



# **Completing the Suitability Process: A Guide for Employment Networks**

**Ticket to Work Program  
Ticket Program Manager**

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## Introduction

This Guide is a tool to assist Employment Networks (EN) in understanding the Social Security Administration's (Social Security) rules, policies and procedures concerning the requirement of background investigations (referred to as both security clearances and suitability determinations). The details on these requirements are found in Part IV—Section 5 of the Request for Agreement (RFA) dated July 3, 2017. Suitability investigations determine the suitability of contractors, contractor employees, subcontractors, and subcontractor employees who need access to a facility, site, system or information that the Social Security Administration maintains.

## Purpose

For ENs, the purpose of a suitability investigation is to determine which employees, contractor and, as appropriate, subcontractor employees are deemed suitable to have access to Social Security beneficiary-related information. Access to information, as defined in Part IV—Section 5 of the RFA, is having physical access to any Social Security facility or site, access to any Social Security information system, or access to programmatic or sensitive information, also known as “Personally Identifiable Information” or PII. This also applies to any access, including access through automated processes administered by the Ticket Program Manager for the Ticket to Work program (TPM).

## Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

Accessing and exchanging PII on individuals currently receiving or who previously received Social Security disability benefits is necessary for an organization to operate as an EN under the Ticket to Work program. As a result, key staff at every EN must complete the suitability process prior to the EN initiating its Ticket program operations, including securing Ticket assignments. The suitability process for ENs is administered by Social Security's Center for Personnel Security and Project Management (CPSPM). PII includes, among other things, a person's name, date of birth, Social Security Number (SSN), address, bank account information, health records and Social Security benefit payment data. PII can be any one piece of information or a combination of several pieces of information that can be used to identify a specific individual. As an EN under contract with Social Security, your organization is responsible for properly safeguarding PII at all times from loss, theft or inadvertent disclosure.

## EN Requirements for Protecting PII

Every EN, its employees, any subcontractors and subcontractor employees have certain responsibilities concerning the protection of confidential information and PII. To find out more regarding these requirements, carefully review the following sections of the Part IV within the RFA (SSA-EN RFA-17-0001):

- Section 5, EN Security and Suitability Requirements (pages 48-56)

- Section 6, Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) and Agency Privacy Management (training requirements that must be met annually) (page 56)
- Section 6, SSA Security Awareness: Contractor Personnel Security Certification (a form that must be completed annually) (page 57)
- Section 7, Protection of Confidential Information (pages 58-59)
- Section 8, Protecting and Reporting the Loss of Personally Identifiable Information: Responsibilities Concerning Individual Employees (includes a Worksheet for Reporting the Loss, Compromise, or Potential Compromise of PII) (pages 60-70).

**Note:** ENs may be required to grant Social Security and other Federal oversight agencies, and/or contractor representatives of these agencies, permission to make on-site inspections or other arrangements for reviewing/auditing the EN's compliance with the terms of the EN RFA as outlined in Part IV--Section 7, to ensure that adequate safeguards are being maintained.

## Determining Who Needs to Complete the Suitability Process

To a large extent, the business plan your organization submitted in response to the EN RFQ and the responsibilities assigned to key staff working under your EN's Ticket Program Agreement (TPA) will determine who needs to complete the suitability process. Ultimately, it is the EN's responsibility to ensure that all staff working under the TPA that will access beneficiaries' PII and/or who will be exchanging beneficiary PII with Social Security and/or the TPM, have been deemed suitable to assume these responsibilities. Staff with limited access to PII solely through a beneficiary's self-disclosure of such information as part of the service delivery process would not need to be deemed suitable through the Social Security suitability process. Such staff would, however, need to follow Social Security's rules for protecting PII.

Any EN staff that must access personal information on beneficiaries that is available through automated systems, CDs, encrypted emails and hard copy reports must be deemed suitable to have access to this information. The exchange of PII is necessary for ENs to:

- Assign/unassign tickets;
- Submit for/receive payments;
- Facilitate/conduct Timely Progress Reviews; and
- Maximize resources available to market the Ticket program to beneficiaries.

