

# **Employment Network Security and Suitability Business Process Guide**



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## Introduction

This business process guide documents the Social Security Administration's (SSA) suitability process for Employment Network (EN) personnel.

A background investigation is required any time personnel require any type of access to an SSA facility, site, system, or information, whether or not a Personal Identity Verification (PIV) credential is required.

SSA personnel may not allow EN personnel access to a facility, site, information, or system until SSA's Center for Suitability and Personnel Security (CSPS) issues a current, favorable suitability determination for the specified award (e.g., agreement, contract, grant, etc.). A suitability determination letter issued by CSPS is valid only for performance on the SSA award specified in the letter. Even if an individual previously worked on an SSA award, they must still go through the suitability process to return to work on the specified award or work on a new award (see [EN Personnel Workflow](#) for the applicable steps and stages).

The Company Point of Contact (CPOC) must submit the appropriate, required paperwork **at least 30 business days** prior to the date personnel are to begin work. The suitability process will not begin until CSPS receives accurate and complete documents.

We recommend the CPOC review the entire business process guide prior to bringing EN personnel to work.

***Failure to follow the chronological process, as detailed in this document, will result in delays and/or personnel not allowed to work on SSA awards.***

## Process Overview

The following is a high-level overview of the SSA security and suitability requirements for EN personnel. Please see the [EN Personnel Suitability Workflow](#) charts below for the full step-by-step security and suitability requirements.

1. The **CPOC** submits the suitability package to [DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov](mailto:DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov) and [ENService@ssa.gov](mailto:ENService@ssa.gov) via [secure email](#):
  - a. An Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP) Applicant Listing, including the award number, award points of contact, and information on the applicants identified to work on the award;
  - b. Completed Optional Form (OF) 306, Declaration for Federal Employment;
  - c. Completed Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) Authorization Form; **and**
  - d. Work authorization documentation for non-U.S. born applicants, if applicable.
2. **CSPS** verifies if the EN personnel (applicant) already has the appropriate background investigation on record, or, if applicable, initiates the applicant in e-QIP. **CSPS** emails the e-QIP invitation and instructions for electronic fingerprinting to the **CPOC and [ENService@ssa.gov](mailto:ENService@ssa.gov)**.
3. **CPOC** forwards e-QIP invitation to the **applicant**.
4. **Applicants** have 10 business days to complete e-QIP and submit electronic fingerprints.
5. **CSPS** makes initial suitability determination (as applicable, reviews form submissions, resolves any discrepancies, and releases investigation to Office of Personnel Management (OPM)) and releases the applicable suitability determination letter to the **CPOC and [ENService@ssa.gov](mailto:ENService@ssa.gov)**.

6. **OPM** completes the full background investigation. **CSPS** reviews and adjudicates the background investigation.

## EN Personnel Suitability Workflow

### New Applicants

Timeframes below are estimates for completing the activity.

Step	Responsible Party	Activity	Timeframe*	Tips and Follow-Ups
1	CPOC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Provides the <a href="#">OF-306, Declaration for Federal Employment</a> and <a href="#">FCRA forms</a> to the <i>applicant</i> to complete and return to CPOC.</li> <li>2) Requests work authorization documentation for non-U.S. born applicants, if applicable.</li> </ol>		<p>Name on forms must match the legal name, including middle name or initial (if initial only) as it appears in SSA's official record.</p> <p>Forms must be complete and accurate.</p> <p>Acceptable work authorization documentation for non-U.S. born applicants; e.g., permanent/temporary resident card, I-94 form, employment authorization card, etc.</p>
2	Applicant	<p>Completes and returns the <a href="#">OF-306, FCRA form</a>, and work authorization documentation (if applicable) to the CPOC.</p> <p>Applicants must complete the OF-306 accurately, thoroughly, and honestly. "Yes" answers to questions 9 – 15 must be explained in the #16 Remarks field.</p>		<p>Carefully read the OF-306 question instructions to ensure <u>all</u> requested information is provided.</p> <p><a href="#">OF-306</a> must be completed thoroughly and all questions answered including the Selective Service question and the Military Service question for all applicants including females.</p> <p>Failure to answer questions accurately and provide required details will result in CSPS re-contacting the applicant for additional clarification, which may delay the process and may be grounds for finding the applicant unsuitable.</p>
3	CPOC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Submits a completed <a href="#">e-QIP Applicant Listing</a> with the scanned, completed <a href="#">OF-306(s)</a>, <a href="#">FCRA(s)</a>, and work authorization documentation (if applicable).</li> <li>2) Save scanned documentation as a PDF with the naming</li> </ol>	Applications should be submitted to CSPS at least <b>30 business days</b> prior to the date EN personnel are to begin work.	<p>CPOC should review these forms to ensure they are complete and signed before scanning them.</p> <p>Note: SSA can only receive up to 10MB in a single email. On the subject line, enter: <i>EN Suitability Applicant Listing and Forms (Award #_____)</i></p> <p>If the CPOC does not have an</p>

