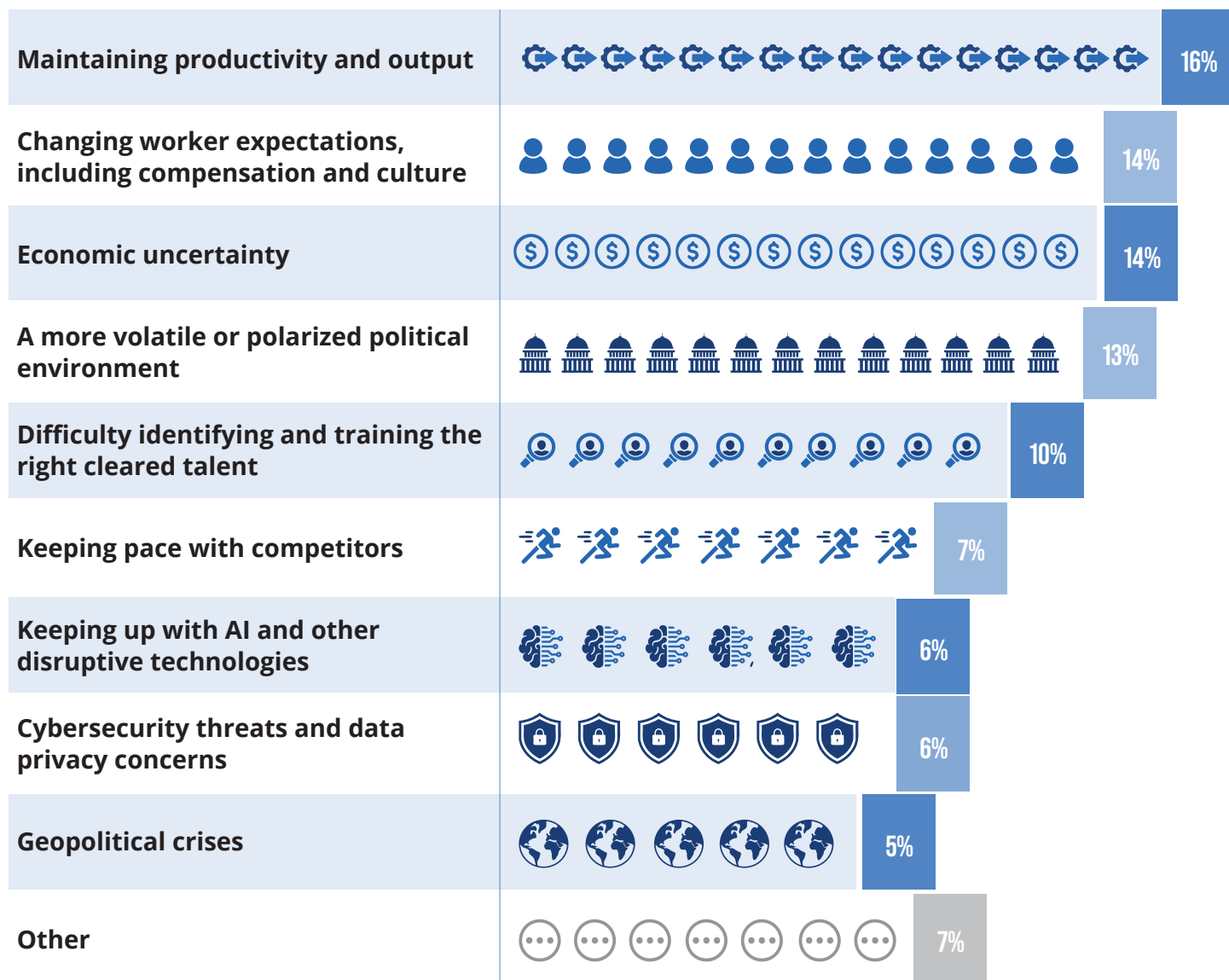
HOW MANY HOURS DO EXECUTIVES WORK?



Leadership isn’t a 9-to-5 job. Cleared executives reported heavy workloads, with the majority working 50 to 70 hours per week. For some, the number climbs even higher.

