

SECURITY CLEARANCE CONSIDERATIONS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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GENERAL QUESTIONS

What is the process for obtaining a security clearance?

Booz Allen managers determine which positions require Personnel Security Clearances (PCL) to support the successful completion of classified contracts based on the requirements within the contract. Employees and managers submit requisitions for Initial, Periodic Reinvestions (PR), Reinstatements, SCI Crossovers, SCI Request for Access Updates, Pre-Screens, and Outgoing Visits via the automated Security Management and Resource Tool (SMART).

For initial clearance requests, employees and independent consultants will not be allowed to work on the contract until the Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing (eQIP) is completed, submitted to the government, and an eligibility determination is made. The SMART application is managed by the Security Shared Service Center (S3C), a centralized security processing center. The S3C provides updated security clearance information to both employees and managers through SMART. Once the clearance requisition is properly submitted via SMART, the S3C will initiate the submission of the application to the appropriate adjudication facility for PCL actions.

Employees may go to SMART.BAH.Com

How does the Government decide who gets a security clearance?

An employee must be aligned to a contract that requires access to National Security Information which is classified as either Top Secret, Secret or Confidential. Additionally, the employee must undergo a background investigation commensurate with the access and finally be given a positive adjudication from the 13 National Security Adjudication Guidelines. See [Topics of Potential Concern](#) below.

How long does a security clearance remain in effect?

Employees are responsible for ensuring their clearance eligibility remains in compliance with agency requirements. Most government agencies require a reinvestigation to be conducted every 7 years for personnel holding Top Secret and Top Secret Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI) level clearances, every 10 years for Secret, and Confidential level clearances. Most employees will be notified by the S3C, others may be notified by their agency Contractor Special Security Officer (CSSO), that they are due for a Periodic Review (PR).

Failure to complete PR paperwork within the allotted timeframe may result in an employee being removed from a classified contract or prevent a new employee from starting a contract. Likewise, Security reserves the right to debrief an employee that fails to work with Security to complete their PR requirements within the required timeframe. Employees requiring additional time to complete requirements should work with the S3C or their local security officer to establish a plan for completion. Managers will be notified throughout the process to ensure they're aware of ongoing actions.

TOPICS OF POTENTIAL CONCERN

What are the Topics of Potential Concern?

Topics of Potential Concern are areas that may cause concern or require additional investigation by the government. While only a few of these are automatic disqualifiers, the government uses an adjudicative standard across all executive branch agencies called Security Executive Agent Directive (SEAD) 4- National Security Adjudications. This single standard provides the disqualifying and mitigating factors for the 13 areas of Adjudicative Concern:

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| (1) GUIDELINE A: Allegiance to the United States | (8) GUIDELINE H: Drug Involvement and Substance Misuse |
| (2) GUIDELINE B: Foreign Influence | (9) GUIDELINE I: Psychological Conditions |
| (3) GUIDELINE C: Foreign Preference | (10) GUIDELINE J: Criminal Conduct |
| (4) GUIDELINE D: Sexual Behavior | (11) GUIDELINE K: Handling Protected Information |
| (5) GUIDELINE E: Personal Conduct | (12) GUIDELINE L: Outside Activities |
| (6) GUIDELINE F: Financial Considerations | (13) GUIDELINE M: Use of Information Technology |
| (7) GUIDELINE G: Alcohol Consumption | |

What are examples of Topics of Potential Concern?

- 1) Citizenship as you must be a United States Citizen
- 2) Can the government corroborate your places of residence, work, and education?
- 3) Do you have family members including your spouse who are not U.S. Citizens?
- 4) Do you maintain close and continuing contact with foreign nationals?
- 5) Do you own foreign stock or trade in foreign currency, own foreign property or vote in foreign elections, or have sponsored foreign nationals or traveled to foreign countries?
- 6) Have you ever been declared mentally incompetent, hospitalized for a mental health condition, or diagnosed "psychotic disorder, schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, delusional disorder, bipolar mood disorder, borderline personality disorder, or antisocial personality disorder"?
- 7) Have you been issued a summons, citation, arrested, charged or currently on parole or probation?
- 8) Have you illegally used any drugs in the last 7yrs including Marijuana?
- 9) Has your use of alcohol impacted your work performance, your personal life, or your finances?
- 10) Have you ever had a clearance denied or revoked or debarred from government?
- 11) Are you delinquent in your finances, have bankruptcies Chap 7, 11, 12 or 13?
- 12) Have you illegally accessed without consent from the owner any information technology system?
- 13) Have you participated with any groups that would call into question your loyalty to the United States?
- 14) Were you truthful and honest in answering all the questions on the security clearance paperwork and would those answers differ from other investigative paperwork, applications, and or pre-screening forms?

BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION

What can I expect during a background investigation?

This portion of the clearance process consists of gathering of information about your reliability, trustworthiness, conduct and character, and loyalty to the United States. It also aims to verify your education, employment, and residency history. Investigator(s) will interview references you provide as well as references developed during the investigation. Interviews of people who know you both personally and professionally may include your friends, co-workers, current and past employers, managers, landlords, family, and neighbors. An investigator may also interview you to verify, expand upon and/or clarify the information you provided on your investigative questionnaire.

Background investigations typically cover a period of either 10 years, or since age 18, or since the date of your previous background investigation, whichever period is least. Completed and favorably adjudicated background investigations are used reciprocally by multiple clearance granting agencies for efficiency and to conserve government resources.

THE USE OF POLYGRAPHS

What are the different types of polygraphs?

Depending on contract requirements you may be asked to submit to a polygraph. The Director National Intelligence issued [SEAD 2- Use of Polygraph](#) and defines the types of polygraphs below:

- **Counterintelligence Scope Polygraph (CSP):** A polygraph examination that includes counterintelligence (CI) topics concerning involvement in espionage, sabotage, or terrorism, unauthorized disclosure or removal of classified information (including to the media); unauthorized or unreported foreign contacts, and deliberate damage to or malicious misuse of U.S. Government information or defense systems.
- **Expanded Scope Polygraph (ESP):** A polygraph examination that includes all CI topics of the CSP, as well as the topics of criminal conduct, drug involvement, and falsification of security questionnaires and forms. (The ESP examination has also been referred to as a Full-Scope Polygraph (FSP) or an Expanded-Scope Screening (ESS) examination in some organizations.)
- **Specific Issue Polygraph (SIP):** An examination conducted to address an individual issue of adjudicative concern such as espionage, sabotage, unauthorized disclosure of classified information, criminal conduct, etc. This examination may be used in conjunction with CSP or ESP.

Do I need to complete a polygraph in order to obtain a security clearance?

Not all National Security positions require a polygraph. Traditionally, the Intelligence Community requires either a CSP or ESP before you can start work. While the polygraph may be the most stressful part of the personnel security vetting it is important to know that the polygraph is just another tool in the personnel security strategy for the protection of fragile intelligence sources and methods. However, it is important to note that SEAD 2 is clear that:

“Refusal, without reasonable cause (as determined by the agency) to undergo, or failure to cooperate during a polygraph examination or purposeful noncooperation, including confirmed polygraph countermeasures, may result in an additional review and a potential adverse security determination regarding the individual's eligibility for access to classified information or eligibility to hold a sensitive position.”

How long does a polygraph last?

Polygraph examination results are valid for an unspecified period. Traditionally, you will be required to sit for a CSP every 5-7 years or as directed by the agency.

FITNESS DETERMINATIONS

What is the Difference between Fitness and National Security Determinations?

Certain agencies have a zero-tolerance policy for activities that may be affecting you today or may have taken place in the past. For example, to work at the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) they may have a strict policy of “No Illegal Drug Use”. Therefore, while your drug use may have been investigated and adjudicated favorably for a national security eligibility,

the DEA may choose not to issue you logical and or physical access to their facilities or systems based on their Law Enforcement responsibilities and sensitive nature of its work. Likewise, employment at the U.S. Treasury would highly likely have a zero-tolerance for contractor employees with unpaid federal debts and high debt to income ratios.

Most importantly for an employee who has a completed and adjudicated national security eligibility for the level required of the position, a denial of fitness does not usually mean a denial or revocation of national security eligibility, unless new adverse information was developed or discovered.

NATIONAL SECURITY ELIGIBILITY, DENIAL, OR REVOCATIONS

How will I be notified of my eligibility?

Employees will be notified directly by the Government that they intend to suspend, deny or revoke an eligibility as well as by the S3C regarding all changes to your eligibility.

What happens if my National Security Eligibility has been denied or revoked?

Employees must be aware that if the government, after it completes its investigation, interviews, and polygraph examinations and during review of the 13 adjudicative areas, deems you ineligible for a national security eligibility, they shall either deny (initial request) or revoke (continuing access) your eligibility. This will impact your ability to provide billable support to any National Security customer within Booz Allen regardless of the type and level of clearance. Additionally, you will be required to provide a true copy of your denial or revocation to the Firm for consideration of risk acceptance.

Should you be subject to a denial or revocation, you will be afforded the opportunity to appeal to the agency in which the denial or revocation was issued which will be explained to you in a letter from the adjudicative agency. It is important to note that this appeal is between you and the government and Booz Allen has no part in the process.

What are the most common reasons for denial or revocation?

The below list was developed to provide some context into the areas of the Adjudicative Criteria where we see a number of denial and revocations. It is not all inclusive and each of the area holds a threshold for mitigation as outlined in SEAD 4.

