

FBI Information on Security Clearances

It is the policy of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to share with Law Enforcement personnel pertinent information regarding terrorism. In the past, the primary mechanism for such information sharing was the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF). In response to the terrorist attack on America on September 11, 2001, the FBI established the State and Local Law Enforcement Executives and Elected Officials Security Clearance Initiative. This program was initiated to brief officials with an established "need-to-know" on classified information that would or could affect their area of jurisdiction.

Most information needed by state or local law enforcement can be shared at an unclassified level. In those instances where it is necessary to share classified information, it can usually be accomplished at the Secret level. This brochure describes when security clearances are necessary and the notable differences between clearance levels. It also describes the process involved in applying and being considered for a clearance.

State and local officials who require access to classified material must apply for a security clearance through their local FBI Field Office. The candidate should obtain from their local FBI Field Office a Standard Form 86 (SF 86), Questionnaire for National Security Positions; and two FD-258 (FBI applicant fingerprint cards). One of two levels of security clearance, Secret or Top Secret, may be appropriate.

The background investigation and records checks for Secret and Top Secret security clearance are mandated by Presidential Executive Order (EO). The EO requires these procedures in order for a security clearance to be granted; the FBI does not have the ability to waive them.

Secret Clearances

A Secret security clearance may be granted to those persons that have a "need-to-know" national security information, classified at the Confidential or Secret level. It is generally the most appropriate security clearance for state and local law enforcement officials that do not routinely work on an FBI Task Force or in an FBI facility. A Secret security clearance takes the least amount of time to process and allows for escorted access to FBI facilities.

The procedure is as follows:

- FBI performs record checks with various Federal agencies and local law enforcement, as well as, a review of credit history.

- Candidate completes forms SF-86 and FD-258. Once favorably adjudicated for a Secret security clearance, the candidate will be required to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement.

Top Secret Clearances

A Top Secret clearance may be granted to those persons who have a "need-to-know" national security information, classified up to the Top Secret level, and who need unescorted access to FBI facilities, when necessary. This type of clearance will most often be appropriate for law enforcement officers assigned to FBI Task Forces housed in FBI facilities.

In addition to all the requirements at the Secret level, a background investigation, covering a 10-year time period, is required.

Once favorably adjudicated for a Top Secret security clearance, the candidate will be required to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement.

Questions and Answers (Q&A):

Q: Who should apply for a security clearance?

A: State or local officials whose duties require that they have access to classified information, and who are willing to undergo a mandatory background investigation.

Q: What is the purpose of a background investigation?

A: The scope of the investigation varies with the level of the clearance being sought. It is designed to allow the government to assess whether a candidate is sufficiently trustworthy to be granted access to classified information. Applicants must meet certain criteria, relating to their honesty, character, integrity, reliability, judgement, mental health, and association with undesirable persons or foreign nationals.

Q: If an individual occupies an executive position with a law enforcement agency, must he or she still undergo a background investigation in order to access classified information?

A: An Executive Order (EO), issued by the President, requires background investigations for all persons entrusted with access to classified information. The provisions of the EO are mandatory, cannot be waived, and apply equally to all federal, state, and local law enforcement officers. This is true of both Secret and Top Secret security clearances.

Q: How long does it normally take to obtain a Secret security clearance?

A: It is the goal of the FBI to complete the processing for Secret security clearances within 45 to 60 days, once a completed application is submitted. The processing time for each individual case will vary depending upon its complexity.

Q: How long does it normally take to obtain a Top Secret security clearance?

A: It is the goal of the FBI to complete the processing for Top Secret security clearances within 6 to 9 months, once a completed application is submitted. The processing time for each individual case will vary depending upon its complexity

Q: What kind of inquiries will the FBI make into my background?

A: Credit and criminal history checks will be conducted on all applicants. For a Top Secret security clearance, the background investigation includes additional record checks which can verify citizenship for the applicant and family members, verification of birth, education, employment history, and military history. Additionally, interviews will be conducted of persons who know the candidate, and of any spouse divorced within the past ten years. Additional interviews will be conducted, as needed, to resolve any inconsistencies. Residences will be confirmed, neighbors interviewed, and public records queried for information about bankruptcies, divorces, and criminal or civil litigation. The background investigation may be expanded if an applicant has resided abroad, or has a history of mental disorders, or drug or alcohol abuse. A personal interview will be conducted of the candidate.

Q: If I have a poor credit history, or other issues in my background, will this prevent me from getting a security clearance?

A: A poor credit history, or other issues, will not necessarily disqualify a candidate from receiving a clearance, but resolution of the issues will likely take additional time. If the issues are significant, they may prevent a clearance from being approved.

Q: If I choose not to apply for a security clearance, will I still be informed about counterterrorism issues important to my jurisdiction?

A: Absolutely. If the FBI receives information relevant to terrorism which may impact your jurisdiction, you will be informed by your local Field Office, through the Law Enforcement On-Line network, via NLETS, and through other available mechanisms which are approved for the transmission of unclassified information. Most terrorism-related information can be provided in an unclassified form.

Q: Are there any other advantages or disadvantages to receiving unclassified or classified terrorism-related information?

A: An additional advantage of receiving unclassified terrorism-related information is that there may be fewer restrictions on your ability to further disseminate it within your jurisdiction. Classified information may only be disseminated to other cleared persons, who also have a need-to-know.

Q: What is the difference between an interim and a full security clearance?

A: Interim clearances are granted in exceptional circumstances where official functions must be performed before completion of the investigative and adjudicative processes associated with the security clearance procedure. There is no difference between an interim and a full security clearance as it relates to access to classified information. However, when such access is granted, the background investigation must be expedited, and, if unfavorable information is developed at anytime, the interim security clearance may be withdrawn.

If you have any additional questions, and/or wish to apply for a security clearance, please contact your local FBI field office.