EN (and EN subcontractor) personnel who require direct access to the data sources used to administer these processes, including the individual who accesses the Secure Provider Portal (Portal), receives the Beneficiary Referral CD, and/or receives hardcopy PII directly from Social Security or the TPM, must receive a favorable suitability determination from Social Security prior to accessing the information available through these sources.

Depending on the size of the EN, its service delivery model, and its administrative structure, the exchange of PII via automated systems, CDs, encrypted emails, or hardcopy reports may be limited to one person or may be the responsibility of multiple individuals on staff. Staff assigned responsibility for business processes such as those listed above are likely to require a suitability clearance. Those contacts include the following:

**Signatory Authority:** Also referred to as the Company Point of Contact (CPOC), the Signatory Authority is the individual whose signature appears in block 30a of the EN agreement award form (Standard Form 1449) as the EN's authorized contractor official. This person will need to complete suitability if he/she is directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the Ticket program and has direct access to PII provided by the Social Security Administration or the Ticket Program Manager.

**Beneficiary Contact:** This is the EN employee that is responsible for exchanging beneficiary information, including beneficiary SSNs, with the TPM to secure ticket assignments. Depending upon the size of the EN, this person may also be responsible for intake, job placement and providing long-term employment supports.

**Payments Contact:** The EN employee(s) responsible for submitting, processing, handling and receiving payment requests under the Ticket program must exchange personal information about beneficiaries (e.g., SSNs, earnings information, etc.) with Social Security and the TPM. This person must obtain a suitability clearance.

**Program Contact:** An EN employee that may be responsible for administrative processes and other key business processes such as beneficiary outreach, annual performance reporting, Timely Progress Reviews, etc. will need to complete the suitability process. The person designated as the EN Other Contact is the only person other than the Signatory Authority that can make changes to the EN TPA.

**Subcontractor Staff:** If the EN has a contractual relationship with another organization to handle Social Security beneficiary-related information or PII in any capacity, a suitability clearance is required.

**Other Staff:** Any other EN staff and, as appropriate, subcontractor staff that will be accessing reports and/or files containing PII on beneficiaries with disabilities received from Social Security or the TPM may be required to complete the suitability process. The EN must do a thorough assessment of all staff to make the appropriate determinations and ensure compliance with PII and suitability requirements.

**New Hires:** Newly hired staff assuming any of the roles described above will need to complete the suitability process before exchanging PII on beneficiaries with Social Security or the TPM.

## Completing the Suitability Process

The following steps are necessary to complete the suitability process. To ensure that all of the information submitted throughout the suitability process is properly processed, always use your EN's TPA number (SS00-xx-Exxx or 0600-xx-Exxx) in all correspondence with the Social Security Administration, including all emails, cover sheets and suitability packages.

## Step 1: Initiating the Suitability Process

The first step in the suitability process occurs when the Signatory Authority receives notification from Social Security of an awarded Ticket Program Agreement. At that time, the EN must fax a list of staff (i.e., applicants) requesting suitability determinations to the Social Security Administration CPSPM Suitability Team, at 410.966.0640. Receipt of this fax will initiate the suitability process. The form used to provide this information is the eQIP Applicant Listing. This form requires the following information:

- Name of the EN as it appears on the TPA
- TPA number found in the TPA agreement (SS00-xx-Exxx or 0600-xx-Exxx)
- Name and contact information for the Signatory Authority/CPOC
- For each EN employee applying for suitability, his/her
  - Full name,
  - SSN,
  - Date of birth, and
  - Place of birth (including the city and state if born in the U.S. or the city and country if born outside the U.S.)

If an employee that has been identified as requiring a security determination has received a favorable suitability determination from Social Security or another Federal agency within the last five years, CPSPM will consider accepting this in place of a new security clearance. In such situations, information about the prior suitability determination should be included on the Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing (eQIP) Applicant Listing next to the person's name, noting the Federal agency that made the determination and the date of the determination. If CPSPM decides a new suitability determination is not required, a letter will be sent to the Signatory Authority/CPOC indicating that the person was previously cleared and will not need to go through another suitability determination. The only additional information that will need to be provided on this person when the completed suitability package is submitted is a completed Declaration of Federal Employment form (i.e., Optional Form 306).