- **ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES:** This is rarely the cause of a clearance denial or revocation, but political dissidents beware. You can certainly participate in politics but advocating or engaging in sabotage, sedition, treason, or terrorism to overthrow the government is not looked upon well.
- **FOREIGN INFLUENCE:** Foreign influence is an increasingly significant factor in security clearance determinations, both for naturalized citizens and for those whose parents were born in a foreign country. Your security clearance investigation will seek to ensure that you don't have divided loyalties.
- **FOREIGN PREFERENCE:** Foreign preference – very similar to foreign influence, also comes down to loyalty. It is frequently cited as a factor for dual citizens. If you're a dual citizen, you'll want to avoid taking advantage of the benefits of that citizenship – including traveling on a foreign passport.
- **SEXUAL BEHAVIOR:** Sexual behavior is rarely used for a clearance denial or revocation. When it is, it typically relates to criminal sexual behavior whether in the United States or Outside of Conus.
- **PERSONAL CONDUCT:** Personal conduct is a common disqualifying condition, and it is most frequently used against applicants who have lied on their SF-86. Fabricating details on your security clearance application is a sure sign of dishonesty. That's why the rule about the SF-86 is to always be truthful. Don't disclose unnecessary information but omitting a known drug use (which may or may not be a disqualifying issue) is certain to come back to haunt you.
- **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:** Financial considerations are the number one clearance killer. The idea is, if you can't be responsible for your finances, then you may not be trustworthy with classified information, either. Not all debt is considered equally – medical debt, debt due to lay-offs and other explained debt can be mitigated. A problem with overspending is not as favorable and puts you at risk for foreign espionage efforts and the chance for a quick pay off.
- **ALCOHOL ABUSE:** This adjudicative guideline comes down to alcohol abuse – not the regular glass of wine before dinner or the occasional bender. It is often seen through repeated citations for Driving Under the Influence (DUI) or public intoxication. If you've been cited recently – or frequently – for alcohol related offenses, consider enrolling yourself in an alcohol education course.

- **DRUG INVOLVEMENT:** Drug involvement frequently gives young security-clearance applicants sweaty palms. But infrequent drug use can be mitigated – particularly with the passage of time. Even a habitual drug user can show that s/he’s changed his/her ways with the passage of time. So be honest on your application but avoid any contact with drugs in the future.
- **CRIMINAL CONDUCT:** Criminal offenses are considered based on three categories – felonies, misdemeanors and infractions. All must be reported on the SF-86. When in doubt as to whether or not you were actually arrested for that college drinking incident (a common issue), go ahead and include that information on your SF-86 – along with mitigating factors such as a character reference.
- **PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS:** Certain emotional, mental, and personality conditions can impair judgement, reliability, or trustworthiness.
- **HANDLING PROTECTED INFORMATION:** This criterion is more often used to revoke an existing clearance and comes down to the ability to responsibly carry out your duties in handling classified information. Repeatedly failing to lock a safe, for instance, may be seen as a callous attitude toward your duties, and could result in a clearance revocation if the situation is serious.
- **OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES:** This criterion often comes down to relationships – particularly financial ones – with a foreign country. If you’re currently being paid by a foreign company or government for any reason, cease that relationship and be sure you can clearly explain your involvement on your SF-86.
- **USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS:** This adjudicative criterion typically relates to excessive illegal downloading of music or misuse of a workplace computer system – including activities such as viewing pornography on a workplace computer.

CONTINUOUS EVALUATION AND MONITORING

How often will I be evaluated and monitored by the Government?

The Government conducts continuous evaluation in accordance with [SEAD 6 Continuous Evaluation](#) of cleared employees through automated record checks such as Criminal Arrest, Foreign Travel and Financial Transactions just to name a few. These alerts when generated are sent to the adjudicative agency and if warranted an investigation to resolve such an alert will be initiated. Likewise, Booz Allen also has a continuous evaluation program whereby we monitor similar automated records as allowed by law.

CONSIDERATIONS

So, what does this all mean to me?

The United States Government takes great care and concern when authorizing access to special or sensitive intelligence information protected as sources and methods or Sensitive Compartmented Information. Being given access to this information requires continual compliance with all security regulations, remaining in compliance with the adjudicative criteria and subjecting yourself to continuous evaluation and monitoring by the government. Only the executive branch, adjudicative agencies can grant or deny a national security eligibility which remains an inherent governmental responsibility.

We encourage you to review [SEAD 4](#) and [SEAD 2](#) to understand the areas of concern and to make an informed decision about the risks that may be involved.

Should you have questions or want to discuss these areas in more detail we ask that you contact your security officer or send your questions to the S3C@bah.com.