While long hours are par for the course in senior roles, this data underscores a trend we see across the industry: high responsibility, high reward—and high pressure.

WHAT KEEPS CLEARED EXECUTIVES UP AT NIGHT?

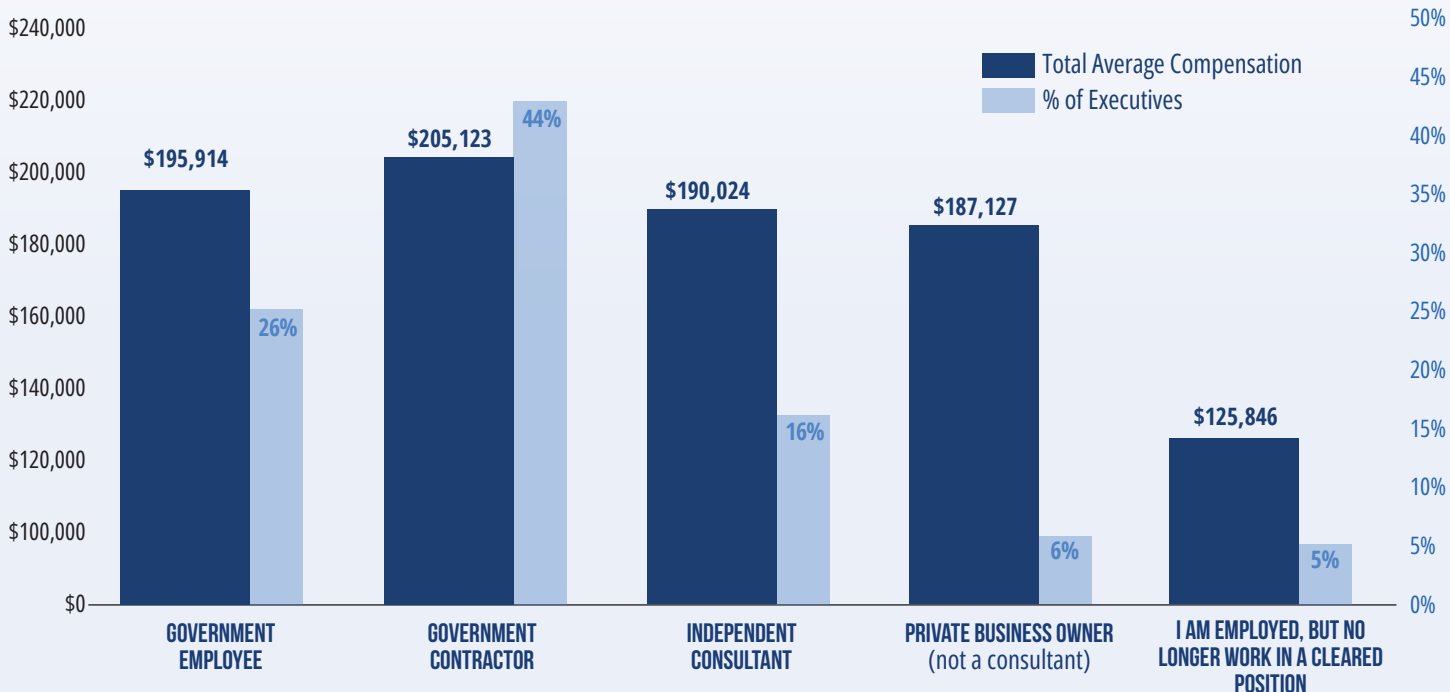


From culture shifts to competitive threats, cleared executives are feeling pressure from all sides. The most commonly cited challenge was maintaining productivity and output—a sign that sustaining performance under resource constraints remains a top concern. But just behind that are deeply human issues: changing worker expectations around compensation, flexibility, and mission alignment, and economic uncertainty that clouds long-term planning. Executives are also contending with political volatility, talent shortages, and the breakneck pace of AI innovation. The result? A leadership environment where strategic clarity is hard-won and success means navigating competing demands across people, policy, and performance.

