



ClearanceJobs®



STATE OF THE SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS

1H 2024

STATE OF THE SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS

A letter from our President and Founder, Evan Lesser

The spotlight shining on the security clearance and vetting process following Jack Teixeira's leaks hasn't lifted, and the challenges in implementing security clearance reform haven't abated. For the first time in several years, in the second half of 2023, we saw the pending backlog of security clearance cases rise above a steady state, and security clearance processing times increase.

Security policy, clearance processing, and recruiting are linked in the national security hiring space. In a cleared workforce that still suffers from a major supply/demand imbalance, small changes in the security clearance process can have big effects.

Understanding the security clearance process is essential for both hiring managers and applicants. And the need to stay informed will only increase in the months to come, as the government eliminates eQIP and fully transitions to eApp, the National Background Investigation Services continues to grow more operational, and Trusted Workforce 2.0 reforms and policies move forward.

Improving the security clearance process requires not just government policy makers, but the professionals impacted by those policies to advise and inform. The best way to grow the cleared workforce is to grow the number of professionals who understand how clearance eligibility works. With knowledge comes power - at least the power to understand the clearance process, what it entails, and how to get and keep your eligibility.

The 1H 2024 State of the Security Clearance Process continues to provide actionable insights into the state of the security clearance process today. We're going back to the basics to help you understand where the clearance process is today and the reform efforts underway.



President and Founder of ClearanceJobs

SECURITY CLEARANCE 101: GOING BACK TO THE BASICS

The structure and foundation of the security clearance process and eligibility to access classified information comes through Executive Orders. EOs create the foundation upon which other reforms are built. EO 13467 established the Suitability and Security Clearance Performance Accountability Council, which includes the critical roles and agencies responsible for both security clearance policy and process.

The Four Horsemen of Personnel Vetting Reform:

OMB:
Reform Accountability



DNI:
Security Policy



OPM:
Suitability Policy



DoD: Reform Implementation
including NBIS, DCSA



Jason Miller

Deputy Director for
Management, Office of
Management and Budget



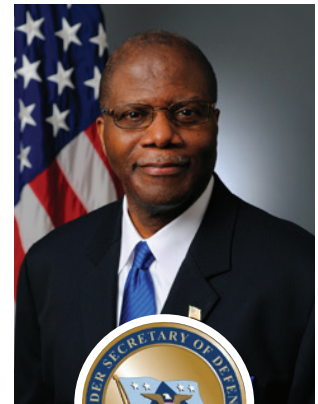
Avril Haines

Director of National
Intelligence



Kiran Ahuja

Director of the U.S. Office of
Personnel Management



Ronald S. Moultrie

Under Secretary of Defense
for Intelligence & Security

The National Security Act of 1947 spelled out the need for a security clearance process and became the framework upon which the entire security clearance process has been built. But it took decades before anything resembling a unified set of standards around access to classified information was codified. The first time adjudicative standards were mentioned was in another Executive Order – EO 10450. Fortunately, the adjudicative guidelines – which may sometimes seem like a Cold War relic – have been updated as recently as 2017 through Security Executive Agent Directive (SEAD) 4. The adjudicative guidelines today are an improvement upon the 1980 SCI guidelines which included ‘cohabitation’ and ‘undesirable character traits’ as potential red flags.

Creating universal standards across the security clearance process isn’t just a topic in vogue today – it has been a reform effort bandied about since there has been a security clearance for an agency to grant. A major movement toward creating security clearance reciprocity came in 1997, with the creation of uniform adjudicative guidelines which are the 13 used to grant and maintain clearance eligibility today.

The 13 Adjudicative Guidelines



Guideline A:
Allegiance to the U.S.



