

Obtaining and Maintaining a Security Clearance

Who is eligible for a security clearance:

An individual who requires access to classified information and/or who will occupy a sensitive position.

What is a security clearance:

An administrative determination by a competent national authority that an individual is eligible, from a security stand-point, for access to national security classified information. You must be a U.S. citizen to be eligible for a security clearance.

The Office of Personnel Management conducts Personnel Security Investigations (PSI)s for Department of Defense (DoD) military, civilians, contractor personnel, consultants, and other DoD agency personnel as authorized. These investigations are used by the DoD to determine if it is clearly consistent with the interests of national security to:

- grant an individual access to classified information**
- determine if access should be continued**
- determine an individual's eligibility for assignment to sensitive duties; and**
- determine if an individual should be accepted or retained in the U.S. Military**

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Types of Security Clearances:

The scope of investigative work needed to grant a security clearance depends on the level of clearance being requested. There are three basic levels of security classification:

- **Confidential Clearance:**
an individual has access to information the unauthorized disclosure of which reasonably could be expected to cause damage to the national security that the original classification authority is able to identify or describe.
- **Secret Clearance:**
an individual has access to information the unauthorized disclosure of which reasonably could be expected to cause serious damage to the national security that the original classification authority is able to identify or describe.
- **Top Secret Clearance:**
an individual has access to information the unauthorized disclosure of which reasonably could be expected to cause exceptionally grave damage to the national security that the original classification authority is able to identify or describe.

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A PSI consists of one or more of the following inquiries:

- a search of investigative files and other records held by federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
- a review of appropriate criminal history records held by local law enforcement agencies, such as police departments or sheriffs, with jurisdiction over the areas where you have resided, gone to school, or worked covering a period of 5-7 years
- credit checks
- field interviews of references to include coworkers, employers, personal friends, educators, neighbors, and other appropriate individuals
- checks of records held by employers, courts, and residences
- a subject interview (an interview with you by an investigator)

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The adjudicative process is an examination of a sufficient period of a person's life to make an affirmative determination that the person is an acceptable security risk. In evaluating the relevance of an individual's conduct, the adjudicator should consider the following factors:

- the nature, extent, and seriousness of the conduct
- the circumstances surrounding the conduct, to include knowledgeable participation
- the frequency and recency of the conduct
- the individual's age and maturity at the time of the conduct
- the extent to which participation is voluntary
- the presence or absence of rehabilitation and other permanent behavioral changes
- the motivation for the conduct
- the potential for pressure, coercion, exploitation, or duress; and
- the likelihood of continuation or recurrence

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The ultimate determination of whether the granting or continuing of eligibility for a security clearance is clearly consistent with the interests of national security must be an overall common sense judgment based upon careful consideration of the following guidelines, each of which is to be evaluated in the context of the “whole person”.

- **GUIDELINE A: Allegiance to the United States**
- **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**

In order to maintain your security clearance, a Periodic Reinvestigation (PR) is required every 5 years for a TOP SECRET Clearance, 10 years for a SECRET Clearance or 15 years for a CONFIDENTIAL Clearance.

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BOTTOM LINE:

As a general rule:

- **don't use illegal drugs/excessive alcohol**
- **don't lie, cheat, or steal**
- **keep your credit clean (pay your bills on time)**
- **avoid criminal activity**
- **be honest**
- **be reliable**
- **be forthcoming with information**