## Step 2: Invitation to Sign in to the Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing System

Within seven 7 to 10 days of receipt of the eQIP Applicant Listing, CPSPM will provide an email notification to the Signature Authority/CPOC that each applicant has been invited into the eQIP website to electronically complete their background investigation form. To prevent this email from going to the Signatory Authority's Spam or Junk folder, it is advisable for the Signatory Authority to add [dchr.ope.css@ssa.gov](mailto:dchr.ope.css@ssa.gov) and ssa.gov to the safe sender list in his/her email mailbox.

It is extremely important to alert the Signatory Authority to look for this emailed invitation as each applicant only has 14 **calendar** days from the day the Signatory Authority receives the eQIP invitation to log into the eQIP website, work out any login issues, and complete the background investigation, Form 85. If the form is not completed within the

designated timeframe, the eQIP link will expire. When the link expires, the Signatory Authority will have to email CPSPM and start the process over from the beginning.

It is strongly recommended that every applicant review the “Quick Reference Guide for eQIP Applicants” ([eQIP - Quick Reference Guide for the Applicant](#)) and the “Frequently Asked Questions” (<https://nbib.opm.gov/e-qip-background-investigations/e-qip-fags/>) prior to starting the eQIP questionnaire. ENs should encourage their applicants to review this information prior to receiving the eQIP invitation. The Guide offers useful information, including tips on configuring different browsers and JAWS Screen-Reading Software to complete the application online.

### Step 3: Completing the eQIP Form

Each designated EN staff person that was listed on the email invitation to log into eQIP must log in to the eQIP website and complete Standard Form 85, Questionnaire for Non-Sensitive Positions, online within 14 *calendar* days of the date the Signatory Authority/CPOC received the eQIP invitation. Go to <http://www.opm.gov/e-qip> and click on the “Enter eQIP Applicant Site” link to complete the Form 85 questionnaire. Once all questions are completed, each applicant should:

- Print a completed copy of the form to be kept on file;
- Sign and date the eQIP signature pages;
- Provide the original signed signature pages to the CPOC; and
- Keep a copy of the completed questionnaire and the signed signature pages with his/her personal records.

If the Signatory Authority mistakenly overlooks the eQIP invitation or the EN is unable to get all individuals on the applicant list to log in and complete Form 85 within the 14 day deadline, the EN can email [enservice@ssa.gov](mailto:enservice@ssa.gov) and request another eQIP invitation.

The following tips are helpful for completing the eQIP process:

- Make sure the name, date of birth, place of birth and SSN for each applicant matches the “Golden Questions/Answers” in eQIP. This information is generated from the eQIP Applicant Listing which was sent to CPSPM to initiate the suitability process.
- Report eQIP login issues immediately to [enservice@ssa.gov](mailto:enservice@ssa.gov), including details on the reasons for the unsuccessful login and/or problems with the “Golden Answers.” In most instances, issues will be addressed within 24 hours.

**Note:** A sample of a Standard Form 85 is available at:

[http://www.ssa.gov/oag/acq/Sample\\_Security\\_Requirement\\_Docs.pdf](http://www.ssa.gov/oag/acq/Sample_Security_Requirement_Docs.pdf)

**Important Reminder:** The background investigation cannot begin until all required information is received by CPSPM.

### Step 4: Social Security Review of Completed eQIP Forms

As your sponsoring agency, Social Security’s CPSPM will carefully review the eQIP form completed by each applicant at your EN. If the information or attachments are incomplete for any or all applicants, CPSPM may return the information provided in eQIP and contact the Signatory Authority/CPOC of the need for the applicant(s) to make

necessary corrections to the form. To make corrections to the form, the applicant will need to:

- Log into eQIP.
- Review the details of the request and make corrections via the eQIP system.
- Re-certify and print a new archival copy of the form.
- Print, sign and attach new signature pages.
- Provide the original signature pages to the CPOC to be sent to CPSPM.