Guideline B:
Foreign Influence



Guideline C:
Foreign Preference



Guideline D:
Sexual Behavior



Guideline E:
Personal Conduct



Guideline F:
Financial Considerations



Guideline G:
Alcohol Consumption



Guideline H:
Drug Involvement



Guideline I:
Psychological Conditions



Guideline J:
Criminal Conduct



Guideline K:
Handling Protected
Information



Guideline L:
Outside Activities



Guideline M:
Use of Information
Technology

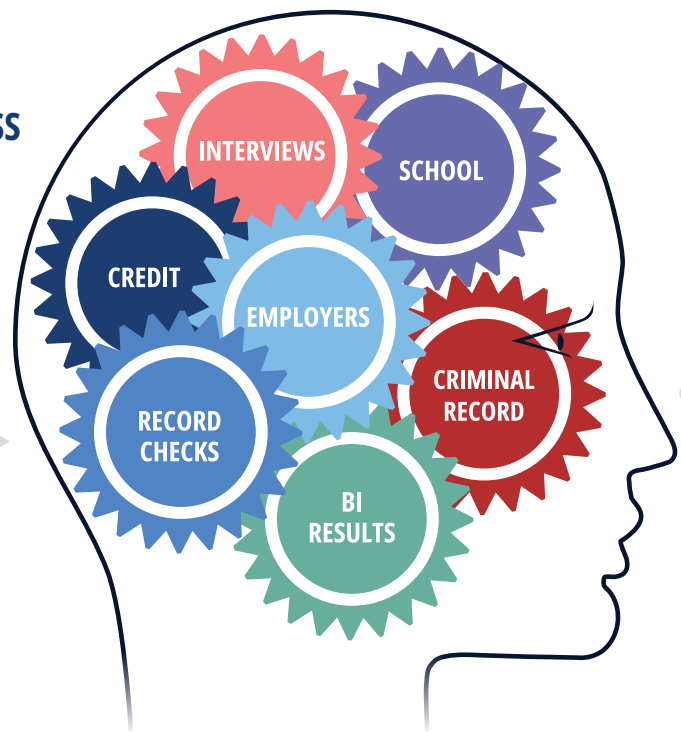
1997 was a good vintage in the world of security clearance reform because it also ushered in the universal application of a standard critical to security clearance applicants today – the whole person concept. The universal guidelines stated decisions must be made “in the context of the whole person.”

The adjudication process also considers:

- Nature, extent, and seriousness of the conduct
- Circumstances surrounding the conduct, to include knowledgeable participation
- Frequency and recency of the conduct
- Individual’s age and maturity at the time of the conduct
- Voluntariness of the participation
- Presence or absence of rehabilitation and other permanent behavioral changes
- Potential for pressure, coercion, exploitation, or duress
- Motivation of the conduct
- Likelihood of continuation or recurrence

BACKGROUND ADJUDICATION PROCESS WHOLE PERSON CONCEPT

NATURE & EXTENT >>>
FREQUENCY >>>
REHABILITATION >>>
POTENTIAL FOR PRESSURE >>>
MATURITY >>>
MOTIVATION >>>
RECENCY >>>



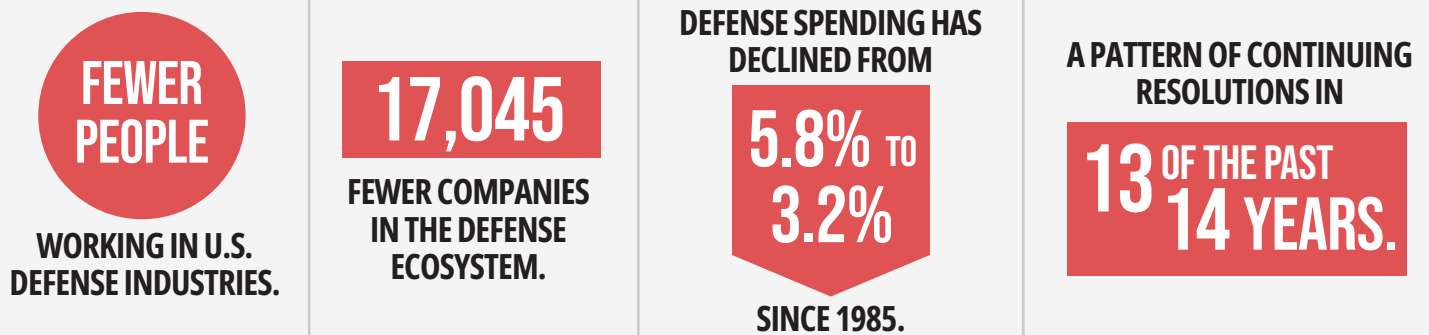
TOP ISSUES THAT CAUSE SECURITY CLEARANCE DENIAL

