Tips for Obtaining a Security Clearance

Information obtained from Partnership for Public Service and SPP Career Development
What is a Security Clearance?

- Provides authorization for access to sensitive national security information.

- Required for federal & private-sector jobs that involve access to classified information.

- Three levels of security clearances:
  - Confidential (reinvestigation required every 15 years)
  - Secret (reinvestigation required every 10 years)
  - Top Secret (reinvestigation required every 5 years)
Conducted to determine if a person is able and willing to safeguard classified information, based on his or her loyalty, character, trustworthiness, and reliability (source: Partnership for Public Service)

**The Investigative Process**

Average Timeline is 120 days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Key Steps</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applicant Completes</td>
<td>• Applicant completes e-QIP (Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing) *or in hardcopy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paperwork</td>
<td>• Fingerprint taken</td>
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<td>• National agency check</td>
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<td>• Paperwork checked for completeness * May include polygraph</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agency Verifies</td>
<td>• Investigators gather input from employers, friends, and family (written or interviews)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>• Adjudicators review all information collected and compare with agency guidelines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td>• Agency notifies applicant of the case determination</td>
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<td>Conducts Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agency Adjudication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agency Decision</td>
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**Tips and Reminders for Students:**

- Always answer all questions on the form. If you forget something, just contact your security official.
- All information is confidential.
- Your current employer may be contacted during the investigation.
- The employer requests the investigation or clearance level based on the job. You can’t choose your clearance level.
Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP)

https://nbib.opm.gov/e-qip-background-investigations/

e-QIP
Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing

IN THIS SECTION

e-QIP Background Investigations
- e-QIP Help
- e-QIP FAQs

TOOLS AND RESOURCES
Signature Instructions for Applicants [768.43 KB]
e-QIP for Agency Users
Enter e-QIP

e-QIP BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS

Welcome to the Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP) system. e-QIP is a web-based automated system that was designed to facilitate the processing of standard investigative forms used when conducting background investigations for Federal security, suitability, fitness and credentialing purposes. e-QIP allows the user to electronically enter, update and transmit their personal investigative data over a secure internet connection to a requesting agency.

ENTER e-QIP APPLICATION

Guides and Resources for filling out your Standard Form:
- First-time User Login Instructions [385.29 KB]
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Click-to-Sign Instructions for Applicants [768.43 KB]
- Guide for the Standard Form (SF 86) [3.73 MB](Updated to align with SF 86 version 07/2017)
Areas of the Investigation

• Foreign Influence/Preference
  • Review of foreign contacts, foreign travel, dual citizenship
  • Foreign languages and international experience can be major assets

• Criminal Behavior/Drug Use
  • Be knowledgeable of agency-specific policies regarding past drug use.

• Alcohol Use & Abuse

• Financial History
  • Review of credit report including repayment of student loans, amount of debt, past bankruptcy
Areas of the Investigation (contd.)

- Disciplinary Record
  - Viewed in effort to assess trustworthiness and moral character

- Mental Health and Physical Health Exams may be required

- The “Whole Person” Concept and Mitigating Factors
  - Age, recency of behavior, frequency of behavior
Tips for a Smooth Process

- Review SF-86
  - Document education/work history for last 7-10 years
  - Keep a record of contact information and addresses of last 7 – 10 years

- Document all foreign travel and foreign contacts

- Submit paperwork in timely manner.

- Ensure packet is complete including properly rolled fingerprints, if required.
  - (digital fingerprinting)

- Be sure to have registered for selective service (males).
Tips for a Smooth Process (contd.)

- Provide any extra records as required (financial records, etc.)

- Consider an internship or co-op that requires a clearance – possessing a clearance is very marketable

- Be accurate and honest

- Follow-up after 30 days if you have not been contacted
Questions?

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