### **Step 5: Completing the Other Required Forms**

There are three additional forms that each applicant must complete before submitting all of the required information to Social Security's CPSPM to complete the suitability process. As soon as the TPA is received, the person designated as the point of contact for the suitability process may begin collecting these forms from each person listed on the eQIP Applicant Listing.

- [Form 306 - Declaration for Federal Employment](#): Each applicant at the EN must complete this form as part of the suitability process.
  - It requires the applicant's full name; SSN; place of birth; U.S. citizenship status; other names used such as your full maiden name or a nickname; phone numbers; Selective Service registration status; military service; and information on convictions, imprisonment, and/or being discharged from a job in the last 5 years; being delinquent on any Federal debts, etc.
  - All responses must be truthful and complete.
  - Each applicant must respond to every question on the form before signing and dating Section 17a of the form (Applicant's Signature) in ink.
- [Fair Credit Reporting Act \(FCRA\) Authorization Form](#): In completing, signing and dating this form, the applicant is authorizing the Social Security Administration to obtain credit reports from any consumer/credit reporting agency for the purpose of completing the security clearance. The information obtained through a Fair Credit Report may be re-disclosed to other Federal agencies for the purpose of a security clearance to the extent that such disclosure is permitted by law.
- [Applicant Fingerprint Charts \(FD-258 Charts\)](#): At the time of the TPA award, Social Security's Office of Acquisition and Grants (OAG) will send two Field Division-258 charts for each person listed on the RFQ Suitability Listing. This list is generated from the names in the organization's response to the RFQ. Each applicant must complete two Fingerprint Charts as soon as possible after receiving the charts from Social Security. As soon as the fingerprint charts are completed, they should be given the EN staff person responsible for pulling all of the suitability information together to be submitted to Social Security.

Applicants have three other options for obtaining approved fingerprint charts.

- Contacting the EN's Specialist at the EN Support Team (ENST)

- Visiting a local police station and completing two official fingerprint charts at the station. Not all local police stations offer this service and there is usually a small fee for this service. Applicants need to make sure the police station uses the correct form, i.e., FD-258.
- Googling a local fingerprinting service. If using this option, make sure the service uses the FD-258 chart and make sure the cards are printed as Social Security does not currently access LiveScan electronic fingerprints.
- Do not use the chart that can be downloaded from the FBI website. It will not be accepted.

**Note:** For reference only, examples of completed forms, including the Applicant Fingerprint Chart (FD 258), the Declaration for Federal Employment Form (Optional Form 306), and the Fair Credit Reporting Act Authorization Form, are available at: [http://www.ssa.gov/oag/acq/Sample\\_Security\\_Requirement\\_Docs.pdf](http://www.ssa.gov/oag/acq/Sample_Security_Requirement_Docs.pdf).

### Step 6: Gathering All Required Forms and Information

Once all of the required forms and information is obtained from each applicant, the CPOC should review the entire application packet to ensure that all forms are included and completed correctly prior to submitting the packet to Social Security's CPSPM for processing. Check to make sure written information is legible and all forms are signed and dated in all indicated places.

The completed suitability package must include the following items:

- The eQIP Paperwork Cover Sheet which will include the following information exactly as provided on the eQIP Applicant Listing faxed to CPSPM at the onset of this process.
  - Contract number (i.e., EN TPA number),
  - Each applicant's full name,
  - Each applicant's SSN,
  - Each applicant's date of birth, and
  - Each applicant's place of birth.
- Original signed and dated eQIP signature pages for each applicant.
- [Form 306 - Declaration for Federal Employment](#) for each applicant.
- [Fair Credit Reporting Act \(FCRA\) authorization form](#) for each applicant.
- Two fingerprint cards (Field Division-258 charts) for each applicant.
- If the contractor, contractor employee, subcontractor or subcontractor employee is not a U.S. Citizen, the EN must include a legible photocopy of the applicant's work authorization permit and Social Security card.

