

Here's what companies need to know to compete successfully for homeland security projects.

# The Key to Winning Contracts

By Eric Grasser / Illustration by Stuart Bradford

Comments below by Evan Lesser, Director, ClearanceJobs.com, are excerpted from pages 112 & 114 of the full article

Unfortunately, "At this point, it's still taking a year or more for someone who does not have a clearance to obtain one," says Evan Lesser, director of ClearanceJobs.com, a Web site that tracks job openings for more than 28,000 professionals holding active or current clearances.

Contracting firms could see marked improvement in the clearance process by later this year, however. As part of the Intelligence Reform Act of 2004, Congress stipulated that a single agency become responsible for granting clearances. The Office of Personnel Management has been given the task of streamlining the efforts, which should be enhanced by the substitution of electronic applications for paper.

The single-agency approach will allow clearances to be transferred from one government agency to another. For example, an employee with a Depart-

ment of State clearance would be able to seamlessly transfer to DHS without having to undergo the same clearance approval process for the new agency.

"That's something that hasn't happened in the past," Lesser says. "Now one investigation is all that's required. This is definitely helping out the private sector because they are starting to see these results. They're not going to have to make candidates wait as long, and they're going to be able to staff projects a little bit sooner."

But the private sector also needs to be careful about which candidates it sponsors for clearances. There are clearly some triggers for investigators to deny a clearance, including insufficient financial funds, bankruptcy, bad-check writing, a criminal history including jail or prison time, drug use, and sometimes even excessive foreign travel.