Step	Responsible Party	Activity	Timeframe*	Tips and Follow-Ups
		<p>convention of <i>Last name, First name 306 or Last name, First name FCRA</i>.</p> <p>3) Send <a href="#">e-QIP Applicant Listing</a> with <a href="#">306(s)</a> and <a href="#">FCRA(s)</a> to <a href="mailto:DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov">DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov</a> and <a href="mailto:ENService@ssa.gov">ENService@ssa.gov</a> via a secure or password encrypted email.</p>		<p>SSA email account, the CPOC must submit the documentation in an encrypted, password protected email. See <a href="#">Encrypted Email Procedures</a> for details.</p> <p>Use TTWE and last 4 digits of your award number (e.g., TTWE1234) for the password.</p>
4	CSPS	<p>1) Reviews applicant's investigation history to verify if a sufficient investigation is on record (i.e. reciprocity).</p> <p>2) If the applicant already has a reciprocal investigation on file, CSPS will issue the preliminary suitability determination letter at this stage and proceed to Step 7.</p> <p>3) If not, initiates the applicant in e-QIP. Provides e-QIP invite with e-QIP registration codes, e-QIP instructions, and electronic fingerprinting services information to ENService and CPOC for dissemination to applicant.</p>	Within 4 business days	<p><b>CPOC:</b> The e-QIP invitation email will be sent from the SSA Contractor Suitability System (CSS), <a href="mailto:dchr.ope.css@ssa.gov">dchr.ope.css@ssa.gov</a> mailbox. This mailbox is NOT monitored.</p> <p><b>CPOC:</b> If you do not receive the e-QIP link within 5 business days, please send a follow-up to <a href="mailto:DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov">DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov</a> with email Subject line: <i>e-QIP invite follow-up request</i>. Attach the email with the <a href="#">e-QIP Applicant Listing</a> and forms (Step 3).</p>
4a	OPM System (automated process)	Emails e-QIP registration code to applicant's email account as indicated on the <a href="#">e-QIP Applicant Listing</a> .	1 day (within 24 hours after step 4)	<p><b>Applicants:</b> In addition to the email instructions received from your CPOC, you may also receive the e-QIP registration code directly from <a href="mailto:do-not-reply@e-qip.opm.gov">do-not-reply@e-qip.opm.gov</a> or on behalf of <a href="mailto:do-not-reply@registration.opm.gov">do-not-reply@registration.opm.gov</a>. If you receive the automated email, but do <u>not</u> receive the instructions from your CPOC, please follow up with your CPOC to ensure you receive the instructions timely.</p>
5	CPOC	<p>Notifies applicant of the requirement to:</p> <p>1) complete the e-QIP form (provides the e-QIP registration code) and</p> <p>2) submit fingerprints electronically.</p>		