### Step 7: Mailing the Completed Application Package to CPSPM

Completed application packages must be mailed by traceable mail (i.e., FedEx, UPS or USPS Certified) to Social Security at the following address:

Social Security Administration  
Attn: CPSPM Suitability Program Officer

6401 Security Boulevard  
2601 Annex Building  
Baltimore, MD 21235

Completed packages should be mailed at least 15 days prior to the date the EN expects to initiate Ticket operations. If the EN experiences any problems in gathering or sending the required forms and information, questions and concerns should be sent via email to [enservice@ssa.gov](mailto:enservice@ssa.gov).

### Step 8: The Suitability Investigation

The completion of an eQIP form generates an investigation of the applicant that completed the form. Each applicant may be contacted by an investigator to schedule a personal interview. If an interview is required, the applicant must provide photo identification such as a valid state driver's license. In some situations, the applicant may be required to provide other documents to verify his/her identity. When the investigator calls to set up the interview, he/she will let the applicant know what is required.

### Delays to the Suitability Process

It can take anywhere from 15 days to several months for an EN to complete the entire suitability process. Delays in processing an application package are typically the result of one or more of the following:

- Submitting suitability packages that are incomplete or not completed properly, or contain written information that is illegible.
- Packages submitted without the EN's TPA number on the mailing label, cover sheet and/or contents.
- Packages that do not include all of the required information on all applicants seeking suitability clearance.
- Fingerprint cards that are on the wrong form, not formatted correctly or electronic/scanned.
- Glitches with the eQIP System.
- Failure to respond in a timely manner to requests for missing information.
- Backlogs in processing packages.

A list of helpful hints for completing the suitability process is found in Appendix B.

### Possible Responses to Suitability Applications

There are four possible determinations in response to the submission of a suitability package:

- **Suitable:** Applicant is cleared to work for the EN under the Ticket to Work TPA.
- **Prescreened Denied:** Applicant is not authorized to work on the contract due to not providing requested information by the deadline. Applicant can reapply within 90 days.

- **Unsuitable:** Applicant is not authorized to perform work for your EN under the Ticket to work TPA. Applicant can appeal through the appeals email. (This is generally for applicants with a record, federal debt not in payback status, or removed from the contract after the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) reviewed the application and found issues.)
- **Denied/Incomplete:** A denied/incomplete application package occurs when the application package CPSPM receives is incomplete. A notice is forwarded to the EN's Signatory Authority indicating the application status to include a checklist indicating the specific missing requirements. The EN has 30 days to respond by resubmitting the application package with the missing information. If no response is received with 30 days, the EN is required to repeat the entire application process.

### Appealing an Unsuitable Determination

The notice that an employee received an unsuitable determination is sent to the EN's Signatory Authority. An EN employee that receives an unsuitable determination from Social Security may appeal the decision in writing. The appeal must be submitted within 30 days of the date of the determination and should describe why the applicant believes Social Security should review and reevaluate his or her application. The EN may not file appeals on behalf of its employees, subcontractors or subcontractor employees. The applicant must file his or her own individual appeal to by submitting the clarification and/or the appeal to:

Social Security Administration  
 Attn: CPSPM Suitability Program Officer  
 6401 Security Boulevard  
 2601 Annex Building  
 Baltimore, MD 21235

### What to do While Waiting for the Suitability Determination

**Required Training for New ENs:** While gathering the information for the suitability package and waiting for Social Security's response to the submission of the completed package, designated EN employees should complete the required training for new ENs.

- Once your EN's TPA has been awarded, the EN Development Consultant at the Ticket Program Manager assigned to work with your EN will be in contact by email to set up the date for your first orientation training call. A second and third training call will be scheduled to cover additional required training topics, to review any questions you may have, and to develop goals and objectives for your EN's Ticket program success.
- It is mandatory that Key Points of Contact (Program, Ticketholder, Payments and Suitability Contacts) for all new ENs attend the Service Provider Foundations Training sessions. You will receive an invitation to training directly from your designated EN Development Consultant.