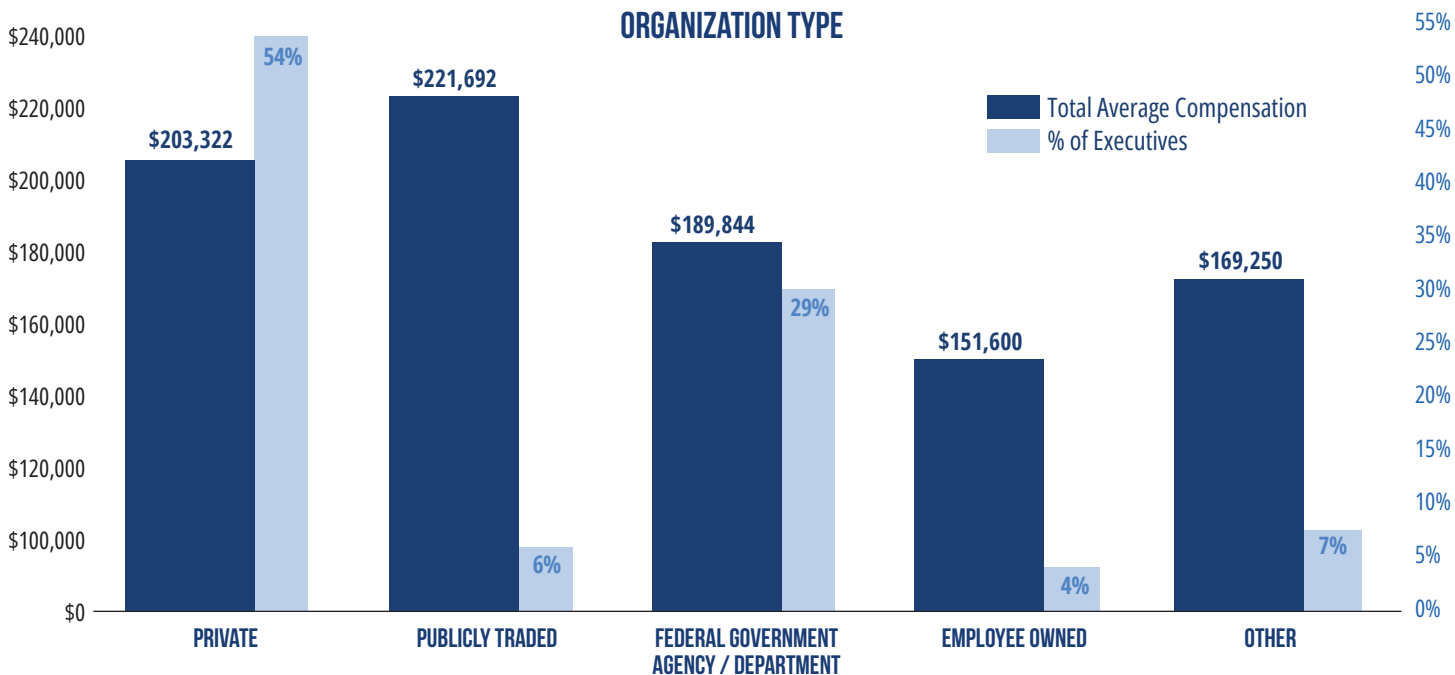
ORGANIZATIONS

Whether an executive works directly for a government agency or leads a private-sector firm, compensation tells two stories. Government contractors dominate the cleared executive workforce, representing nearly half of all surveyed leaders—and they're well-compensated, averaging over \$205K annually. Independent consultants and private business owners hold their own, with earnings in the high \$180Ks to low \$190Ks. On the organizational side, publicly traded companies rise to the top of the pay scale, with an average compensation exceeding \$220K. Those employed by federal agencies or employee-owned companies trail slightly, reflecting more rigid salary structures. The takeaway? Company structure matters, and compensation reflects the risk, reward, and revenue potential each model offers.

