

Personnel Security
Frequently Asked Questions: Background Investigations
VA NY Harbor Healthcare System

Q. Why are you going to investigate me? I'm only applying for an entry level job and I don't need a security clearance.

A. The interests of the national security require that all persons privileged to be employed in the departments and agencies of the government shall be reliable, trustworthy, of good conduct and character, and of complete and unswerving loyalty to the United States. This means that the appointment of each civilian employee in any department or agency of the government is subject to investigation. The scope of the investigation will vary, depending on the nature of the position and the degree of harm that an individual in that position could cause. The requirement to be investigated applies whether or not the position requires a security clearance (in order to have access to classified national security information).

Q. Do I have to answer all the questions on the form? A lot of that information is already on my resume.

A. Yes. The resume is part of the application process. The Security Questionnaire is part of the investigation process. All of the questions should be answered fully, accurately, and honestly.

Q. What will happen if I refuse to give you some of this personal information?

A. The investigation is a job requirement. Providing the information is voluntary, but if you choose not to provide the required information, you will not meet the requirements of the job and will therefore not be considered further. If you are already employed by the Federal government, your appointment will be terminated. The courts have upheld this principle.

Q. What should I do if I remember something later after I've filled out the form and turned it in?

A. Immediately notify the security officials to whom you submitted the questionnaire.

Q. I don't want everybody reading my personal information. Who see this form?

A. The only persons authorized to see your personal information are Personnel Security, Suitability, and Investigations professionals who have been investigated at the appropriate level and who have a genuine and demonstrated need for access to the information.

Q. I'm not a criminal. Why do you want my fingerprints?

A. So that we can verify your claim that you're not a criminal by checking the FBI's fingerprint files. And, Executive Orders require that all Federal employees be fingerprinted.

Q. My brother works for one of the largest companies in the world but he didn't have to go through all this. Why should I?

A. The rules, regulations, laws, and orders governing the hiring and retention of Federal employees are specific. There is no requirement for private employers to use the same guidelines as public employers. Of course, if your brother's job with the private employer required him to have access to classified national security information as a contractor to the Federal government, even your brother would have to be investigated.

Q. Are you going to interview people other than those I name on the questionnaire? If so, why?

A. Background Investigators are required to identify, locate, and interview a sufficient number of people who know you well. We want a balanced and unbiased investigation; it would be a questionable investigative practice to only interview persons whom the individual being investigated identified for us.

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Q. Is it okay if I guess at dates and addresses that I barely remember?

A. Providing information that is as complete and accurate as possible will assure that your investigation is completed in an efficient and timely manner. If you give us approximate information, note that on the questionnaire and, if you're interviewed in person, point out the approximated information on the questionnaire to the Investigator.

Q. Why do you need information about my relatives?

A. Relatives can potentially influence your actions. We need to determine if you could be exploited by threats or pressure against your relatives or if they themselves could exert pressure against you.

Q. Will I get a chance to explain some of the answers I give you?

A. Yes. Many types of background investigation involve a personal interview. Moreover, you may submit information on extra pages with your questionnaire if you feel you need to more fully explain details or circumstances of the answers you put on the form.

Q. Who see the report you prepare about me? Do I?

A. The only persons authorized to see this information are Personnel Security, Suitability, and Investigations professionals who have been investigated and have a demonstrated need to review the information. You may request a copy of your investigation file under provisions of the Privacy Act. For an OPM investigation request, write to OPM-IS, FOIP, Post Office Box 618, Boyers, PA 16018-0618. You must include your full name, Social Security Number, date and place of birth, and you must sign your request.

Q. What if you talk to someone who just doesn't like me and they lie about me?

A. We talk to as many knowledgeable people as possible to get a balanced, accurate, and comprehensive picture of the person being investigated. Later, you may have an opportunity to refute any misleading or false information that was reported about you.

Q. I was arrested for speeding once. Will that keep me from getting a job or a clearance?

A. Any negative information is evaluated regarding its recency, seriousness, relevance to the position and duties, and in light of, and in relationship to, all other information about you.

Q. I got into some trouble 20 years ago. Is that going to be held against me now?

A. See our previous answer.

Q. I'm physically handicapped. Will that hurt my chances for a job?

A. No. It is against Federal law to discriminate based on a handicapping condition.