**Social Security Awareness - Contractor Personnel Security Certification:** Every EN must ensure that all employees working under the EN TPA, as well as contractor

and subcontractor staff working under the EN TPA, have complied with Social Security's security awareness requirements.

- Following the award of the TPA, each EN employee (and contractor or subcontractor employee) must be trained on Social Security's computer security awareness and accepted computer security practices.
- Once trained, each employee must read and sign the form on page 57 of the EN RFQ, i.e., SSA Security Awareness: Contractor Personnel Security Certification. The EN's Signatory Authority/CPOC must keep copies of these signed Certifications on file.
- The EN must submit an email to [security.awareness.training@ssa.gov](mailto:security.awareness.training@ssa.gov) providing the names of the EN employees who have signed the Certification. A copy must also be emailed to Social Security's EN Contracts Team ([enservice@ssa.gov](mailto:enservice@ssa.gov)). This notification must be done within 60 days following the receipt of the TPA award and anytime a new EN contractor employee is added to perform work under the EN's TPA.
- The Signatory Authority/CPOC must ensure that all staff working under the TPA review and sign this Certification on an annual basis.

For details on the Federal Information Security and Management Act (FISMA) and Agency Privacy Management, and a copy of the Certification form referenced above, see Part IV--Sections 6 (pages 56-57) of the EN RFA.

### **Questions about Suitability or the Suitability Process**

Email all EN security/suitability questions to [enservice@ssa.gov](mailto:enservice@ssa.gov). Always reference your EN TPA number in the email (found in the TPA agreement sent to the Signatory Authority). Use this dedicated mailbox for questions and issues about the suitability process.



# **Appendix A**

## **Acronyms and Definitions Associated with the Suitability Process**

## Appendix A: Acronyms and Definitions Associated with the Suitability Process

**Access to a facility, site, system or information:** This phrase refers to physical access to any Social Security Administration facility or site, logical access to any Social Security information system, or access to programmatic or sensitive information.

**TPA:** The Ticket Program Agreement awarded by Social Security to agencies that applied through the Request for Quotation (RFQ) process and have been deemed qualified by the Social Security Administration to operate as an Employment Network.

**CO:** Contracting Officer

**Contractor:** This term refers to any entity that has a relationship with the Social Security Administration as a result of responding to the EN RFQ. This term includes, but is not limited to, corporations, limited liability partnerships, and individuals.

**Contractor Employee:** With regard to an EN, this term means a person hired by a Social Security contractor to provide services in exchange for compensation.

**COTR:** Contracting Officer's Technical Representative(s)

**CPOC:** Company Point of Contact, as specified by the contract. Also known as the Suitability Contact listed in your Ticket Program Agreement (TPA) on page 72 or the Signatory Authority indicated in the TPA on page 81.

**CPSPM:** The Center for Personnel Security and Project Management is the department within the Social Security Administration's Office of Personnel that processes the EN employees' suitability request and if applicable, the requests of employees of an EN's subcontractors.

**Payments Contact:** This is the EN staff person who submits for, processes and handles payments under the Ticket program. Since this person will be exchanging beneficiary personal information with Social Security and the TPM (e.g., SSNs, earnings information, etc.), he/she must go through a security clearance and be deemed suitable to fulfill these responsibilities. Depending upon the EN's business model, this could include subcontractor staff responsible for gathering, accessing and/or submitting earnings information to the EN or to the TPM.

**PII:** Personally Identifiable Information (PII) refers to any information which can "distinguish or trace an individual's identity, such as their name, Social Security number.... identifying information which is linked to a specific individual."

**PIV:** Personal Identify Verification

**Subcontractor:** With regard to an EN, this term refers to any entity that has a relationship with the Social Security Administration's contractor because of the EN TPA. This term includes, but is not limited to, corporations, limited liability partnerships, and individuals. EN because of this agreement; this term includes, but is not limited to, corporations, limited liability partnerships, and individuals.

