

Security Clearance for Contractors: What You Need to Know



INTRODUCTION

Navigating the complexities of security clearances is crucial for contractors involved in government projects. At Dunlap Bennett & Ludwig (DBL), we specialize in guiding contractors through the security clearance process, ensuring compliance and facilitating successful project execution. This guide provides a comprehensive overview tailored to contractors, highlighting key considerations and steps to obtain and maintain the necessary clearances.

WHY CLEARANCES MATTER FOR CONTRACTORS

- **Expanded Job Opportunities:** Many lucrative government and defense industry positions require clearances
- **Higher Compensation:** Cleared contractors often command higher salaries
- **Competitive Advantage:** A clearance sets you apart in the job market
- **Project Access:** Allows you to work on classified, cutting-edge projects

SPONSORSHIP: THE CONTRACTOR'S FIRST HURDLE

Unlike government employees, contractors cannot apply for clearances independently:

- **Company Sponsorship:** Your employing company must sponsor your clearance
- **Contract Requirement:** Sponsorship typically occurs when a company wins a contract requiring cleared personnel
- **No Self-Sponsorship:** This means you can't obtain a clearance to make yourself more marketable; it must be job-specific

CLEARANCE LEVELS FOR CONTRACTORS

Contractors can obtain the same clearance levels as government employees:

1. Confidential: Least sensitive, but still opens doors to entry-level cleared positions
2. Secret: Most common, required for many defense and intelligence contracts
3. Top Secret: Highest level, often needed for senior roles or highly sensitive projects

THE APPLICATION PROCESS: A CONTRACTOR'S JOURNEY

1. Contract Award: Your company secures a government contract requiring clearance
2. Sponsorship Initiation: Company submits request for your clearance
3. SF-86 Submission: You complete the extensive background questionnaire
4. Investigation: Expect a thorough examination of your history
5. Adjudication: The waiting game as a decision is made

Contractor Tip: Be prepared for a lengthy process. Your ability to start work may depend on clearance approval.



INTERIM CLEARANCES: A CONTRACTOR'S FAST TRACK

- **Rapid Access:** Allows you to begin work while full clearance is processed
- **Conditional Nature:** Can be revoked if issues arise during full investigation
- **Limited Scope:** May restrict access to certain types of information

Why It Matters: Interim clearances can be crucial for contractors to start time-sensitive projects promptly.

CLEARANCE PORTABILITY: A CONTRACTOR'S ASSET

- **24-Month Window:** Clearance remains active for 24 months after leaving a cleared job
- **Job Flexibility:** Allows easier movement between cleared contracts
- **Marketability:** An active clearance makes you immediately valuable to new employers

Contractor Benefit: Enhances your ability to move between projects or companies without lengthy clearance delays.

MAINTAINING CLEARANCE: A CONTRACTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY

- **Continuous Evaluation:** Be prepared for ongoing monitoring
- **Reporting Requirements:** Must report significant life changes
- **Training:** Regular security briefings are often mandatory

Why It's Critical: As a contractor, losing your clearance could mean losing your job and future opportunities in the field.

FACILITY CLEARANCES: WHAT CONTRACTORS SHOULD KNOW

- **Company Requirement:** Your employer needs a Facility Clearance (FCL) to handle classified information
- **Level Matching:** The FCL level must match or exceed the classified information handled
- **Impact on You:** The company's FCL can affect your ability to work on certain projects

Contractor Consideration: When job hunting, consider the FCL status of potential employers.

CLEARANCE PROCESSING TIMES: PLANNING YOUR CAREER MOVES

- **Secret Clearance:** Typically 4-6 months
- **Top Secret Clearance:** Can take 12-18 months or longer

Why It Matters: As a contractor, understanding these timelines is crucial for career planning and managing job transitions.



COST CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTRACTORS

- **No Personal Cost:** The government or your employer typically covers clearance costs
- **Salary Impact:** Cleared contractors often earn higher salaries
- **Employer Considerations:** Some companies may require reimbursement if you leave shortly after obtaining clearance

Contractor Benefit: A clearance can significantly boost your earning potential without personal financial investment.

CONCLUSION

For contractors, a security clearance is more than just access to classified information—it's a career asset. Understanding the unique aspects of the clearance process for contractors can help you navigate job opportunities, manage career transitions, and maximize your potential in the cleared workforce. Stay informed, maintain your clearance diligently, and leverage this valuable credential to advance your contracting career.

At Dunlap Bennett & Ludwig (DBL), we recognize the importance of understanding the security clearance process and are dedicated to assisting individuals and organizations in navigating these complex procedures. Our experienced attorneys are here to provide guidance and support to help you achieve and maintain the necessary clearances for your professional endeavors.

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