



Department of Defense Suitability and Fitness Guide

Procedures and Guidance for Civilian Employment
Suitability and Fitness Determinations within the
Department of Defense

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Preface

The *Department of Defense (DoD) Suitability and Fitness Guide* (“the Guide”) was developed for the purpose of supporting the end-to-end employment suitability and fitness processes throughout DoD. The Guide pulls together information from multiple sources into a single document to include both open-source guidance from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), as well as DoD policy and procedures. It is intended to serve as a convenient reference and supplement to OPM and DoD suitability training.

Although the Guide cites both OPM and DoD policy, it is not U.S. Government policy and may not be cited as authority for denial or revocation of employment suitability or fitness. The Guide was developed by the Department of Defense Personnel and Security Research Center Division of the Defense Manpower Data Center for use by the DoD suitability and fitness communities.

User Input: User input is needed to make the Guide as useful as possible and to inform future updates. Individual users, as well as supervisors and managers, are invited to communicate directly and informally concerning suggested additions, deletions, changes, questions or comments regarding this product. Send user input and comments to perserec@mail.mil.



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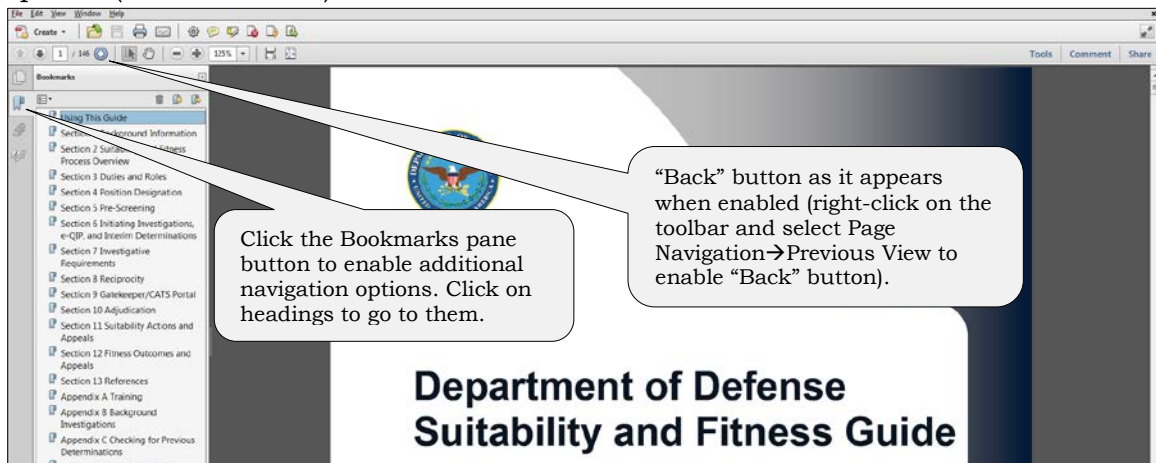
Using This Guide

The *Department of Defense (DoD) Suitability and Fitness Guide* (“the *Guide*”) is represented as a single PDF file designed to function with the convenience of a HTML help system (or in hardcopy format, depending on user preference). Users can easily search for terms of interest (Ctrl+F), jump to sections of interest, go back to their previous location(s) in the document, print to hardcopy, and distribute the *Guide* through a simple email attachment.

Following the two important usage tips (below) will help maximize user convenience.

- (1) **Hyperlinks:** If using an electronic copy of the *Suitability Guide*, **BLUE** text represents a hyperlink that can be clicked to jump to other sections of the *Guide*. The top of each page contains navigation links enabling you to return to the section-specific table of contents or to the *Guide*’s primary table of contents. In-text links and page references allow you to navigate the *Guide* with equal facility in softcopy or hardcopy format.
- (2) **Previous View (“Back”):** If you click a link to jump to a section of interest but then want to return to your previous location(s) in the *Guide*, right click on the page and select “Previous View” from the context menu (this is the equivalent of a “Back” button in a HTML browser). Optionally, for additional convenience, you can enable the Previous View button on Adobe Acrobat/Reader by right-clicking on the toolbar and selecting Page Navigation→Previous View from the context menu. The Previous View (“Back”) button  will display on the toolbar. When clicked, the Previous View button takes you back to your previous location(s) in the *Guide*, allowing you to navigate the *Guide* in a manner identical to a HTML help system. It is highly recommended users enable this feature to help navigate the large and complex *Guide* (see screenshot).

Additionally, users can leverage Adobe’s Bookmarks pane for additional navigation options (see screenshot).



Section 1 Background Information

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1.1. Overview

This section describes the purpose of this guide and covers suitability as well as fitness policy and applications within the Department of Defense (DoD). In brief, this section covers the following key topics:

- Guide purpose and applicability
- Suitability and fitness authority and policy
- Distinction between suitability and fitness

NOTE: Refer to [Appendix E: Acronyms](#) (page [133](#)) for a list of acronyms used in this Guide.

1.2. Guide Purpose

The *DoD Suitability and Fitness Guide* serves as a supplement to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Suitability Processing Handbook, to include processing fitness cases within DoD. Use of the guide should help ensure compliance with suitability and fitness policy and promote consistent application of suitability principles across the Department.

This guide outlines resources, procedures, and guidelines for making employment suitability and fitness determinations for DoD civilian employees. The material herein corresponds to information and training provided specifically for DoD suitability and fitness adjudication, as in the “Introduction to Suitability Adjudications for the DoD” course developed by the Defense Security Service (DSS) Center for Development and Security Excellence (CDSE). It includes details on end-to-end processing of DoD suitability and fitness cases (from position designation through final adjudication and appeal) as well as links to references and supporting



materials. It also describes how suitability and fitness cases are processed by the DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF).

Note that although the procedures and guidance in this guide were developed to conform specifically to DoDI 1400.25 v731, instruction in 5 CFR § 731 and any OPM issuances regarding suitability take precedence over information presented here.

1.2.1. Applicability

Procedures and guidance described in this guide may be employed by DoD components as defined and authorized in DoDI 1400.25 v731. This information should help DoD officials perform suitability and fitness functions in compliance with applicable policy. DoD personnel also should check with their component suitability authorities to ensure compliance with component-specific requirements that do not conflict with DoDI 1400.25 v731 or other higher-level policy (e.g., 5 CFR § 731).

1.3. Executive Authority and Policy

Under sections 3301 and 7301 of title 5 of the United States Code (U.S.C.), the President was given authority to determine the suitability of applicants for the civil service and to establish regulations governing the conduct of federal employees. According to the code, such regulations should “best promote the efficiency of the service” – that is, they should ensure all duties and actions within or on behalf of their employing agency are performed effectively, and that the agency’s missions are advanced or accomplished.

With the issuance of Executive Order (E.O.) 10577 (November 23, 1954), *Amending the Civil Service Rules and Authorizing a New Appointment System for the Competitive Service*, the President delegated authority to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to evaluate the qualifications and suitability of applicants for competitive federal employment. This order, along with E.O. 13467 (June 30, 2008), *Reforming Processes Related to Suitability for Government Employment, Fitness for Contractor Employees, and Eligibility for Access to Classified National Security Information*, delegated OPM with the responsibility of developing and implementing policies and procedures for suitability investigations and adjudications. This responsibility includes handling eligibility for access to federal information systems and facilities.

OPM retains its authority to conduct suitability investigations, but has further delegated the duty of suitability adjudication to the DoD and other executive agencies. Under Title 5: Administrative Personnel, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 731, *Suitability*, as amended (5 CFR § 731), heads of agencies are given the authority, with some exceptions, to conduct suitability adjudication for competitive



service, senior executive service, and some excepted service positions (i.e., covered positions). Title 5 CFR § 731 also establishes for agencies the criteria and procedures for making suitability determinations and for taking suitability actions regarding employment in covered positions.

1.3.1. DoD Authority and Policy

In keeping with the delegation of authority from OPM, the DoD has issued its own instruction, DoDI 1400.25 v731 (August 24, 2012), *DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Suitability and Fitness Adjudication For Civilian Employees*, which outlines the policies and procedures related to suitability for DoD civilian employment. The instruction also covers policies and procedures related to fitness, which is a similar type of determination; however, fitness cases are not governed by 5 CFR § 731 or OPM policy.

According to DoD policy, the DoD components are charged with establishing and maintaining an effective suitability and fitness program, delegating authority, vetting personnel, establishing and implementing procedures, as well as training. These DoD policies and procedures will be discussed in greater detail throughout this guide.

1.4. Suitability

Suitability is a person's character or conduct that may have an impact on the integrity or efficiency of the service. During suitability adjudication, the adjudicator reviews information about the behavior of an individual (e.g., obtained from a background investigation and from the individual) seeking to enter or continue federal service to ensure that it demonstrates appropriate conduct and character. Essentially, certain standards of character and conduct are used to evaluate whether employees will fulfill their position duties and responsibilities effectively, and in doing so, support their employing agency's reputation and mission.

Suitability adjudication is distinct from assessment of an individual's qualifications for a job and from assessment of eligibility for access to classified information or assignment to sensitive duties. Additionally, suitability determinations are separate from objections to eligibles or pass overs of preference eligibles (where an eligible candidate is not selected, and either removed from further consideration or a non-preferred eligible candidate is selected instead).

Suitability adjudication is applied to:

- Positions in the competitive service,
- Positions in the excepted service where the incumbent can be noncompetitively converted to the competitive service, and



- Career appointment to positions in the Senior Executive Service.

1.5. Fitness

The definition of fitness is similar to the definition of suitability. Fitness, as defined by DoDI 1400.25 v731, refers to “a person’s level of character and conduct determined necessary for an individual to perform work for, or on behalf of, a Federal agency.” Two primary ways in which fitness and suitability differ are (a) types of positions and (b) the guiding authority.

Fitness adjudication is applied to:

- Excepted service positions, which cannot be converted to the competitive service (or otherwise are not subject to suitability);
- DoD contractor positions; and
- Nonappropriated Fund (NAF) positions.

The guiding authority for suitability adjudication is 5 CFR § 731 and OPM. Fitness adjudication, however, does not have a similar clear guiding authority; the types of positions specified (e.g., NAF positions) are not covered by 5 CFR § 731 or by OPM. Nevertheless, DoD has elected to apply the 5 CFR § 731 investigation and adjudication standards to fitness as well as suitability cases (DoDI 1400.25 v731).

NAF Positions: NAF positions provide services and support to DoD and are funded through profits generated by the employing organization (e.g., positions in exchanges, commissaries, and DoD morale, welfare, and recreation [MWR] organizations). These positions are not funded through appropriations by Congress (as is the case for appropriated [ApF] positions). NAF positions are primarily covered by DoD Instruction 1400.25, v1405, *DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Nonappropriated Fund (NAF) Pay, Awards, and Allowances* (June 26, 2014).



Section 2 Suitability and Fitness Process Overview

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2.1. Overview

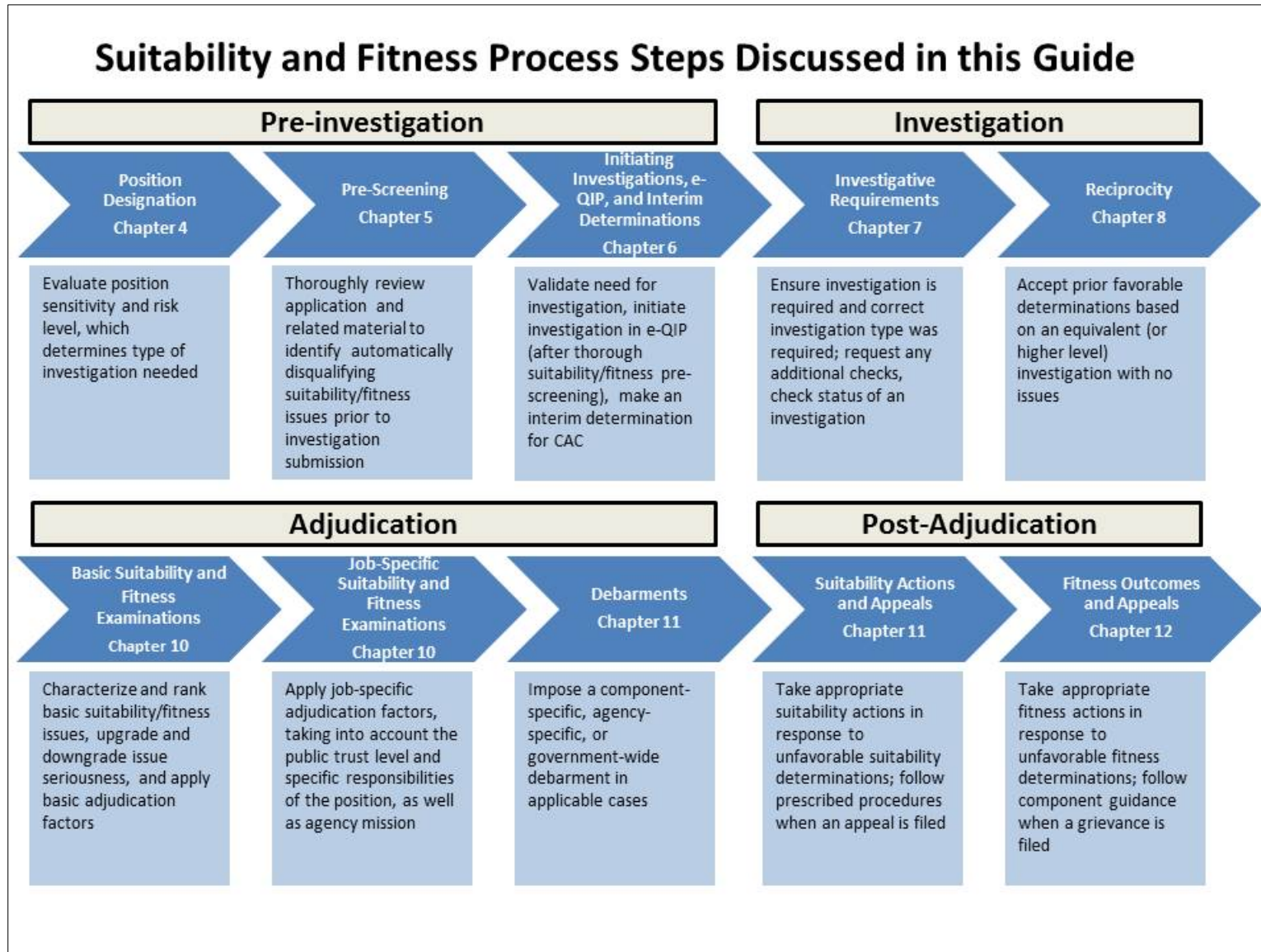
This section provides an introduction to the four major phases of the suitability and fitness process:

- Pre-investigation
- Investigation
- Adjudication
- Post-adjudication

The phases of the process are inter-related; however, some tasks and associated steps overlap. [Figure 1](#) (page [13](#)) presents the phases of the suitability and fitness process graphically.



Figure 1: Major Phases of the Suitability and Fitness Process



2.2. Pre-investigation

The first major phase of the suitability and fitness process is pre-investigation. The suitability and fitness tasks in this phase are an integrated component of the overall civilian hiring process. This guide focuses on suitability and fitness, covering only tasks that contribute to those determinations; it does not cover other hiring tasks. Primary suitability and fitness tasks during this phase include:

- Designating position sensitivity and risk
- Pre-screening for suitability and fitness concerns
- Initiating the Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP) and making an interim determination

[Section 4: Position Designation](#) (page 27) covers the process of designating position risk and sensitivity, and how to use OPM's Position Designation Tool (PDT) to make a final position designation and investigation assignment.

[Section 5: Pre-Screening](#) (page 40) highlights the type of information that should be assessed before initiating the required investigation. It describes the forms that should be completed and reviewed, how to gather additional necessary information, and how to check whether an individual has been debarred from federal employment. This section also provides guidance on proceeding with the hiring process (e.g., a tentative offer of employment) or terminating the hiring process (i.e., in cases with unfavorable pre-screening outcomes).

[Section 6: Initiating Investigations, e-QIP, and Interim Determinations](#) (page 46) provides instructions on validating investigation need and subsequently using e-QIP to initiate the required background investigation. Additionally, [Section 6](#) focuses on making interim determinations for issuance of Common Access Cards (CACs) or Personal Identification Verification (PIV) cards. The section discusses the specific roles and functions of the databases used to validate need for an investigation. The systems currently available for these checks include OPM's Central Verification System (CVS) and the DoD Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS). It also provides guidance on using e-QIP to request investigations, with a focus on steps specific to DoD personnel. Lastly, this section covers the steps to making interim determinations.

2.3. Investigation

An appropriate background investigation, identified by position designation, must be conducted by OPM or other designated Investigation Service Provider (ISP) to determine an individual's suitability or fitness for federal employment. Having an appropriate investigation on file ensures that important information regarding an



individual is assessed in a manner that keeps the specific requirements and responsibilities of a position in mind.

All suitability and fitness investigations conducted for positions in the federal government consist of the same basic elements (see [Appendix B: Background Investigations](#) on page [122](#)), but differ in additional requirements depending on position risk level and sensitivity. For example, the most basic suitability and fitness investigation, the Tier 1 investigation (formerly the National Agency Check with Inquiries [NACI]), addresses the requirements for nonsensitive, low risk positions. Other, more rigorous investigation types build upon these basic requirements and employ expanded coverage of a person's background via personal interviews and record checks. Prior to initiating any investigation, however, reciprocity across agencies and investigation requests should be evaluated as required by the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Administrative Personnel, Title 5, Part 731, *Suitability*, as amended (5 CFR § 731) and/or by DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1400.25, Volume 731 (v731) (August 24, 2012), *DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Suitability and Fitness Adjudication For Civilian Employees*. Specifically, the appropriate systems (e.g., CVS, JPAS) should be consulted to ensure an equivalent or more comprehensive investigation has not already been conducted.

The investigation phase discussed in this guide focuses on the following two suitability and fitness topics:

- Investigative requirements
- Reciprocity

[Section 7: Investigative Requirements](#) (page [58](#)) discusses the different kinds of investigations available, as well as the kinds of positions and conditions that require their use. The section also covers when and how often initial investigations, reinvestigations, and additional checks should be conducted.

[Section 8: Reciprocity](#) (page [64](#)) describes the requirements and process of granting reciprocal acceptance (i.e., reciprocity) for previous favorable suitability or fitness determinations that were based on equivalent investigations. This includes how to check for previous investigation information in databases such as CVS and JPAS, and what occurs when reciprocity for a case is granted and adjudication at both the DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF) and field component are bypassed.

2.4. Adjudication

The goal of suitability and fitness adjudication is to determine whether individuals entering federal employment meet standards of conduct, are worthy of public trust, and will promote the efficiency of the employing agency or service. Adjudication is a complex task by which trained personnel (adjudicators) review and evaluate



investigative information against national standards. Based on this evaluation, adjudicators decide whether an individual is suitable or fit for employment.

Suitability and fitness determinations are generally made after an applicant's qualifications are considered. If the position is national security sensitive, a suitability or fitness evaluation should be performed prior to a national security determination. If the candidate is deemed unsuitable, it is not necessary to proceed with a national security determination.

DoD established the CAF, and tasked it with handling the majority of suitability and fitness determinations. The Investigative Service Provider (ISP) will conduct and send completed background investigations directly to the DoD CAF. DoD CAF adjudicators will review the cases and, where possible, make a final favorable determination. If the case involves significant derogatory information or missing investigative items, the case will be returned to the submitting component to make a final determination. Importantly, these cases do not necessarily require unfavorable component determinations by default. Rather, they require further review by component-level representatives.

[Section 10: Adjudication](#) (page 88) provides an overview of the adjudication process. It describes the flow of investigative information, the electronic tools, and the roles of the DoD CAF and component adjudicators. It identifies the adjudicative factors and additional considerations in Title 5, Administrative Personnel, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 731, *Suitability*, as amended (5 CFR § 731) and provides an introduction to the OPM adjudicative approach.

2.5. Post-adjudication

After a suitability or fitness determination is made, certain steps may follow, depending on the nature of the determination or position. For instance, when an unfavorable determination is made, a suitability or fitness action must be taken (e.g., cancellation of employment eligibility, removal, cancellation of reinstatement eligibility, and/or debarment [see 5 CFR § 731 or DoDI 1400.25, v731]).

Additionally, some positions and circumstances may require reinvestigation down the line (e.g., high-risk positions, changing to a position requiring a higher-level investigation, or when new information raises suitability or fitness concerns). See DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1400.25, v731 for more information.

The two main topics covered in post-adjudication are:

- Characterizing and taking suitability or fitness actions
- Appealing negative suitability or fitness actions

[Section 11: Suitability Actions and Appeals](#) (page 103) describes the different suitability actions that can be taken after a negative determination and the types of positions involved. It further details debarment procedures, which can be enforced



by either OPM or the employing DoD component. Lastly, [Section 11](#) covers the steps necessary to take a suitability action, including but not limited to, informing the applicant or incumbent of the action via a Notice of Proposed Action and/or a final decision letter.

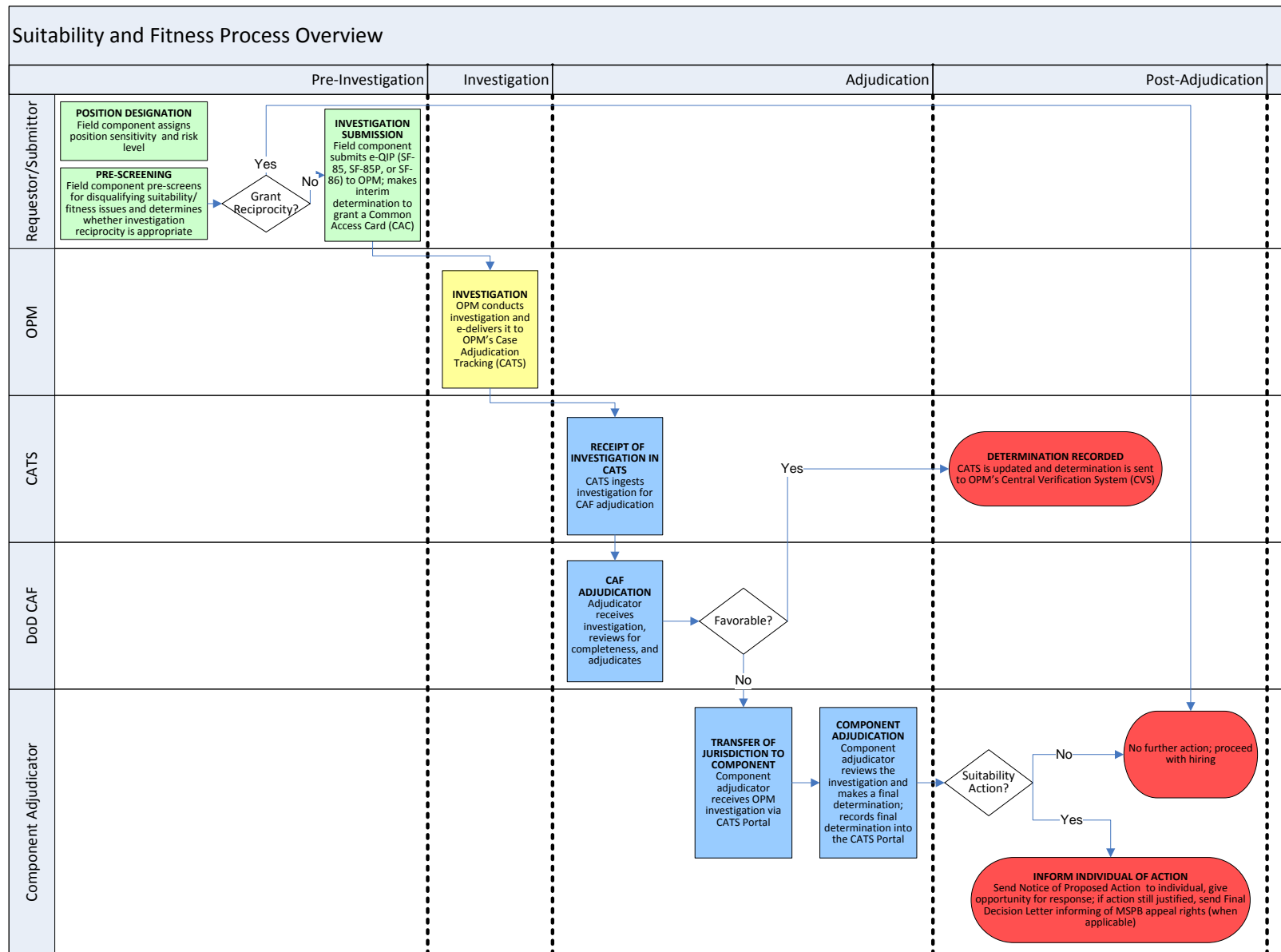
[Section 12: Fitness Outcomes and Appeals](#) (page [112](#)) highlights different outcomes that may follow a negative fitness determination. It also discusses procedures for debarment and other outcomes following an unfavorable fitness determination. Lastly, guidance is provided for cases where an employee appeals an unfavorable fitness determination (MSPB appeal rights only apply to those subject to a suitability determination).

2.6. Summary

[Figure 2](#) (page [18](#)) provides an overview of the complete suitability and fitness determination process from the point at which a DoD component conducts the position designation to the point any post-adjudication steps are taken once a case is adjudicated at the DoD CAF or a component. It should be noted that an adjudication determination can be made earlier in the process if warranted. For example, if a review of the OF-306 or SF-85 or comparison of the two forms identifies issues, the may be referred to the component adjudicator earlier in the process. The figure also does not represent debarment or suitability actions taken by OPM, which can also occur earlier in the process when material, intentional false statements, deception, or fraud are detected.



Figure 2: Overview of the Suitability and Fitness Determination Process



Note: Adapted from Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Memorandum, Supplemental Implementation Guidance for DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF) Favorable Suitability and Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12) Adjudications (Aug 29, 2013)

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3.1. Overview

This section identifies suitability and fitness responsibilities delegated to the Department of Defense (DoD) components and describes the personnel who fulfill various roles in the suitability and fitness process (e.g., authorized DoD officials such as hiring managers, human resources and security office personnel, and suitability or fitness adjudicators).

This section addresses the following key topics:

- DoD component duties
- Positions with responsibility for steps in the suitability and fitness process
- Role of DoD component adjudicators
- Role of DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF)

3.2. DoD Component Duties

DoD delegates six major suitability and fitness duties to its components. These duties include:

- Designating sensitivity and position risk for all positions in the component;
- Ensuring compliance with investigation and reinvestigation requirements;
- Adjudicating suitability and fitness cases in which the DoD CAF cannot reach a favorable determination;



- Taking suitability and fitness actions;
- Overseeing training and certification for suitability duties, as needed; and
- Safeguarding information.

This section provides a brief introduction to each of these duties. Later sections and appendices provide more detailed information.

