

# Comprehensive Guide to Security Clearances

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## 1. Security Clearance Basics:

- **Purpose:** Security clearances allow individuals to access classified information critical to national security. They are required for many federal, DoD, intelligence, and government contractor roles.
  - **Clearance Levels:**
    - ✓ **Confidential (Tier 1):** Minimal damage if disclosed.
    - ✓ **Secret (Tier 3):** Serious damage if disclosed.
    - ✓ **Top Secret (Tier 5):** Exceptionally grave damage if disclosed.
    - ✓ **SCI (Sensitive Compartmented Information) and SAP (Special Access Programs):** Special designations at the Top-Secret level for highly compartmentalized information.
    - ✓ **DOE Clearances:** “Q” (like Top Secret) and “L” (like Secret) for nuclear and energy roles.
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## 2. Key Agencies and Their Roles:

- **Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA):** Conducts background investigations for DoD and many federal agencies.
  - **Department of Defense Consolidated Adjudications Facility (DoD CAF):** Reviews investigation results and makes clearance eligibility decisions for DoD personnel.
  - **Intelligence Community Agencies (CIA, NSA, FBI):** Conduct their own investigations and grant clearances tailored to intelligence needs.
  - **Department of Energy (DOE):** Manages Q and L clearances for nuclear information.
  - **Department of State:** Grants clearances for roles involving diplomatic and foreign relations.
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## 3. Security Clearance Process:

- **Application:** Initiated by the sponsoring agency or employer, often requiring completion of Standard Form 86 (SF-86).
  - **Background Investigation:**
    - ✓ Conducted by DCSA or agency-specific investigators. Involves credit checks, criminal record reviews, interviews, and verification of foreign contacts and financial stability.
  - **Adjudication:**
    - ✓ The adjudicating agency (DoD CAF, CIA, FBI, etc.) reviews findings against the **13 Adjudicative Guidelines**, which include foreign influence, financial considerations, personal conduct, and more.
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## 4. Continuous Evaluation (CE)

- **Purpose:** CE is a real-time, ongoing monitoring process for individuals with clearances.
  - **Functionality:** CE includes checks on credit, criminal records, and other public records to identify potential security risks before they escalate.
  - **System Integration:** CE is supported by DISS and NBIS, ensuring agencies stay updated on any changes in an individual’s risk factors.
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## 5. The “13 Adjudicative Guidelines:”

- The guidelines include factors such as **Allegiance to the United States, Foreign Influence, Sexual Behavior, Financial Considerations, Criminal Conduct**, and others.

- Adjudicators use these guidelines to evaluate the “whole person” and make decisions on eligibility based on national security considerations.
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#### 6. Common Reasons for Denial or Revocation:

- Security clearance denials often stem from:
    - ✓ **Financial issues** (e.g., high debt, unresolved bankruptcies).
    - ✓ **Criminal conduct** (e.g., recent arrests, drug involvement).
    - ✓ **Foreign contacts** (e.g., connections that could pose a security risk).
    - ✓ **Personal misconduct** (e.g., false information, mishandling classified information).
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#### 7. Maintaining and Renewing a Security Clearance:

- **Reinvestigations:**
    - ✓ **Confidential:** Every 15 years.
    - ✓ **Secret:** Every 10 years.
    - ✓ **Top Secret:** Every 5 years (or ongoing CE).
  - **Reporting Requirements:** Cleared personnel must report significant life changes, arrests, or changes in foreign contacts.
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#### 8. Key Clearance Management Systems:

- **Defense Information System for Security (DISS):** Manages and verifies DoD clearances.
  - **Scattered Castles:** Used by Intelligence Community agencies to track and verify clearances for IC personnel.
  - **National Background Investigation Services (NBIS):** New DoD system that integrates clearance management, CE, and investigation tracking.
  - **Continuous Evaluation Systems:** CE programs integrated into DISS and NBIS provide real-time risk assessment.
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#### 9. DHS and Other Agencies' Clearances:

- **DHS Clearances:** DHS grants standard federal clearances (Confidential, Secret, Top Secret) for roles in homeland security, law enforcement, and cybersecurity.
  - **Reciprocity Across Agencies:** Federal guidelines generally support reciprocity, allowing agencies to recognize clearances from other agencies. Additional checks or agency-specific requirements (such as polygraphs for CIA/FBI or DHS suitability reviews) may still be required.
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#### 10. Compatibility and Transfers Between Agencies:

- **Reciprocity:** Clearances are often transferable between agencies through reciprocity agreements, but additional steps may be needed for SCI, SAP, or roles requiring polygraphs.
- **Agency-Specific Checks:** While a DHS clearance may be transferable to DoD, the new agency might perform additional checks or require enrollment in its Continuous Evaluation program.
- **Special Access Requirements:** Some intelligence roles may require re-adjudication or new background investigations due to agency-specific guidelines.

Investigation Type	Standard Cost
National Agency Check (NAC)	\$140
Tier 1 (Non-Sensitive Low Risk)	\$180
Tier 2 (Moderate Risk Public Trust)	\$420
Tier 2R (Reinvestigation)	\$380
Tier 3 (Non-Critical Sensitive – Secret)	\$420
Tier 3R (Reinvestigation)	\$380
Tier 4 (High Risk Public Trust)	\$4,095
Tier 4R (Reinvestigation)	\$2,530
Tier 5 (Critical and Special Sensitive – Top Secret and SCI)	\$5,410
Tier 5R (Reinvestigation)	\$2,965

## Quick Reference Guide: SF-86 and Continuous Evaluation (CE)

### SF-86 Overview:

- **Purpose:** Used to conduct background checks for security clearance eligibility and reinvestigations.
- **Information Included:** Personal history, employment, education, foreign contacts, financial status, criminal history, etc.
- **Who Uses It:** Required for anyone applying for or renewing a security clearance, particularly for Secret, Top Secret (TS), and Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI) levels.

### When SF-86 is Required:

1. **Initial Clearance Application:** Required for anyone applying for a clearance for the first time.
2. **Periodic Reinvestigations (PRs):**
  - ✓ **TS/SCI:** Every **6 years** (previously 5 years).
  - ✓ **Secret:** Every **10 years**.
3. **Upgrading Clearance Level:** Required if upgrading from Secret to TS or SCI.
4. **Break in Service:** If clearance is inactive (no sponsorship) for over 2 years, a new SF-86 is needed.
5. **Triggered Reinvestigations:** Additional SF-86 may be requested if Continuous Evaluation flags potential issues.

### Continuous Evaluation (CE) Explained:

- **Purpose:** CE continuously monitors clearance holders for security risks in real time, reducing the need for traditional periodic investigations.
- **Monitors:** Financial records, criminal activity, foreign travel, and other risk indicators.
- **Who is Enrolled:** All clearance holders at TS/SCI and, increasingly, Secret levels.



### CE's Impact on Periodic Reinvestigations:

- **Less Frequent PIs:** CE reduces the need for frequent PIs by addressing concerns as they arise.
- **Still Required for TS/SCI:** An SF-86 and formal review are still required every **6 years** for TS/SCI clearances, even with CE in place.
- **Secret Clearances:** Generally, retain the 10-year cycle but may benefit from fewer traditional PIs due to CE.

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### Key Points

- **SF-86** is required at regular intervals despite CE, primarily every 6 years for TS/SCI.
- **CE** supplements the reinvestigation process by monitoring continuously, potentially reducing traditional investigation frequency.
- **Break in Service** longer than 2 years generally requires a new SF-86 for clearance reinstatement.

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### Have questions or concerns?

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