| Adjudicative Category | Number of Denied Cases | | Adjudicative Category | Number of Denied Cases | |
|---|------------------------|-------|---|------------------------|------------|
| | 2022 | 2023 | | 2022 | 2023 |
| Guideline A: Allegiance to the U.S. | 0 | 2 ▲ | Guideline H: Drug Involvement | 148 | 212 ▲ |
| Guideline B: Foreign Influence | 64 | 61 ▼ | Guideline I: Psychological Conditions | 26 | 39 ▲ |
| Guideline C: Foreign Preference | 8 | 6 ▼ | Guideline J: Criminal Conduct | 101 | 116 ▲ |
| Guideline D: Sexual Behavior | 31 | 36 ▲ | Guideline K: Handling Protected Information | 10 | 13 ▲ |
| Guideline E: Personal Conduct | 247 | 266 ▲ | Guideline L: Outside Activities | 1 | 2 ▲ |
| Guideline F: Financial Considerations | 624 | 602 ▼ | Guideline M: Use of Information Technology | 11 | 12 ▲ |
| Guideline G: Alcohol Consumption | 82 | 69 ▼ | Appeals Denied Eligibility | | 720 |
| | | | Appeals Granted Eligibility | | 230 |

Source: <https://doha.ogc.osd.mil/>

The security clearance guidelines haven't changed since 1997. And while much is made of the number of individuals with a security clearance, that's another number that hasn't seen massive change in the past 20 years. The overall number of individuals with clearance eligibility remains below the baseline. The relatively flat figure may not be an issue if security clearance processing times were at benchmark, but with delays in onboarding new talent and continued pushes for contractors to justify every cleared position, the lack of market elasticity is a hiring issue.

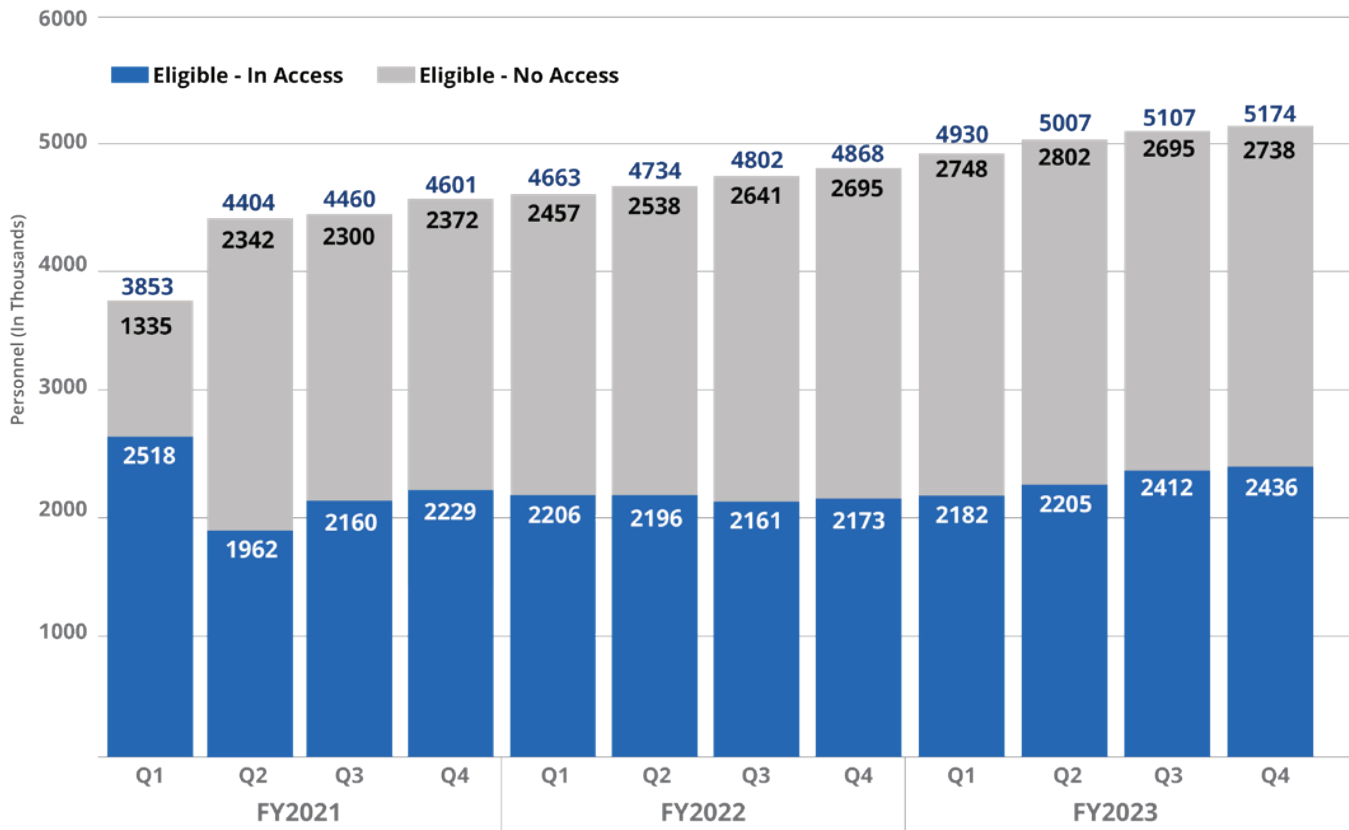
The NDIA Annual Report on the Defense Industrial Base, Vital Signs 2023, noted key trends creating a reduction in the strength of the DIB:



ELIGIBILITY & ACCESS

THE NATIONAL SECURITY POPULATION CONTINUES TO REMAIN STEADY.

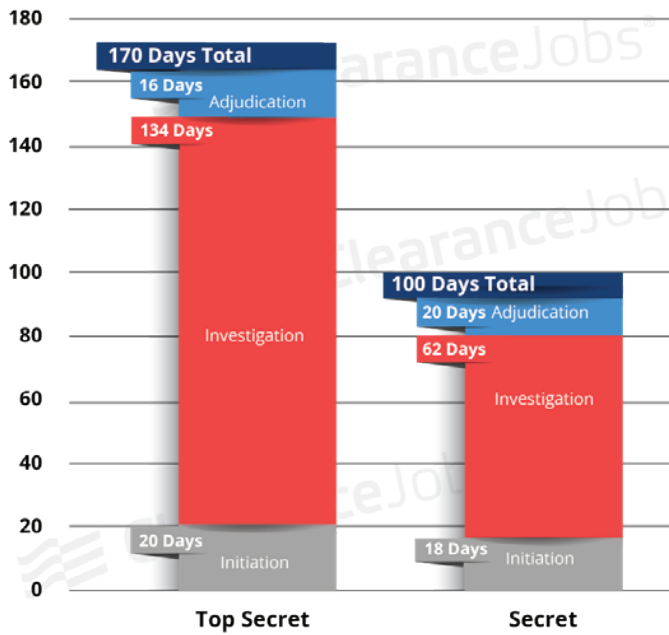
DoD National Security Population Eligibility/ Access