**Subcontractor Employee:** a person hired by a subcontractor to provide services in exchange for compensation.

**eQIP:** Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing (<http://www.opm.gov/eqip/>).



# **Appendix B**

**Helpful Hints for Completing the Suitability Process**

## Appendix B: Helpful Hints for Completing the Suitability Process

### Prior to Starting the Process

Read the sections of the Employment Network (EN) Request for Quotation (RFQ) that address EN security and suitability requirements, expectations related to Personally Identifiable Information (PII) received from the Social Security Administration and the Ticket Program Manager for the Ticket to Work program, and the protection of confidential information about individuals receiving Social Security disability benefits. Mark or highlight key requirements and refer back to them as needed as you go through the suitability process. These requirements are found in the following sections of Part IV of the SSA-EN RFA 0 17-0001, dated July 3, 2017.

- Section 5, EN Security and Suitability Requirements (pages 48 – 55)
- Section 6, Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) and Agency Privacy Management (pages 56-57)
- Section 6, SSA Security Awareness: Contractor Personnel Security Certification (a form that must be completed annually) (page 57)
- Section 7, Protection of Confidential Information (pages 58-60)
- Section 8, Protecting and Reporting the Loss of Personally Identifiable Information: Responsibilities Concerning Individual Employees (includes a Worksheet for Reporting the Loss, Compromise, or Potential Compromise of PII) (pages 60-71).

### Throughout the Process

Avoid the need to resubmit information and delays in processing requests by using your EN Contract or Ticket Program Agreement (TPA) number (SS00-xx-Exxx or 0600-xx-Exxx) in all correspondence with the Social Security Administration. This includes e-mails, cover sheets and suitability packages (labels and contents).

Follow-up via email at ([enservice@ssa.gov](mailto:enservice@ssa.gov)) throughout the process if things are taking longer than expected, e.g., if the eQIP invitation has not arrived within 7 to 10 days after submitting the list of applicants for clearance.

- Ask questions and be sure you are clear on the responses. If still unclear, ask more questions.
- If the instructions on a form are not clear, ask for clarification.

### At the Beginning of the Process

- Once your EN's TPA is awarded, prepare a list of employees and, as appropriate, subcontractor employees who will be completing the suitability

process. Use the eQIP Applicant Listing found in the Resources tab for the Suitability Training to record each applicant's full name, Social Security Number (SSN), date of birth (mm/dd/yyyy), and place of birth (City/State/Country). Fax this list to 410.966.0640 as soon as possible as this will initiate the first step in the suitability process.

- Alert the Signatory Authority/Company Point of Contact (CPOC) to be looking for the email invitation from Social Security's Center for Personal Security and Project Management (CPSPM) to complete the eQIP. This email should arrive approximately seven days after faxing the eQIP Applicant Listing. To prevent this email from going to the Spam or Junk folder, the Signatory Authority should add [dchr.ope.css@ssa.gov](mailto:dchr.ope.css@ssa.gov) and [ssa.gov](mailto:ssa.gov) to the safe sender list for his/her email mailbox.
- As soon as the Applicant Fingerprint Charts (FD-258) are received from Social Security, distribute them to the employees (and contractor employees if appropriate) listed on the eQIP Applicant Listing and ask them to get their fingerprints done as quickly as possible.
- Ask each applicant to read over the required forms and questionnaires carefully and begin gathering the information needed to complete each form. Skipping questions on these forms is a common mistake that can be avoided with a careful review.
- In preparation for completing the eQIP questionnaire (SF-85, Questionnaire for Non-Sensitive Positions), each applicant should log onto the eQIP website and review the "Quick Reference Guide for eQIP Applicants" and the "Frequently Asked Questions" prior to completing SF-85. Both can be accessed on the eQIP website at: <http://www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/%23url=Quick-Reference-Guide>. Each applicant will need to carefully review the "Before You Begin" section, which includes instructions on how to configure the browser on a computer to submit information through the eQIP site.
- Each applicant should review the SF-85 form carefully and begin gathering the information that will be needed to complete the form. Gathering this information ahead of time can be critical to the timely completion of this process. Social Security expects this form to be completed within 14 calendar days of receiving the invitation to access the eQIP system. This information includes, among other things:
  - Proof of citizenship, if applicable, such as: passport, Citizenship Certificate, Naturalization Certificate, or Alien Registration Number. You may be able to obtain assistance with lost or unknown information at the [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website](#) (wait for external link to connect).