Step	Responsible Party	Activity	Timeframe*	Tips and Follow-Ups
6 (Preferred Method)	Applicant	<p>1) Completes e-QIP form and electronically signs e-QIP signature pages. Go to: <a href="https://nbib.opm.gov/e-qip-background-investigations/">https://nbib.opm.gov/e-qip-background-investigations/</a> for “click to sign” instructions and more e-QIP guides.</p> <p>2) <b>AFTER</b> completing e-QIP and releasing, makes appointment with electronic fingerprint services provider and submits fingerprints. Refer to <a href="#">Fingerprint Instructions</a> document.</p>	Up to 10 days after step 5	<p>Note: As instructed within the e-QIP invitation email, applicants receiving a Tier 2 investigation will need to complete and upload OPM’s “Additional Questions for Moderate Risk Positions” document to e-QIP before releasing.</p> <p>In e-QIP, click on the Release button so it is released to CSPA.</p> <p><b>If the release button is not clicked within e-QIP, CSPA will not be able to access the form.</b></p> <p>For assistance with e-QIP, call 1-844-874-9940 between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.</p> <p>e-QIP application will time out if it is not completed timely.</p> <p>Retain user name and password exactly as entered in order to return to e-QIP later, if needed.</p> <p>Note: The applicant is responsible for paying the \$16.50 fee when scheduling their electronic fingerprinting appointment.</p>
6a (Alternate Fingerprint Option)	Applicant	Visit the local sheriff’s office or police department to be fingerprinted on paper form Field Division-258 and mail the form via priority delivery to Social Security Administration, Security and Suitability Office, Attn: Personnel Security Officer, 6401 Security Boulevard, 2246 Annex Building, Baltimore, MD 21235.		<p><b>This option will add considerable delays and is not preferred.</b></p> <p>This option is used if the applicant does not use SSA’s electronic fingerprint services contract (Step 7). In this situation, the envelope must include the <a href="#">Suitability Cover Sheet-Fingerprint Cards</a>.</p> <p>Most fingerprint locations (e.g., local police stations) charge a higher fee for fingerprinting than the electronic fingerprint service. The applicant is responsible for any fingerprint costs.</p> <p>The applicant should also notify <a href="mailto:DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov">DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov</a> with a cc to their CPOC and ENService that the fingerprints are being mailed.</p>

7	CSPS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Reviews all provided documentation.</li> <li>2) Follows up with applicant on any discrepancies or issues. If the applicant does not comply timely, CSPS may issue a “pre-screen” denial letter. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pre-screen denial is a final warning that the applicant must timely comply or CSPS will cancel the applicant’s suitability application.</li> <li>• The applicant is not permitted to work for SSA unless they comply and subsequently receive a suitable determination letter.</li> </ul> </li> <li>3) Issues suitability determination letter (suitable or unsuitable). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If suitable, releases investigation request to OPM.</li> <li>• If unsuitable, cancels investigation request in e-QIP.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	Up to 15 business days from release of e-QIP form and submission of electronic fingerprints	<p><b>ENService/CPOC/Applicants:</b> For status checks after 15 business days, call CSPS’ Hotline at 1-844-874-9940.</p> <p><b>Applicants:</b> Applicants must submit any additional requested supporting documentation (e.g., Federal debt payment plans, payment history, etc.). Refusal to provide the requested documentation will result in a denial of suitability.</p>
8	ENService	1) Adds the agreement number to the applicant’s profile.		
9	OPM	Conducts Subject Interview, if applicable, and completes full background investigation.	Up to 1 year after Step 7	<p>As applicable, an OPM Investigator will contact the applicant to schedule an investigative interview.</p> <p>Note: The applicant, if determined suitable, is able to work under the SSA award during this OPM investigation.</p>
10	CSPS	<p>Confirms if the applicant is still active on an SSA award.</p> <p>Contacts the applicant if additional information is needed to make an adjudicative decision.</p> <p>Reviews and takes necessary actions to adjudicate the background investigation.</p>	Up to 90 days from the date OPM completes the investigation (Step 9)	<p>If CSPS is unable to reach the applicant or resolve the issue after two attempts, CSPS will contact ENService/CPOC for assistance.</p> <p><b>Applicants:</b> Comply with CSPS requests and inquiries to ensure a timely determination. Failure to do so may result in an unfavorable determination and removal from any SSA awards.</p>

## Current Contractor/EN Personnel Moving to Another Award (Rollover Request)

If current contractor/EN personnel are to perform work under a new award, CSPA must review the applicant's suitability to work on the new award. As applicable, CSPA will issue a suitability letter for the new award or notify the CPOC and the COR-COTR of any additional required steps for the suitability review.

