



Frequently Asked Questions

Security Clearance

What is involved the security clearance process?

The clearance process considers such factors as registration for the Selective Service, failure to repay U.S. Government-guaranteed student loan, credit history, violations of the law, drug or alcohol abuse, or a less-than-honorable discharge from the armed forces. Background investigations may take several months (longer if a candidate has moved frequently or lived overseas for extended periods of time), and may include interviews of supervisors and coworkers. These investigations are conducted by the Department of State in cooperation with other federal, state, and local agencies.

What is the background investigation?

Applicants who are successful in the Oral Assessment will be asked to submit forms for a security clearance required for appointment to the Foreign Service. The clearance process considers such factors as: registration for the Selective Service; failure to repay a U.S. Government-guaranteed student loan; past problems with credit or bankruptcy; failure to meet tax obligations; unsatisfactory employment records; violations of the law; drug or alcohol abuse; a criminal record; extensive travel; education; residence and/or employment overseas; dual citizenship; foreign contacts; immediate family or relatives who are not citizens of the United States and/or a foreign born spouse; or a less-than-honorable discharge from the armed forces. The Department of State conducts background investigations on each candidate to determine eligibility for security clearance. Investigations include interviews with current and previous contacts, supervisors, and coworkers.

I have dual citizenship - can that be a factor in obtaining my security clearance?

Security clearance evaluations/determinations must assure that access to classified information for a specific individual is "clearly consistent with the interests of national security." Under the adjudicative guidelines, "any doubt as to whether access to classified information is clearly consistent with national security will be resolved in favor of the national security." When making such a determination, DS must consider all available information, both positive and negative. This is the "whole person" concept. Dual nationality is a relevant element in some cases. While U.S. citizenship is a basic eligibility requirement to be considered for access to classified information, it does not automatically confer the right to a security clearance. Dual citizenship must be considered in context of other circumstances in an individual's background. For more information on Dual Citizenship please visit our in-depth page.

What happens if I do not receive clearance?

Candidates who do not receive security clearances are ineligible for appointment. Potential Candidates who have any serious issues which could prevent them from receiving their clearance should give some thought to the likelihood of their being found ineligible before starting this process. These investigations are conducted by the Department of State in cooperation with other federal, state, and local agencies.

During the security clearance process, what will my current employer be told is the reason for the clearance? Is it best they didn't know I was applying for another job, since A-100 isn't guaranteed?

If you don't want your current employer contacted, you need to say so to the security investigator. They are not supposed to do that unless you say that they may, since this is a common - and obviously legitimate - concern.

Can you give me an idea of the average time frame from taking the written exam to completing the whole process (Oral, clearance, medical)?

It all depends on whether issues arise in either the medical or security clearance processes. It can take as little as 60 days (sometimes even less), but it can also drag on almost indefinitely if there are issues that defy resolution. Such cases, fortunately, are rather rare, and we generally know within 120 days or so whether the clearances will be forthcoming.

I have top security clearance now. If I pass the written and oral exams, would I be eligible for a job immediately?

If your TS clearance was granted by the Department of State, then you won't need a new one. However, if it's from another agency, we'll need to do our own background investigation and issue our own clearance.

What chance does someone with a misdemeanor conviction have of becoming a foreign officer?

All security clearances are handled on a case-by-case basis. It depends on when, what, etc.

Is sexual orientation a factor considered by the Department in its hiring decisions?

The Department of State is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of sexual orientation. There are, however, no provisions for benefits for domestic partners.