# STEP-BY-STEP SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS



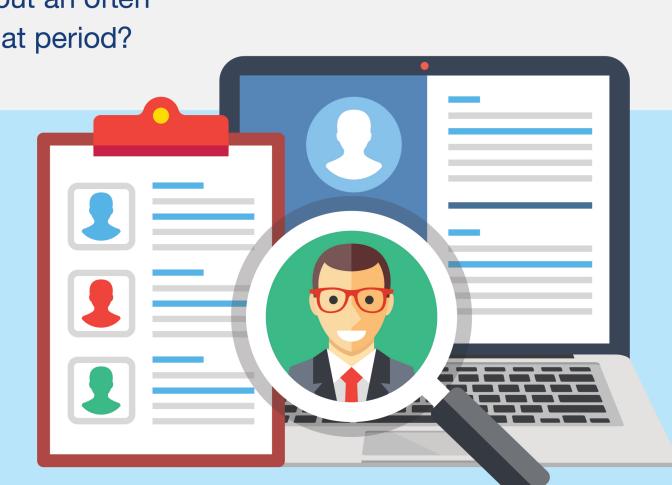
Companies interested in hiring candidates for security-cleared positions have to wait out an often lengthy background check and approval process. What can employers do to shrink that period?

#### 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.



## STEP 1

Employer extends employment offer contingent on security clearance approval.



## SECURITY CLEARANCE TIMELINE

# Initiation Phase

APPLICATION PROCESS



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.

## STEP 5

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

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.).



**REVIEW PROCESS** 

# **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.

## STEP 7

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



# Adjudicative Phase

ADJUDICATIVE AGENCY

## **CLEARANCE APPROVED**

## 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 STATE OF

Facility Security Officer:
Responsible for
maintaining the security
of a facility, including the
screening of securitycleared 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.