3.2.1. Position Designation

Position designation is the assignment of sensitivity level and position risk to jobs within the federal government, where position risk refers to the position's potential for adverse impact to the efficiency or integrity of the service. Position designation is important to ensure that the impact of position-holders on national security and public trust is accurately documented. In addition, position designation identifies the level of background investigation required for position candidates.

The DoD components are instructed to designate the position sensitivity and risk level of all job titles and descriptions according to criteria set forth in the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) Position Designation System (the latest version is found in *Position Designation of National Security and Public Trust Positions* (OPM, 2010)). [Section 4: Position Designation](#) (page 27) of this guide provides details of the position designation process and defines position sensitivity and risk in greater detail.

3.2.2. Investigation and Reinvestigation Compliance

Appointment to DoD civilian positions requires a favorably adjudicated background investigation, as identified during position designation. Before making a position appointment, authorized management officials (e.g., human resources personnel or security officials) must request the required investigation or reinvestigation. A candidate may begin working before the background investigation is complete and may receive an interim suitability or fitness determination, but must be informed that his or her appointment to the position is dependent upon a favorable final suitability or fitness determination.

Reinvestigations are required for certain types of positions to determine whether an individual may continue to occupy a position. The position's sensitivity and risk level (see [Section 4: Position Designation](#)) determines the type of reinvestigation and the frequency with which it must be conducted; DoD components must ensure compliance with such reinvestigation requirements.

[Section 6: Initiating Investigations, e-QIP, and Interim Determinations](#) (page 46) and [Section 7: Investigative Requirements](#) (page 58) provide additional information about background investigations and the process of requesting background



investigations. Additionally, [Section 8: Reciprocity](#) (page 64) covers the acceptance of a determination made on a previous investigation, when an individual applies to a new position with similar investigative requirements as his/her prior position.

3.2.3. Suitability and Fitness Adjudication

During suitability or fitness adjudication, authorized and trained personnel review background information to determine whether a position candidate meets federal standards of character and conduct. The purpose of the review is to identify any suitability or fitness issue(s) and, if issues are identified, determine whether it is in the best interest of the federal government to recommend or continue employment of the individual.

As indicated in 5 CFR § 731, suitability adjudication of background information may take place at any point during the hiring process (e.g., after review of completed application forms, employment forms, or after a completed background investigation). Fitness adjudication also may take place at any point during the hiring process. Many DoD components perform an initial adjudication when receiving an applicant's declaration of federal employment form (i.e., the Optional Form [OF] 306). The final adjudication is performed when the completed report of investigation (ROI) is received by either the DoD CAF or a component adjudicator.

The completed background investigation undergoes initial adjudication by staff at the DoD CAF. For those cases where a DoD CAF adjudicator can make a favorable determination, the case is adjudicated and the decision is recorded in the Case Adjudication Tracking System (CATS). For those cases where the DoD CAF cannot reach a favorable determination, the case is returned to the component adjudicator for a final determination. Importantly, returned cases do not necessarily require an unfavorable determination. Instead, these cases may involve information that requires component-specific evaluation.

[Section 10: Adjudication](#) (page 88) provides more information on suitability and fitness adjudication performed by the DoD CAF, the components, and in some cases, OPM.

3.2.4. Suitability and Fitness Determination and Outcome Decision-making

A suitability action is an outcome taken by OPM or a DoD component following an unfavorable suitability determination in accordance with 5 CFR § 731 and OPM's Suitability Processing Handbook. DoD components should follow the same procedures to perform fitness actions (see DoD Instruction [DoDI] 1400.25 v 731). Fitness actions, however, are not governed by 5 CFR § 731 and are not subject to Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) appeal rights (discussed in subsequent



sections). Individuals may appeal unfavorable fitness determinations according to the procedures of the respective DoD component.

The specifics of the suitability or fitness action depend on the reason for the unfavorable determination and can be one of the following: cancellation of employment eligibility, removal from the position, cancellation of reinstatement eligibility, or debarment from employment. More details about the actions and exceptions that require OPM involvement are described in [Section 11: Suitability Actions and Appeals](#) (page [103](#)) and [Section 12: Fitness Outcomes and Appeals](#) (page [112](#)).

3.2.5. Training and Certification

Personnel with duties related to the suitability or fitness process (e.g., position designation, suitability adjudication, e-QIP support) must receive appropriate training in accordance with DoDI 1400.25 v 731. It is the responsibility of authorized management officials, or other designated personnel, to ensure that appropriate training is provided and that training and certification records are properly documented and stored.

Suitability adjudicators in particular must receive OPM or DoD-approved adjudication training. Training options are available through OPM, through the Defense Center for the Development of Security Excellence (CDSE) at the Defense Security Service (DSS), and through Graduate School USA. [Appendix A: Training](#) (page [117](#)) provides information about training available for component adjudicators (also see your component suitability authority or the suitability program manager at the Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service [DCPAS]).

3.2.6. Safeguarding Information

DoD personnel must ensure that records containing information about individuals or classified information are safeguarded in accordance with OPM and DoD policy, to include:

- OPM Suitability Processing Handbook (2008)
- OPM Operating Manual: The Guide to Personnel Recordkeeping (2011)
- DoDD 5400.11 (October 29, 2014), DoD Privacy Program
- DoDD 5400.07 (January 2, 2008), DoD Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Program
- DoDM 5200.01, Volumes 1-4 (February 24, 2012), DoD Information Security Program



OPM requires that information developed through investigation or other means shall be handled and maintained in accordance with 5 CFR § 736 (if based on an OPM investigation) or with the agency's own system of records notice, if developed by the agency (e.g., DMDC 12 DoD). In addition, DoD requires that personnel follow the directives of the DoD Privacy Program (DoDD 5400.11, October 29, 2014). This program requires that DoD personnel shall:

- Take such actions, as considered appropriate, to ensure that any personal information contained in a system of records, of which they have access and are using to conduct official business, shall be protected so that the security and confidentiality of the information shall be preserved.
- Not disclose any personal information contained in any system of records, except as authorized by DoD Manual 5400.11-R (May 14, 2007), or other applicable laws or regulations. Personnel willfully making such disclosure when knowing that disclosure is prohibited are subject to possible criminal penalties and/or administrative sanctions.
- Report any unauthorized disclosures of personal information from a system of records or the maintenance of any system of records that are not authorized by this Directive to the applicable Privacy POC for his or her DoD Component.

Other important considerations include (OPM Operating Manual: The Guide to Personnel Recordkeeping, 2011):

- Only persons conducting official government business should have access to personnel records protected by the Privacy Act.
- Employees or their designated representatives must have access to their own records.
- Prior to transfer of a Personnel Folder to an agency under OPM's recordkeeping authority, agencies must remove or conceal all Social Security Numbers (SSNs) and other personally identifying information belonging to someone other than the subject that are displayed on records in the folder (except for beneficiary information) and provide a copy of the changed record to the employee.
- Agencies must guard against disclosure of personally identifying information (PII) belonging to someone other than the subject when an individual requests access to his or her personnel files. Agencies must review a personnel file prior to providing access to the subject of the file and take appropriate action such as removal or concealment of SSNs and other PII.

3.3. Roles

Components vary in the specific positions assigned to the tasks that make up the suitability and fitness process, but the personnel involved typically include



component hiring managers, human resources personnel, security office personnel, and suitability or fitness adjudicators. This section provides a general description of the various suitability and fitness personnel roles.

3.3.1. Hiring Managers

The hiring manager role typically performs duties that are part of the pre-investigation phase of the suitability and fitness process. Hiring managers begin by completing the Standard Form 52 (SF-52), *Request for Personnel Action (RPA)*, or equivalent documentation. Next, hiring managers may be responsible for completing the position description and designating the position sensitivity and risk level. Other duties may include conducting interviews and evaluating referred candidates.

3.3.2. Human Resources and Security Office Personnel

Human resources personnel, security office personnel, or other appropriate designated officials, are responsible for assessing applicant background information to determine whether the individual qualifications and background meet the requirements of the position. Security office personnel typically assess only those requirements related to the suitability, fitness, or personnel security process. Typically these individuals do not assess qualifications as related to job performance.

Some of the preliminary checks and pre-investigative actions taken by human resources or security office personnel may include:

- Request and review of Optional Form (OF) 306, Declaration for Federal Employment;
- Checking for previous investigations or adjudications in the OPM Central Verification System (CVS) and DoD Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS), or the successor systems;
- Checking for proper fingerprinting, where applicable for a position;
- Checking for existing debarment from federal employment;
- Request and review of selected candidates' SF-85, *Questionnaire for Non-Sensitive Positions*; SF-85P, *Questionnaire for Public Trust Positions*; or SF-86, *Questionnaire for National Security Positions*;
- Request and review of results of Special Agreement Checks (SACs);
- Initiation of the background investigation by submitting the completed SF-85, SF-85P, or SF-86 electronic form to OPM;



- Extending tentative and official offers of employment to applicants with no suitability or fitness issues or with favorable suitability or fitness determinations;
- Providing the conditions of employment to tentatively hired candidates; and
- Verifying a candidate's eligibility to work in the United States.

It should be noted that pre-investigative procedures, and the personnel who perform them, may differ among DoD components. For example, Army human resources personnel initiate the suitability and fitness investigation by submitting a Personnel Security Investigation Portal (PSIP) request to the Personnel Security Investigation Center of Excellence (PSI-CoE), which validates the need for an investigation and in turn submits applicants' completed forms to OPM. It is therefore advised to verify specifics of component roles and pre-investigative procedures with the appropriate component suitability or fitness authority.

In addition to pre-investigative tasks, authorized component officials may provide a final offer if and when the candidate's suitability or fitness investigation is favorably adjudicated. If the selected candidate accepts the final offer and reports for duty, human resources personnel, security office personnel, or other designated officials should use E-Verify to confirm the candidate's eligibility to work in the United States. Officials should also compare the candidate's completed Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 with the results of their completed background investigation. See [Section 5: Pre-Screening](#) (page 40) and [Section 6: Initiating Investigations, e-QIP, and Interim Determinations](#) (page 46) for more information.

In some cases, it may take several months to adjudicate a candidate's suitability or fitness investigation. If this occurs, authorized officials may extend a final offer and have a selected candidate begin duty following a favorable interim suitability or fitness determination. A final suitability or fitness determination can then be made by an adjudicator during the first year of appointment or service or during the one-year probationary employment period, after the appropriate background investigation has been conducted and adjudicated.

3.3.3. Suitability and Fitness Adjudicators

Suitability and fitness adjudicators are responsible for evaluating an applicant's suitability or fitness for federal employment. These adjudicators may be human resources personnel, security officers, or specially designated adjudicators at either the hiring component or the DoD CAF. In all cases, individuals in this role must themselves have a favorable adjudication determination based on the OPM investigation type "Background Investigation" (BI) or other high level investigation (i.e., the BI is higher level than the Tier 1-3 investigations and will eventually become the Tier 4 investigation). Suitability adjudicators must also complete



required training through OPM or other DoD-approved suitability adjudicator courses as described in [Appendix A: Training](#) (page 117).

3.3.3.1. DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility

Beginning in October 2013, DoD consolidated favorable adjudication of suitability and fitness background investigations at the DoD CAF. OPM (or any other designated Investigation Service Provider [ISP]) now sends completed investigations to the DoD CAF and the CAF assigns each case to a suitability and fitness adjudicator for initial review. The CAF adjudicator reviews the case for derogatory information and for missing investigation items, including missing OF-306 forms. If derogatory information is mitigated, the CAF adjudicator may be able to make a favorable determination. However, if any investigation items are missing, including the OF-306, the CAF adjudicator will not be able to make a favorable determination and will return the case to the submitting component. The submitting component will need to determine whether to make a final determination despite the missing information or to return the case to OPM to request the additional information.

DoD CAF adjudicators record favorable determinations in the Case Adjudications Tracking System (CATS). Adjudicative determinations are available for review by submitting offices via the CATS portal or its successor system. If the DoD CAF is unable to render a favorable determination, the case is made available to the submitting office via the CATS portal or its successor, for the component adjudicator's final suitability determination. Component adjudicators must obtain a CATS portal account to receive the results of DoD CAF adjudications. Speak with your component suitability representative or contact DCPAS for more information about obtaining a CATS portal account.

3.3.3.2. DoD Component Suitability and Fitness Adjudicators

A primary duty for many DoD component adjudicators is to make determinations about cases where DoD CAF adjudicators could not. Such cases are not necessarily unfavorable by default; rather, they require component level insight to arrive at a final determination.

Component adjudicators may also adjudicate suitability information received earlier in the suitability or fitness process. For example, some components adjudicate information from the OF-306 or other sources to make suitability determinations.

In addition, components may vary in terms of specific personnel who fill the role of component adjudicator. Regardless of who fills the role, all suitability and fitness adjudicators must meet background investigation and training requirements.



Section 4 Position Designation

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4.1. Overview

This section discusses the definition and purpose of position designation and provides an introduction to the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM’s) automated Position Designation Tool (PDT).

The section addresses the following key topics:

- Definitions of position designation, sensitivity, and risk levels
- DoD implementation of position designation
- Using the PDT to complete and record a position designation

4.2. Description of Position Designation

Position designation refers to the process of reviewing the duties and responsibilities assigned to a position and, on the basis of that information, determining the sensitivity (national security) and public trust risk level associated with the position. Position designation is required to determine both the national security sensitivity and the public trust level of all positions (see [Section 1: Background Information](#) on page 8) for positions covered under suitability and fitness adjudication). Once national security sensitivity and risk level are identified, position designation identifies the required level of background investigation for position candidates.



The concepts of *sensitivity* and *risk* are central to the position designation process.

- *Position sensitivity* refers to the extent to which an occupant of a position could adversely affect national security.
- *Position risk* refers to the extent to which an occupant of a position could adversely affect the efficiency and integrity of the civil service, which are suitability and public trust considerations.

Regulations governing designation of position risk and public trust investigative requirements appear in Title 5: Administrative Personnel, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 731, *Suitability*, as amended, Section 106. Regulations governing national security position sensitivity designations and investigative requirements appear in Part 732, *National Security Positions*, as amended, Section 201.

Position sensitivity and risk designation are integral components of the suitability and fitness process. The individual making the designation must have adequate information about a position to provide accurate position descriptions and to assign appropriate sensitivity and risk level designations. While components may employ different systems for establishing position descriptions (e.g., Army's Fully Automated System for Classification [FASCLASS]), hiring managers should use OPM's Position Designation Automated Tool (PDT) to designate position sensitivity and risk level (see [Section 4: Position Designation](#) on page [27](#) for more information).

4.2.1. Position Sensitivity

In evaluating position sensitivity, personnel making the position designation must assess the potential for an occupant of a position to adversely affect national security. Although position sensitivity is a function of national security concerns, not suitability or fitness, it is covered in this section because evaluating position sensitivity is one of the key steps of the position designation process.

There are four categories of national security sensitivity: Special Sensitive, Critical Sensitive, Noncritical Sensitive, and Nonsensitive. The categories of sensitivity differ in the level of potential harm someone in the position may cause. [Table 1](#) describes these categories further.



Table 1: National Security Sensitivity Levels

Sensitivity Type	Definition	Access Eligibility
<i>Special Sensitive</i>	Position has potential to cause inestimable harm to national security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI) • Access to any other intelligence-related Special Sensitive information or involvement in Top Secret Special Access Programs (SAP) • Any other position determined to be at a higher level than Critical Sensitive due to special requirements that complement Executive Order (E.O.)10450 and E.O. 12968
<i>Critical Sensitive</i>	Position has potential to cause exceptionally grave damage to the national security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Top Secret or "Q" classified information • Development or approval of war plans, future major or special operations of war, or critical and extremely important items of war • National security policy-making or policy-determining positions that have the potential to cause exceptional or grave damage to national security • Investigative duties that have the potential to cause exceptional or grave damage to the national security (e.g., counterintelligence investigations) • The adjudication, recommendation of adjudicative determinations, and/or granting of personnel security clearances • Duty on personnel security boards • Any other positions related to national security requiring the same degree of trust
<i>Noncritical Sensitive</i>	Position has potential to cause damage to the national security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Secret, "L," Confidential classified information • Any other positions with the potential to cause a moderate degree of harm to national security
<i>Nonsensitive</i>	Position does not have potential to damage national security but may carry public trust responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No clearance or other sensitive national security requirements are necessary. • Note: some positions may be nonsensitive from a national security perspective, but high risk under suitability criteria.

Note: Adapted from OPM’s PDT

4.2.2. Position Risk

The other component of position designation involves determining a position’s risk level, which is a function of suitability and fitness. In evaluating position risk,



personnel making the position designation must assess the potential for an occupant of a position to adversely affect the efficiency or integrity of the service (e.g., an adverse effect would be putting personal interests before public and agency interests). There are three position risk levels: high, moderate, and low. High and moderate risk positions are considered “public trust” positions. Such positions may involve policy making, major program responsibility, public safety and health, law enforcement duties, fiduciary responsibilities or other duties demanding a significant degree of public trust. Other positions may involve access to or operation or control of financial records, with a significant risk for causing damage or realizing personal gain. Positions assigned low/limited risk levels are not labeled as public trust positions; however, they still may require rigorous vetting (e.g., childcare providers).

[Table 2](#) (page [31](#)) describes the risk level categories.



Table 2: Suitability and Fitness Position Risk Levels

Risk Level	Risk Type	Definitions	Duty Examples
<i>High</i>	Automatic High Risk, Public Trust	Position has potential for grave impact	Duties are essential to the agency or program mission; An open-ended scope of responsibility and authority exists. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct involvement with diplomatic relations and negotiations • Senior management officials for key government programs • Independent responsibility for planning or approving continuity of government operations • Investigative, law enforcement, and any position that requires handling of highly sensitive or controversial matters (the compromise of which could cause grave harm to the Nation)
	Severe Risk or Impact, Public Trust	Position has potential for exceptionally serious impact	Duties are especially critical to the agency or program mission; A broad scope of responsibility and authority exists. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy-making, policy-determining, and policy-implementing • Higher level management duties or assignments or major program responsibility • Independent spokespersons or non-management position with authority for independent action • Investigative, law enforcement, and any position that requires carrying a firearm • Fiduciary, public contact, or other duties demanding the highest degree of public trust
<i>Moderate</i>	Moderate Risk or Impact, Public Trust	Position has the potential for moderate to serious impact	Duties are considerably important to the agency or program mission; A significant program responsibility exists. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistants to policy development and implementation • Mid-level management duties or assignments • Any position with responsibility for independent or semi-independent action • Delivery of service positions demanding public confidence or trust
<i>Low/Limited</i>	Low/Limited Risk or Impact	Position has potential for limited impact	Duties are of limited relation to an agency or program. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation of policy input is limited to contributing to working groups or providing technical input • Management duties with less than moderate impact on programs • Any position with limited authority for independent action

Note: Adapted from OPM's PDT



4.3. DoD Position Designation and National Security Positions

In a memorandum from the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness (USD P&R), *Implementation of the Position Designation Automated Tool* (May 10, 2011), DoD components are instructed to use the PDT to ensure consistent position sensitivity designation determinations, to capture documentation/rationale behind those determinations, and to identify the background investigation required for positions.

The USD P&R position designation memorandum notes that DoD categorizes national security sensitive positions differently from OPM. DoD identifies Noncritical Sensitive, Critical Sensitive, and Special Sensitive positions as national security positions (the memorandum references the definitions in DoD Manual [DoDM] 5200.2R, *Personnel Security Program*, 1987, as amended 1996), and DoD does not require an additional position risk determination for these positions. The OPM position designation process, however, presents the option to designate position risk level of Noncritical Sensitive positions. The description below for using the PDT describes how DoD component personnel who assign position designations should handle this.

Although it is not necessary to designate position risk level for DoD national security positions (including noncritical sensitive positions), candidates for these positions should still be evaluated against suitability or fitness requirements. At the component level, this evaluation will largely be based on information obtained prior to submitting a request for investigation (e.g., the OF-306, application materials, etc.) because national security background investigations are fully adjudicated by the DoD CAF. If candidates do not meet basic suitability or fitness requirements, they should be removed from the list of eligible candidates and no investigation request submitted.

4.4. Position Designation Tool

The PDT is a web-based tool designed by OPM for use by hiring managers and other personnel for systematic and uniform position designation. The internet location of the PDT at the time this guide was prepared was:

<https://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/position-designation-tool/>

Although websites change over time, the PDT should remain accessible through the OPM homepage (<http://www.opm.gov/>). Currently the PDT is accessible from the homepage by clicking on the *Investigations* link and after arriving on the Investigations page, clicking on the *Position Designation Tool* icon in the middle of the page. Additional training resources are noted on the first screen of the PDT



under the link for *Position Designation*. [Appendix A: Training](#) (page [117](#)) also lists PDT training options.

4.5. Completing the PDT

Completing the PDT assumes that a written job description was produced and that the job/position description provides sufficient information to guide determinations of sensitivity and risk.

The position designation process begins with completion of the Position Designation Record, followed by four major steps. The process is as follows:

- (1) Complete the Position Designation Record (basic information about the position),
- (2) Assess the nature of the position (National Security Requirements and Suitability Requirements),
- (3) Assess potential position impact on service efficiency and integrity (Public Trust Requirements),
- (4) Adjust the position for program scope and level of supervision (for Public Trust, Suitability, and Fitness), and
- (5) Obtain final position designation and investigation requirements.

4.5.1. Complete the Position Designation Record

After arriving at the first page of the PDT (by clicking the button labeled *Position Designation Tool*, reading the overview, and clicking the button labeled *Continue*), the PDT shows five blank boxes that must be completed for the Position Designation Record. The Position Designation Record includes the following fields:

- *Agency*: [The hiring component: Army, Navy, DoD Agency name, etc.]
- *Position Title*: [As provided on the position description]
- *Series and Grade/Pay Band*: [As provided on the position description]
- *Position Description Number*: [As provided on the position description]
- Designator's Name and Title: [Your name and title]

After completing this information, the PDT walks the user through a four-step process. These steps are outlined below.



4.5.2. Step 1: Assess the Nature of the Position

In this section, the user identifies the position's national security sensitivity. Each of the three sensitivity levels includes a subset of options to identify the aspect of the position that requires a given sensitivity level (e.g., an option under Special Sensitive is used to indicate that the position has access to Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI); and an options under Noncritical-Sensitive indicates whether the position has access to Secret, "L," or Confidential classified information).

4.5.2.1. 1A: National Security Requirements of the Position

To begin, the user selects one of the following options:

- Special Sensitive
- Critical Sensitive
- Noncritical Sensitive
- None of the above (Nonsensitive)

After selecting a sensitivity option, the user selects from the subset of options to indicate why the level of sensitivity is appropriate (e.g., access to SCI, access to top secret or "Q" classified information).

Next Step for each of the National Security Sensitivity Options:

- *Special and Critical Sensitive Option:* For positions designated as Special Sensitive or Critical Sensitive, the PDT skips the rest of Step 1 as well as Steps 2 and 3 and advances the user to *Step 4: Final Position Designation and Investigation Assignment*. This occurs because Special and Critical Sensitive designations meet or exceed the requirements of the highest position risk designation.
- *Noncritical Sensitive Option:* If the Noncritical Sensitive option is selected, the PDT advances to *Step 1B: Suitability Requirements*. This occurs because OPM designates Noncritical Sensitive positions in terms of suitability, whereas DoD does not. Therefore, for Noncritical Sensitive DoD positions identified at Step 1A, the user should select 'None of the above' for Step 1B. This action takes the user to *Step 4: Final Position Designation and Investigation Assignment*.
- *None of the above Option for Step 1A:* For positions that result in the selection of 'None of the Above for Step 1A, the PDT advances to *Step 1B: Suitability Requirements*.



4.5.2.2. 1B: Suitability Requirements of the Position

In this section, the PDT provides a list of position duties from which to choose. The list covers a range of duties that are potentially associated with medium and high levels of position risk. Some examples include:

- Government rulemaking, policy, and program responsibility (includes regulation or policy making, directing, implementing, advising)
- Public safety and health regulation, enforcement, and protection
- Control, custody, physical protection and disposition of hazardous materials (e.g. biological select agents and toxins, chemical agents, and nuclear or radiological materials)
- Law Enforcement or criminal justice duties
- Investigation, oversight, and audits of government personnel, programs, and activities (includes access to complete investigative files)
- Adjudication - suitability determinations, or the adjudication of other matters or claims with the potential to cause harm
- Protection of government funds (fiduciary responsibilities or other duties, such as developing statements of work, with the potential for realizing significant personal gain)
- Protection of information technology systems (includes access to or processing of controlled unclassified information, supervision, or control of information technology systems, authority to bypass significant technical and operational security controls for general support systems, or access to major applications. The scope of these duties exceed that of ordinary or routine computer use)
- Protection of personal, private, controlled unclassified or proprietary information (includes access to or processing of personal information such as that protected by the Privacy Act (PA) of 1974, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), financial data, government information that is for "Official Use Only," or privileged information involving the award of contracts, contractor proprietary information, etc.).



Next Step after Indicating the Duties of the Position:

The user should select all duties applicable to the position.

- *Selection of one or more duties:* If one or more duties is/are selected, the user will advance to Step 2: Determine the Potential Impact of the Position on the Efficiency and Integrity of the Service (Public Trust).
- *None of the above:* If none of the duties listed are applicable to the position the user should select 'None of the above'. The user then advances to *Step 4: Final Position Designation and Investigation*.

4.5.3. Step 2: Determine the Potential Impact of the Position on the Efficiency and Integrity of the Service (Public Trust)

In this step, position designation requires an evaluation of the position's potential for adverse impact on the efficiency and integrity of the service. As the level of authority and responsibility of a position increase, the level of risk associated with the position increases, and character and conduct become more significant in deciding whether employment or continued employment would protect the integrity or promote the efficiency of the Federal service. This component of position designation is completely separate from the national security sensitivity designation.

The potential for damage to service integrity and efficiency is always described in terms of the relevant duty. For example, the PDT lists one possible position duty as *Government service delivery, including customer service or public liaison*; it also provides a description of the duty as it applies for each risk type.

The user must select one of the following options of risk type for each duty:

- Automatic High Risk Conditions
- Severe Impact
- Moderate Impact
- Low/Limited Impact
- Not Applicable (N/A)

[Table 3 \(below\)](#) provides an example of the different duty descriptions and corresponding risk type the PDT lists for a particular position duty.



Table 3: Position Risk Categories and Duty Descriptions

Risk Level	Risk Type	Description of Duties
<i>High</i>	Automatic High Risk Conditions	Duties involve customer service responsibilities and/or public liaison that could cause grave damage to individuals, business entities, or government programs or operations nationwide or worldwide
	Severe Impact	Duties involve customer service responsibilities and/or public liaison that could cause severe damage to individuals, business entities, or government programs or operations
<i>Moderate</i>	Moderate Impact	Duties involve customer service responsibilities and/or public liaison that could cause moderate damage to individuals, business entities, or government programs or operations
<i>Low/Limited</i>	Limited Impact	Duties involve customer service responsibilities and/or public liaison that could cause limited damage to individuals, business entities, or government programs or operations

Note: Adapted from OPM’s PDT. Descriptions are those listed in PDT for position duty “Government service delivery, including customer service or public liaison”.

