

Report

on

The Status of Executive Branch Efforts to  
Improve the Security Clearance Process

required under

Title III of Public Law 108-458

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004

This is the first report on the status of Executive Branch efforts to improve the security clearance process required under the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.

Current Status of the Security Clearance Process

The Administration has taken significant steps to improve the process by which the Federal Government grants individuals access to classified information – the security clearance process.

The average time it takes today to complete the security clearance process has been reduced by 18 days, or 6 percent:

Phase	FY 2005	1st Quarter FY 2006	December 1, 2006 Goal (for initial investigations and adjudications)
Completed Security Clearance Form Submitted to Investigative Agency	32 days	33 days	14 days
Investigation Phase	189 days	155 days	90 days
Adjudication Phase <sup>1</sup>	76 days	91 days	30 days
<b>Total</b>	<b>297 days</b>	<b>279 days</b>	<b>134 days</b>

Agencies are just beginning to implement reforms to improve the security clearance process and achieve the timeliness goals.

Administration Activities to Improve the Security Clearance Process

The Administration has established a Security Clearance Oversight Group to guide the improvement effort, consisting of representatives from the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Energy, Justice, Transportation, Commerce, and State, as well as the National Archives and Records Administration and the Director of National Intelligence, together with the Office of Management and Budget and the National Security Council.

Agencies and entities involved in the security clearance improvement process have established mutually agreed to performance goals for each component of the security clearance process, which must be met by December 1, 2006 if the government is to achieve the overall security clearance improvement goals.

For agencies requesting a security clearance, the goals are to:

- Project within 5 percent the number of investigations required, for workload management purposes;
- Submit 100 percent of SF 86 forms by e-QIP, an on-line submission system, by April 1, 2006. (This goal currently pertains only to those departments listed above);

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<sup>1</sup> Data on the adjudicative process from all agencies is not yet available. It will be provided in future progress reports.

- Submit investigation requests within 14 days from when the form is signed by the individual; and
- Limit insufficient investigation request packages to no more than 5 percent.

For agencies conducting investigations, the goals are to:

- Complete 80 percent of initial investigations within 90 days;
- Fulfill 90 percent of the National Agency Record Repositories file requests within 30 days; and
- Complete 90 percent of international coverage requests within 30 days.

For agencies adjudicating security clearances, the goals are to:

- Complete 80 percent of adjudications within 30 days; and
- Report 100 percent of adjudication decisions to OPM within 30 days.

The Administration also established a mutually agreed upon standard for reciprocal recognition of security clearances. For individuals with existing security clearances requiring the same level of clearance that were not granted the existing clearance by waiver or on a temporary or interim basis, agencies cannot:

- Request the individual complete a new security questionnaire;
- Review existing background investigations for the individual;
- Review existing security questionnaires for the individual; or
- Initiate any new investigative checks.

Exceptions to the above standard are made only if one or more of the conditions below are met:

- The current clearance is interim or temporary;
- For highly sensitive programs (to include SAPs, SCI and Q) the current agency accepted greater risk by granting a waiver or other exception;
- For certain highly sensitive programs, the individual must satisfy a polygraph requirement of the new agency when no such requirement was imposed by the current agency;
- For certain highly sensitive programs, the individual is disqualified based upon immediate family who are not U.S. citizens if applicable to the new program; and
- For certain highly sensitive programs, the individual does not meet additional but not duplicative investigative or adjudicative requirements approved by OMB on a program specific basis.

For more detailed criteria agencies must consider when determining whether to grant reciprocity of security clearances, a copy of the memorandum establishing this new standard is included in the appendix.

The Security Clearance Oversight Group has communicated the plan for improving the security clearance process and standards for meeting the Administration's goals to smaller agencies not represented on the Oversight Group. Both large and small agencies have provided their plans for achieving the desired goals, and will be held accountable for performance as promised.

OPM's Federal Investigative Services Division (FISD) is establishing a single consolidated database of personnel security clearance information that is easily accessible by authorized users to confirm the existence of current active clearances. Currently the database includes the status of over 370,000 clearances, with links to DoD's and the Intelligence Community's databases. This database is comprised of 19 essential data elements, which have been approved by the Requirements and Reciprocity Working Groups. These groups consist of numerous agencies throughout the security community and are responsible for the overall design and implementation of the database. As a requirement in support of reciprocity, the database must contain common data elements regarding identity, investigations, clearances and alerts, so that each agency's data is comparable.

To meet the goals for improving the security clearance process, FISD has increased the investigations staff to 8,000 full time employees (contractor and Federal combined), and is now working to bring them to full productivity.

The Administration is collaborating with the contractor community, which is comprised of personnel who require security clearances to perform work for the Government, to achieve the goals for improving the security clearance process.

#### Impediments (or Challenges) to Meeting the Government's Security Clearance Process Improvement Goals

All agencies involved have set ambitious goals. Achieving these goals will be difficult, but all have committed to accomplishing them. The greatest challenge to achieving the improvement goals is ensuring agencies actually implement their plans as promised.

#### Improved Use of Technology to Achieve the Administration's Security Clearance Process Improvement Goals

Technology will be a major factor in the Government's success in improving the security clearance process over the long term. In the past, the process has been burdened by paper intensive, manual steps that slow investigations and adjudications, which increases the risk of error. Current technology in use and under development by OPM to expedite the security clearance process is described in greater detail in the appendix.

#### Conclusion

The Administration's greatest focus today is on improving the 90 percent of investigations now performed by the Office of Personnel Management, and making the greatest use of current technology. Once improvement plans for this work are final and well into implementation, focus will shift to ensuring the remaining 10 percent of investigative operations are performing to the

same standards, and to the development and application of new technologies. Additionally, with the recent establishment of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Administration will continue to evaluate the best processes for ensuring continued improvement of the security clearance process.

Achieving success in this effort will take the combined efforts of numerous agencies. All agencies involved have committed to specific goals and standards that Congress can use to hold the Administration accountable for reducing the time it takes to grant security clearances.

## Appendix

1. Title III of Public Law 108-458 (The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004)
2. Executive Order 13381: Strengthening Processes Relating to Determining Eligibility for Access to Classified National Security Information
3. Director of OMB Memorandum delegating responsibilities under E.O. 13381
4. Deputy Director of OMB for Management December 12, 2005 memorandum on reciprocal recognition of security clearances
5. Government-wide Plan for Improving the Personnel Security Clearance Process
6. Report on the Use of Information Technology in OPM Background Investigations