EMPLOYER TYPE



ORGANIZATION TYPE



SECURITY CLEARANCES AND POLYGRAPHS

SECURITY CLEARANCES

CLEARANCE	AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF EXECUTIVES
Dept of Defense Confidential	N/A	1%
Dept of Defense Secret	\$161,486	14%
Dept of Defense Top Secret	\$192,269	15%
Dept of Defense Top Secret/SCI	\$208,637	35%
Dept of Energy (Q or L)	\$267,750	2%
Intelligence Agency (CIA, FBI, NSA)	\$217,956	14%
Dept of Homeland Security	\$156,921	5%
Public Trust	\$154,429	3%
Other Government Agency	\$197,901	12%

POLYGRAPHS

Lifestyle or Full Scope Polygraph

20% of Executives

\$198,448

CI Polygraph

18% of Executives

\$200,065

Don't have a current Polygraph

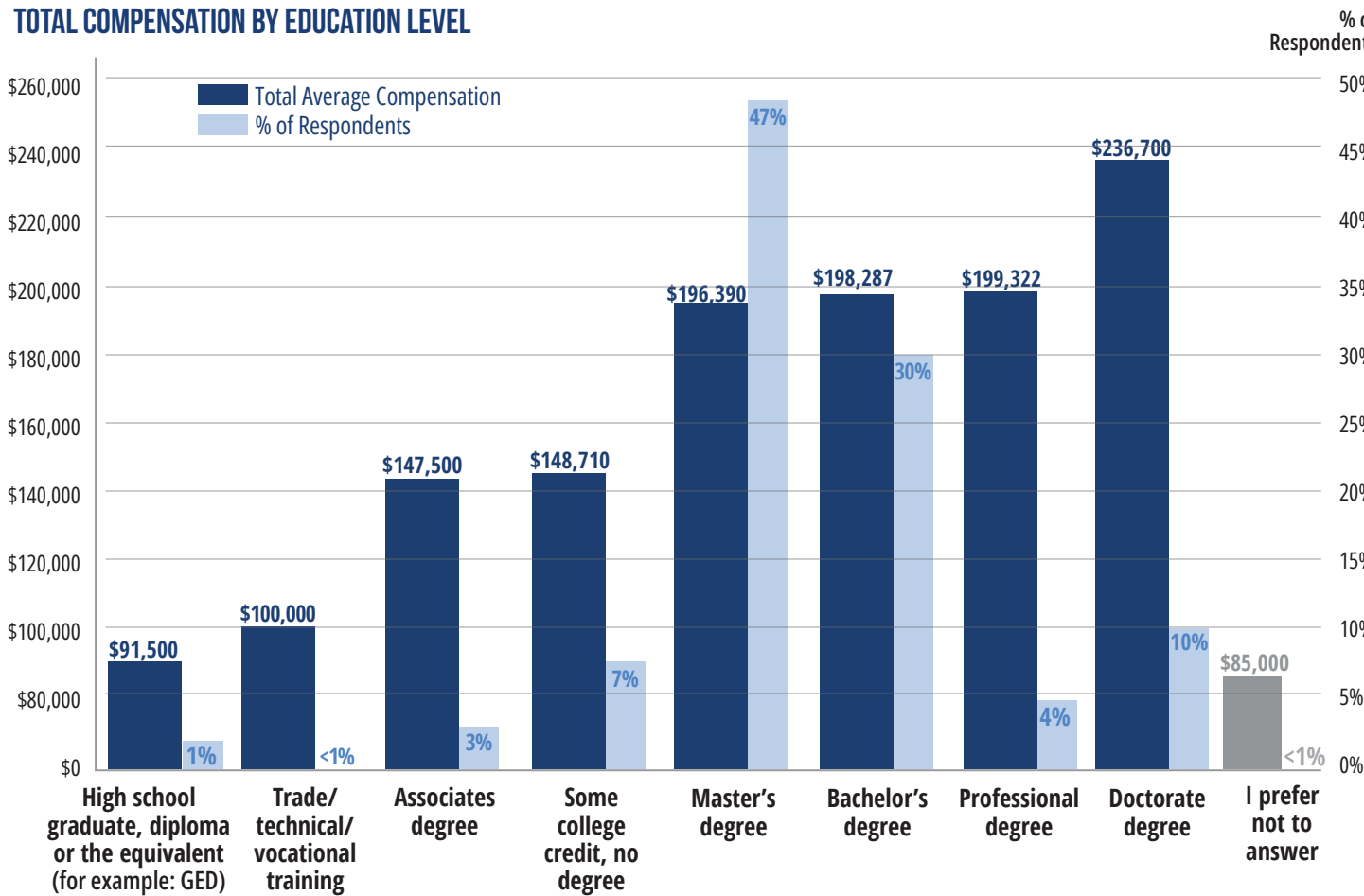
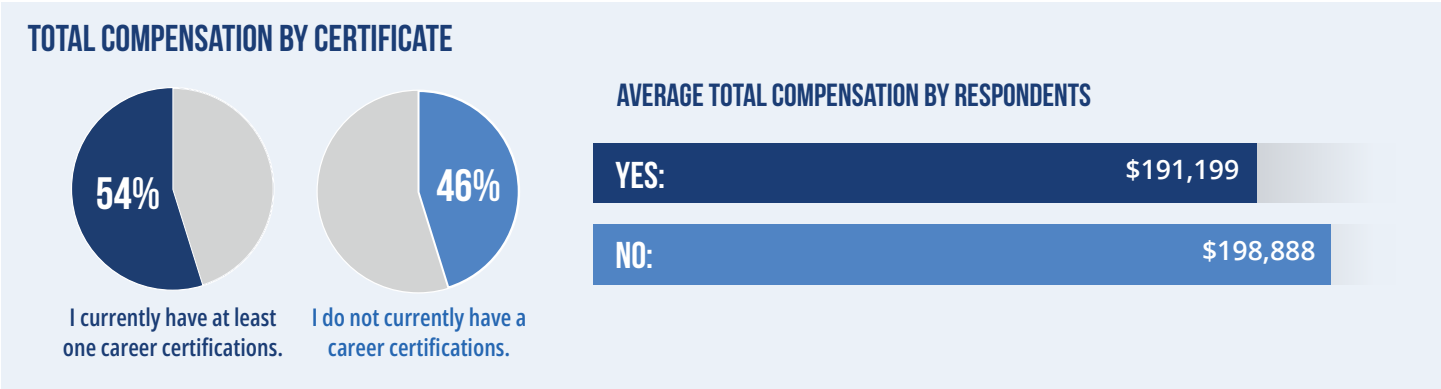
62% of Executives