Selecting the appropriate risk type for every duty of a position helps to determine the overall position risk level. The position designation process also uses questions about risk impact, job duties, and amount of supervision of the position to assign a position risk level.

Next Step after Indicating Risk Impact:

The PDT will request a risk impact assessment for each duty selected in the previous step. The user must select one (and only one) risk impact level per duty.

- Automatic High Risk Condition Selection: If all duties listed in Step 2 are Automatic High Risk Conditions, the user advances to Step 4: Final Position Designation and Investigation. No further inquiries on program scope or supervision level occur.
- Severe, Moderate, and Low/Limited Impact Selections: In instances where a duty falls under Severe, Moderate, or Low/Limited Impact, the user advances to *Step 3: Point Adjustment for Program Designator and Level of Supervision*. Further inquiries on program scope and supervision level will occur.

4.5.4. Step 3: Point Adjustment for Program Designation and Level of Supervision

In addition to assessing risk impact, if a duty is *not* Automatic High Risk, two further distinctions are necessary. That is, when a position duty is Severe, Moderate, or Low/Limited Risk Impact, further information is collected. This



information pertains to (1) the scope of the position and (2) its required level of supervision.

Program scope refers to whether a position has world or government-wide, multiple-agency, or agency-specific risk impact. OPM considers the DoD to be an *agency* with specific components (e.g., Army, Navy, etc.); therefore, the DoD should be referenced as an agency when determining program scope. [Table 4](#) shows the three program scope classifications:

Table 4: Adjusting Position Risk Impact for Program Scope

Program Scope	Definition
<i>Worldwide or Government-wide Impact</i>	Program operations have potential to affect the entire government or they have global implications. Misconduct has potential for a broad national or international impact on the US Government. Other countries, individuals, or private entities may be affected.
<i>Multi-agency Impact</i>	Program operations affect more than one agency. Misconduct has the potential to affect multiple government agencies, individuals, or private entities affected by those agencies.
<i>Agency Impact</i>	Program operations affect only one agency. Misconduct has potential for a local impact on the agency, individual, or private entities affected by the agency.

Note: Adapted from OPM’s PDT

The level of position supervision refers to its necessity for independence. The categories used to define position supervision are: limited or no supervision, periodic, ongoing review, and close technical supervision. [Table 5 below](#) defines these categories:

Table 5: Adjusting Position Risk Impact for Supervision Level

Position Supervision	Definition
<i>Limited or No Supervision</i>	Ability to act independently in almost all areas almost all of the time
<i>Periodic, Ongoing Review</i>	Ability to act independently a lot of the time
<i>Close Technical Supervision</i>	Ability to act independently infrequently

Note: Adapted from OPM’s PDT

Next Step after Point Adjustment:

- The user must select one (and only one) option for position scope and level of supervision, respectively.
- After selecting these options, the user moves to Step 4: Final Position Designation and Investigation.



4.5.5. Step 4: Final Position Designation and Investigation

The final screen of the PDT shows the resulting position designation and associated investigation. This information should be printed, attached to the job/position description signed, and provided to the appropriate human resources official. Ultimately, the final designation should be recorded in the Defense Civilian Personnel Management System (DCPDS).

Final Step: Step 4 provides a table displaying the designation tier, investigation type, and security form applicable to the position.

- The user can also enter a written note in an open-ended dialog box.
- Press 'Print Summary' to move on to the next screen.
- The following screen must be printed and signed. The user should retain a copy of this printout for their records in addition to providing a copy to the appropriate human resources official.



Section 5 Pre-Screening

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5.1. Overview

This section describes the pre-screening steps that are part of the suitability and fitness determination process.

Specifically, the section addresses the following topics:

- Basics of pre-screening
- Pre-screening materials and checks
- Determining the pre-screening outcome

5.2. Pre-Screening

The purpose of suitability and fitness pre-screening is to identify—early in the hiring process—any concerns that could disqualify an applicant or appointee from potential employment in a position. Screening for suitability or fitness requirements is a basic hiring prerequisite and is similar to screening for other basic job qualifications (e.g., determining whether someone possesses a required vocational license).

Agencies may assess an applicant’s suitability or fitness at any time during the hiring process, as stated in Title 5: Administrative Personnel, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 731, *Suitability*, as amended, Section 103, *Delegation to agencies* (5 CFR § 731.103). Components should, however, perform basic suitability and fitness pre-screening before initiating a background investigation. This ensures the best use of resources by disqualifying candidates with readily identifiable suitability or fitness issues.



Pre-screening steps are generally handled by component human resources personnel, and the process may begin as soon as the application and other application-related information is received. Suitability and fitness tasks to complete during pre-screening include:

- Review resume, employment application, and/or other hiring materials
- Verify citizenship status
- Review and adjudicate OF-306, *Declaration for Federal Employment*
- Perform checks for debarment

The adjudication that occurs during pre-screening consists of an evaluation of background information against the same suitability and fitness factors of interest during adjudication of the background investigation. These concerns are listed below. [Section 10: Adjudication](#) (page [88](#)) provides more detail about these factors and the adjudication process.

- (1) Misconduct or Negligence in Employment;
- (2) Criminal or Dishonest Conduct;
- (3) Material, Intentional False Statement, Deception or Fraud in Examination or Appointment;
- (4) Refusal to Furnish Testimony as Required;
- (5) Alcohol Abuse;
- (6) Illegal Drug Use;
- (7) Allegiance to the United States;
- (8) Statutory or Regulatory Bar to Employment.

Depending on the process in use at your component, pre-screening may also include checking for previous background investigations, reviewing special agreement checks (SACs) and reviewing completed Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP) entries. These actions should be completed before an investigation request is submitted and as part of the interim determination. These steps are discussed in more detail in later sections of this guide.

5.2.1. Review Hiring Materials

Review of hiring materials such as the resume, hiring application, and responses to pre-employment screening questions (e.g., through USAJobs), typically focuses on assessing applicant qualifications. However, these materials may also include information relevant to suitability or fitness concerns. As an example, the hiring



process may include verification of credentials, job experience, or any aspect of previous positions. This may include verifying education, position title, previous job duties, etc. If a check of this information indicates that they are invalid, it may be necessary to make a suitability referral to the OPM, Federal Investigative Services, Suitability Adjudications Branch for deception or fraud in examination or appointment. That is, if there is any evidence of dishonesty or fraud in the competitive examination or appointment processes, the case should be considered for referral to OPM.

Hiring materials may also be useful for corroborating information provided in other documentation such as the OF-306 or completed e-QIP form. Discrepancies do not necessarily indicate falsification by a candidate, but should be discussed to gather any explanation of the differences.

In addition to typical hiring materials such as resumes and applications, some DoD components gather supplemental information during the hiring process that may have direct relevance to suitability or fitness concerns. For example, if a position involves firearms, the component may require information from the applicant to verify that he or she is eligible to access firearms. The supplemental information could raise suitability concerns (e.g., due to discovery of a domestic violence conviction). Your local or component suitability representative is the best source of information about component-specific hiring materials.

5.2.2. Review and Adjudicate OF-306

All new Federal civilian employees are required to complete an Optional Form (OF)-306, *Declaration for Federal Employment*. The OF-306 collects basic information from applicants and appointees to determine acceptability for federal or federal contract employment. That is, it may be used in the hiring process for both suitability and fitness positions. Information collected includes name, birthdate, social security number, and citizenship. It also asks about selective service registration, military service, criminal history, delinquency on federal debt, and employment of any relatives by the agency or organization to which the form is submitted. A PDF version of the form is available at: http://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/of0306.pdf.

Components may decide at which point in the pre-investigation phase they want applicants to complete the OF-306. For instance, components may provide the form as part of the pre-employment paperwork package, or with the initial, tentative job offer. Components may also send the form as an attachment to an e-mail, an e-mailed link to the online version of the form, or request the applicant complete the form on-site at the human resources or security office. Applicants must return a signed hard copy of the form in person, via fax, or as a scanned e-mail attachment.



Once submitted by an applicant or appointee, designated component officials should review the form for completeness and contact the applicant or appointee to fill in any missing information. They may also perform additional follow-up checks to clarify information (e.g., in cases where the applicant or appointee reported being fired).

The completed OF-306 should be reviewed against the eight suitability factors. These factors are outlined in 5 CFR § 731.202(b), the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook (2008), and in [Section 10: Adjudication](#) (page 88) of this guide. A set of automatically disqualifying criteria, specifically for childcare service positions, is listed in Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1402.5, *Background Checks on Individuals in Child Care Services*, 2015. For suitability and fitness cases with potential issues, component adjudicators may consult with the hiring manager to see if they still wish to consider the candidate, seek additional information to mitigate those issues, or have the component adjudicator make a final determination.

5.2.3. Perform Checks for Debarments

A check for debarment verifies whether the applicant is prohibited from being hired (or retained in) a covered position for a specific period of time. A debarment may be agency-specific or may refer to positions in the federal government as a whole. Government-wide debarments imposed by OPM are documented in OPM's Central Verification System (CVS). If documentation of Government-wide debarment is found and the debarment is still in effect, the applicant may not continue in the hiring process.

If the debarment is agency-specific, it is a judgment decision whether to terminate the hiring process, particularly if it was another government agency that imposed the bar (e.g., Department of Energy, Department of Homeland Security, etc.). If the debarment is neither government-wide nor imposed by DoD, the person is eligible for consideration within DoD. Additionally, if the debarment was position specific, the person may still be eligible for employment in another position with differing job requirements, even if a DoD component imposed the bar.

In addition to OPM or agency-wide debarments, components may have their own debarment process in place. Component-specific debarments may not be as consistently documented, however. Check with your human resources headquarters or suitability representative.

As a first step in checking for debarment, human resources personnel, or other designated component officials, should check CVS for any notice of debarment for the applicant. Options for checking for DoD-wide debarments include the Case Adjudication Tracking System (CATS) Portal or the Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS). While it is possible to document debarment in either CATS or JPAS,



there was previously no requirement to do so, and the information may not be available. In the future, CATS will include options for recording and searching debarment information to aid consistent documentation. In addition, employing activities, HROs, and appropriate designated officials have the authority to debar individuals for up to three years for all or specific covered positions (per DoDI 1400.25, Volume 731), and representatives of those groups may be contacted, as well.

5.2.4. Gather Additional Information

During pre-screening, components should seek to clarify, mitigate, or otherwise gather information that would help identify and resolve suitability or fitness issues before initiating the required background investigation. This includes contacting the applicant or appointee to discuss information in their application package, contacting references to clarify information that has been reported, and requesting additional checks (e.g., Special Agreement Checks [SACs]) from OPM or other designated Investigation Service Provider (ISP). These actions help to ensure an effective interim suitability or fitness determination.

SACs, described in section [7.3.3: Special Agreement Checks](#) (page 63) are single or multiple record checks that a component can use to gather additional information before initiating a background investigation. For example, SACs may be used to verify an applicant or appointee’s citizenship or birth record. When SACs are conducted by OPM, they are automatically transferred to the requesting component through the CATS Portal, granted the component used the security office identifier (SOI) for the DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF) in the Agency Use Block when submitting the Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP). SAC results will also be delivered to the component, if the component has a SOI. However, in order to receive notifications via the CATS Portal, the submitting office must be registered for a CATS Portal account. As a side-note, components should not request an Advance NAC report when they are using a FBI-approved fingerprint machine to electronically transmit fingerprints to accompany an investigation request, as OPM automatically provides SAC results.

5.3. Pre-screening Outcome

Pre-screening should determine, based on initially available information, whether the applicant should be made a conditional offer of employment. Only candidates that appear to meet suitability or fitness requirements should receive such an offer.

5.3.1. Tentative or Conditional Offer of Employment

Generally, components issue offers of employment to applicants after the applicant receives a favorable suitability or fitness determination. However, if component



officials find no suitability or fitness issues during the initial review of an applicant's education background and OF-306, they can provide a tentative offer of employment.

In most cases, the outcome of pre-screening will be favorable; the pre-screening will not identify any derogatory information. If as a result a designated component official extends a conditional or tentative offer of employment, the official must inform the applicant that the final job offer or appointment to the position is conditional upon a final favorable suitability or fitness determination. Until the background investigation is completed and adjudicated, appointment to a position remains conditional. See [Section 6: Initiating Investigations, e-QIP, and Interim Determinations](#) (page 46) for more information on initiating an applicant's background investigation for adjudication and final determination.

5.3.2. Terminate Hiring Process

For those cases where pre-screening identifies derogatory information and the decision is made to terminate the hiring process, the applicant should be informed of the results of pre-screening. The procedures for accomplishing this are at the discretion of the component.

As mentioned above, it is advisable to gather additional information to determine whether it is possible to mitigate derogatory information. If it is not possible to mitigate, the most advisable course is to terminate the hiring process. Note that a withdrawal of an offer is not a suitability action even if it is based on suitability concerns.

In rare cases, a hiring manager or other official may prefer to move forward with the background investigation, despite the presence of unmitigated derogatory information found during pre-screening. The suitability and fitness process allows for this, but the pre-screening results should be carefully documented and additional, relevant information reviewed (e.g., information from the completed background investigation) to determine whether it is appropriate to mitigate the derogatory information. If a decision is made to move forward with the background investigation, derogatory information developed during the course of the pre-screening should be shared with the DoD CAF via the CATS Portal.



Section 6 Initiating Investigations, e-QIP, and Interim Determinations

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6.1. Overview

This section describes the suitability and fitness process steps concerned with requesting a background investigation and making an interim suitability or fitness determination, including:

- Validating need for an investigation
- Requesting an investigation using the Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP) system
- Conducting the proper checks for an interim suitability or fitness determination

6.2. Validate Need

Before requesting an investigation for a candidate, component officials should first verify there is no record of a recent background investigation that meets position requirements. [Section 8: Reciprocity](#) (page 64) describes how to check for records of previously conducted background investigations and determine whether an existing background investigation meets current needs.



6.2.1. Systems of Record: CVS and JPAS

Two primary systems can be used to check for previous investigations: the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) Central Verification System (CVS), and the Department of Defense's (DoD's) Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS). CVS is the OPM-managed federal database used to record adjudicative outcomes for all investigations performed by OPM (on all federal personnel), as well as any government-wide debarments imposed by OPM. DoD uses JPAS primarily to record outcomes for DoD personnel security adjudication results, though some components have stored DoD suitability and fitness adjudication results in this system as well. Additionally, JPAS has a direct link to CVS/Personnel Investigations Processing System (PIPS) that enables users without a CVS account to access investigation information recorded by OPM on both DoD- and non-DoD-affiliated personnel. Users may access JPAS directly or via the Case Adjudication Tracking System (CATS) portal (CATS is the DoD's case management system for investigation and adjudication information).

Designated component officials should first check CVS and/or JPAS to see whether any prior investigations were conducted for an applicant or appointee (this check could also be made when checking for debarment). If accessing the CVS/PIPS Security/Suitability Investigations Index (SII) via JPAS, users should follow the "Display SII" link displayed in JPAS. JPAS or CATS (via the CATS Portal) should be checked to determine whether any suspensions or holds exist on an individual's employment.

6.2.2. Previous Investigation

If an applicant does not have a previous investigation on record in CVS or JPAS, component officials should initiate a new investigation and continue the hiring process. In some instances, however, a JPAS or CVS check will uncover a favorably adjudicated investigation that is equivalent to or greater scope than that currently needed for the position. In such instances, a new investigation may not be warranted. Rather, components may be able to "grant reciprocity" in certain scenarios and proceed through the hiring process without initiating a new investigation. Details on accessing prior records and granting reciprocity are discussed further in [Section 8: Reciprocity](#) (page 64).

6.3. Request Investigation

OPM performs the majority of DoD background investigations and most DoD components use the OPM process for requesting investigations. That is, they make their requests by entering information directly into the OPM e-QIP system, without intermediate steps. This section of the guide describes the process of requesting an investigation using e-QIP. For those DoD components that use other systems, such



as the Army Personnel Security Investigation Portal (PSIP) system for submitting investigation requests, contact your local or component representative (e.g., the Army Personnel Security Investigation Center of Excellence [PSI-CoE]) for instruction.

The level and type of investigation requested is determined by position designation, as described in [Section 4: Position Designation](#) (page 27). For most suitability or fitness investigations, the application will consist of Standard Form 85 (SF 85), *Questionnaire for Non-Sensitive Positions*, and a Tier 1 investigation will be conducted. Previously, OPM accepted hard copy submission of investigation requests and the background investigation application. However, effective October 1, 2013, OPM declared that all Standard Form (SF) 85, 85P, and 85PS investigation requests must be submitted through e-QIP (OPM Federal Investigations Notice 13-05, *Discontinuing Acceptance of Hardcopy Requests for Investigation*; OPM stopped accepting hard copy SF 86 forms in 2011).

Component staff (e.g., human resources or security officers as determined by the component) can request the required investigation for an applicant by accessing e-QIP and completing the Agency Use Block section of the application for background investigations. Individuals who need access to e-QIP and the other required systems must have an appropriate background investigation. The specific investigation required depends on the individual's user role.

In addition to the information in this guide, OPM-FIS INV-15, *Requesting OPM Personnel Investigations* serves as a guide to requesting OPM background investigations. It is currently available through a link on the right side of the following OPM website page:

<https://www.opm.gov/investigations/requesting-investigation-copies/hrsecurity-specialists/>.

6.4. e-QIP

The e-QIP is an OPM application for submitting applicant personal history information and to request background investigations. The e-QIP allows applicants, appointees, and employees to enter, update, and submit their personal, investigative data to the component over a secure internet connection. It also allows component staff to review an applicant's personal history information and to request investigations by submitting the applicant's forms and fingerprints. The following sections provide a general overview of the user roles and functions in e-QIP, as well as the process of initiating investigation requests using the e-QIP system. More detailed information can be found on the OPM website, in the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook, and with the specific resources indicated throughout this section.



6.4.1. User Roles and Functions

There are several user roles component personnel may have. Depending on user duties, responsibilities, and level of investigation, each role is allowed to perform certain e-QIP functions. In addition, component personnel may have multiple roles as long as they meet investigation requirements. The following outlines the e-QIP roles available to component personnel, as well as major duties.

6.4.1.1. Implementation and Setup

DoD Component Administrator. The DoD component e-QIP Administrator serves as the main point of contact for OPM Federal Investigative Services (OPM-FIS), which conducts the investigations that components request in e-QIP. The DoD component e-QIP Administrator is responsible for managing their component's setup in e-QIP, creating and managing groups within e-QIP, and editing Agency Use Block (AUB) templates to suit the specific needs of the component. This role requires at least a Tier 2 or Tier 3 investigation.

User Administrator. The e-QIP User Administrator is responsible for adding and managing component users in e-QIP, based on user duties and level of background investigation. This role requires at least a Single Scope Background Investigation (SSBI) or a Background Investigation (BI). When the tiered investigation system is fully implemented, these will become Tier 5 and Tier 4 investigations, respectively.

6.4.1.2. Investigation Processing

Initiator. The e-QIP Initiator serves as the main point of contact for applicants, appointees, and employees regarding the start of their investigation. Initiators initiate the investigation request, select the form(s) that must be completed, complete the AUB section, attach any required documents, monitor the completion of the investigation form(s) (i.e., Standard Form) in e-QIP, and cancel investigation requests when necessary. Component officials with this role must have at least a Tier 1 investigation.

Reviewer. The e-QIP Reviewer ensures the information in the investigation request is correct and complete before forwarding the request to the Approver. The Reviewer reviews applicant data, accepts or rejects applicant answers, records comments for rejected answers, attaches appropriate documents, confirms applicant-uploaded attachments, indicates fingerprint submission, and rejects any requests that have issues the applicant must address. This role requires at least a Tier 2 or Tier 3 investigation.

Approver. The e-QIP Approver performs a final review of the investigation application and sends the request to OPM-FIS or other designated ISP. The Approver's responsibilities are very similar to those of the Reviewer in that they ensure the investigation request is complete and free of any issues that require



addressing. In some cases, a component official may be both the Reviewer and Approver. This role requires at least a Tier 2 or Tier 3 investigation.

Third Party Data Entry (3PDE) User. The Third Party Data Entry (3PDE) User is a component e-QIP user who has been granted permission by the User Administrator to enter application information into e-QIP on behalf of an applicant, appointee, or employee. They can initiate and complete a Standard Form in e-QIP for those who cannot access e-QIP or for those who do not have a Social Security Number (e.g., foreign nationals). This role requires at least an SSBI.

6.4.1.3. Administration and Support

Program Manager. The e-QIP Program Manager supervises the tasks completed by Initiators, Third Party Data Entry users, Reviewers, and Approvers. They manage, assign/un-assign, and cancel/un-cancel requests, approve authentication requests for component users, and review the status of requested cases. This role requires at least a Tier 2 or Tier 3 investigation.

Business Manager. The e-QIP Business Manager generates statistical reports of DoD component data within e-QIP. The minimum requirement for this role is a Tier 1 investigation.

Component Help Desk User. If DoD component has developed its own e-QIP Help Desk for their applicants, the Component Help Desk User serves as the applicants' point of contact regarding request status updates and authentication question resets. The minimum requirement for this role is a Tier 1 investigation.

6.4.2. e-QIP Instructions and Job Aids

For detailed, step-by-step instructions on how to use e-QIP for initiating, reviewing, approving and submitting investigations, or for entering investigation data, review OPM's web-based training modules and job aids at:

<http://www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/web-based-training/>

Job aids may be accessed by clicking on specific e-QIP application role titles on the left side of the screen. Additional information may be found in OPM-FIS INV-15, *Requesting OPM Personnel Investigations* (April 2012).

Information on additional e-QIP training is located in [A.3](#) (page [118](#)).

6.4.3. Accessing e-QIP

Gaining access to e-QIP involves three steps:

- (1) **Obtain access to the OPM Secure Portal.** Contact your local suitability or fitness representative to connect you with the Component Administrator to



request access. The Component Administrator will send an e-mail invitation that provides instructions on how to register for an OPM Secure Portal account.

Once a requestor completes registration and their account is approved by their agency's portal administrator, they may log in to the OPM Secure Portal at <https://opmis.xsp.org/>.

- (2) **Obtain an e-QIP agency user account.** A requestor must also obtain an e-QIP agency user account through their agency's e-QIP User Administrator, who creates the account and assigns specific e-QIP roles based on the requestor's assigned duties and level of investigation.
- (3) **Configure your web browser.** e-QIP operates on most major web browsers. All users should enable TLS 1.0, and any additional browser settings, indicated in the instructions; instructions on the site provide more detail. The error message "The page cannot be displayed" indicates the need to configure your browser.

Once access to e-QIP has been established, users may log in at any time to perform tasks related to the investigation application and request. To log in to e-QIP, users must sign in to the OPM Secure Portal and click on the "Link to e-QIP Agency" button on the right side of the screen. If logging in for the first time, users must enter their Social Security Number, answer their "Golden Questions" (used for authentication), and create a new Username and Password. All other users enter their Username and Password.

Detailed, step-by-step instructions for gaining access, configuring browser settings, and logging into e-QIP may be found in the "Accessing and Navigating in e-QIP" training module, provided by OPM:

http://www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/web-based-training/courseware/e-Qip_AccessingNavigating/index.html#).

6.4.4. Initiating a Request

The purpose of this step is to establish an investigation request within e-QIP. Initiating a request for an investigation involves identifying the applicant, providing demographic data for the applicant, assigning the request to a group (if applicable), indicating the type of investigation being requested, and entering other relevant data in the AUB section. A component official must be assigned the Initiator role by their component's User Administrator before they can perform this function.

Before initiating a request, you must have the following information for each applicant:

- Social Security Number (SSN)



- Full Name
- Date of Birth (DOB)
- Place of Birth (POB)
- Personal Contact Information
- Standard Form (SF) to complete

Initiators also have the option to mass initiate investigation requests for large numbers of applicants at the same time, provided they require the same Standard Form, component group, and AUB data. This saves time and effort in initiating requests, as the AUB data will only need to be entered once.

Detailed instructions on how to initiate a new investigation request, complete the AUB section, mass initiate requests, and perform related tasks are found in the “Initiating Requests” e-QIP training module provided by OPM (http://www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/web-based-training/courseware/e-Qip_InitiatingRequests/index.html#).

Guidance on attaching documents to requests, submitting fingerprints, as well as other tasks that can be performed by Initiators, Approvers, or Reviewers is found in the “Reviewing and Approving Requests in e-QIP” module (http://www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/web-based-training/courseware/e-Qip_ReviewingAndApproving/index.html).

6.4.5. Completing the Agency Use Block

The AUB allows components to provide specific request information to OPM such as position sensitivity and risk level, access and eligibility, and the component office requesting the investigation. The AUB also requires certain information and varies depending on the Standard Form being used. Instructions and codes for completing the AUB can be found at:

<https://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/requesting-opm-personnel-investigations/#url=7.0>

[Table 6](#), [below](#), was adapted from that document and shows the type of form to use as well as the investigation to request based on position designation. Questions regarding component-specific AUB fields or codes should be directed to the DoD component e-QIP Administrator or component suitability or fitness representative. AUB codes may also change with the introduction of the new Federal Investigative Standards (FIS). Check the OPM website for updated guidance on requesting personnel investigations.



Table 6: Suitability and Fitness Investigation Types and AUB Codes

Form Type	Position Designation	Investigation Type	Type Code
SF-85	Non-Sensitive Position Low Risk or HSPD-12 Credential (with no other designation)	Tier 1	63
SF-85P	Moderate Risk Public Trust Position (No national security sensitivity)	Tier 2S	57
	Reinvestigation for Moderate Risk Public Trust Position (No national security sensitivity)	Tier 2RS	58
	High Risk Public Trust Position (No national security sensitivity)	Background Investigation (BI); future Tier 4	25
	Reinvestigation for High Risk Public Trust Position (No national security sensitivity)	Periodic Reinvestigation (PRI); future Tier 4	11

Adapted from OPM-FIS INV 15, *Requesting OPM Personnel Investigations*.

6.4.5.1. Receiving Office Identifiers

Once a check or investigation is conducted, OPM-FIS or the designated ISP that conducted it routes the completed check or report of investigation (ROI) to the requesting agency (indicated in the AUB of the investigation request) for adjudication. There are three types of receiving office identifiers that determine where OPM-FIS sends the results.

Security Office Identifier (SOI). This is one type of identifying number assigned by the OPM Federal Investigations Processing Center (OPM-FIPC) whenever OPM-FIS conducts an investigation for an agency. It is used to identify the agency security office that is responsible for receiving a completed ROI. The SOI allows authorized, OPM-approved SOI officials to obtain detailed case information from the OPM-FIPC.

Submitting Office Number (SON). This is another type of identifying number assigned by OPM-FIPC when OPM-FIS conducts an investigation for an agency. It is used to identify the component office that has initiated or requested an investigation. A submitting component office may have multiple SONs, which authorized officials within a submitting office may use to obtain general information from OPM-FIPC on the status of a background investigation.

