

## Not All Clearances Are Created Equal

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In Washington, D.C., security clearances are golden. Whether confidential, secret or top secret, they can help job seekers get jobs and pay packages that those without them often can't.

But do all designations available to government workers and contractors carry the same weight? That's what one job seeker asks:

**At my last job, I received a position of public trust clearance through a project I worked on for the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. However, I'm not totally sure what that means... Does having the clearance increase my chances of getting employed by the government and getting a full-scale security clearance?**

It can, but it's not the same as a security clearance, says Evan Lesser, director of ClearanceJobs.com, an Atlanta, Ga.-based Web site that provides job listings that require security clearances.

A public trust position requires a cursory background check, explains Lesser -- perhaps including a basic look at financial or driving records and police reports.

With a full-scale security clearance, meanwhile, even the lowest confidential or secret levels require a far more comprehensive process. Such background checks could include a look at past foreign travel, an extensive look at your financial background and work history and, for married candidates, an investigation of your spouse. For higher-level secret and top secret clearances, an even deeper investigation would take place.

The type of work being performed typically dictates the designation needed. Many jobs at the Treasury Department and Department of Agriculture are public trust positions, Lesser says. Workers with defense or homeland security-related responsibilities, meanwhile, are generally required to have a full security clearance.

And having earned a public trust position, warns Lesser, won't guarantee you a full clearance. "However, it is a positive indicator," he says.

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