

Breaking into Government Contracting Without Experience:

If you're new to government contracting, you might think the lack of experience, or a security clearance is a roadblock. The truth? It's challenging but **doable**—and with the right strategy, you can position yourself for success. Here's how to break in, stand out, and set yourself up for long-term growth.

Step 1: Understand the Industry

The government contracting world is vast and includes work in everything from IT and engineering to logistics and program management. Here's what you need to know:

- **Prime Contractors:** These companies work directly with the government.
- **Subcontractors:** These firms partner with primes to fulfill contract requirements
- **Security Clearance is Critical:**
 - A clearance is often required for roles, and many jobs specify the **type of clearance** (e.g., Secret, Top Secret, TS/SCI, TS/SCI/FSP).
 - **Most companies will NOT sponsor a clearance upfront.** If you don't have one, start with roles that don't require a clearance and work your way up.
 - **Pro Tip:** Take a role with a company that doesn't require a clearance or only needs a lower-level clearance. Show loyalty and deliver results. After some time, request to work on projects that require a higher-level clearance—companies are more likely to sponsor you once you've proven yourself.

Step 2: Identify Transferable Skills

Even without direct experience in the field, your existing skills can make you a strong candidate. Examples include:

- ✓ **Project Management:** Leading initiatives, managing deadlines, and delivering outcomes.
- ✓ **Administrative Skills:** Document management, scheduling, and maintaining compliance records.
- ✓ **Technical Expertise:** IT support, network troubleshooting, or cybersecurity knowledge.
- ✓ **Military or Public Sector Experience:** Veterans or those with public sector experience often have directly transferable skills.

Pro Tip: Speak the language of the industry. Use terms like “program support,” “compliance monitoring,” or “contract deliverables” when describing your experience, even if it's from another field.

Step 3: Tailor Your Resume

Your resume needs to meet the expectations of this highly competitive field. Here's how to stand out:

- ✓ **Highlight Transferable Skills:** Link your experience to contract-specific needs like project support, data analysis, or technical documentation.
- ✓ **Include Keywords:** Use terminology found in job descriptions (e.g., "Federal Acquisition Regulations," "classified environments").
- ✓ **List Clearances or Clearance Eligibility:** If you already hold a clearance or are eligible, mention it prominently.
- ✓ **Quantify Achievements:** Showcase results (e.g., “Coordinated efforts that reduced processing time by 25%”).

Step 4: Build Industry-Specific Expertise

If you lack experience, **certifications** are a fast way to demonstrate your interest and commitment.

- **Highly Valued Certifications:**
 - **Project Management:** PMP, CAPM
 - **Cybersecurity:** CompTIA Security+, CISSP
 - **IT & Networking:** ITIL, AWS certifications
 - **Acquisitions/Contracting:** DAU Certifications (Defense Acquisition University)

Pro Tip: Pair certifications with networking—highlight your progress in LinkedIn posts or communities.

Step 5: Focus on Entry Points

Not all roles in the industry require experience or a clearance. Look for positions such as:

- ✓ **Administrative Assistant or Program Coordinator:** Support contract teams with scheduling, documentation, and logistics.
- ✓ **Analyst Roles:** Start as a junior data, financial, or operations analyst.
- ✓ **IT Support or Help Desk:** Technical support roles are often entry-level and don't require clearances.

Pro Tip: Some companies with large contracts (like Leidos or Peraton) hire for entry-level roles where they may sponsor a clearance after you've demonstrated your capabilities.

Step 6: Build Relationships

Networking is essential for breaking into this field.

- ✓ **LinkedIn:** Join groups like Cleared & Confused or job boards. Engage with posts, share insights, and connect with recruiters.
- ✓ **Recruiting Firms:** Use agencies that specialize in placing candidates in government contract roles (e.g., Tier One Talent & Intel Recruiting).
- ✓ **Job Fairs:** Attend virtual and in-person events to meet recruiters and learn about companies hiring entry-level talent.

Pro Tip: Reach out directly to recruiters and hiring managers—many roles are filled through referrals or direct applications.

Step 7: Prioritize Companies That Sponsor Clearances

While most companies don't sponsor clearances initially, some are known for clearance sponsorship:

- **CACI, Leidos, ManTech:** Known to sponsor clearances for roles where it's required.
- **Subcontractors:** Subcontracting firms often hire entry-level candidates and invest in their long-term growth.

Pro Tip: When interviewing, ask about clearance sponsorship opportunities and career advancement plans.

Step 8: Stay Persistent and Flexible

Breaking into this industry can take time, so don't get discouraged. Use each application as an opportunity to refine your approach.

Pro Tip: Take short-term contract roles to get your foot in the door—these can lead to long-term positions once you prove your value.

Tier One Talent: Here to Help You Succeed

At **Tier One Talent**, we're dedicated to helping you navigate your career in government contracting. Here's how we support you:

- ✓ **Open Roles:** We post new opportunities weekly on the **Cleared & Confused** LinkedIn group.
- ✓ **Free Resume Reviews and Revisions:** We'll help you tailor your resume to the industry at no cost.
- ✓ **Always Available:** Got questions or need guidance? Reach out—we're happy to help!

Other available guides are free to download – All can be found on Cleared & Confused or Tier1-Talent.com under the job seeker tab!

- ✓ Contracting Pay & Schedule Essentials – A Candidate's Guide
- ✓ Government Contracts and Job Stability
- ✓ Security Clearance Comprehensive Overview
- ✓ Understanding Salary Rates on Government Contracts
- ✓ Government Contracting Guide 2024
- ✓ The Ultimate Cleared Professional Resource Guide 2024
- ✓ Cleared & Confident – The GovCon Professional's Guide to Salary Negotiation
- ✓ The No BS Resume Guide 2025 Edition
- ✓ The Ultimate GovCon Survival Guide 2024 – All Guides Combined
- ✓ Pro Tips Guide – Navigating the World of Recruiters like a Pro
- ✓ Guide to National Security Clearances vs. Public Trust Positions

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