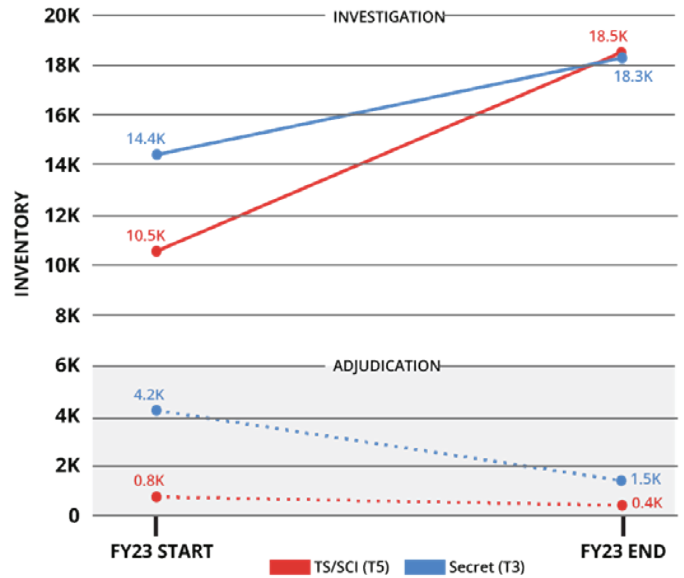
Market elasticity is important. But it's essential when security clearances processing times start to tick upward, as they're doing today. DCSA pointed to several issues behind a recent increase in its processing times for DoD/Industry security clearance. Several systems outages and the ongoing transition to the National Background Investigation Services (NBIS), along with working through more complex cases that may require more time were listed as reasons. But as trendlines go up, security clearance applicants, and their employers, need to be patient.