\$192,912

Clearances still matters—and in many executive roles, it's a differentiator. Executives with TS/SCI or agency-specific access (like those at CIA, NSA, or FBI) consistently earn above the \$200K mark. Even more striking, those holding Department of Energy Q or L clearances report the highest average compensation in the group—an impressive \$267,750. On the polygraph side, roughly 38% of cleared execs hold some level of poly, and they tend to out-earn their non-polygraph peers. And while just 14% of executives hold only a Secret clearance, that's significantly lower than the 34% average across the overall cleared workforce—suggesting that at the top, deeper vetting is the norm.

EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATIONS

Certifications make less of a pay impact at the top. The overall industry has around a \$15,000 pay bump with at least one career certification, but at the top, it's irrelevant because the certification is not in demand for the role.



Cleared executives are an educated cohort—more than half hold advanced degrees, with 10% reporting a doctorate and 44% holding a master's. Unsurprisingly, that depth of education aligns with compensation; those with a PhD or professional degree are at the top of the executive pay scale. At the C-suite level, strategic insight and leadership experience matter more than role-based credentials. It's less about the degree or certification, and more about the individual.

WHAT DO CLEARED EXECUTIVES ACTUALLY DO?

The C-suite in national security isn't one-size-fits-all. Cleared executives span a wide range of specialties, from mission leadership to tech oversight.