Unit Identification Code (UIC). Each military unit within the DoD possesses a unique identifying code (UIC). Though OPM does not use UICs to identify or reference investigations, DoD military activities may identify the UIC for internal use or to specify which of their units has submitted an investigation request to OPM.



Components submitting an investigation request in e-QIP for nonsensitive, public trust positions should do so using the appropriate component SON, along with the SOI “DODS” (DoD Memorandum, August 29, 2013). “DODS” is the DoD CAF SOI for suitability (nonsensitive, public trust) investigations. This ensures that OPM delivers the completed ROI to the DoD CAF for adjudication. The SOI may be used in place of the SON in the SON block of the standard form if the SOI and SON are the same office.

6.4.6. Previous Investigations

OPM will not conduct an investigation if an individual has an equivalent or higher level investigation on record and it was completed within 24 months of the date of the new request. If an investigation is already on file, an error message will appear in e-QIP and inform the user that there is an investigation available and that OPM, upon request, may send a copy of the existing investigation to the requesting office for component adjudication. Within the investigative package OPM will provide the previous case number, the date the previous case was closed, and which DoD component requested it.

If a previous investigation exists, but was conducted more than 24 months before the request, the error message will not generate. OPM will process the investigation request, but will send copies of all prior investigations along with the one most recently requested.

If a component requests an investigation and there is a lower level investigation currently in process, OPM will schedule the newly requested, higher level investigation. It will also contact the component to determine whether the lower level investigation should be discontinued. Otherwise, if the investigations were requested by different DoD components, they will be run concurrently.

6.4.7. General Applicant Assistance

Components may encounter difficulties with assisting applicants completing e-QIP. These difficulties can concern a variety of issues, such as applicants’ limited computer skills or access, assistance for non-native English speakers, and timeliness and thoroughness of e-QIP completion. Guidance on assisting applicants filling out their Standard Form (SF) in e-QIP may be found in the “Solutions to Common Issues” e-QIP training module provided by OPM (http://www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/web-based-training/courseware/e-Qip_SolutionsToCommonIssues/index.html).

Components may differ in the issues they encounter with applicants using e-QIP, as well as the strategies used to overcome them. It is best to consult with the appropriate component human resources or security office to determine the appropriate troubleshooting procedures.



6.5. Interim Determination

The need to perform an interim suitability or fitness determination is relatively new and supports the requirement that persons receiving a Common Access Card (CAC) undergo identity validation and be assessed against other credentialing standards. However, even individuals that do not receive a CAC should get an interim suitability or fitness determination, where practicable. Interim determinations are an important part of an effective pre-screening process and essential for identifying and resolving suitability or fitness issues early in the application process.

The need for interim suitability determinations is documented in DoD Instruction 1400.25 v731 (2012) *DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Suitability and Fitness Adjudication For Civilian Employees*. The standards for issuing a CAC on an interim basis are defined in DoD Instruction 5200.46, *DoD Investigative and Adjudicative Guidance for Issuing the Common Access Card (CAC)* (September 9, 2014).

6.5.1. Background Checks for Interim Determinations

Information from the following sources should inform interim suitability or fitness determinations:

- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) fingerprint check
- Optional Form (OF) 306
- Security forms and investigation information available from OPM CVS, or other Federal agencies.

For individuals who will receive a CAC, the background check requirements for an interim determination are similar:

- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) fingerprint results **or**
- Advance National Agency Check (NAC), **and**
- Two identity source documents.

Before finalizing a favorable interim determination, component staff should also initiate the background investigation in e-QIP, if not already initiated. The investigation must be of equal to or greater scope than a Tier 1 investigation.

6.5.1.1. Advanced NAC or Fingerprint Checks

An advanced NAC or advanced FBI fingerprint check can be requested through the AUB of the standard form in e-QIP. Instructions on how to complete the AUB to request advanced NAC or fingerprint results are in OPM-FIS INV-15, *Requesting OPM Personnel Investigations*.



Alternatively, a fingerprint-only SAC may be requested before initiating an investigation request. This fulfills the requirement for FBI fingerprint results for CAC issuance. Refer to OPM-FIS INV-15 for more information on fingerprint-only SACs. Fingerprint-only SACs are submitted electronically via LiveScan or CardScan technology to the OPM-FIS Fingerprint Transaction System (FTS) and are checked against FBI national criminal history fingerprint files. Results of SACs are provided to the associated SOI(s).

6.5.1.2. Optional Additional Checks

A component may request additional checks from OPM or other designated ISP to assist in conferring an interim suitability or fitness determination. Such requests are intended to identify and resolve any suitability or fitness issues before the required background investigation is initiated. They do not, however, constitute a complete investigation.

6.5.2. Making an Interim Determination

The information collected from the background checks should be reviewed to identify any suitability or fitness issues. A favorable interim determination should only be made in those cases where no derogatory information was identified, unless your component's risk management strategy allows for mitigation of minor issues. In some cases, components may extend a final offer of employment based on a favorable interim suitability or fitness determination. This is because it may take several months to complete a background investigation. In these cases, the selected candidate may enter on duty following the favorable interim determination and receive a final suitability or fitness determination once the investigation is completed.

If derogatory information is identified and not mitigated, the offer of employment may be withdrawn. In some cases, it may be an option to request a background investigation and wait for the results of that investigation to gather additional information about any concerns. If this route is followed, the applicant is not eligible for a CAC until receiving a final favorable determination.

If the adjudicator deems the applicant unsuitable for federal employment, the component adjudicator may initiate a debarment (using the debarment guidelines found in the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook) or refer the case to OPM, depending on the seriousness of the issues present. Such OPM referrals are required regardless of whether the offer of employment has been withdrawn. If the component still wishes to consider a case despite an unfavorable interim determination, it should initiate an investigation via e-QIP and continue the hiring process.



Per DoDI 1400.25 v731, every component should have procedures that allow individuals to provide clarifying or mitigating information before a final suitability or fitness determination is made.

Regardless of whether a favorable or unfavorable interim determination is made, all applicants will be informed that their appointment is subject to a final favorable suitability or fitness determination. If the results of the background investigation result in a negative final determination, the individual will not be able to retain the position. This is discussed in greater detail in [Section 11: Suitability Actions and Appeals](#) (page [103](#)).

6.5.2.1. Referral to OPM

If serious issues are identified, it may be necessary to refer a case to OPM. In particular, if at any point during the hiring process a suitability case is found to have evidence of material, intentional false statements, deception, or fraud in examination or appointment, the component must report it to OPM. OPM has the authority to make final suitability determinations and take the appropriate suitability action in such cases. For fitness cases, the component has the authority to make the final determination and take the appropriate fitness action.

6.5.2.2. Child and Youth Services Positions and Interim Determinations

Child and Youth Services positions are eligible for interim determinations, as are other nonsensitive positions. However, individuals who enter on duty in a child or youth services position with only an interim determination and favorable installation records checks must be within sight and under the supervision of a component employee who has a favorably adjudicated background investigation (minimum of a Tier 1 investigation with additional State Criminal History Repository checks). This is required until all state and other criminal history checks are complete as well as the Tier investigation and both have adjudicated. DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1402.5, *Background Checks on Individuals in DoD Child Care Services Programs*, outlines these requirements.

6.5.3. Documenting Interim Determinations

There are no formal requirements or procedures for recording interim determinations. However, components are encouraged to document them locally as part of the suitability adjudication record. You may refer to the DCPAS Suitability Case Management Reference Guide in approaching case documentation.



Section 7 Investigative Requirements

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7.1. Overview

This section describes suitability and fitness investigative requirements and the various types of investigations.

This section addresses the following key topics:

- Determining investigative requirements
- Types of background investigations

7.2. Need for Investigation

Appointment to virtually all DoD civilian positions requires a favorably adjudicated background investigation (as do most positions in federal government). It is required in 5 CFR § 731 that persons appointed to covered positions must undergo an investigation by OPM or by an agency conducting investigations under delegated authority from OPM. Additionally, 5 CFR § 731.104 requires an investigation for appointment to a position when 1) the position requires a higher level of investigation than was previously conducted, or 2) new information related to the individual’s appointment arises that calls into question their suitability or fitness for employment in that particular position.

For civilian positions that are not national security sensitive (i.e., nonsensitive positions), an investigation appropriate for a suitability or fitness determination is typically required. Before requesting an investigation, it is important to verify the answers to the following questions:

- Does the position require a background investigation?
- If the position does require a background investigation, what type of investigation is appropriate?



- Given background investigation requirements, is a new investigation needed or does a prior equivalent investigation already exist?

Individuals who have worked for the federal government previously may have already had a background investigation. If so, the next step is to determine whether the previous investigation meets the requirement of the new position and may be reciprocally accepted. This concept is called reciprocity and is described briefly below and in more detail in [Section 8: Reciprocity](#) (page 64).

7.2.1. Reciprocal Acceptance of a Previous Investigation

In many cases, a suitability or fitness determination made on a previous investigation may be accepted if the adjudication decision was (a) based on an equivalent or greater scoped investigation and (b) adjudicated using standards equivalent to the standards established by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for suitability determinations. If these conditions are met, reciprocity applies regardless of the nature of the previous position. Reciprocity can typically be granted when an individual enters into a new position that has similar or lesser suitability or fitness investigation requirements than the previous position and if there are no issues that conflict with the new position's core duties.

Component officials (e.g., human resources or security personnel) must check an authoritative source before granting reciprocity. The Central Verification System (CVS) is the authoritative source for suitability and fitness determinations, but it may be possible to access CVS information through the Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS) or the Case Adjudication Tracking System (CATS). Refer to [Section 8: Reciprocity](#) for detailed information on granting reciprocity.

7.2.2. Positions Not Requiring a Background Investigation

A few DoD positions do not require a background investigation. These include positions that are intermittent, seasonal, per diem, or temporary, totaling no more than 180 days per year in either a single continuous appointment or series of appointments, unless the position requires logical access to federally-controlled information systems, or it involves the care and well-being of children. However, the employing agency should conduct any necessary checks to ensure an individual's suitability or fitness for employment. These checks may include prior employment records, criminal records, and personal and professional references, in addition to other checks as appropriate.

7.3. Types of Background Investigations and Checks

The OPM Suitability Processing Handbook (2008) explains that the level of investigation required for a position depends on the responsibilities associated with



the position. The type of investigation conducted is ultimately based on the position’s risk level and national security requirements. As described in [Section 4: Position Designation](#) (page 27), the position designation process determines the type of background investigation required for a position. Additional checks or investigations may also be requested as deemed necessary by an agency or component. A brief description of these investigations and the specific checks included in each is provided in [Appendix B: Background Investigations](#) (page 122).

NOTE: The terminology used in this section is that of the current Federal Investigative Standards (FIS). The federal government is currently in the process of implementing the revised FIS (approved in 2012), which may use different terminology. [Appendix B: Background Investigations](#) incorporates information from the revised FIS.

7.3.1. Initial Investigations

The minimum initial investigations for low, moderate, and high risk positions are the Tier 1, Tier 2, and Background Investigation (BI), respectively (see [Table 7](#)). Background investigations for low risk positions (i.e., nonsensitive positions) are based on Standard Form 85 (SF-85), *Questionnaire for Non-Sensitive Positions*. Moderate and high risk public trust positions with no national security sensitivity require Standard Form 85P (SF-85P), *Questionnaire for Public Trust Positions*. Until August 2010, the NACI (now Tier 1) was used for a broad range of positions and conducted with both the SF-85 and SF-85P, but OPM released a memorandum restricting the NACI to low risk or non-sensitive positions and Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12) credentialing based on the SF-85 (OPM, 2010).

Table 7: Suitability and Fitness – Minimum Initial Investigations

Position/Risk Designation	Investigation
High Risk Public Trust (No national security sensitivity; future Tier 4)	Background Investigation (BI)
Moderate Risk Public Trust (No national security sensitivity; future Tier 2)	Tier 2
Low Risk Public Trust (Nonsensitive; future Tier 1)	Tier 1 and Tier 1 with State Criminal History Repository checks

Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1400.25 v731 and 5 CFR § 731 indicate that the necessary background investigation for a public trust position should be requested from OPM or an authorized Investigation Service Provider (ISP) before appointment, but no later than 14 calendar days after placement in the position. For appointees or employees that undergo an upgrade to a higher position risk level due to promotion, demotion, reassignment, or the position’s risk level being upgraded, the required investigation for that risk level should also be initiated



within 14 calendar days of the risk level change. During this time, the appointee or employee may still occupy the position.

There is no limit on the time OPM or other designated ISP has to conduct the required background investigation for an applicant who has been appointed to a position. Additionally, employees are not subject to a new or extended probationary or trial period because their appointment is subject to an investigation. In all cases, applicants and appointees must be informed that their appointment is subject to a final favorable suitability or fitness determination.

7.3.2. Reinvestigations

Suitability and fitness reinvestigations are currently not required for low risk (nonsensitive positions), but should be conducted for individuals in moderate and high risk public trust positions at least once every 5 years to ensure continued employment suitability (Executive Order [E.O.] 13488; DoDI 1400.25 v731). As previously stated, reinvestigations also must be conducted if position requirement changes indicate a higher level of investigation or new information results in suitability concerns. Standards for reinvestigations in suitability cases are determined by the Director of OPM.

Authority to conduct reinvestigations may come from:

- Computer Security Act of 1987
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular No. A-130 Revised (issued November 20, 2000)
- Agency-specific regulations
- Written policy

The type of reinvestigation depends on the level of position risk. For example:

- High Risk Public Trust = Periodic Reinvestigation (PRI) [minimum]
- Moderate Risk Public Trust = Tier 2RS

[Table 8](#) shows the type and frequency of reinvestigation to conduct for specific position designations. Note that variations in reinvestigations may be requested from OPM to support agency requirements for specific positions, as necessary.

Table 8: Suitability and Fitness Reinvestigation Assignment and Frequency

Vetting	Position/Risk Designation	Reinvestigation	Frequency of Reinvestigation
<i>Suitability</i>	High Risk Public Trust (Any level of position)	Single-Scope Background Investigation – Periodic Reinvestigation (SSBI-PR) or	Every 5 years



Vetting	Position/Risk Designation	Reinvestigation	Frequency of Reinvestigation
	sensitivity)	Phased Periodic Reinvestigation (PPR)	
	High Risk Public Trust (No national security sensitivity)	Periodic Reinvestigation (PRI)	Every 5 years
	Moderate Risk Public Trust (No national security sensitivity)	Tier 2RS	Every 5 years
	Low Risk Public Trust (Nonsensitive)	Tier 1 and Tier 1 with State Criminal History Repository checks	N/A ¹
<i>Personnel Security</i>	Special Sensitive – Top Secret/SCI	Single-Scope Background Investigation – Periodic Reinvestigation (SSBI-PR) or Phased Periodic Reinvestigation (PPR)	Every 5 years
	Critical Sensitive – Top Secret	Single-Scope Background Investigation – Periodic Reinvestigation (SSBI-PR) or Phased Periodic Reinvestigations (PPR)	Every 5 years
	Noncritical Sensitive - Secret	Tier 3R	Every 10 years

¹ Currently no reinvestigation requirement exists for the Tier 1; however, components may periodically conduct local checks (e.g., Defense Central Index of Investigations [DCII], Installation Record Check [IRC]).

A component may choose to request additional investigations before a scheduled reinvestigation, in order to 1) determine access to classified information or eligibility to hold a sensitive position, or 2) meet investigative requirements as a result of a change in risk level. If a separate investigation is conducted before the next required reinvestigation, and that investigation meets or exceeds the requirements of a public trust position, a new public trust reinvestigation is not required. Instead, the separate investigation restarts the cycle for a public trust reinvestigation.

Suitability concerns uncovered in a reinvestigation should be evaluated according to the guidelines discussed in [Section 10: Adjudication](#) (page 88) of this guide. An adverse action may be initiated under 5 CFR § 752 if a suitability concern is discovered and the subject is an employee as defined by Title 5 of the United States



Code (U.S.C.), Section 7511 (5 U.S.C. 7511). This is separate from a suitability action under the procedures of 5 CFR § 731.

7.3.3. Special Agreement Checks

As described in [Section 6: Initiating Investigations, e-QIP, and Interim Determinations](#) (page 46), OPM offers a number of other background checks, in addition to the various types of background investigations. These checks are known as Special Agreement Checks (SACs) and are single or multiple record checks that may be requested by a component in order to gather additional information prior to initiating a background investigation.

Components should continue to submit Special Agreement Checks (SACs) to OPM through the Federal Investigative Services (FIS) using their component SON and SOI. This ensures that OPM delivers the completed SAC directly to the component for filing, review, and/or action. Completed SACs are sent directly to the component upon completion and later are electronically transmitted to the DoD CAF with the case ROI. Note however that only components with a SOI will receive SAC results. Otherwise, SAC results are sent to and made available by the DoD CAF on the CATS Portal. Results via the CATS Portal are only made available to users registered for Portal access associated with the requesting SON.

A current listing of the SACs offered by the OPM-FIS can be found on the OPM website under the Federal Investigations Notices:

<http://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/federal-investigations-notices/>



Section 8 Reciprocity

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8.1. Overview

This section covers reciprocity concepts and the process for reciprocal acceptance of prior suitability and fitness determinations, including the following key topics:

- The criteria used to grant reciprocity
- Conditions under which reciprocity should not be granted
- How to check for previous investigations or determinations

8.2. Reciprocity

Reciprocity refers to the acceptance of a prior, favorable suitability or fitness determination, without requiring additional information. The requirement for suitability and fitness reciprocity was initially defined in Executive Order 13488, 2009. OPM provided additional guidance for suitability and fitness reciprocity in a memorandum from the director, *Guidance on Implementing Executive Order 13488*, 2009.

The primary source of information about previously rendered suitability and fitness determinations is the OPM Central Verification System (CVS). It may also be possible to access this information through the Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS) or the Case Adjudication Tracking System (CATS) Portal. [Section 8.3: Checking for Previous Determinations](#) (page [67](#)) provides more information on this process.



Granting reciprocity is an essential step in the suitability or fitness adjudication process as it can save considerable investigative time and effort, as well as cost savings to the DoD. If a previous favorable determination can be reciprocally accepted, that means that it will not be necessary to perform an entirely new investigation and adjudication.

8.2.1. Reciprocity Criteria

The primary criteria for deciding whether to reciprocally accept a previous suitability or fitness determination are:

- (1) The determination was based on an investigation equivalent to or more comprehensive than the investigation required for the new position,
- (2) The determination used adjudication criteria from, or equivalent to, those in Title 5: Administrative Personnel, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 731, Suitability, as amended, (5 CFR § 731).

8.2.2. Conditions That Do Not Support Reciprocity

A determination should not be reciprocally accepted if any of the following are true:

- (1) There was a break in service between the prior position and the new position greater than 24 months,
- (2) There are issues in the individual's background that are incompatible with the core duties of the new position, or
- (3) New information calls into question the applicant's character or conduct.

8.2.3. Additional Factors

Reciprocity must be based on final suitability or fitness determinations. If a previous investigation is recorded without an adjudication determination, the component may choose to request a copy of that investigation and use it to make a determination. Agencies have the right to request and receive an individual's investigative file from OPM or other designated Investigation Service Provider (ISP).

Also, if issues are present in the case, and there has not been a break in service, the component may request a copy of the investigation to adjudicate the issues in the context of the new position.

The following are some examples of circumstances in which a previous investigation and adjudication determination may be reciprocally accepted:



- Appointment or conversion to an appointment if the person has been serving continuously with the agency for at least 1 year in one or more positions subject to investigation;
- Transfer to a new position, provided the person has been serving continuously for at least 1 year in a covered position subject to investigation;
- Transfer or appointment from an excepted service position to a new position, provided the person has been serving continuously for at least 1 year in a position where the person has been determined fit for appointment based on criteria equivalent to the factors used in determining suitability (Title 5: Administrative Personnel, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 731, *Suitability*, as amended, Section 202, *Notice of proposed action* [5 CFR § 731.202]);
- Appointment to a new position from a position as an employee working as a Federal Government contract employee, provided the person has been serving continuously for at least 1 year in a job where a Federal agency determined the contract employee was fit to perform work on the contract based on criteria equivalent to the suitability factors listed in 5 CFR § 731.202; or
- Appointment to a new position where there has been a break in service of less than 24 months, and the service immediately preceding the break was in a covered position, an excepted service position, or a contract employee position described by the preceding criteria.

In summary, if the previous favorably adjudicated investigation meets or exceeds the investigative requirements of the new position and used criteria equivalent to those in 5 CFR § 731, the gaining component need not request a new investigation or make a new determination. If no break in employment occurred, it does not matter how long ago the previous favorable suitability or fitness determination was made.

8.2.4. Reciprocity for Investigative Elements

Suitability and fitness policy allows for reciprocal acceptance of investigative elements (i.e., background checks conducted as part of the investigation), in addition to acceptance of entire investigations. If an individual enters a new position that requires a higher investigation tier (see [Section 4: Position Designation](#) on page [27](#)), reciprocity should be granted for investigative elements whose results are not expected to change from a prior investigation (e.g., education degree). Other investigative elements from the higher investigation tier should still be requested. This aspect of policy will be most helpful once the 2012 Investigative Tiers are fully implemented.

As an example, if the gaining component requests the optional Enhanced Subject Interview (ESI) for a moderate risk, noncritical sensitive position, it may grant



reciprocity once the ESI is complete. If the gaining component receives new information that questions the individual's suitability or fitness, or discrepant information when compared to that of a previous investigation, it should request an Expandable Focused Investigation (EFI) to address the area of concern.

8.3. Checking for Previous Determinations

The primary repository for suitability and fitness determinations is CVS, which is an OPM database that houses the investigation and adjudication information for multiple federal agencies. There are two DoD systems that also may be useful for checking for prior determinations, depending on level of user access. JPAS is the DoD system of record for personnel security determinations and was recently assigned responsibility for holding suitability and fitness determinations. JPAS shares information with CVS and offers options for checking the CVS database to certain types of users. The DoD CATS portal is another system that may offer the option for checking for determinations recorded in CVS. [Appendix C: Checking for Previous Determinations](#) (page [126](#)) provides additional information about using each of these systems.

To meet the requirement for reciprocity, designated component officials (usually human resources or security office personnel) should check the authoritative databases to see whether a prior final adjudication determination was recorded for the applicant. Most commonly, the individual's full name and Social Security Number (SSN) are used to locate any available investigation and determination records. The designated component officials should acquire this information from the individual in advance. If a prior adjudication is identified, the component official should apply the reciprocity criteria and ensure that none of the conditions that do not support reciprocity are true.

If no current investigation exists for an individual, the component should proceed through the hiring process, including initiation of a background investigation using the Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP). The examination of reciprocity is merely an initial step to determine an individual's suitability or fitness; a decision not to grant reciprocity does not reflect a negative suitability or fitness determination.

8.3.1. CVS Checks Conducted by OPM

OPM also conducts checks of CVS when an investigation is initiated. This check is described in OPM Federal Investigations Notice (FIN) 12-04, *Security and Suitability Investigations Index (SII), Central Verification System (CVS), National Agency Check (NAC) Item* (February 9, 2012) and in the following section. The OPM CVS check can also affect the results of an investigation request.



OPM will not schedule an investigation if an equal or higher level investigation is on file and was completed within 24 months of the date of the new request. Instead, e-QIP will generate an error message to inform the user that there is an investigation available and that it may be requested for review.

If an equal or higher level investigation was conducted more than 24 months prior to the request, no error message will appear. OPM will continue in processing the request, but will send copies of all prior investigations on file along with the investigation that was most recently requested.

If a component requests an investigation at a higher level than one that is already in progress, OPM will schedule the newly requested, higher level investigation. OPM will also contact the requesting component to determine whether the lower level investigation should be cancelled. If the investigations were requested by different DoD components, they will be conducted concurrently.

8.3.2. OPM SIIC Check

The OPM CVS check appears as “SIIC” on the Case Closing Transmittal (CCT) form that is included in the completed investigation packet. The CCT provides a summary of the investigative findings, including a list of the checks conducted.

If the SIIC check finds a previous investigation, the report for the check will list the contact information of the prior adjudicating agency and one of the results listed in [Table 9](#). If no CVS data exist for an individual, the SIIC will appear with a “NO RECORD” result on the CCT.

For some components, a separate entity may inform them of existing investigations. For example, the Army’s Personnel Security Investigation Center of Excellence (PSI-CoE) will contact the applicant and human resources office if OPM already has an equivalent investigation on file.



Table 9: CVS NAC Item (SIIC) Results Found on the CCT

SIIC NAC Item Results	
<i>AA: Acceptable Attached</i>	CVS has an investigation record of the individual, but no unfavorable information exists (i.e., there is a favorably adjudicated investigation with no issues)
<i>RF: Referred</i>	CVS has an OPM investigation record of the individual, and any of the following applies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fingerprint results are classifiable-record (CR): see the FBIF/FBFN item on the investigation • Fingerprint results are classifiable-record in a closed, unacceptable, discontinued, or incomplete investigation in the individual’s investigative record: see the FBIF/FBFN item on the investigation • A closed investigation has the seriousness code A, B, C, D, E, H, J, K, L, O, P, Q, R, or W: see the SIIF item on the investigation
<i>IS: Issues</i>	CVS has an investigation record for the individual, and any of the following applies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a “please call” alert on an adjudication • A current OPM debarment exists • A clearance has one of the following statuses: revoked, suspended, or denied • A clearance has an exception reported (i.e., bond amendment, deviation, condition, waiver) • No exceptions exist, but the adjudicating agency indicates a “please call” or notes foreign immediate family members when reporting a clearance to CVS

Note: Adapted from OPM FIN 12-04, “Security and Suitability Investigations Index (SII), Central Verification System (CVS), National Agency Check (NAC) Item” (February 9, 2012).

8.4. Granting Reciprocity

The steps for determining whether to grant reciprocity include the following:

- (1) Check CVS through CVS, JPAS, or CATS.
 - (a) If the check of CVS finds a previous investigation, and the investigation was favorably adjudicated, continue with the next step of the **reciprocity** process.
 - (b) If the check of CVS finds a previous investigation, but the investigation was NOT favorably adjudicated, decide whether to request a new investigation, call the agency to determine the issues, or discontinue the hiring process.
 - (c) If the check of CVS does not find a previous investigation, request an appropriate new investigation and continue with the **hiring** process.



- (2) Evaluate whether the previous investigation meets the needs of the new position. (Only perform this step if the conditions in Step 1a were met.)
 - (a) If the investigation meets the needs of the position, continue with the next step of the **reciprocity** process.
 - (b) If the investigation does not meet the needs of the position, request an appropriate new investigation and continue with the **hiring** process.

The Position Designation step of the suitability process determines the type of investigation required. The Tier 1 investigation is the most common type of investigation for DoD positions that require only a suitability or fitness determination (e.g., they do not also require a personnel security determination). Almost all other investigation types meet or exceed the standards of the Tier 1 and can be accepted in its place.