- Employment history for the last five years, including current and previous work location addresses, names of supervisors, addresses, and contact information.
- Personal residence(s) for the last five years, including the name, address, and phone number of a person who knew you at each address.
- Contact information on three personal references.
- Relatives' citizenship information, aliases, employer, and foreign activities.
- Selective Service ID number, if applicable. If you need your Service Number call 1.847.688.6888 or visit the [Selective Service System website](#).

### Responding to the eQIP Invitation

Notify all applicants immediately when the eQIP invitation is received by the Signatory Authority/CPOC. Stress the fact that each applicant has only 14 calendar days from the date the invitation is received to log in to the eQIP System and complete SF-85. Failure to meet this 14-day deadline will necessitate contacting CPSPM to request another eQIP invitation and the applicant will need to start the process all over again.

Report eQIP login issues immediately to [enservice@ssa.gov](mailto:enservice@ssa.gov), including details on the reasons for the unsuccessful login and/or completion of "Golden Answers." In most cases, issues will be addressed within 24 hours.

### Completing the eQIP Questionnaire

- If they have not already done so, each applicant should review the "Quick Reference Guide for eQIP Applicants" and the "Frequently Asked Questions" prior to starting the questionnaire. Both can be accessed at: <http://www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/#url=Quick-Reference-Guide>.
- Each applicant needs to make sure the name, date of birth, place of birth and SSN he/she enters into the eQIP system is the exact same information that was submitted on the eQIP Applicant Listing.
- Each applicant must make sure every question on the eQIP questionnaire is completed honestly and with all required information. If the eQIP application is missing required information, there can be a significant delay before the EN is notified of the omission(s). Two common errors are:
  - Failing to account for breaks in employment (even when the break is only a month to six weeks), and
  - Not including the full maiden name of the applicant's mother.
- Each applicant must print the completed eQIP form, and then sign and date the signature pages. The originals of the signature pages should be given to the person collecting the information to complete the suitability package. Each applicant should keep a copy of the completed SF-85 form, including copies of the signature pages, with his/her personal records.

## Prior to Submitting the Suitability Package

The person responsible for submitting the completed suitability package should:

- Review all information/forms to make sure everything has been filled out completely and all hand written information is neat, clear and legible. A thorough review will prevent common mistakes such as:
  - Skipped questions.
  - Forms not being signed and dated in every place indicated.
  - The name and contact information for the Signatory Authority/CPOC being illegible.
- Always keep a copy of everything that is being submitted to CPSPM.

As soon as the completed suitability package has been submitted to CPSPM, the Signatory Authority/CPOC should be notified to be on the alert for emails from CPSPM requesting additional information or corrections to the information that was submitted.

## Things That Can Delay the Suitability Process

Processing delays are typically the result of one of more of the following:

- The submission of suitability packages with information that is illegible, incomplete or not completed properly.
- Packages submitted without the EN's TPA number on the mailing label, cover sheet and/or contents.
- Packages that do not include all of the required information on all applicants seeking suitability clearance. Do not send information piecemeal.
- Fingerprint Charts that are on the wrong form or not formatted correctly.
- Glitches with the eQIP System.
- Failure to respond in a timely manner to requests for missing information.
- Backlogs in processing packages. Questions about Suitability or the Suitability Process

Email all EN security/suitability questions to [enservice@ssa.gov](mailto:enservice@ssa.gov) or directly to your EN specialist.

- Always reference your EN TPA number in the email (found in the TPA agreement sent to the Signatory Authority).
- Use this dedicated mailbox for questions and issues about the process.
- Do not send questions about other issues to this mailbox as it is dedicated sole for the suitability process.