Government Contractor / Military and Law Enforcement / Security | 25% of Executives

\$155,236

Intelligence / Linguist | 7% of Executives

\$196,118

Engineering | 5% of Executives

\$204,000

Emergency / Healthcare and Science | 3% of Executives

\$208,444

Business / Finance / Management | 36% of Executives

\$214,027

IT | 15% of Executives

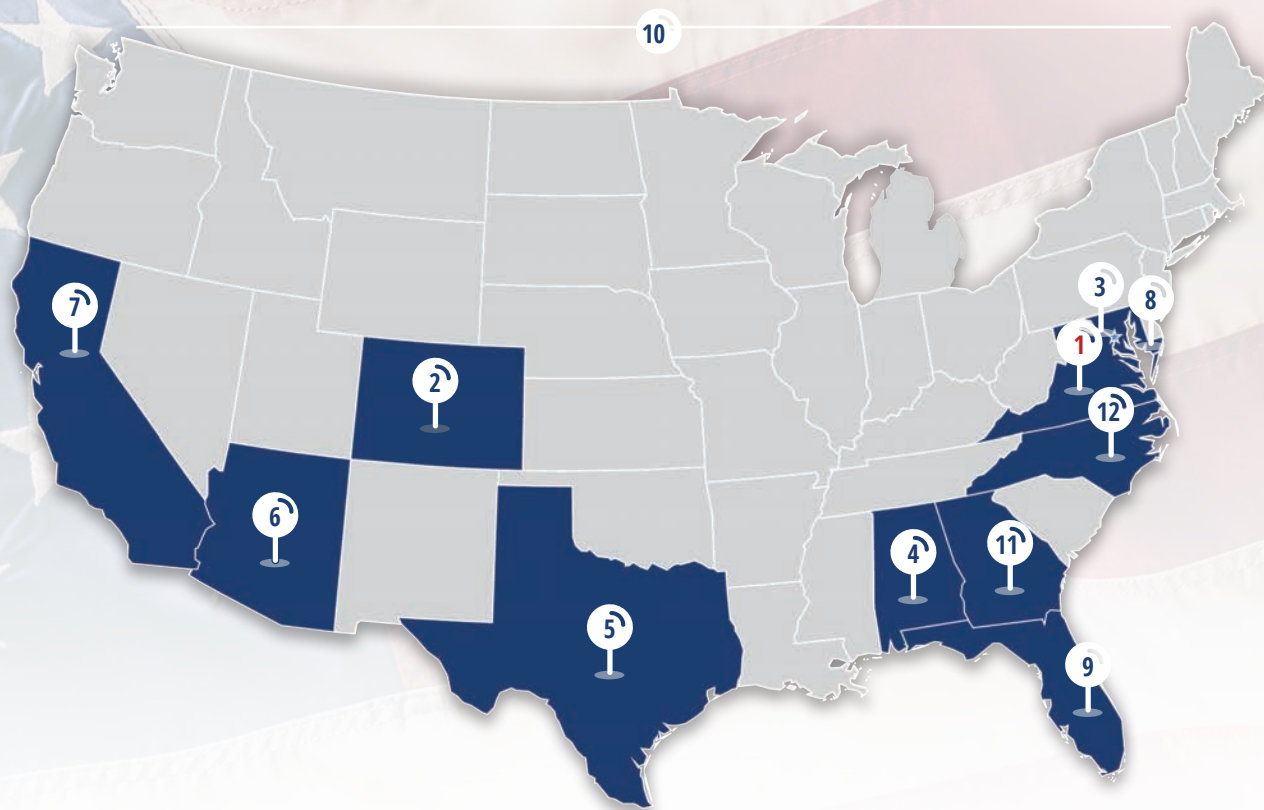
\$231,905

All other Positions | 9% of Executives

\$160,958

This variety shows that the clearance advantage doesn't just apply to intelligence or cyber roles—it spans the entire executive suite. And depending on your role, compensation can swing higher or lower. For example, tech leaders in AI-heavy firms or security-focused companies often report the highest bonus potential.

WHERE ARE CLEARED EXECUTIVES LOCATED?