More information about which investigations can be reciprocally accepted for suitability or fitness determinations can be found at:

<https://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/federal-investigations-notice/2015/fin-15-03.pdf>

- (3) Determine whether there has been any break in service. (Only perform this step if the conditions in Step 2a were met.)
 - (a) If there was no break in service, continue with the next step of the **reciprocity** process.
 - (b) If there was a break in service, but it was less than 24 months, continue with the next step of the **reciprocity** process.
 - (c) If there was a break in service, and it was more than 24 months, request an appropriate new investigation and continue with the **hiring** process.
- (4) Evaluate whether the favorable adjudication was made using 5 CFR § 731 or equivalent criteria. (Only perform this step if the conditions in Step 3a or 3b were met.)
 - (a) If the answer is yes, the adjudication used 5 CFR § 731 or equivalent criteria, continue with the **reciprocity** process.
 - (b) If the answer is no, the adjudication did not use 5 CFR § 731 or equivalent criteria, but the investigation meets the requirements of the position, request the investigation and adjudicate it using 5 CFR § 731 criteria.
- (5) Evaluate whether the investigation identified any issues. (Only perform this step if the conditions in Step 4a were met.)



- (a) If the answer is no, the investigation did not identify any issues, reciprocally accept the favorable adjudication, thereby **granting reciprocity**. Continue with the hiring process.
 - (b) If the answer is yes, the investigation did identify issues, continue with the next step of the **reciprocity** process.
- (6) Request the investigation and evaluate whether the issues identified are of concern to the component or incompatible with the core duties of the job. (Only perform this step if the conditions in Step 5b were met)
- (a) If the answer is no, the issues are not of concern in light of either the component's risk management approach or the core duties of the position. Reciprocally accept the favorable adjudication, thereby granting reciprocity. Continue with the hiring process.
 - (b) If the answer is yes, the issues are of concern. Adjudicate the investigation using 5 CFR § 731 criteria. It may also be necessary to request additional checks from OPM, such as an expanded subject interview.

8.4.1. Notes

If no break in employment occurred, it does not matter how long ago the previous favorable suitability or fitness determination was made.

If the component decides to grant reciprocity, the hiring process should continue until the position is filled. Although there is currently no way to indicate in CVS or JPAS that an agency has granted reciprocity, future versions of CATS, which interfaces with CVS, will allow users to record reciprocity decisions. Alternatively, components may note in local employment files (e.g., the suitability record/case file) that reciprocity was granted for an individual.

If a component decides not to grant reciprocity for a current investigation with a previous favorable determination, a new adjudication is required on the investigation on file. If no new issues exist in the investigative file and the individual has had no break in service, the component should NOT initiate a new investigation. Rather, it should make a new adjudication on the existing investigation on file, if the investigation meets the needs of the current position. The following list provides instances when reciprocal acceptance of a previous adjudication may not be granted, and a new adjudication (not investigation) would be required:

- The investigation on file was not adjudicated according to criteria under 5 CFR § 731 or equivalent standards



- The final case issue characterization seen in CVS requires another adjudicative action other than favorable due to concerns related to the core duties of the position
- The investigation on file was not previously adjudicated
- New information on the individual comes to light and resolution is required before granting reciprocity or possibly making a new adjudication

If such information is not available or if the information is insufficient to make a reciprocity decision, component officials should contact the former or current employing agency to obtain the information necessary to grant or deny reciprocity. Contact information for the former or current employing agency can be obtained through CVS. If a reciprocity decision still cannot be made, it need not be granted.



Section 9 Gatekeeper/CATS Portal

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9.1. Overview

The Gatekeeper/Case Adjudication Tracking System (CATS) Portal, commonly referred to as the CATS Portal, is a collaborative tool established to provide the DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF) and Human Resources (HR) personnel/security managers the ability to receive investigations and case status information. Component adjudicators (CAs) can update case adjudications in the CATS Portal after they have been transferred by the DoD CAF. Final adjudications made by a CA in the CATS Portal will be updated in the Central Verification System (CVS) via a daily interface between the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and CATS.

9.2. Obtaining Access

Persons requiring access to the CATS Portal must obtain approval in accordance with their higher headquarters' guidance, prior to submission of the DD Form 2875, System Authorization Access Request (SAAR) to <https://cafregistration.army.mil>. Once the approved SAAR has been received, the CATS Portal team will provide further instructions to complete the registration process.

Note: To obtain CATS Portal access, users must be within the .mil domain, and they must be U.S. citizens. Contractors are ineligible for a CA role.

9.3. User Roles

HR User Role: Provides CATS Portal users with the ability to conduct a subject query for the purpose of determining the current status of cases received by the



DoD CAF. Any notifications generated by the DoD CAF for subjects managed by the portal user will also be available.

Component Adjudicator Role: In addition to the functionality described for the HR user role, the CA role will allow the CATS Portal user to receive documents/investigations transferred by the DoD CAF for adjudication. The CA will have the ability to record suitability/fitness determinations via the portal.

Note: The minimum requirement for a HR role is a favorably adjudicated Tier 2 investigation. A CA role requires a favorably adjudicated Background Investigation (BI) or Single-Scope Background Investigation (SSBI).

9.4. Checking Status of an Investigation

Once an investigation request has been initiated via the Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP), a component human resources or security office official may check the status of the OPM investigation by using any one of the following:

- (1) By contacting OPM’s Federal Investigations Processing Center (OPM-FIPC),
- (2) By accessing CVS directly, or
- (3) By accessing OPM Federal Investigative Service’s (OPM-FIS) Personnel Investigations Processing System (PIPS).

OPM-FIPC: For case status of a background investigation, authorized officials (i.e., “Authorized Contacts”) from the submitting office or DoD component security office can contact an OPM-FIPC telephone liaison at 724-794-5228.

Note: Every DoD component security office must provide OPM with a list of authorized contacts who can use the Security Office Number (SON) or Security Office Identifier (SOI) to request information about cases being processed. To obtain an SOI and/or update SOI contact information, security offices should contact FIPC at 724-794-5228 and request the PIPS 11, *Security Office Identifier (SOI) Authorization and Amendment* form. They may also download and complete a copy of the PIPS 11 form (<http://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/reference/pips11.pdf>) and send it to the address indicated on the form. It is the responsibility of the SON or SOI to ensure the “Authorized Contact” list is updated to reflect gains and losses.

[Table 10](#) indicates the type of case status information that may be obtained from OPM-FIPC by authorized SON and SOI contacts.



Table 10: Information Requests by Authorized SON and SOI Contacts

Requested Information	Authorized SON Contacts	Authorized SOI Contacts
Questions regarding case papers, fingerprints, and reprints	√	√
Receive current status of investigation	√	√
Receive expected completion date	√	√
Authority to discontinue a case (not available via CVS)	√	√
Receive SII search results		√
Access to a Reviewer for case specific information		√
Receive types of issues in case		√
Receive pending items in case		√

Note: Taken from OPM-FIS INV-15, Requesting OPM Personnel Investigations (April 2012)

For additional OPM investigation-related phone numbers, refer to the “Contact Investigations” page on the OPM website:

<http://www.opm.gov/investigations/contact-investigations/>.

CVS. CVS is used by OPM to store adjudicative information for all investigations conducted by OPM. Component officials with a CVS account may check investigation status by searching for an individual’s record using the “Search SII/CVS/JPAS” link on the home screen. Any pending OPM investigations will be listed under the “Investigation” tab, and double clicking a record will provide more information regarding the investigation.

Note: Security officers and suitability/fitness adjudicators that do not have access to CVS should contact FIS’s System Access Support Team (SAST) at 724-794-5612, ext. 4600 to request access.

PIPS. An alternative to direct CVS access is to use PIPS to indirectly connect to this system. PIPS maintains the Security/Suitability Investigations Index (SII), which contains records of all background investigations conducted by OPM. Authorized security office officials may conduct SII searches and review Special Agreement Check (SAC) results (if initiated under their component SOI) in PIPS or in the CVS/PIPS SII “Display SII” link via the Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS).



Note: Security officers and suitability/fitness adjudicators that do not have access to PIPS can contact FIS's System Access Support Team (SAST) at 724-794-5612, ext. 4600 to request access.

9.5. Checking Status of DoD CAF Adjudication

The status of DoD CAF adjudication can be checked via the “Subject Query” tab in the CATS Portal. Both the HR User and CA roles have this capability.

SUBJECT QUERY: Provides the status of pending or closed Suitability/Fitness cases.

- (1) Click on the “Subject Query” tab in the navigation menu
- (2) Enter the 9 digit SSN (no dashes)
- (3) Click on the “Search” button



- (4) Click on the “+” button to expand and display details of Subject record.

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Department of Defense GateKeeper

Subject Query | Correspondence | My Notifications | Feedback Help

Department of Defense GateKeeper

Subject Query Results

Export to PDF | Export to XLS | Save/Print | Back

Drag a column header here to group by that column

#	SSN#	First Name	Middle Initial	Last Name	DOB	Citizenship	Birth State	Birth Country
	333333333	RECORD		TEST	11/11/1968	U.S. CITIZEN BY BIRTH - BORN IN THE UNITED STATES	TEXAS	UNITED STATES

- (5) “Personnel Information” tab displays basic PII.

Subject Query | Correspondence | My Notifications | Feedback Help

Department of Defense GateKeeper

Subject Query Results

Export to PDF | Export to XLS | Save/Print | Back

Drag a column header here to group by that column

#	SSN#	First Name	Middle Initial	Last Name	DOB	Citizenship	Birth State	Birth Country
	333333333	RECORD		TEST	11/11/1968	U.S. CITIZEN BY BIRTH - BORN IN THE UNITED STATES	TEXAS	UNITED STATES

Personnel Information | CAF Status | Investigation Information | Current Eligibility

Name:	RECORD . TEST	Date of Birth:	11/11/1968
SSN:	333333333	Separation Date:	
Separation Status:		Birth State:	TEXAS
Birth Country:	UNITED STATES		
MPC/CAT:	ACTIVE DUTY		
Citizenship:	U.S. CITIZEN BY BIRTH - BORN IN THE UNITED STATES		

Export to PDF | Export to XLS | Save/Print | Back



(6) “CAF Status” tab displays any pending status associated with Subject’s case.

The screenshot shows the Department of Defense GateKeeper interface. The top navigation bar includes "Subject Query", "Correspondence", "My Notifications", "Feedback", and "Help". The main content area is titled "Subject Query Results" and contains a table with columns: #, SSN#, First Name, Middle Initial, Last Name, DOB, Citizenship, Birth State, and Birth Country. A single record is displayed for SSN# 33333333, First Name RECORD, Last Name TEST, DOB 11/11/1968, and Birth State TEXAS. Below the table, there are four tabs: "Personnel Information", "CAF Status" (highlighted with a red box), "Investigation Information", and "Current Eligibility". The "CAF Status" tab is active, showing fields for Case Status, Case Status Date (12/6/2013), Investigation Type, Investigation Date, Interim Status, Interim Date, Organization (TEST11), and Adjudicator's Name.

(7) “Investigation Information” tab displays most recent investigation information.

The screenshot shows the Department of Defense GateKeeper interface with the "Investigation Information" tab selected and highlighted with a red box. The table above shows the same subject record as in the previous screenshot. The "Investigation Information" tab displays the following details: Investigation Type Opened: NACI (R), Investigation Open Date: 10/10/2007, Investigation Type Closed: NACI (R), Investigation Closed Date: 10/10/2007, Investigation Type, and Investigation Agency.



(8) “Current Eligibility” tab displays most recent eligibility determination.

The screenshot shows the Department of Defense GateKeeper interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: "Subject Query", "Correspondence", "My Notifications", and "Feedback". A "Help" button is located in the top right corner. Below the navigation, the page title "Department of Defense GateKeeper" is displayed. On the left side, there is a vertical menu with the following items: "Subject Query", "Correspondence", "My Notifications", and "Feedback". The main content area is titled "Subject Query Results" and contains several buttons: "Export to PDF", "Export to XLS", "Save/Print", and "Back". Below these buttons is a table with the following columns: "#", "SSN#", "First Name", "Middle Initial", "Last Name", "DOB", "Citizenship", "Birth State", and "Birth Country". The table contains one row of data: # 33333333, First Name RECORD, Last Name TEST, DOB 11/11/1968, Citizenship U.S. CITIZEN BY BIRTH - BORN IN THE UNITED STATES, Birth State TEXAS, and Birth Country UNITED STATES. Below the table, there are four tabs: "Personnel Information", "CAF Status", "Investigation Information", and "Current Eligibility". The "Current Eligibility" tab is highlighted with a red border. Below the tabs, there is a box containing the following information: "Current Eligibility: FAV-SUIT/FIT", "Adjudication Date: 3/16/2015", "Current Investigation: NACI (R)", "Investigation Date: 1/30/2015", "ReviewCode: NON-SENSITIVE POSITION", and "Exception:". At the bottom of the main content area, there are buttons for "Export to PDF", "Export to XLS", "Save/Print", and "Back".



9.6. My Notifications

Queue displays CAF and Portal generated notifications. Notifications are generated for specific CATS and portal activities, such as when a case status determination has been completed by the CAF. The portal user will see the “Source” as CATS in the queue with a message indicating a CATS update has been done.

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Department of Defense GateKeeper

Subject Query: Correspondence | My Notifications | Feedback Help

Department of Defense GateKeeper

My Notification

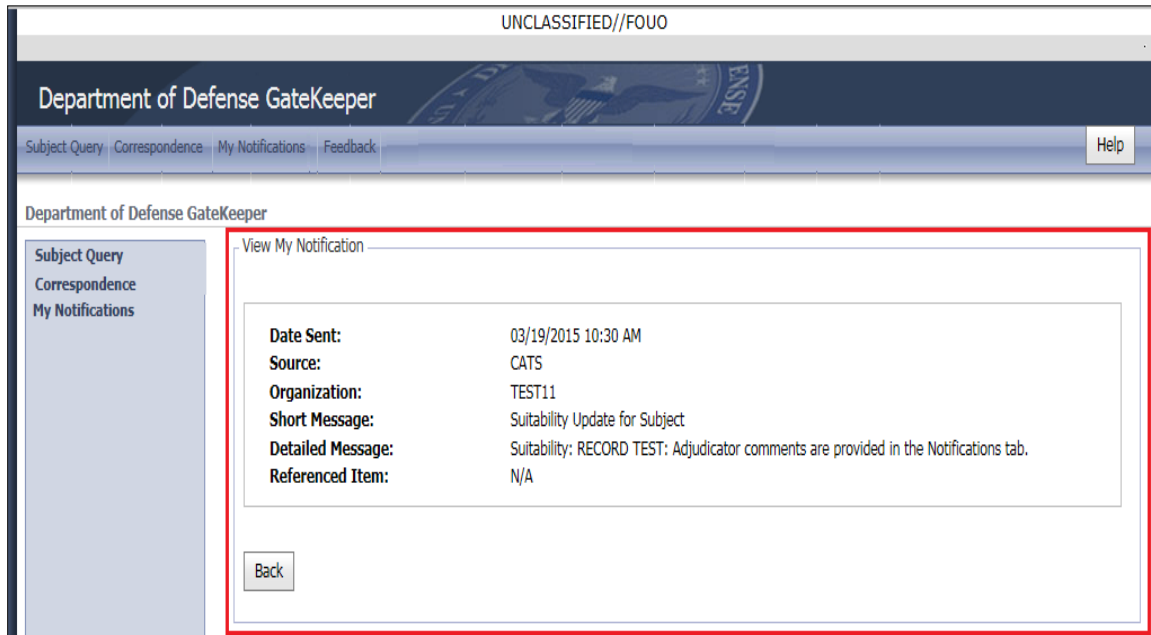
[Delete All](#) [Delete Read](#) All Unread Read

Page 1 of 6 (112 items) [1] 2 3 4 5 6

#	Sent	Organization	Source	Last	First	MI	SSN	Message
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST



Details will be displayed after clicking on the “View” link. The “Back” button will return to the previous screen.



9.7. Recording Final Adjudication Information

Only a CA is permitted to receive, view and record determinations via the CATS Portal. The following Suitability/Fitness case determinations are available in the CATS Portal via drop-down selection, as listed below:

- FAV-SUIT/FIT
- REFERRED TO OPM
- RESIGNED/TERMINATED
- SUBJ NOT APPT
- SUBJ REMOVED
- WARNING ISSUED
- RETAINED – CLEAR, REVKD
- SUSPENDED FROM DUTY



CORRESPONDENCE: Queue displays all CAF and Portal generated correspondence.

NOTE: Information can be sorted by clicking on the column headings; “Date Sent,” Status,” etc. You can also filter results by entering the specific data you want to retrieve. For example, entering a specific SSN will only display information for that SSN.

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Department of Defense GateKeeper

[Subject Query](#) | [Correspondence](#) | [My Notifications](#) | [Feedback](#) [Help](#)

Department of Defense GateKeeper

Correspondence

[Subject Query](#)
[Correspondence](#)
[My Notifications](#)
[Feedback](#)

Page 1 of 2 (21 items) < [1] 2 >

#		Date Sent	Status	Organization	SSN	Full Name	Case Status	Current Eligibility
	Details	11/19/2013 10:14:32 PM	New	TEST11	111111111	NOT DO	Assigned	----
	Details	11/19/2013 10:14:03 PM	New	TEST11	111111111	NOT DO	Assigned	----
	Details	11/19/2013 10:13:56 PM	New	TEST11	111111111	NOT DO	Assigned	----
	Details	11/13/2013 2:30:22 PM	New	TEST11	111111111	NOT DO	Assigned	----
	Details	11/13/2013 2:23:27 PM	New	TEST11	111111111	NOT DO	Assigned	----
	Details	11/13/2013 2:23:23 PM	New	TEST11	111111111	NOT DO	Assigned	----
	Details	11/13/2013 2:06:12 PM	New	TEST11	111111111	NOT DO	Assigned	----



- (1) Click on “Details” to retrieve CAF generated correspondence and to respond to CAF.

NOTE: You will be able to respond to the CAF only through this function, so please **DO NOT DELETE** until a response is generated, if applicable.

- (2) Click on document to view CAF generated correspondence.

The screenshot shows the 'Department of Defense GateKeeper' web application. At the top, there are navigation links for 'Subject Query', 'Correspondence', 'My Notifications', and 'Feedback', along with a 'Help' button. The main content area is titled 'Edit Correspondence' and contains a table of case details:

SSN:	33333333
Full Name:	RECORD TEST
Case ID:	3104585
Case Status:	Assigned
Date Sent:	10/22/2014
Status:	New
Organization:	TEST11
Current Eligibility:	----

Below the table, there are two sections: 'Adjudicator's Comments' and 'Documents From Adjudicator:'. The 'Documents From Adjudicator' section contains a link to 'test_card.docx' which is highlighted with a red box. At the bottom of the page, there are three buttons: 'Respond' (with an envelope icon), 'Delete' (with a red X icon), and 'Back'.



- (3) Click on “Respond” to update Subject’s Suitability determination, send a message or to send documentation to the CAF.

Department of Defense GateKeeper

Subject Query | Correspondence | My Notifications | Feedback | Help

Department of Defense GateKeeper

Edit Correspondence

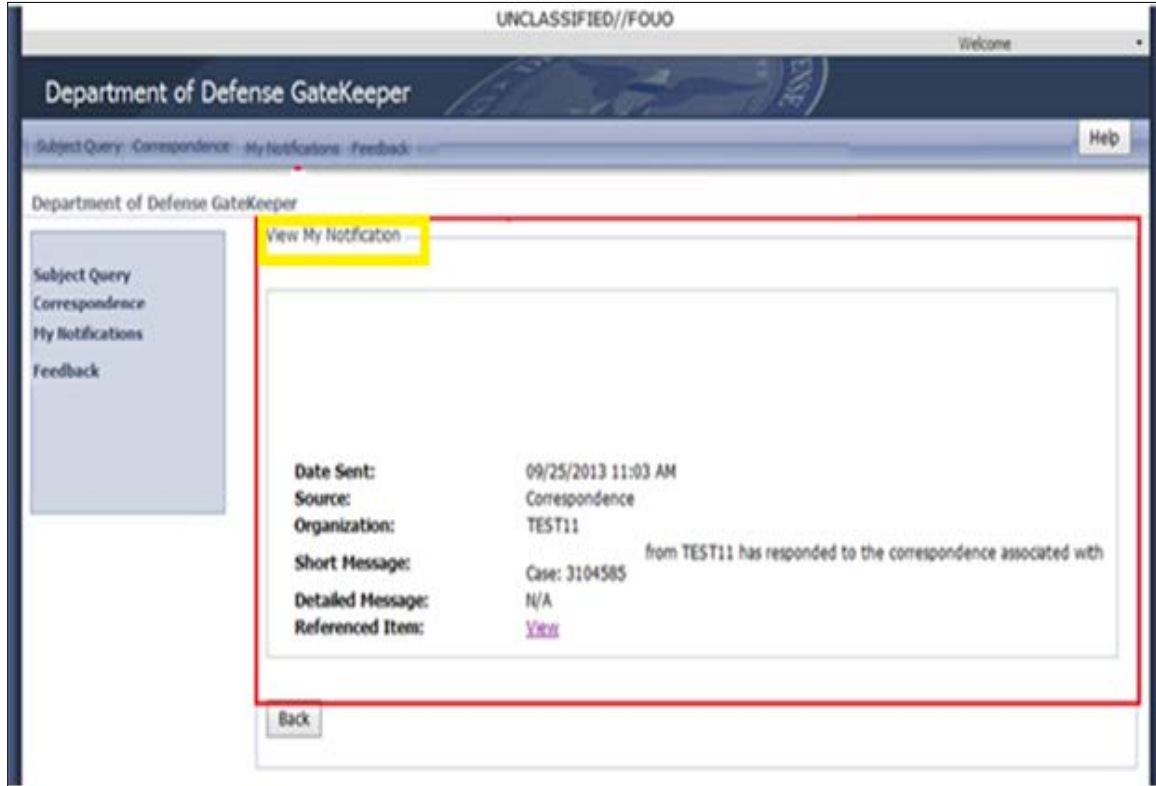
SSN:	33333333
Full Name:	RECORD TEST
Case ID:	3104585
Case Status:	Assigned
Date Sent:	10/22/2014
Status:	New
Organization:	TEST11
Current Eligibility:	----

Adjudicator's Comments:
The DoD CAF was unable to render a suitability determination in accordance with 5 C.F.R. 731. The authority that has been delegated to the DoD CAF for suitability determinations is limited to "favorable" decisions. Accordingly, the complete case file is forwarded to your agency for a "Favorable" or "Unfavorable" adjudicative determination in accordance with 5 C.F.R. 731 and DoDI 1400.25, Volume 731. The attachment includes all data reviewed by the DoD CAF after receipt of the case. This data is forwarded for your agency's information only and is not an adjudicative recommendation. Your agency is responsible for rendering and recording the final suitability determination. Case Guideline Rationale: CHILD CARE - DISCRETIONARY DISQUALIFIERS FACTOR POOR JUDGMENT, UNRELIABILITY, OR UNTRUSTWORTHINESS // NATURE OF THE POSITION MITIGATOR MITIGATING: DUE TO THE NATURE OF THE SUBJECT'S POSITION, THE DOD CAF WAS ABLE TO MITIGATE THE DISQUALIFYING FACTOR(S) PRESENT WITHIN THE SUBJECT'S OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT (OPM) INVESTIGATION. THE DISQUALIFYING FACTOR(S) PRESENT DO NOT HAVE A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP TO THE SUBJECT'S POSITION OR SUITABILITY FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT. //

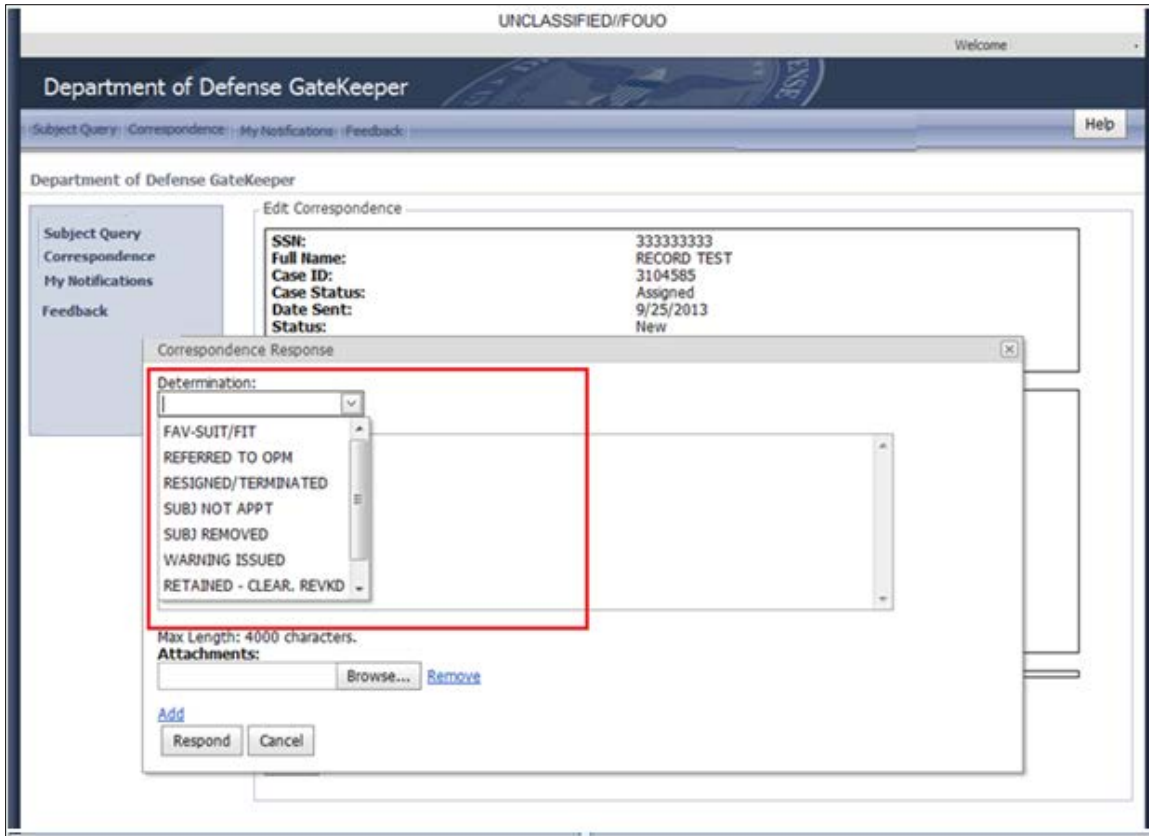
Documents From Adjudicator:
[Test card.docx](#)



Correspondence may also be accessed via the “My Notifications” tab. To display Correspondence details, click “View” in “Referenced Item:” area.