DoD/Industry Security Clearance Processing Times



Security Clearance Inventory

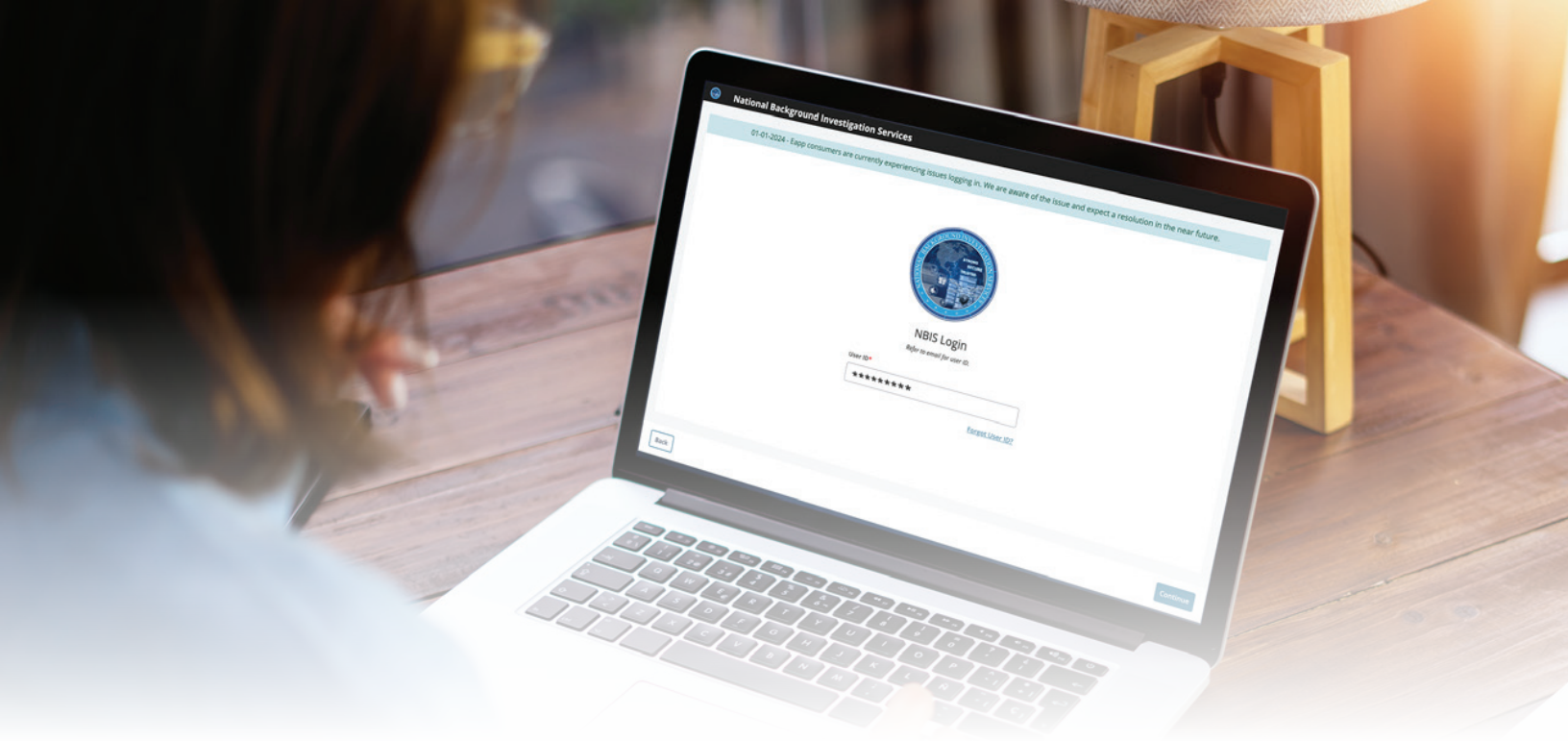


Security clearance processing times may be increasing, but new performance management standards are still coming soon. In an effort to get a better grasp of true end-to-end security clearance processing times, the PMO announced new security clearance processing benchmarks and a move to report on all security clearance times – not just the fastest 90%. ODNI and OPM are working on implementation guidance to provide to agencies to help enable the new benchmarks and create a path to better reporting.

CONTINUING PROGRESS TOWARD UPDATED BENCHMARKS:

Performance Management Implementation Guidance (PMIG)

| IRTPA | Years of Use | PMIG |
|--|--|---|
| 2004 to Present | | 2024 to Future |
| 90% fastest | Vetting Population | 100% fastest |
| Clock starts when security receives investigative and application documents from individual. | Personnel Security Processing Timeline | Clock starts when conditional offer is sent to application. |



Good-bye eQIP, hello, eApp

By the end of 2023 all of industry and approximately 85% of federal agencies were submitting applications using eApp. As NBIS moves forward and new technological releases are made, eApp will become the security clearance application we all know and love. eApp offers a better, faster candidate experience, a growing focus of the clearance reform effort.



The Security Clearance Candidate Experience

The security clearance process has not typically considered the applicant experience, but has frequently held a heavy bias toward government or company needs. But the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) was recently named a High Impact Service Provider, increasing the transparency and customer service benchmarks offered by America's largest security organization. The designation means DCSA will soon be providing action plans and customer feedback data through a [transparent dashboard](#).

The designation underpins ongoing efforts to make the applicant experience an important part of obtaining a security clearance - a key part of the Trusted Workforce 3.0 effort to build a holistic and flexible national security workforce.



Public Trust Continuous Vetting Enrollment

Now that all security clearance holders are enrolled in CV, it's time to begin the process of enrolling the entire trusted workforce into a CV solution. Key to Trusted Workforce 2.0 is creating mechanisms to reduce risk across the entire federal workforce. Suitability is often considered the Wild Wild West of the personnel vetting program. By making CV a vetting mechanism of the public trust population, suitability, and not just the security clearance process, becomes a bit more straightforward.



Annual Vetting Appraisal

The government continues to emphasize the need for self-reporting despite the move to CV. But it's going a step further, and will soon be adding an Annual Vetting Appraisal to the personnel vetting process. It's an idea already in place with our friends in the UK, who have an annual security appraisal form. The form continues the more proactive approach to establishing trust, and gives supervisors a greater role in reauthorizing the eligibility of their workforce. If the UK model is any indication, it's not just security clearance holders who will self-certify, but supervisors who will need to provide a brief response to whether or not individuals have had a change in behavior or circumstance that could necessitate further intervention.



But don't worry – if the UK model is any example, the AVA is just a few pages (<5) vs. the 136 of the SF-86.

Example of the UK's Security Appraisal Form

The government is taking steps to improve the security clearance process. Sometimes those steps may seem slow, and often they aren't noticeable outside of the security office. But in the community of trust, small changes can have big effects. One small step for security may be a giant leap for better workforce mobility.

**Have more questions about the security clearance process?
Visit our [Security Clearance FAQ](#).**

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- Convert passives to active potential hires.



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- Choose from in-person or virtual, public or private events.



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- All that's left for you to do is interview and hire.



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