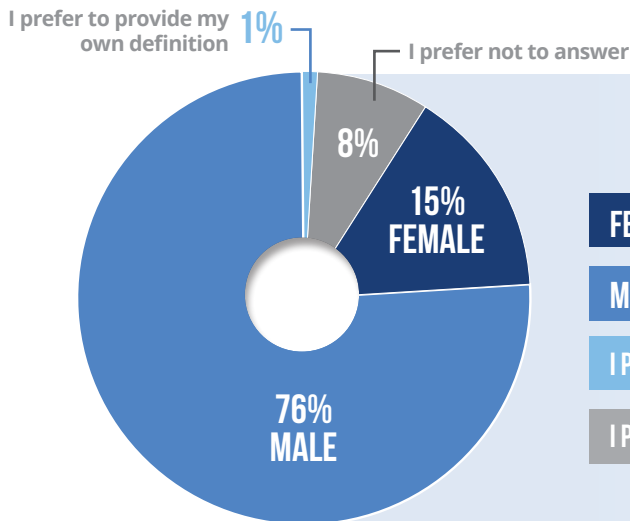
STATE	AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF EXECUTIVES
Alabama	\$209,000	2%
Arizona	\$189,500	2%
California	\$189,364	4%
Colorado	\$212,333	2%
D.C.	\$209,896	12%
Florida	\$185,075	8%

STATE	AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION	% OF EXECUTIVES
Georgia	\$174,333	1%
Maryland	\$187,773	9%
North Carolina	\$131,667	1%
Texas	\$203,000	7%
Virginia	\$216,357	22%
Other	\$183,096	30%

Unsurprisingly, cleared executive talent is concentrated in national security hubs. Virginia, D.C., and Maryland continue to attract the bulk of leadership roles—driven by proximity to the Pentagon, intelligence agencies, and major government contractors. Virginia leads in both headcount and average pay, while D.C. remains competitive due to high-level policy and agency positions.

But the map is changing. Executives in Colorado, California, and even Arizona are commanding strong pay, particularly in cyber, aerospace, and space-focused sectors. And the growth of remote-friendly roles is helping spread talent across more locations—73% of senior-level executives report having some level of remote work, compared to just 57% of the overall cleared workforce. That flexibility is opening doors for talent outside traditional hubs, while also giving employers new ways to compete for senior leaders.

GENDERS IN THE CLEARED C-SUITE



AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION BY EXECUTIVES

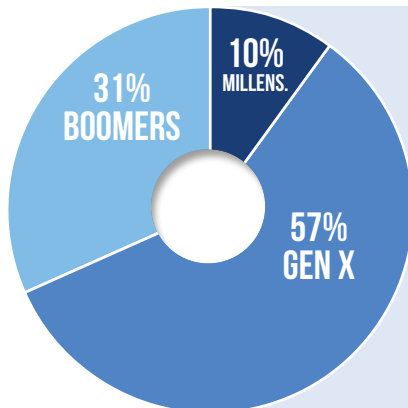
FEMALE:	\$188,813
MALE:	\$193,302
I PREFER TO PROVIDE MY OWN DEFINITION	\$110,000
I PREFER NOT TO ANSWER	\$226,000

Men continue to make up the largest share of cleared executives - similar to the overall cleared population. Women in the C-suite often report compensation almost on par with men, especially when they hold technical or mission-critical roles.

However, gaps still exist in some areas—particularly around access to stock options and bonus-heavy structures. That’s not just a pay equity issue; it’s a retention risk for companies that fail to evolve.

The good news? Organizations that actively promote gender diversity in leadership report stronger pipelines, better retention, and higher overall compensation satisfaction. As national security hiring gets more competitive, expect gender equity needs to be more than a goal.

GENERATIONS IN CHARGE



AVERAGE TOTAL COMPENSATION BY EXECUTIVES

MILLENNIALS (BORN 1981-96)	\$197,000
GENERATION X (BORN 1965-80)	\$205,835
BOOMERS (BORN 1946-64)	177,679

In terms of age, cleared executives span three generations. Gen X leads the pack, representing over half of all C-suite respondents and averaging more than \$205,000 in compensation. These leaders bring deep mission knowledge, decades of experience, and a strong grasp of both government and private sector demands. Baby Boomers, though a smaller share, still hold powerful positions—especially in legacy contracts and advisory roles—and often bring long-term incentives and equity to the table. Meanwhile, Millennials are beginning to break into senior leadership, particularly in roles tied to cybersecurity, digital modernization, and technical innovation. Their numbers are still small but growing, and their compensation—nearly on par with Gen X—is a sign they’re being recognized for leading edge expertise.