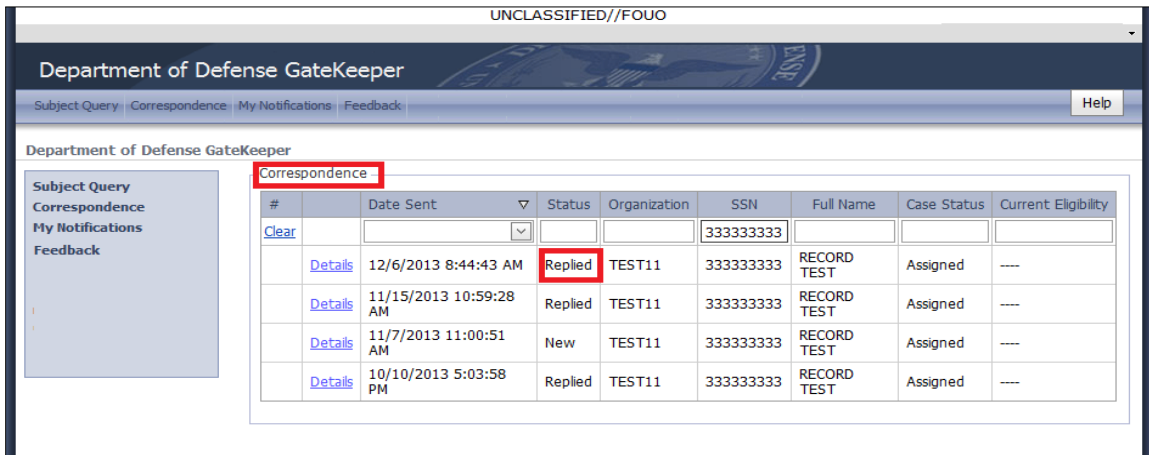


Updating Subject’s Suitability Determination – Click on “Determination” drop-down arrow to display eligible Suitability determinations.



You will click on the “Respond” button, after a determination has been selected, to finalize your action in the CATS Portal. OPM’s CVS will be updated daily to reflect determinations made by CAs via the CATS Portal.

Click on the “Correspondence” tab to confirm response was sent. “Status” will display as “Replied.”



You can also click on the “My Notifications” tab and then “View” to confirm response was sent to the CAF. Portal User – Determination – Comments to CAF and Documentation sent to CAF will be displayed.

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Department of Defense GateKeeper

Subject Query | Correspondence | My Notifications | Feedback Help

Department of Defense GateKeeper

Subject Query

Correspondence

My Notifications

Feedback

My Notification

[Delete All](#) [Delete Read](#) All Unread Read

Page 1 of 6 (112 items) [1] 2 3 4 5 6 >

#	Sent	Organization	Source	Last	First	MI	SSN	Message
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST
Delete View	01/25/2014	TEST11	Correspondence	DO	TEST		111111111	New correspondence for DO TEST



Section 10 Adjudication

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10.1. Overview

This section provides an overview of the adjudication process for suitability and fitness determinations, especially as it relates to adjudication by DoD component adjudicators. In addition, it also describes important aspects of suitability and fitness procedures at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF). This section addresses the following key topics:

- Overview of the suitability and fitness adjudication process;



- Flow of adjudication case information from OPM, DoD CAF, and DoD components;
- Descriptions of the suitability and fitness adjudication factors; and
- OPM adjudication approach.

The overview provided in this section is not intended as stand-alone guidance to either the suitability or fitness adjudication process. Suitability adjudication applies to covered positions defined in Title 5: Administrative Personnel, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 731, *Suitability*, as amended (5 CFR § 731), and the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) *Suitability Processing Handbook* must follow those requirements. OPM is the final authority for suitability adjudication and offers extensive training. This section is intended as a supplement to the OPM guidance, and any apparent conflicts should be resolved consistent with OPM requirements.

Fitness adjudication does not fall under 5 CFR § 731 or OPM authority. However DoD, in DoD Instruction 1400.25 volume 731, *DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Suitability and Fitness Adjudication For Civilian Employees* (DoDI 1400.25 v731), has elected to apply the same adjudication criteria and follow many of the same processes for fitness adjudication. A major difference between suitability and fitness adjudication in DoD relate to the processing of unfavorable fitness determinations which do not invoke the processes defined under 5 CFR § 731 (e.g., government-wide debarment, the Merit System Protection Board). Given the procedures outlined in DoDI 1400.25 v731, suitability and fitness adjudication are described together throughout much of this section, but it is important to keep in mind the differences in guiding authorities for each.

10.2. Adjudication

The purpose of suitability or fitness adjudication is to determine whether an individual meets the standards of character and conduct required for individuals working for the federal government (or DoD, in the case of fitness determinations). Suitability and fitness adjudication start with the review of information about an individual's background to identify adverse suitability or fitness issues using established adjudication factors. If issue(s) are identified, the next step is to determine whether it is in the best interest of the federal government to recommend or continue employment of the individual. This determination requires careful and objective analysis of information, and should include attempts to discover whether negative issue information is offset by positive information or otherwise mitigated.

Adverse prior conduct that falls under the adjudication factors, such as driving while intoxicated, possessing or using a controlled substance, or misconduct at work, does not automatically disqualify an applicant or employee from Federal employment. Rather, this type of information is assessed to determine whether it is



sufficient in nature and gravity to warrant an unfavorable determination. If a person's character or conduct could adversely impact the component's integrity or efficiency, the person may not be considered suitable or fit. Protecting the interests of the Government is the first responsibility, but adjudicators must also remember that their decisions directly affect individuals, their careers, and their families.

10.2.1. Timing of Adjudication

As indicated in 5 CFR § 731, suitability adjudication of background information may take place at any point during the hiring process (e.g., a final suitability determination may be made after review of the completed OF-306, after review of completed application forms, after review of completed background investigations). The same process applies to fitness adjudication. Many DoD components perform an initial adjudication when receiving the OF-306 and perform a final adjudication when the completed report of investigation (ROI) is received. However, the adjudication process described in this section can be applied at any of these points in the process.

10.3. Adjudicators

DoD suitability and fitness adjudication are performed by two groups of adjudicators. Adjudicators at the DoD CAF make up one of the groups and specially-qualified personnel at DoD components make up the second group. Individuals serving as adjudicators must have completed required training. They must also have the ability to consider each case carefully, in the context of all available information, including favorable as well as unfavorable information. Adjudicators should possess mature judgment, discretion, reliability, integrity, loyalty, good analytical ability, tactfulness, writing and speaking skills. OPM requires that persons assigned adjudicative responsibility be familiar with the laws and regulations governing suitability adjudications. In addition, each Adjudicator must have been subject to a favorable determination based on the results of at least a Background Investigation (BI). Alternatively, under the new tiered investigative system, this would be equivalent to a Tier 4 investigation.

An OPM approved training course is required for personnel who will perform adjudications. OPM offers a comprehensive two week course, DoD offers an on-line course, and the Graduate School USA (formerly part of United States Department of Agriculture [USDA]) offers a three-day OPM-developed course. [Appendix A: Training](#) (page [117](#)) provides more detail about training options.

10.3.1. DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF)

Beginning in October 2013, DoD consolidated favorable adjudication of suitability and fitness background investigations at the DoD CAF. The idea behind the



consolidation was to centralize and standardize the majority of adjudication in one facility to take advantage of the efficiencies of having a dedicated workforce to handle the majority of adjudication tasks. The DoD CAF, at this time, will make only favorable suitability and fitness determinations. The rationale for this is that the components have detailed knowledge of position requirements and should have an opportunity to review a case that contains issues. DoD component staff are best positioned to know whether derogatory information in a case is of concern for the component and the specific position. DoD CAF adjudicators also will return investigations that are missing investigative scope items so that the component can determine whether to return the case to OPM for additional work or gather the information themselves.

10.3.2. DoD Component Suitability and Fitness Adjudicators

Personnel performing adjudications at DoD components must also meet the background investigation requirements and should have completed an approved training course. Other than meeting those criteria, DoD components vary in terms of the type of personnel serving as adjudicators. Most of these personnel will perform adjudication as one of many functions of their position and most of those positions will be in either the human resources or security functions of the organization.

DoD component suitability and fitness adjudicators adjudicate only those suitability and fitness cases where the DoD CAF was unable to make a favorable determination or those cases that were missing certain scope items (e.g., FBI fingerprint check results). These cases are not necessarily unfavorable, but they do require a final determination from an adjudicator at the component level. The component adjudicator should be more knowledgeable about the specific needs of the component and is in a position to gather additional information as necessary.

The specifics of the component suitability and fitness adjudication process may vary by component and may include consultation with other personnel such as a Commander, but the actual adjudication should be performed by a suitability or fitness adjudicator that meets background investigation and training requirements. Before describing suitability and fitness adjudication in detail, the next section provides an overview of the flow of suitability and fitness background information, with particular emphasis on electronic tools to facilitate the movement of the completed background investigation.

10.4. DoD CAF Electronic Tools

The flow of adjudication case information is dependent on several electronic tools that are used by the DoD CAF. These tools support the adjudication process, speed the transfer of cases, and improve the security of sensitive adjudication and



investigation information. Electronic delivery (eDelivery) of completed ROIs from OPM to the DoD CAF is a tool that allows the transfer of information over a secure connection and eliminates the delays associated with mailing hard copies of cases. Note that suitability and fitness investigation requests must use “DODS” as the security office identifier (SOI) to ensure correct eDelivery of the completed investigation to the DoD CAF. The submitting office number (SON) identifies the office that should receive the results of the DoD CAF adjudication and any advance background checks (e.g., the location of the component adjudicator). In addition, the component adjudicator must have an account with the Case Adjudication Tracking System (CATS) to ensure proper flow of the case from the CAF to the component.

10.4.1. Case Adjudication Tracking System (CATS)

The centerpiece of the DoD CAF electronic tools is CATS. CATS is the DoD CAF adjudication case management system. It receives background investigations as they are eDelivered from OPM, supports the adjudication work process, and automates record keeping, including a centralized database of adjudication outcomes. Currently the main functionality of CATS is only available at the DoD CAF. However, the CAF launched a portal application that allows approved users to access parts of the system.

10.4.2. CATS Portal

It is necessary that component adjudicators obtain access to the portal in order to receive communications from the CAF about the status of cases and to ensure that the CAF is able to return cases to the correct source when the CAF adjudicator is unable to make a favorable determination. DoD CAF adjudicators will notify the submitting office via the portal and use the portal to transfer case information to the component adjudicator. The portal also offers options for checking on the status of cases and for submitting the results of component adjudication determinations. [Section 9: Gatekeeper/CATS Portal](#) (page 73) provides more information about portal functions and requirements for gaining access.

10.4.3. Electronic Adjudication (eAdjudication)

The DoD CAF is also working to validate business rules for generating automatic approvals of clean suitability and fitness cases. Electronic adjudication (eAdjudication) of this type is already in use for adjudication of personnel security cases at the secret level. eAdjudication will have the benefit of further reducing the amount of time and resources needed for adjudication because clean cases will not normally require human review.

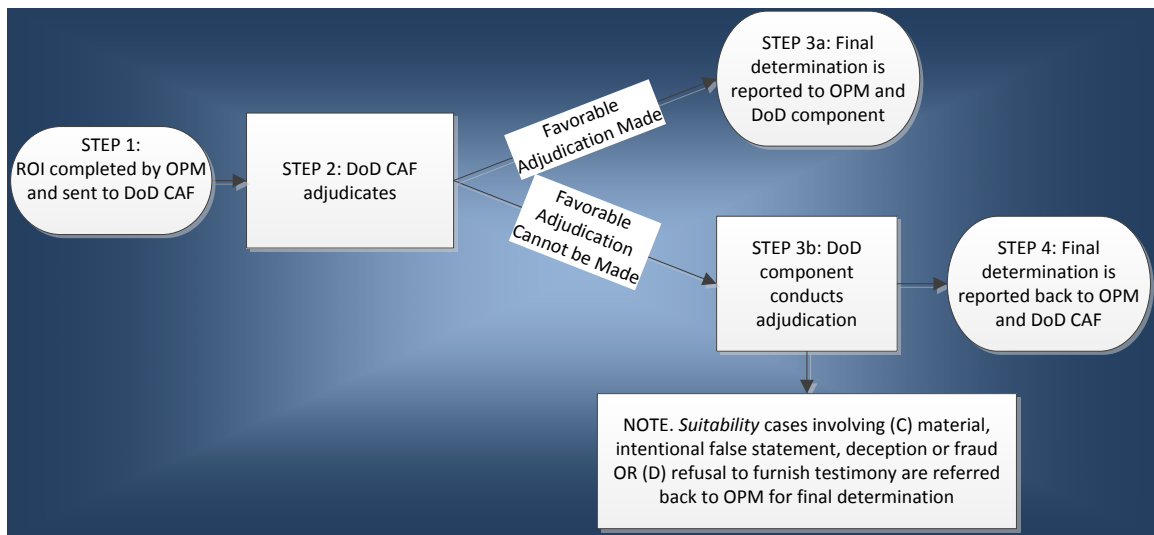


10.5. Adjudication Case Process Flow

Prior to the background investigation, most of the background information moves directly from the applicant or candidate to component human resources or security personnel. Human resources or security provides forms for applicants or candidates to complete and the applicants or candidates complete and return the forms to the human resources or security personnel.

The process flow for the background investigation conducted by the investigative service provider (e.g., OPM) is more complicated and involves parties external to the requesting components. The process flow begins when component staff submits the request for investigation, typically to OPM, using e-QIP. OPM receives the request and completes the investigation. The process from this point forward is shown in [Figure 3 below](#). The figure depicts the flow of the adjudication case from OPM, to DoD CAF, and to DoD component adjudicators.

Figure 3: OPM, DoD CAF, and DoD Component Suitability and Fitness Procedures



10.5.1. OPM to DoD CAF

Once OPM completes the background investigation, it sends the ROI to the DoD CAF electronically through eDelivery (Step 1). The correct information must be entered in the SOI box of the Agency Use Block (AUB) for OPM to send cases to the DoD CAF. The correct SOI for suitability and fitness cases is “DODS.” Note that OPM sends advance fingerprint check results or advance NAC results directly to the office linked to the submitting office number (SON), not to the DoD CAF.



10.5.2. DoD CAF Adjudicates

As the ROI is received through eDelivery, it is ingested into CATS and routed to a DoD CAF suitability and fitness adjudicator for initial review (Step 2). If the DoD CAF adjudicator can make a favorable determination using the criteria listed in 5 CFR § 731.202, the outcome is recorded in the OPM Central Verification System (CVS) and the Report of Agency Adjudicative Action on OPM Personnel Investigations (INV Form 79A) is sent to the components for filing in personnel records (Step 3a). If the DoD CAF adjudicator cannot make a favorable determination, either due to potentially derogatory information or because the investigation is missing one or more scope items (e.g., missing reference check), the DoD CAF adjudicator refers the case back to the component adjudicator (Step 3b). A third outcome of DoD CAF adjudication occurs when the DoD CAF adjudicator refers cases back to OPM when issues are identified that fall under OPM jurisdiction (e.g., suitability cases involving (C) material, intentional false statement, deception or fraud or (D) refusal to furnish testimony are referred back to OPM for final determination).

10.5.3. DoD Component Adjudicates

If the DoD CAF adjudicator returns a case to a component adjudicator for a final determination (Step 3b), the component adjudicator is notified through the CATS portal. If the case is referred due to a potential issue, the component adjudicator must review the issue information and follow the OPM adjudication procedure to make a final determination. In some cases, this may include gathering additional information from the subject. If the case is referred due to missing investigative scope item(s), the component adjudicator must decide whether (a) to gather additional information from the subject, (b) to contact OPM to conduct additional checks, or (c) the level of risk in making a determination without the additional information is acceptable (e.g., the level of risk that the missing information would be derogatory). After completing his or her adjudication, the component adjudicator will report the final determination to the DoD CAF and OPM through the CATS Portal.

10.6. Review Background Information

The task of adjudicating cases is made up of two linked activities that result in either a favorable or unfavorable determination. The first activity consists of reviewing background information. The second consists of evaluating the background information against the adjudication factors from 5 CFR § 731. The combined review and evaluation must result in a careful, objective analysis of all available, relevant information, both favorable and unfavorable. The analysis itself results in a determination of whether employment or retention of an applicant would protect the integrity or promote the efficiency of the employing DoD



component. The second activity, evaluation against the adjudication factors, is discussed in the sections under OPM Adjudicative Approach.

Suitability and fitness adjudicators review a number of information sources as part of the adjudication process. These may include resumes, other employment documents, and OF-306 forms. A key item of review is the Report of Investigation (ROI). The review should cover sufficient information about an applicant to (a) identify any suitability or fitness issues and (b) determine whether or not the issues are offset by relevant information (i.e., mitigated). The ROI may provide enough information to mitigate any issues, but it is recommended that components develop a process for gathering follow-up information at earlier points in the suitability process, if needed (e.g., for issues identified on the OF-306).

Component adjudicators have an advantage over DoD CAF adjudicators in that they generally have better access to the applicant (e.g., because they are handling the hiring process). Applicants can be a productive source of additional information about issues, either by providing information directly relevant to the issue or by providing information about additional sources to contact. The Tier 1 investigation used for most suitability and fitness cases, typically does not include any in-person interviews. It does not even include an interview with the subject of the investigation.

10.6.1. Review the Report of Investigation (ROI)

The most detailed source of information about the individual is likely to be the ROI. OPM is the most common provider of suitability and fitness background investigations for DoD and the OPM ROI consists of several elements. The order of ROI sections may vary and may depend on whether the ROI is in electronic or hard-copy format.

The file will likely begin with a standard coversheet intended to protect the sensitive information it contains. ROIs contain extensive, personally identifiable information (PII) about each investigation subject and must be protected from inappropriate disclosure. After the coversheet, the next section of the ROI may be the “Agency Use Block,” which includes information about the case that was entered during the initial request of investigation made through e-QIP.

The next section of the ROI is likely to be the “Case Closing Transmittal” (CCT). The CCT provides a useful overview of case information, beginning with basic information about the case, including case number, investigation type, and identifying information about the subject. The first page of the CCT also includes the OPM assessment of the case, review level, and some standard text. The next major section of the CCT is likely to be a list of the investigative scope items and the results of the check of each item. This list can be helpful for identifying specific scope items to pay particular attention to and also for noting any scope items that



were not completed. Following the list of investigative scope items is likely to be a reappearance of the Agency Use Block (AUB) information.

The next section will likely be the Certificate of Investigation (COI). A copy of this page, with the relevant information completed should be filed in the applicant's official personnel file. The following section will likely be INV Form 79A. If the component adjudicator records the final determination through the CATS portal, as is recommended, it is not necessary to return INV Form 79A to OPM. The CATS system transfers recorded adjudication determinations to OPM CVS automatically.

The ROI also will include a copy of the information from the e-QIP submission, then the results of the rest of the investigative checks. The ROI packet can be challenging to review and the information may not be organized the same way every time. A best practice is to ensure that all adjudicators receive on-the-job training with an individual experienced in reading ROIs. [Appendix D: OPM Electronic Investigative Files](#) (page 129) has more information about these electronic files.

10.7. OPM Adjudicative Approach

The OPM approach to adjudicating suitability cases includes identifying derogatory information related to one of eight suitability factors and careful application of additional considerations as detailed in 5 CFR § 731. The OPM approach specifically applies to suitability cases, but DoD recommends the same adjudicative approach for fitness cases. The OPM and Graduate School USA training courses provide adjudicators with the knowledge required to employ this adjudicative approach and the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook provides detailed guidance that cannot be described at all except in the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook. However, the rest of section 10.7 provides information about the adjudication factors and additional considerations on which OPM's adjudicative approach is based.

10.7.1. Evaluate Against Adjudication Factors

The goal of the review of background information is to determine whether anything in the applicant's background indicates that there is derogatory information that falls under any of the 5 CFR § 731.202(b) criteria and identifies the presence of an issue. These criteria are listed below. An approved training course will provide more information about the definitions of the factors and how they link to behaviors.

- (1) Misconduct or negligence in employment;
- (2) Criminal or dishonest conduct;
- (3) Material, intentional false statement, or deception or fraud in examination or appointment;



- (4) Refusal to furnish testimony as required by § 5.4 of 5 CFR § 731;
- (5) Alcohol abuse, without evidence of substantial rehabilitation, of a nature and duration that suggests that the applicant or appointee would be prevented from performing the duties of the position in question, or would constitute a direct threat to the property or safety of the applicant or appointee or others;
- (6) Illegal use of narcotics, drugs, or other controlled substances without evidence of substantial rehabilitation;
- (7) Knowing and willful engagement in acts or activities designed to overthrow the U.S. Government by force; and
- (8) Any statutory or regulatory bar which prevents the lawful employment of the person involved in the position in question.

10.7.2. Additional Considerations

After reviewing the background information and identifying any suitability or fitness issues, the adjudicator should evaluate the issues in terms of several additional considerations. The additional considerations help the adjudicator determine the extent to which the issue makes the applicant unsuitable or unfit for employment. As indicated in 5 CFR § 731.202(c), the additional considerations include the following:

- (1) The nature of the position for which the person is applying or in which the person is employed;
- (2) The nature and seriousness of the conduct;
- (3) The circumstances surrounding the conduct;
- (4) The recency of the conduct;
- (5) The age of the person involved at the time of the conduct;
- (6) Contributing societal conditions; and
- (7) The absence or presence of rehabilitation or efforts toward rehabilitation (may apply to all types of conduct, except for any statutory or regulatory bar to employment).

Use of additional considerations during the adjudication process must be explained and documented in appropriate records. Also, note that these seven considerations do not apply to the last factor (i.e., a statutory or regulatory bar to employment).



10.7.3. Nature of the Position

The nature of the position is an additional consideration with particular implications for adjudication because issues that relate to the nature of the position may have more serious implications for an individual's suitability. As stated in DoD 1400.25 v731:

“The more authority, responsibility, sensitivity and public trust associated with the position, the higher the risks involved and the more potential adverse impact there is to the efficiency and integrity of the service; thus the misconduct becomes more serious as a potentially disqualifying issue.”

The position designation process is an important component for identifying duties with implications for suitability adjudication. There are three aspects of the nature of the position to consider: (a) the public trust level of the position, (b) the core duties of the position, and (c) agency mission.

10.7.3.1. Public Trust

In the suitability context, public trust level refers to the relative risk of damage to the integrity or efficiency of the service and is distinct from national security sensitivity. During position designation, agencies determine the risk level of a position's public trust (see [Section 4: Position Designation](#) on page 27). Public trust levels are High, Moderate, or Low. Positions at the High and Moderate risk levels are referred to as “Public Trust” positions. When evaluating issues identified in a case, the seriousness of an issue increases as the public trust level increases. That is, the higher the level of public trust, the more serious an issue becomes.

10.7.3.2. Core Duties and Agency Mission

Adjudicators must also evaluate the relationship between suitability or fitness issues, core job duties, and agency mission. Core duties refer to continuing responsibilities that are of particular importance to the position or the achievement of an agency's mission.

When it is clear that certain issues could undermine duties or mission, the conduct must be weighed more heavily in the adjudication process. In addition, conduct that might not be viewed as an issue for some positions may be of greater concern for other positions, when core job duties are considered. Although it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list, some examples of concerning conduct in relation to a job's duties or an agency's mission are:

- Conduct that reflects unwillingness to adhere to laws and regulations when relevant to jobs or agencies concerned with enforcement of rules (e.g., law enforcement jobs or agencies)



- Conviction for drug-related offenses when relevant to jobs that require access to narcotics or other controlled substances (e.g., nurses and nursing assistants)
- Specific criminal conduct relevant to core duties of a job (e.g., arson charges for firefighter jobs, child molestation charges for childcare jobs, smuggling charges for border patrol jobs, terrorist associations for explosives workers)
- Discharge from employment for lax security habits or unauthorized use of an information technology system when related to an information technology position (e.g., IT administrator)

10.7.4. Issue Seriousness

Issues vary in relative seriousness and the OPM adjudicative approach has very specific guidance for evaluating seriousness.

OPM typically notes on the ROI the characterization codes and rankings for each investigative check that contains issue information. However, OPM also states that agencies to which OPM has delegated suitability adjudication authority (e.g., DoD) are ultimately responsible for conducting their own independent assessment of the character and ranking of issues. Detailed instruction about evaluating relative seriousness is limited to OPM sponsored training and cannot be discussed in more detail here.

The OPM Suitability Processing Handbook includes a useful *Issues and Adjudication Chart* in Appendix C of that volume that lists each of the issue codes along with behaviors that would receive each ranking. [Table 11 \(below\)](#) lists some example issues taken from the OPM.gov website in the Background Investigation section under Suitability Adjudications on the Referral Chart tab or <http://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-inve...s/suitability-adjudications/tabs/referral-chart/>

Table 11: Examples of Issue Seriousness

Issues
Major & Substantial Issues
Including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Patterns of conduct (such as a pattern of drug or alcohol abuse, financial irresponsibility or major liabilities, dishonesty, unemployability for negligence or misconduct, or criminal conduct)● Other than honorable military discharge● Felony offense● Illegal drug manufacturing, trafficking, or sale



Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Major honesty issue (such as extortion, armed robbery, embezzlement, perjury)• Serious violent behavior (such as rape, aggravated assault, arson, child abuse, manslaughter)• Sexual misconduct (such as sexual assault, sexual harassment, prostitution)• Illegal use of firearms or explosives• Hatch Act violation• Employment related conduct involving dishonest, criminal, or violent behavior
Moderate Issues
Including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Driving while intoxicated• Drug-related offense (excluding infrequent use or possession of marijuana or marijuana paraphernalia , to include arrests or charges for possession of marijuana)• Petty Theft or Forgery• Assault, criminal mischief, harassment• Employment related misconduct involving insubordination, absenteeism, rules violations
Minor Issues
Including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minor liquor law violation• Minor traffic violation• Bad check• Minor disruptive conduct (such as disorderly conduct, trespassing, vagrancy, loitering, disturbing the peace)• Minor employment related misconduct

From OPM.gov Suitability Referral Chart

10.7.5. Apply the Additional Considerations

In addition to evaluating the seriousness of issues, adjudicators must review issue information to apply the additional considerations and determine whether the seriousness should be modified. For example, if an issue occurred many years ago, it may be a less serious suitability or fitness concern. Likewise, if multiple issues

are identified for an individual, the pattern of issues may be a more serious suitability or fitness concern. The process for applying these considerations is very carefully defined and an important part of the OPM training.

As mentioned in Section [10.7.3: Nature of the Position](#) (page [98](#)), the additional consideration referring to the nature of the position requires that any issue information be evaluated in light of core job duties, public trust level and agency mission to determine if the issue(s) have implications related to those duties, the public trust level, or the mission.

10.8. Making a Suitability or Fitness Determination

Once the steps for evaluating the issue information are completed, the adjudicator makes a basic suitability or fitness determination. That is, the initial task of the adjudicator is to determine whether issues in a case are actionable in their own right – without reference to specific job requirements. If none of the issues are disqualifying in the basic determination, the issues are then evaluated in the context of the nature of the position, including level of public trust, core job duties, and agency mission.

As a rule of thumb, cases containing Substantial or Major issue are potentially actionable under a basic suitability evaluation. This is particularly true if the behavior reflects a recent or recurring pattern of questionable judgment, irresponsibility, or untrustworthy behavior. However, determining if a case is actionable based on the nature of the position is not dependent on the seriousness of the issue. Instead, if the nature of the position is a significant concern when compared to the conduct, even if that conduct is at the minor or moderate characterization level, it is solely up to the adjudicator to determine whether employment or continued employment would protect the integrity or promote the efficiency of the service. For example, infrequent use of cocaine, an issue characterized at the moderate level, would likely be of suitability concern for a law enforcement position, as the conduct indicates a disregard for the law and lack of judgment. Thus, if the conduct might adversely impact on the ability of one to occupy a particular position, the issue characterization level is irrelevant. The OPM training provides additional instruction for handling the complexities of these determinations.

As described throughout this section, adjudication is a complex task. The adjudicator must consider a wide range of information, about the issue itself and about the additional considerations. In the end, the decision of whether to grant a favorable suitability or fitness determination is an overall common sense judgment, that takes into account all of the considerations described in this section and any risk management considerations. This judgment is based on the whole person concept and focused on ensuring that individuals adjudicated as suitable or fit for employment will support the efficiency and effectiveness of the hiring component.



10.9. Referring Suitability Cases to OPM

There are some types of issues that, if present in the case, must be referred to OPM. However, this applies only to Suitability cases. OPM does not have jurisdiction over fitness cases. The issue types that must be referred to OPM include those with evidence of:

- Material, intentional false statement, deception or fraud in examination or appointment, or
- Refusal to furnish testimony.

In addition, adjudicators may refer suitability cases to OPM if serious issue(s) still exists under one of the other adjudication factors. See the Suitability Adjudications page on the OPM.gov website in the Background Investigation section for a referral chart or <http://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-inve...s/suitability-adjudications/tabs/referral-chart/>

If OPM cannot assume jurisdiction or if they decide not to impose a government-wide debarment, the agency can then take action. Any action taken must be appropriately documented (e.g., on must be entered on the INV Form 79A), including the reasoning if a favorable determination is made.

Note: OPM can also assist with resolving uncertainty when characterizing cases and issues and can provide advisory opinions to DoD components if a written request is sent to the OPM Federal Investigative Services Division (OPM-FISD) Suitability Adjudications Branch. This request must include the DoD component's Submitting Office Number (SON), the specific question area, and any supporting information (e.g., any completed forms and issue resolution conducted).

The OPM-FISD-Suitability Adjudications Branch can also be contacted by phone at (724) 794-5612 extension 7400.



Section 11 Suitability Actions and Appeals

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11.1. Overview

While a favorable suitability determination made by the DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF) will lead to hiring or continued employment, an unfavorable determination in an adjudicated personnel case must initiate a suitability action (e.g., cancellation of eligibility or reinstatement eligibility, removal from position, or debarment). This section provides a brief overview of the suitability action process as well as appeal procedures for unfavorably adjudicated cases.

The guiding authority for suitability actions and appeals is 5 CFR § 731 and OPM. Although DoD has elected to apply the 5 CFR § 731 standards to fitness cases per DoDI 1400.25 v731, fitness positions are not affiliated with the same appeal rights and, therefore, are not covered in this section. Instead, [Section 12: Fitness Outcomes and Appeals](#) (page [112](#)) focuses on fitness outcomes and appeals as handled by DoD components.

The following key topics are addressed:

- Suitability actions performed by OPM and DoD component adjudicators;
- Suitability action procedural requirements; and
- Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) appeal procedures.

11.2. Suitability Actions

A suitability action is an outcome taken by OPM or a DoD component following an unfavorable suitability determination, in accordance with 5 CFR § 731 and OPM’s Suitability Processing Handbook. There are four suitability action categories that



vary depending upon personnel category. The four OPM-defined personnel categories are:

- Applicant: A person who is being considered or has been considered for employment.
- Eligible: A person whose name has been placed on a standing inventory or a list of eligible personnel.
- Appointee: A person who has begun duty and is in the first calendar year of a subject-to-investigation appointment.
- Employee: A person who has completed the first year of a subject-to-investigation appointment. Only OPM can take a suitability action against an employee.

The four OPM-defined suitability actions applicable to these personnel categories are:

- Cancellation of eligibility: This action applies to applicants or eligibles and indicates that the individual is not eligible for employment.
- Removal: This action applies to appointees or employees and involves removing the individual from the position they currently hold by appointment or employment.
- Cancellation of reinstatement eligibility: this action applies to appointees or employees and indicates that the individual is not eligible for reinstatement to the position they currently hold by appointment or employment.
- Debarment: This action applies to all four categories of personnel and indicates that the individual is prohibited from being hired (or retained) in a covered position for a specified period of time (up to three years). This may be used in conjunction with cancellation of eligibility and removal. An individual may also be debarred from all employment with the federal government for up to three years.

A component has the option of taking a suitability action following an unfavorable suitability determination. However, some alternatives exist to these formal actions. These alternatives need not follow the procedural requirements of formal suitability actions, even if based on the criteria for making suitability determinations in 5 CFR § 731. They consist of the following:

- Rescission of tentative offer of employment;
- Non selection, including:
 - Cancellation of a tentative offer for a single position or



- Cancellation of eligibility for a specific position based on an objection to an eligible or pass over of a preference eligible under 5 CFR § 332.406; or
- Reassignment of employee that does not meet suitability requirements specific to a particular position (but does meet basic suitability requirements).

11.2.1. Debarment

The suitability action of debarment is particularly serious and is covered in detail in this section. Debarment refers to the denial of examination for, or appointment to, a covered position (see [Section 1: Background Information](#) on page 8). If enacted by OPM, a debarment may apply to all covered positions within the Federal government. If enacted by a DoD component, a debarment will only apply to the specific position within that component. OPM only issues debarments for positions specifically covered by 5 CFR § 731 (i.e., OPM does not issue debarments for positions covered under fitness requirements). DoD components may issue debarments for positions covered by either suitability or fitness requirements (covered in [11.2.1.1 \[below\]](#) and [11.2.1.2 \[page 106\]](#)).

11.2.1.1. Debarment by OPM

OPM may issue a debarment from all covered positions for up to three years following the date of an unfavorable suitability determination. Further, it may impose an additional period of debarment after an OPM or DoD component issued debarment period expires. This occurs only after the individual again becomes an applicant, appointee, or employee subject to OPM's suitability jurisdiction.

Any additional debarment period applied in such cases may be based on new conduct or the same conduct upon which the previous suitability action was based. OPM has sole authority in determining the duration of any debarment period it imposes. DoD components may use the same process for identifying appropriate debarment periods.

The period of debarment in a given case is related to both the recency and seriousness of basic suitability issues. OPM provides guidelines to identify appropriate debarment periods for basic suitability evaluations. Note that OPM will rarely exercise debarment jurisdiction if the guidelines result in a debarment recommendation that is less than or equal to 18 months. However, the DoD component may still chose to debar an individual.

OPM guidelines for debarment periods also take into account the number of issues using an issue "upgrading" procedure. A review of the issues and any upgrades is used to identify the *longest debarment period* applicable across all issues *after* upgrading is taken into account. Upgrades in this instance apply specifically to the number of issues identified in a case and the established recency of those issues.



Under basic suitability per 5 CFR § 731 and associated issuances, OPM may make Government-wide debarments in:

- Applicant cases where basic suitability results in debarment of at least 24 months;
- Cases with major issues (and time remaining in the first year of employment to take action under the limitations of 5 CFR § 731);
- Applicant, appointee, or employee cases where evidence of material, intentional false statement, or deception/fraud in examination or appointment occurs (such cases, regardless of recency, are contrary to the Federal hiring principles of fair and open competition).

Note: Only when a position occurs in more than one Federal agency will OPM consider Government-wide debarment based on an unfavorable determination resulting from a nexus of the job and the issue (i.e., based on the nature of the position).

11.2.1.2. Debarment by DoD Component

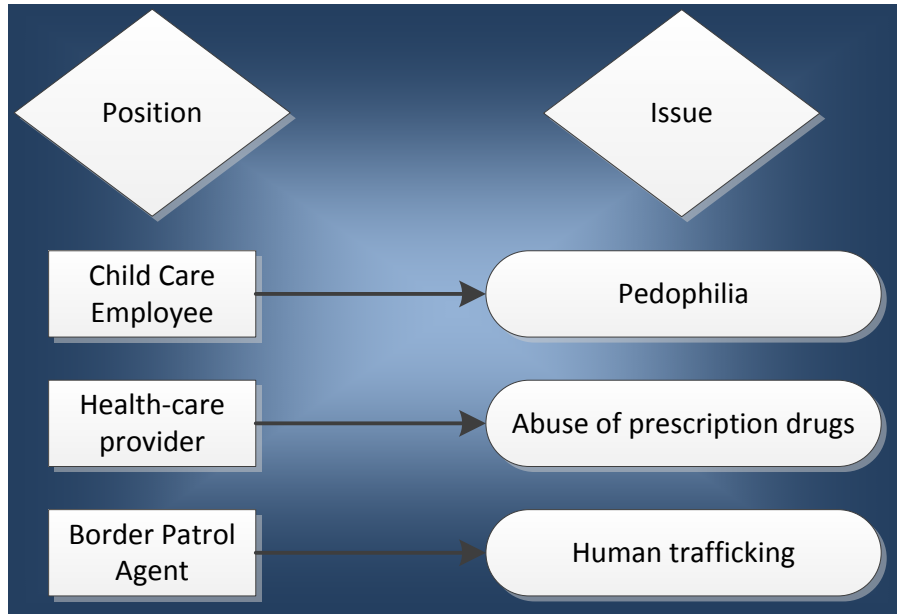
A DoD component may issue a debarment from all or specific covered component positions for up to three years following the date of an unfavorable suitability determination. Like OPM, it may also impose an additional period of debarment after a debarment period expires, but only after the individual has again become an applicant or appointee subject to the components suitability jurisdiction. However, agencies should always ensure that a case is not under OPM debarment authority before taking action (e.g., only OPM can take a suitability action against an employee). Note that recent case law may require OPM to utilize 5 CFR § 752 procedures when taking action against an employee.

If the DoD component issues a debarment, the component must take responsibility for ensuring that the debarment is enforced and for taking the appropriate action if an individual applies for, or is incorrectly appointed to, a position at the component during a debarment period. Components should develop procedures for creating central documentation of debarments and ensuring that component debarment information is checked early in the hiring process. If a component believes that a Government-wide debarment is appropriate for a given case that does not otherwise meet this requirement; the case can be referred to OPM.

As is the case for debarment based on basic suitability or fitness issues, debarments may result from the adjudication of issues specific to a particular position, even if the basic suitability adjudication did not require a debarment. [Figure 4 below](#) provides examples of such cases.



Figure 4: Examples of Issues with a Nexus to a Position

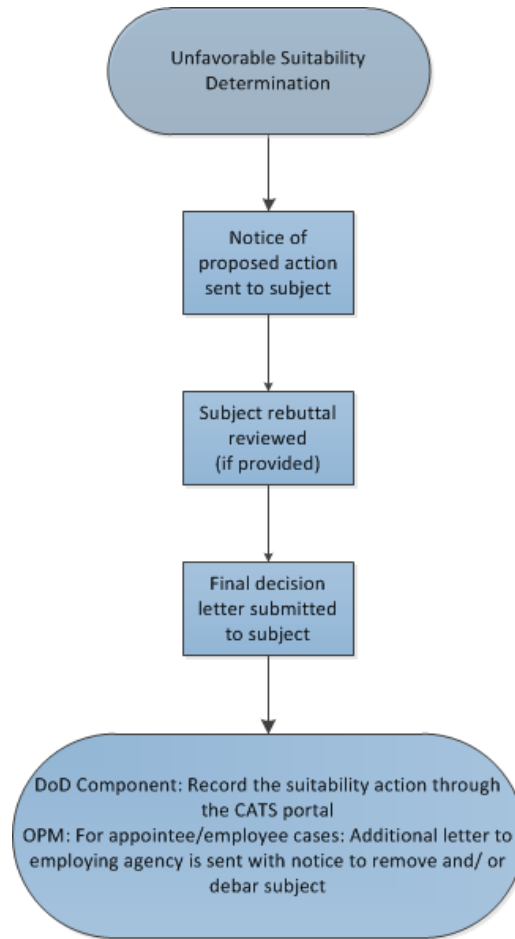


11.2.2. Suitability Action Procedural Requirements

Title 5 CFR § 731 outlines the procedural requirements for taking suitability actions. If the individual against whom the action will be taken is an applicant, eligible or appointee, either OPM or the DoD component can process the action. For personnel who already fall into the employee category, only OPM can take a suitability action, and recent case law may require OPM to utilize the procedures in 5 CFR § 752 to take the action.

[Figure 5](#) (page [108](#)) shows the process flow for suitability or fitness actions. Key process tasks/actions are described further in following sections.

Figure 5: Suitability Action Process



Note: It is critical to document the outcome of the final decision. If the final decision is not favorable, the documentation strategy depends on the source of the information for the final decision and whether the subject underwent a background investigation.

11.2.2.1. Notice of Proposed Action

Before either OPM or the DoD component takes a suitability action, the acting component or OPM must provide subjects with a reason for the proposed action. Subjects must also have an opportunity to explain, mitigate, or refute the potentially disqualifying information. The Notice of Proposed Action provides documentation of the reason for the action. This notice should be sent by registered/certified mail or hand delivered to a subject’s residence or duty station. The OPM Suitability Processing Handbook details the information that must be specified in the Notice of Proposed Action.

Note: DoD adjudicators must refer to OPM’s Suitability Processing Handbook for a detailed listing of information that is restricted from release in the Notice of Proposed Action. This correspondence (and any other subject correspondence) must

be void of restricted, proprietary investigative data (e.g., confidential sources, sensitive medical documentation). Additionally, approval to release OPM-originated investigative information must be sought if it is used to take a suitability action. Examples of the Notice of Proposed Action are found in the OPM Suitability Handbook's Appendix.

11.2.2.2. Final Decision Letter

In instances where a suitability action is deemed necessary after the subject's rebuttal is considered, a final decision letter must be sent to the respondent. OPM Suitability Processing Handbook details the required content of the letter. Please note the following notification processes applicable to OPM and DoD components, respectively:

- **OPM.** When OPM takes a suitability action, a copy of the Final Decision Letter must be sent to the DoD CAF Liaison Office at OPM, who will coordinate with the DoD CAF. If the final decision involves removal and/or debarment (for appointee/employee cases), an additional instruction letter is sent to the employing office (e.g., the subject's duty station). This letter provides information on removal procedures. Specifically, the appointee or employee must be removed from their role within five working days from receipt of this letter.
- **DoD Component.** If a DoD component takes a final suitability action against an applicant or appointee, the final decision letter and the action should be sent to OPM via the Case Adjudication Tracking System (CATS) within 30 days. If the final decision involves removal and/or debarment (for applicant or appointee cases), further instruction should be provided to the employing office at this time. To report the action to OPM, the following documents are first electronically transmitted to the DoD CAF via the CATS Portal (as applicable):
 - (1) If the case was originally investigated by OPM, the DoD components must complete INV Form 79A, *Report of Agency Adjudicative Action on OPM Personnel Investigations*.
 - (2) If the case was originally investigated by the DoD component, the DoD component must complete OFI Form 79, *Notice of Personnel Investigation*. (This form demonstrates that the agency adjudication is sufficient.)
 - (3) Any other unfavorable adjudication is reported to OPM using the INV Form 79C, *Report of Agency Unfavorable Adjudicative Action on Non-Investigated Applicants/Appointees*.

Once in CATS, OPM will receive this documentation via an electronic CVS batch file.



Note: If a component's final suitability action is based on an OPM investigation, the component should report this decision to OPM as soon as possible. At a minimum, however, the component must notify OPM within 90 days of receiving the final report of investigation (ROI) per 5 CFR § 731. The OPM Suitability Processing Handbook includes several additional stipulations.

11.2.2.3. Additional Notes

When OPM does not take action, the component or the DoD CAF still must review and adjudicate for suitability and/or security. If the investigation is being held in abeyance at the DoD CAF, the component should NOT take action unless it is forwarded through CATS. If OPM has closed the investigation and sent it to the CAF for adjudication the component should not take action until the case is transferred via CATS.

11.3. Suitability Appeals

This section discusses the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) appeals process, because it is the only appeal process that cuts across DoD components. This section provides some general information about MSPB, but see the OPM Suitability Process Handbook for information about procedures.

11.3.1. MSPB

The MSPB was established in 1979 to handle the employee appeals function of the Civil Service. It is an independent, Executive Branch agency with quasi-judicial authority that protects federal merit system employees and applicants from partisan political and other prohibited personnel practices.

Most of the cases brought to MSPB are appeals of agency adverse actions such as removals, suspensions of more than 14 days, or reductions in grade or pay. The MSPB also handles appeals to OPM suitability determinations, OPM employment practices (the development and use of examinations, qualification standards, tests and other measurement instruments), and many other types of adverse actions. As mentioned above, for suitability actions, the MSPB only handles appeals for the categories of personnel covered by 5 CFR § 731, *Suitability*.

11.3.2. Appeals

If a suitability action under Title 5: Administrative Personnel, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 731, *Suitability*, as amended (5 CFR § 731) is taken against an applicant or appointee to a covered position (by OPM or a DoD component), or an employee in a covered position (by OPM), that individual may appeal the action to the MSPB. The MSPB will consider the case record as a whole and review each



charge against the individual to determine whether sufficient evidence exists to support the charge(s) and sustain the suitability *determination*. This will determine whether the suitability *action* is still valid, based on the sustained determination.

If the MSPB determines that there is sufficient evidence (i.e., a preponderance of evidence) to validate one or more of the charges against an individual, the MSPB must affirm the original suitability determination made by OPM or the component. The MSPB will assess each charge in depth to determine whether the charge is valid. In this assessment, the evidence presented in a record does not need to support all of the specifications of a charge in order for the charge to be upheld.

If the MSPB does not find justification for all of the charges against an individual, it must send the case back to OPM or the component to review and determine whether the suitability action is still warranted by the sustained charge(s) of the determination record. If sent to the component, the component can only make a decision on the returned case after the individual has exhausted all rights to seek review of the MSPB's decision, including court review.

After the MSPB finalizes its review, OPM or the component decides whether the action taken is justified by the sustained charge(s). The MSPB decision serves as the final determination. There can be no further appeal to the MSPB. Any further appeal must be sought through the Federal court system.

11.3.3. Outside MSPB Jurisdiction

An applicant or appointee may not appeal an unfavorable suitability determination to the MSPB in cases of 1) non-selection or 2) unfavorable determination of eligibility to hold a national security sensitive position or security clearance. Neither non-selection nor unfavorable national security determination, alone, is considered a suitability action under 5 CFR § 731, and therefore are not entitled to MSPB appeal rights for unfavorable determinations. If an applicant or appointee wishes to appeal objections to eligible or pass over of preference eligible decisions, they may do so according to 5 CFR § 332.

An applicant, appointee, or employee may have other entitlements to appeal rights, which are found in 5 CFR § 300.104 and 5 CFR § 1201.2. These appeal rights and grievances relate to employment practices such as candidate evaluation, relevance and requirements of the position, and employment discrimination.

11.3.4. Appeal Procedures and Requirements

See the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook for appeal procedures and requirements.



Section 12 Fitness Outcomes and Appeals

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12.1. Overview

Similar to suitability for covered positions, fitness determinations may find individuals unfit for employment in Nonappropriated Fund (NAF) positions, the excepted service, or as a contractor. Note that in some cases fitness determinations for excepted service positions follow the suitability process, and others follow component-specific procedures. While the hiring process continues in cases with favorable fitness determinations, additional steps often are necessary to process cases with unfavorable determinations. Since these procedures have not been standardized across the DoD, recommended steps are described in this section. This section also briefly discusses the suggested appeal process for fitness cases with unfavorable outcomes.

The following key topics are addressed:

- Fitness outcomes
- Procedures
- Appeals

12.2. Fitness Outcomes

Components may take fitness actions following unfavorable determinations. The possible actions are:

- Rescind a tentative offer of employment
- Non-selection
- Assignment to another position when the employee does not meet fitness requirements specific to a particular position (but does meet basic fitness requirements)
- Debarment



- Separation as disqualification

12.2.1. Debarment

The action of debarment is a particularly serious fitness outcome. Debarment is a prohibition from being hired or retained in a position for a specific period of time. OPM does not issue government-wide debarments for positions covered under fitness requirements.

A DoD component may issue a debarment from all or specific component positions for up to three years following the date of an unfavorable fitness determination. It may also impose an additional period of debarment after a debarment period expires, but only after the individual has again become an applicant or employee subject to the component's jurisdiction.

If a DoD component issues a debarment, the component must take responsibility for ensuring that it is enforced and for taking the appropriate action if an individual applies for, or is incorrectly appointed to, a position at the component during a debarment period. Components should develop procedures for creating central documentation of debarments and ensuring that component debarment information is checked early in the hiring process.

As mentioned in [11.2.1.2: Debarment by DoD Component](#) (page [106](#)), a component may issue a debarment based on adjudication of issues specific to a particular position. This may occur even if a basic fitness determination does not warrant a debarment. Examples may include issues related to child abuse or pedophilia identified in an individual's background investigation, when the position being sought is that of a child care employee. Additional examples can be found in [Figure 4](#) (page [107](#)).

12.3. Fitness Outcome Procedural Requirements

The DoD components retain responsibility for any fitness actions brought against an excepted service, contractor, or NAF employee. Although fitness "actions" cannot be taken under 5 CFR § 731, notifying a non-covered subject of an unfavorable fitness determination is encouraged. Components are encouraged to consider the procedural requirements in 5 CFR § 731 when developing component-specific guidance on fitness and appeals. Note that fitness determinations and actions must be reported to OPM. See [Section 11: Suitability Actions and Appeals](#) (page [103](#)) and the *OPM Suitability Processing Handbook* for more information on these procedures.



12.4. Fitness Outcome Appeals

Fitness outcomes do not fall under a specific federal or DoD appeal process. However, DoD components are encouraged to establish procedures that provide due process to personnel who receive an unfavorable fitness outcome. [Section 11](#) (page [103](#)) describes the appeal process for suitability actions and can provide useful ideas for the elements of a fitness appeals process. However, the body to which an appeal is made will not be the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) as fitness positions do not fall under its jurisdiction. Contractors may be able to appeal fitness decisions to the Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals (DOHA). Appeals for NAF employees are handled in accordance with their component's administrative grievance policies and procedures, or with a negotiated grievance process (DoDI 1400.25 v731, Enclosure 3, paragraph 7d). Please check with your component suitability representative for guidance on appeals not handled by MSPB.

12.4.1. NAF Administrative Grievances

A grievance, in this case, is a request to appeal an unfavorable suitability or fitness determination that is part of NAF employment or retention procedures. DoD component administrative procedures must provide an opportunity for NAF applicants and employees to grieve unfavorable determinations. The components also must maintain administrative grievance records in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and records retention schedules (DoDI 1400.25 v1471).

Management should try to resolve grievances through informal channels, if possible. However, the DoD Components must establish internal administrative procedures for prompt and equitable resolution of grievances that are not resolved informally. These procedures must include specified time limits for processing grievance cases. They also must include informal problem-solving, an initial management response, fact finding and investigation, as well as an official final decision.



References

- (1) Computer Security Act of 1987
- (2) DoD Directive 5400.07, *DoD Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Program* (January 2, 2008)
- (3) DoD Directive 5400.11, *DoD Privacy Program* (October 29, 2014)
- (4) DoD Instruction 1400.25, Volume 1405, *DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Nonappropriated Fund (NAF) Pay, Awards, and Allowances* (June 26, 2014)
- (5) DoD Instruction 1400.25, Volume 731, *DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Suitability and Fitness Adjudication For Civilian Employees* (August 24, 2012)
- (6) DoD Instruction 1402.5, *Background Checks on Individuals in DoD Child Care Services Programs*, (September 11, 2015)
- (7) DoD Instruction 5200.46, *DoD Investigative and Adjudicative Guidance for Issuing the Common Access Card (CAC)* (September 9, 2014)
- (8) DoD Manual 5200.01, Volumes 1-4, *DoD Information Security Program* (February 24, 2012)
- (9) DoD Manual 5400.11-R, *DoD Privacy Program* (May 14, 2007)
- (10) Executive Order 10577, *Amending the Civil Service Rules and Authorizing a New Appointment System for the Competitive Service* (November 23, 1954)
- (11) Executive Order 13467, *Reforming Processes Related to Suitability for Government Employment, Fitness for Contractor Employees, and Eligibility for Access to Classified National Security Information* (June 30, 2008)
- (12) Executive Order 13488, *Granting Reciprocity on Excepted Service and Federal Contractor Employee Fitness and Reinvestigating Individuals in Positions of Public Trust* (January 16, 2009)
- (13) Office of Management and Budget Circular No. A-130, Revised, *Management of Federal Information Resources* (November 20, 2000)
- (14) Office of the Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Supplemental Implementation Guidance for DoD Consolidated Adjudications Facility (CAF) Favorable Suitability and Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12) Adjudications* (Aug 29, 2013)
- (15) OPM Federal Investigations Notice 12-01, *Guidance for Moving between OPM Investigative Products* (November 23, 2011)
- (16) OPM Federal Investigations Notice 12-04, *Security and Suitability Investigations Index (SII), Central Verification System (CVS), National Agency Check (NAC) Item* (February 9, 2012)



- (17) OPM Federal Investigative Services INV-15, *Requesting OPM Personnel Investigations* (April 2012)
- (18) OPM Memorandum, *Guidance on Implementing Executive Order 13488, "Granting Reciprocity on Excepted Service and Federal Contractor Employee Fitness and Reinvestigating Individuals in Positions of Public Trust"* (September 24, 2009)
- (19) OPM Operating Manual, *The Guide to Personnel Recordkeeping* (June 1, 2011)
- (20) OPM Suitability Processing Handbook (2008)
- (21) Parts 300, 302, 332, 731, 736, 732, 752, and 1201 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations
- (22) Sections 3301, 7301, and 7511 of title 5, United States Code

Forms Cited

Form No.	Title
<i>DD Form 2875</i>	Department of Defense Form 2875, <i>System Authorization Access Request (SAAR)</i>
<i>I-9</i>	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Form I-9, <i>Employment Eligibility Verification</i>
<i>INV 79</i>	Office of Federal Investigations Form 79, <i>Notice of Personnel Investigation</i>
<i>INV 79A</i>	Office of Federal Investigations Form 79A, <i>Report of Agency Adjudicative Action on OPM Personnel Investigations</i>
<i>INV 79C</i>	Office of Federal Investigations Form 79C, <i>Report of Agency Unfavorable Adjudicative Action on Non-Investigated Applicants/Appointees</i>
<i>MSPB Form 185</i>	Merit Systems Protection Board Form 185, <i>Merit Systems Protection Board Appeal Form</i>
<i>OF-306</i>	Optional Form 306, <i>Declaration for Federal Employment</i>
<i>PIPS 11</i>	Personnel Investigations Processing System Form 11, <i>Security Office Identifier (SOI) Authorization and Amendment</i>
<i>SF-52</i>	Standard Form 52, <i>Request for Personnel Action (RPA)</i>
<i>SF-85</i>	Standard Form 85, <i>Questionnaire for Non-Sensitive Positions</i>
<i>SF-85P</i>	Standard Form 85P, <i>Questionnaire for Public Trust Positions</i>
<i>SF-86</i>	Standard Form 86, <i>Questionnaire for National Security Positions</i>



Appendix A Training

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A.1. Overview

This section describes training for various procedures and systems employed in the suitability process. The training options and links were active at the time of publication of this guide. For additional training information, contact the Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service (DCPAS) or your component suitability authority.