THE BIG PICTURE: HIGH STAKES, HIGHER REWARDS

If there's one takeaway from this year's report, it's this: a security clearance still adds value, especially at the top. Cleared executives are well-compensated, but they also carry the weight of organizational change, security challenges, and workforce transformation.

While their roles vary across sectors, one trend is unmistakable—C-suite clearance holders consistently out-earn the overall cleared industry. And those working for major corporations, especially publicly traded or private sector firms, have the potential to earn even more. Compensation in the cleared executive space isn't one-size-fits-all—it's shaped by a complex blend of factors including agency affiliation, industry focus, education level, job function, and organization type.

For employers, that means the market for cleared executives is both highly competitive and deeply nuanced. For candidates, it means strategic choices—from where you work to what you lead—can significantly impact long-term earnings. The national security mission may be serious, but so is the talent—and the pay—driving it forward.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Security Clearance Jobs Salary Survey is administered online by ClearanceJobs. The 2024 data presented here was collected between August 27 and December 31, 2024. Security-cleared respondents were invited to participate in the survey through notifications on ClearanceJobs home page and various communications and links. This report focuses on both the findings for the 2024 survey and the comparison of those results for a nearly identical survey conducted one year prior (2023 compensation information).

In 2024, there were 31,001 survey participants, a decrease of -6% over the 2023 survey. After excluding survey respondents not having security clearance, those who were unemployed, active-duty military, students, those whose compensation was below \$18,000 or above \$400,000, and finally incomplete or duplicate questionnaires, there remained 13,177 usable responses in 2024 and 14,251 usable responses in 2023.

By definition, all respondents included in this analysis have an active or current security clearance issued by the U.S. federal government, are not active-duty military, are employed, and reported compensation figures between \$18,000 and \$400,000. Note that in reports completed prior to 2020, active-duty military were included in the analysis universe.

Dollars are as reported in the survey year and not adjusted for inflation. Also, prior to 2022, the high-end cap for compensation figures was \$300,000. That increased to \$350,000 in 2022 and then increased to \$400,000 in 2024. This had a negligible impact on overall compensation figures for 2024 (no impact on median, increased mean total compensation by \$453 and increased mean base pay by \$78).



Advance Your Future with Amentum

Join Amentum's Intelligence & Cyber team—where innovation meets impact. With more than 53,000 employees in approximately 80 countries, Amentum is proud to be the #1 Military Friendly® Employer and a leader in national security.

We harness the power of AI, machine learning, and cutting-edge cybersecurity to protect what matters most. We deliver innovative solutions in mission-driven environments, and your skills are an essential part of our shared success. Take the next step and advance your future with Amentum.

Visit: <https://tinyurl.com/AmentumIC>





A COMMUNITY FOR CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN NATIONAL SECURITY

ClearanceJobs is your all-in-one recruiting solution. Much like a CRM, our unique system lets you target top candidate leads, converting cool passives to active candidates ready to make a move—to your company.

END-TO-END CLEARED **HIRING SOLUTIONS**



RECRUITMENT SOLUTIONS [↗](#)

- Search, directly engage, and easily work cleared candidates through a pipeline.
- Convert passives to active potential hires.



CAREER EVENTS [↗](#)

- Reduce your cost per hire with real-time conversations.
- Choose from in-person or virtual, public or private events.



STAFFING SOLUTIONS [↗](#)

- We'll source cleared candidates for contract, contract-to-hire, and permanent placement roles.
- Save time and free up your bandwidth, all that's left to do is interview and hire.



EMPLOYER BRANDING [↗](#)

- Increase brand awareness to gain cleared candidate trust.
- Amplify your hiring messages using targeted messaging, site advertising and sponsored content.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Connect with a ClearanceJobs Recruiting Specialist today at 1.866.302.7264
or visit our website at www.clearancejobs.com