A.2. Position Designation Automated Tool (PDT)

Proper position risk and sensitivity designations may be made using the PDT, which builds upon the information provided in OPM's Position Designation System. The PDT is offered by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as a way to aid officials with position designation responsibilities to determine appropriate risk and sensitivity levels, and to ensure consistent position designation practices across agencies.

Though not required, OPM offers a course held at the OPM Federal Investigative Services (OPM-FIS) Training Center in Arlington, VA with in-depth training on the PDT and guidance on connecting position designations to OPM's investigative and adjudicative requirements. Information on the position designation training course, and how to register, may be found at the following link.

Position Designation Agency Training:

<http://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/agency-training/position-designation/>

Additional Position Designation Resources

- <http://archive.opm.gov/investigate/resources/position/index.aspx>
- [Position Designation System October 2010](#)



- [Position Designation System Glossary October 2010](#)

A.3. Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP)

OPM offers two kinds of training courses on the Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP), which is typically what applicants use to complete SF-85, SF-85P, or SF-86.

- (1) For personnel involved in management, review, or oversight of e-QIP completion and investigation requests, they may take OPM’s online e-QIP Web-Based Training class, which consists of several lessons covering e-QIP application tasks, user roles, and features (see link below).

e-QIP Application Web-Based Training:

<http://www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/web-based-training/>

- (2) For those designated by their agency to train other agency employees on the e-QIP system, there is a free two-day e-QIP Train-the-Trainer (EQTTT) course, which is held at the OPM-FIS Training Center in Arlington, VA (see link below).

e-QIP Train-the-Trainer (EQTTT) Agency Training:

<http://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/agency-training/e-qip-train-the-trainer/>

A.4. CVS and JPAS

To check for previously adjudicated background investigations, personnel may use OPM’s Central Verification System (CVS), in conjunction with the Department of Defense’s (DoD’s Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS). To access JPAS a user must have at minimum Secret access eligibility, as indicated in the document “JPAS Account Request Procedures” (last updated 7/18/2013) on the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) JPAS website

<https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/psawebdocs/docPage.jsp?p=JPAS>). For CVS access, a minimum of a favorably adjudicated Access National Agency Check and Inquiries (ANACI) or National Agency Check with Law and Credit (NACLC) (or equivalent investigation) is required, as per INV Form 70B, *Request for PIPS/ CVS User ID/ Access*. This form was last updated 3/23/2010, so it does not reference the tiered investigations. The ANACI and NACLC are equivalent to the Tier 3 investigation.

CVS Training. For training on how to utilize the CVS for reciprocity determination tasks, one may take OPM’s course on CVS training (see link below).



Central Verification System (CVS) Agency Training:

<http://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/agency-training/central-verification-system-novice-training/>

JPAS Training (Checks and Review). For training on how to utilize JPAS for eligibility and investigation verification tasks, one may take the following online course, provided through the Defense Security Service (DSS) Center for Development of Security Excellence (CDSE). It provides an overview of the JPAS as well as detailed guidance on how to navigate its subsystem, the Joint Clearance and Access Verification System (JCAVS), for checking investigation records. One must have a Security Training, Education and Professional Portal (STEPP) account in order to take the course and to take the final exam which enables users to receive course credit and print a certificate of successful completion upon receiving a passing exam score.

JPAS/JCAVS Virtual Training for Security Professionals STEPP Course

PS123.16: <http://www.cdse.edu/catalog/elearning/PS123.html> (as noted on the course web page, the course has not yet been fully updated to correspond with recent JPAS updates, and thus may not be entirely consistent with the latest version of JPAS)

Note: Clicking on the “Sign up for this course” link will redirect users to the STEPP login page. If a user does not have a STEPP account, they should click on the “Create your new STEPP user account” link, which will guide the user through the process of establishing one.

JPAS Access. To access and utilize JPAS, users are required to receive appropriate training on cyber security awareness and protecting Personally Identifiable Information (PII). New users must receive this training upon account creation, and existing users must complete the training every year. If an agency does not offer this kind of training internally, personnel should take the DoD version of the Cyber Awareness Challenge/Organization security training course (see link below).

Cyber Awareness Challenge (for DoD and Federal Personnel):

<http://iase.disa.mil/eta/> (click on the course link and proceed by choosing the appropriate version for either DoD employees or Federal employees)

In addition, personnel should take either of the following two Personally Identifiable Information (PII) online training courses:

- (1) **Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) PII Training:**
<http://iase.disa.mil/eta/> (click on the course link and proceed by choosing the appropriate course version)
- (2) **Defense Security Service (DSS) PII Training:**
<http://www.cdse.edu/catalog/elearning/DS-IF101.html> (one must have a



Security Training, Education and Professional Portal (STEPP) account to take this course)

Note: Clicking on the “Sign up for this course” link will redirect users to the STEPP login page. If a user does not have a STEPP account, they should click on the “Create your new STEPP user account” link, which will guide the user through the process of establishing one.

A.5. Adjudications

Suitability and fitness adjudicators should receive appropriate training that provides them with the necessary knowledge and tools to properly review and adjudicate suitability and fitness cases. Where possible, personnel are encouraged to attend an OPM-approved training course. This ensures that the course material meets all training requirements and expectations of OPM, the Suitability Executive Agent. In addition, adjudicators may participate in training developed and provided by the DoD or their respective component as a supplement to the OPM training.

OPM-Provided Adjudicator Training. OPM offers a two-week “Essentials of Suitability Adjudication Program” classroom-based training course, intended for agency-designated suitability and fitness adjudicators and/or those responsible for suitability and fitness review. This course fulfills the necessary OPM training requirements in order to properly adjudicate cases in accordance with 5 CFR § 731 and the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook. As such, attendance is highly recommended.

In order to receive the course training, one must be designated by their agency’s head of security as one authorized to handle suitability and fitness adjudications and thus be issued a copy of the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook. More information on the adjudication training course may be found at the following link.

OPM Essentials of Suitability Adjudication Program Agency Training:

<http://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/agency-training/essentials-of-suitability-adjudication-program/>

OPM-Approved Adjudicator Training. Another course option for suitability and fitness adjudication training is the Graduate School USA’s three-day, classroom-based Suitability Adjudication Course. It was developed and approved by OPM, and therefore meets the necessary training requirement for adjudicators. However, there may be some material not covered in this course that only the OPM two-week course or on-the-job training by a seasoned adjudicator may address.

To receive this training, one must be designated with suitability and fitness adjudication functions and have a copy of the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook. Information regarding this course may be found at the following link.



Graduate School USA Suitability Adjudication Course:

http://www.graduateschool.edu/course_details.php?cid=STAF8101D

Additional information concerning suitability adjudication course training may be found at the Graduate School USA’s website: <http://www.graduateschool.edu/>

DoD Adjudicator Training. The DoD has recently released a suitability adjudications online training course, “Introduction to Suitability Adjudications for the DoD”, intended for DoD security and other agency officials responsible for performing suitability and fitness adjudications. It serves as an introductory course for suitability and fitness adjudications, and therefore does not replace the recommended classroom-based training offered by OPM or the Graduate School USA. The course requires users to have a STEPP account, and may be accessed by clicking the following link.

Introduction to Suitability Adjudication for the DoD STEPP Course PS010.16:

<http://www.cdse.edu/catalog/elearning/PS010.html>

Note: Clicking on the “Sign up for this course” link will redirect users to the STEPP login page. If a user does not have a STEPP account, they should click on the “Create your new STEPP user account” link, which will guide the user through the process of establishing one.



Appendix B Background Investigations

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NOTE: The information presented here is based on the currently implemented 2008 Federal Investigative Standards (FIS). The 2012 revised FIS are in the process of being implemented, with full implementation expected by 2017. Terms from the 2012 revised FIS are noted, where appropriate.

For the latest information regarding implementation of the revised FIS, see the Federal Investigations Notices (FINs) that are issued by OPM-FIS and posted on the OPM website (<http://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/federal-investigations-notices/>).

B.1. Basic Investigative Components

The National Agency Check (NAC) represents the basis for all background investigations. This check consists of searches of the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) Security/Suitability Investigations Index (SII) and the Defense Central Index of Investigations (DCII); review of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) investigation, criminal history, and fingerprint files; and any other agency checks deemed necessary for a position or in relation to the individual's background. All suitability and fitness investigations consist of a NAC plus additional checks or searches, depending on the position's risk and sensitivity designations. The NAC alone does not fulfill suitability and fitness investigative requirements.

B.1.1. Initial Investigations

Currently, there are seven broad investigation types, which are described below. Under the new FIS, these investigations will be transitioned to five investigative tiers, which build upon but do not duplicate one another.

Tier 1 Investigation. This investigation is the minimum investigation required for federal employment and is conducted for Low-Risk, Nonsensitive Positions. It consists of a NAC with the addition of inquiries and searches of employment, education, residence, and criminal history records during the past 5 years. Written



inquiries are sent to current and past employers, schools attended, personal references, and local law enforcement agencies.

Tier 1 Investigation with State Criminal History Checks. This investigation is reserved for positions involved in providing childcare and youth services. It consists of a Tier 1 investigation and searches of criminal history and fingerprint files using the State Criminal History Repository (SCHR) for each state the applicant has resided in.

Tier 2 Investigation. This investigation is the minimum investigation requirement for a Moderate Risk Public Trust Position. Tier 2 adds a credit check and subject interview to the requirements of Tier 1 and is requested using the SF-85P.

Tier 3 Investigation. This investigation is the minimum investigation requirement for Noncritical Sensitive Positions. It adds some checks for foreign activities and is requested using the SF-86, a much more extensive application.

Background Investigation (BI). This investigation is the minimum investigation requirement for High Risk Public Trust Positions. It consists of an MBI, with the addition of 5 years of personal coverage of an individual's employment, residential, and educational history, as well as any court actions in the past 5 years. This will become the Tier 4 investigation with full implementation of the tiered investigation system.

Single-Scope Background Investigation (SSBI). This investigation is the minimum investigation requirement for Special Sensitive or Critical Sensitive Positions. It consists of a NAC, spouse or cohabitant NAC, credit check, Personal Subject Interview (PSI), as well as citizenship, employment, education, residence, law enforcement, and record searches covering the past 10 years, or since the individual's 18th birthday, whichever is less. This will become the Tier 5 investigation with full implementation of the tiered investigation system.

[Table 12](#) provides an overview of these initial investigation types and what they entail.



Table 12: Types of Initial Investigations

	Tier 1	Tier 1 with SCHR	Tier 2	Tier 3	Background Investigation (BI)	Single-Scope Background Investigation (SSBI)
<i>Uses</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LR positions designated NS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All childcare positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MR positions designated NS MR positions Designated NCS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LR positions designated NS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR positions designated NS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All SS or CS positions All sensitive HR positions
<i>Authority Type</i>	Suitability/ Fitness	Suitability/ Fitness	Suitability/ Fitness	Personnel Security	Suitability/ Fitness	Personnel Security
<i>Components</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAC Employment checks Residence checks Education checks Law enforcement agency checks Personal reference checks <p>**Minimum investigation required for federal employees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAC Employment checks Residence checks Education checks Law enforcement agency checks Personal reference checks State Criminal History Repository (SCHR) checks for each state of residence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAC Employment checks Residence checks Education checks Law enforcement agency checks Personal reference checks Credit checks Personal Subject Interview (PSI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAC Employment checks Residence checks Education checks Law enforcement agency checks Credit checks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAC Employment checks Residence checks Education checks Law enforcement agency checks Personal reference checks Credit checks Personal Subject Interview (PSI) Reviews of court actions Other source interviews Citizenship checks Spouse or cohabitant NAC 	

Note: Adapted from Defense Security Service (DSS) Center of Development of Security Excellence (CDSE) "Introduction to Suitability Adjudications for the DoD" Lesson 4 Job Aid: Investigative Requirements. Abbreviations are as follows: Low risk (LR), Moderate Risk (MR), High Risk (HR), Non-Sensitive (NS), Non-Critical Sensitive (NCS), Special Sensitive (SS), Critical Sensitive (CS).



B.1.2. Reinvestigations

In addition to initial investigations, reinvestigations may also be necessary for suitability and fitness positions. The three types of suitability or fitness reinvestigations and the timelines for them are described below.

Tier 2 Reinvestigation with Subject Interview (T 2RS): This reinvestigation is conducted at least once every 5 years for Moderate Risk Public Trust positions.

Periodic Reinvestigation (PRI). This reinvestigation is conducted at least once every 5 years for High Risk Public Trust positions. It consists of a NACLC with the addition of a PSI and written inquiries to references.

SSBI-Periodic Reinvestigation (SSBI-PR). This reinvestigation is conducted every 5 years for Special Sensitive or Critical Sensitive Positions. It consists of a NACLC, PSI, and NAC on any new spouse or cohabitant, as well as employment, neighbor, former spouse, and reference interviews. Additionally, a review of any court actions during the period since the last investigation and a check of the Department of Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) database is conducted.

Phased Periodic Reinvestigation (PPR). This reinvestigation consists of the same checks as the SSBI-PR, but interviews with character references and neighbors are excluded. This reinvestigation may be conducted in lieu of the SSBI-PR, at the discretion of an agency, if no security or suitability concerns are found through other checks.



Appendix C Checking for Previous Determinations

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The following sections provide general guidance for using CVS and JPAS to access information on prior investigations and suitability or fitness determinations. It should be noted, however, that some of these procedures may differ among components, depending on factors like component-specific processes or level of system access. For example, human resources personnel may direct investigation verification duties to Security Office Managers, who may have less restricted access to CVS and JPAS. Sometimes components may use different databases to verify investigation information, such as the Army's Personnel Security Investigation Portal (PSIP). It is therefore advisable to verify the correct investigation verification procedures with the appropriate component office to support reciprocity to the greatest extent possible.

C.1. CVS Checks

Before initiating an investigation, designated component officials should search CVS for an existing record for the individual (i.e., subject).

C.1.1. Searching for a Subject in CVS

CVS allows searches through three databases CVS, JPAS, and the Security/Suitability Investigations Index (SII), which holds all of the investigation and adjudication information that Federal agencies report to OPM. To conduct a search, the user must have the subject's SSN and last name (fields are marked with an asterisk). If either entry is incorrect (e.g., if the SSN is off by a digit), CVS will ask the user for a Place of Birth to verify/find a result.

C.1.2. Investigation Information in CVS

CVS will provide a listing of all previous investigations for the subject to include details of the investigation, such as the type of investigation ("Case Type"),



Standard Form, OPM case number, closing date, and whether any fingerprint results are on record. It also enables requests for an investigative file (if available for review).

Note: An “SF-85” in the “Standard Form/Version” field may indicate that either a National Agency Check and Inquiries (NACI) or a Child Care National Agency Check and Inquiries (CNACI) was conducted (CVS does not currently make a distinction between these two investigations). If the adjudication was conducted prior to 2012, the field will say “SF-85P” to indicate that a CNACI was conducted. If the adjudication occurred after 2012, the user will not be able to tell whether a CNACI was conducted. To obtain this information, the user must contact the previous adjudicating agency or the subject to verify what their previous position was.

The closing seriousness code (under “Seriousness Code”) indicates whether the investigation may require review for nexus concerns. Additionally, reviewing available fingerprint records may provide additional information on issues that were identified and/or mitigated.

C.1.3. Adjudication Information in CVS – Favorable Determinations

Adjudication information also appears in CVS to include the determination made, the date the determination was made, and the agency that conducted the adjudication. In some cases and adjudicative result may not appear either because the investigation was not adjudicated, or the adjudicating agency did not send a record of the adjudication to OPM for filing.

If anything other than a favorable determination was made, the record will indicate the need to either review investigative record or contact the adjudicating agency. It will also provide the contact information for the DoD component that adjudicated the case. The presence of issues in a case is documented by either a yes or a no, however this only reflects whether OPM closed the case with or without issues; it does NOT indicate whether the adjudicating DoD component identified issues in the case. Finally, the record will indicate the criteria under which the adjudication was made (e.g., “5 CFR § 731 or equivalent”).

C.1.4. Required Actions Based on CVS Information

[Table 13](#) outlines the actions that should be taken based on entries in the “Agency Adjudication” and “Issues” data fields.



Table 13: Required Reciprocity Actions when Checking CVS for Previous Investigations

Agency Adjudication	Issues	Required Action
"Favorable"	"No"	Reciprocally accept prior determination ¹
	"Yes"	Contact previous adjudicative agency and review investigative record for any conduct incompatible with the core duties of the new position
"Review investigative record or contact adjudicating agency"	N/A	Do not grant reciprocity; contact previous adjudicative agency and request the investigative file for adjudicative review

¹Under the condition that a) the prior determination was made on at least an equivalent investigation to the one required for the new position and b) the prior determination was based on OPM standards (indicated under "Adjudicative Basis").

If the record includes the message, "Review investigative record or contact adjudicating agency", the investigative file should be reviewed before making a reciprocity decision; it can be requested through CVS. To contact the previous adjudicating agency, refer to the appropriate agency contact information provided. [Appendix A: Training](#) (page 117) provides information on CVS access and training, which covers the use of CVS for reciprocity determination tasks.

C.2. JPAS Checks

If investigative information is not found in CVS, designated component officials should check for records in JPAS. Although JPAS is used primarily to store personnel security adjudication information for DoD employees, some components also use it to store suitability and fitness adjudication information. That is, JPAS holds historical data on suitability determinations previously entered into this system. Users accessing JPAS will need to use its subsystem, the Joint Clearance and Access Verification System (JCAVS), in order to check for previous investigations (see [Appendix A: Training](#)) for JPAS access requirements and JPAS/JCAVS training).

Users also have the option of viewing any results in the SII database instead of entering a subject's JPAS record. This provides direct access to all Federal employee records within the SII. Users will need to enter the subject's SSN, last name, and date of birth. Though users will not have access to adjudication information, they will be able to view the following:

- Any "Also Known As" (AKA) names
- Investigation(s) summary
- Clearance(s) summary



Appendix D OPM Electronic Investigative Files

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The Office of Personnel Management Federal Investigative Services Division (OPM-FISD) sends completed investigations electronically to adjudicating agencies. This automated delivery process is referred to as “eDelivery” by DoD. After investigations are closed in the OPM Personnel Investigations Processing System (PIPS), encrypted .ZIP files are transmitted through an approved secure connection to recipients.

The .ZIP archives are password protected and include investigation data in Portable Document Format (PDF) and Extensible Markup Language (XML) files. The combination these two types of files is known as a Distributed Investigative File (DIF) and it contains all of the information from the report of investigation (ROI). The DIFs are ingested by the Case Adjudication Tracking System (CATS) at the Department of Defense (DoD) Central Adjudication Facility (CAF).

The DIFs containing the ROIs include the following components:

D.1. Closed Case Transmittal (CCT)

Also known as the Case Closing Transmittal, the CCT is included in both the DIF PDF and XML. It provides an overview of the investigation. The important elements of the CCT for adjudication purposes include:

- Investigation closed date (i.e., date investigation was officially closed by OPM)
- Case type and service (i.e., the type and priority of investigation requested)



- Subject identifiers and position (e.g., military, civilian, contractor)
- Submitting Office Number (SON) and Security Office Identifier (SOI) data (i.e., submitting and security office identifiers)
- OPM adjudication case seriousness code
- Agency data section (OPM assessment remarks for adjudicator)
- Item information (number, type, location, method, results)

The case seriousness code is an overall assessment of the issues in the case that were identified by OPM. Case seriousness ranges from “No Issues” to “Major” issues. Refer to [Section 10: Adjudication](#) (page [88](#)) of this guide or the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook for more information about issue and case seriousness codes.

The item information section of the CCT shows the leads (i.e., investigation items) that OPM conducted and a general characterization of the results for each item. Any item with an “ISSUE(S)” result should be reviewed carefully to determine its significance to the case. Items with “PENDING” results are incomplete.

D.2. Certificate of Investigation (COI)

The COI includes some of the same information as the CCT; however, it also provides:

- Additional information about extra coverage codes (i.e., specialized questioning of personal sources requested by the submitting agency on standard forms)
- Scheduled investigation date
- Type of standard form used as the basis for the investigation

The COI certifies that a background investigation was completed and that the results were sent to the agency for a security/suitability determination. The form also is used by agencies to certify that investigations were reviewed and final determinations were made. Originally, this certificate was to be filed on the permanent side of the official personnel folder (OPF) after a final determination. However, consolidation of suitability adjudication at the DoD CAF may result in revised procedures.

D.3. Report of Agency Adjudicative Action (INV Form 79A)

Similarly, INV Form 79A was to be completed by adjudicating agencies and returned to the OPM Federal Investigations Processing Center (FIPC) with any



additional documentation that was used to adjudicate cases. Some agencies use this form to report final adjudication actions to OPM. If used, INV Form 79A must be signed by an adjudication official. However, DoD component adjudicators now will be required to report suitability and fitness determinations to the DoD CAF via CATS, which will then update the Central Verification System (CVS).

D.4. Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP)

The e-QIP is an electronic version of standard form questionnaires that are completed by subjects of investigation (e.g., SF-85, SF-85P, SF-86). Additional information about e-QIP may be found in [Section 6: Initiating Investigations, e-QIP, and Interim Determinations](#) (page 46) of this guide, as well as online at <http://www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/>.

D.5. Report of Investigation (ROI)

The ROI portion of the DIF includes the results of investigative fieldwork such as subject interviews, vouchers, and testimonies by other sources (e.g., reference interviews). Some of the items in the ROI section may include issue characterization codes assigned by OPM. See [Section 10: Adjudication](#) (page 88) of this guide and the OPM Suitability Processing Handbook for more information about issue characterization.

D.6. Credit Report (EO#)

Some investigations include the subject's credit report. The OPM credit report may include results from the three major credit reporting bureaus. The first page of the report provides a credit summary, which includes names the subject has used, SSN, and addresses. The summary also shows various account threshold values and an overall credit score (ranging from 1 to 9, good to bad).

D.7. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Fingerprint (BO#)

Most investigations include FBI fingerprint or name check results. A Reimbursable Suitability/Security Investigation (RSI) will only include the FBI fingerprint check if specifically requested, and only certain SACs will include FBI checks.



D.8. Other Documents

Other documents may include resumes, financial records, application materials, etc. collected by OPM as part of the investigation.

D.9. Manifest XML (Crosswalk)

The manifest crosswalk lists the contents of the eDelivery .ZIP archive.

See Federal Investigations Notice (FIN) No. 08-02, August 8, 2008 for additional information about eDelivery and the OPM DIF. This FIN may be obtained online at <http://www.opm.gov/investigations/background-investigations/federal-investigations-notice/2008/fin08-02.pdf>



Appendix E Acronyms

Acronym	Description
ANACI	Access National Agency Check with Written Inquiries
ApF	Appropriated Fund
AUB	Agency Use Block
BI	Background Investigation
CAC	Common Access Card
CAF	Consolidated Adjudications Facility
CATS	Case Adjudication Tracking System
CCT	Case Closing Transmittal
CDSE	Center for Development of Security Excellence
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNACI	Child Care National Agency Check with Written Inquiries
COI	Certificate of Investigation
CR	Classifiable-Record
CVS	Central Verification System
DASD(CPP)	Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Civilian Personnel Policy
DCII	Defense Central Index of Investigations
DCPAS	Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service
DCPDS	Defense Civilian Personnel Data System
DIF	Distributed Investigative File
DISA	Defense Information Systems Agency
DISS	Defense Information System for Security
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DoD	Department of Defense
DoDD	Department of Defense Directive
DoDI	Department of Defense Instruction
DoDM	Department of Defense Manual
DOHA	Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals
DSS	Defense Security Service
E-Delivery	Electronic Delivery
EFI	Expandable Focused Investigation
E.O.	Executive Order
E-QIP	Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing
EQTTT	Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP) Train-the-Trainer
ESI	Enhanced Subject Interview
FASCLASS	Fully Automated System for Classification



Acronym	Description
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FIN	Federal Investigations Notice
FinCEN	Financial Crimes Enforcement Network
FIPC	Federal Investigations Processing Center
FIS	Federal Investigative Services or Federal Investigative Standards
FISD	Federal Investigative Services Division
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
FPS	Federal Protective Service
FTS	Fingerprint Transaction System
HRO	Human Resources Office
HSPD	Homeland Security Presidential Directive
JAMS	Joint Adjudication Management System
JCAVS	Joint Clearance and Access Verification System
JPAS	Joint Personnel Adjudication System
HR	Human Resources
IRC	Installation Record Check
ISP	Investigation Service Provider
MBI	Minimum Background Investigation
MSPB	Merit Systems Protection Board
NAC	National Agency Check
NACI	National Agency Check and Inquiries
NACLC	National Agency Check with Law and Credit Checks
NAF	Nonappropriated Fund
NCIC	National Crime Information Center
NSA	National Security Agency
OFI	Office of Federal Investigations
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PA	Privacy Act
PDF	Portable Document Format
PDT	Position Designation Tool
PII	Personally Identifiable Information
PIPS	Personnel Investigations Processing System
PIV	Personal Identification Verification
PPR	Phased Periodic Reinvestigation
PRI	Periodic Reinvestigation
PSI-CoE	Personnel Security Investigation Center of Excellence
PSI	Personal Subject Interview
PSIP	Personnel Security Investigation Portal
ROI	Report of Investigation



Acronym	Description
RPA	Request for Personnel Action
SAC	Special Agreement Check
SAP	Special Access Program
SCHR	State Criminal History Repository
SCI	Sensitive Compartmented Information
SII	Security/Suitability Investigations Index
SOI	Security Office Identifier
SON	Submitting Office Number
SOR	Statement of Reasons
SSBI	Single-scope Background Investigation
SSBI-PR	Single-scope Background Investigation – Periodic Reinvestigation
SSN	Social Security Number
STEPP	Security Training, Education and Professional Portal
UIC	Unit Identification Code
U.S.C.	United States Code
XML	Extensible Markup Language