Step	Responsible Party	Activity	Timeframe*	Tips and Follow-Ups
1	CPOC	Submits a fully completed, legible <a href="#">Contractor Rollover Request Form</a> to ENService and CSPA.		See <a href="#">Encrypted Email Procedures</a> for details on securely emailing these documents.  Include <a href="mailto:ENService@ssa.gov">ENService@ssa.gov</a> on the email submission to <a href="mailto:DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov">DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov</a> . Utilize password TTWE and last 4 digits of your award number (e.g., TTWE1234). On the rollover form, just use <a href="mailto:ENService@ssa.gov">ENService@ssa.gov</a> for the COR-COTR information.
2	CSPA	Reviews applicant to ensure they have the appropriate background investigation to perform work on the new award. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. If suitable, releases a suitability determination letter for the new award.</li> <li>b. If the applicant does <u>not</u> have the proper investigation on record, CSPA will notify the CPOC and ENService of the requirement to go through the full suitability process.</li> </ol>	Within 5 business days	If CSPA notifies you the applicant does <u>not</u> have the proper investigation for the new award, see step 1 of the suitability process above to begin a new suitability review for that applicant.

## Unsuitable Determinations

When an applicant is determined unsuitable, CSPA will send a letter notification to EN Service and the CPOC to be issued to the applicant. There is **no** appeals process; however, the applicant may request clarification. Details are provided in the letter.

The applicant must submit requests for clarification for unsuitable determinations in writing within 30 days of the date of the unsuitable determination to [DCHR.OPE.SuitClarify@ssa.gov](mailto:DCHR.OPE.SuitClarify@ssa.gov).

Applicants must file their own requests; award POCs may not file requests on behalf of the applicant.

Through the Freedom of Information Act process, the applicant can request in writing a copy of their investigation from OPM. The written request must prominently note “Freedom of Information Act Request” and describe in detail the records needed. This will assist OPM with locating the records in a reasonable amount of time.

## Name Change Process

CPOC should notify [DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov](mailto:DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov) and [ENService@ssa.gov](mailto:ENService@ssa.gov) once the individual has legally changed their name, including reporting to a local SSA field office to update SSA’s mainframe record.

## Re-Investigations

EN Personnel may be subject to re-investigations every 5 years from the date of their last completed background investigation. CSPS will notify [ENService@ssa.gov](mailto:ENService@ssa.gov) and the CPOC when an individual is due for re-investigation.

EN personnel must comply with any requests from CSPS in order to remain active on an SSA award. The notification from CSPS will detail the steps and requirements for the re-investigation.

## Notification Requirements for EN Personnel

The CPOC shall notify [ENService@ssa.gov](mailto:ENService@ssa.gov) and [DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov](mailto:DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov) within one business day if any EN personnel:

- Is arrested or charged with a crime during the term of their award
- Has any other change in the status of individual (e.g. leaves the company, no longer works under the award, the alien status changes, etc.) that could affect their suitability determination.

The CPOC must provide in the notification as much detail as possible, including, but not limited to: name(s) of individual whose status has changed, award number, the type of charge(s), if applicable, date of arrest, the court date, jurisdiction, and, if available, the disposition of the charge(s).

If the individual separated and the background investigation is in process, CSPS will cancel the investigation.

## Reference Information

### Glossary

#### ***Award Number***

EN personnel are affiliated with an SSA award (e.g., SSA contract, grant, or agreement) number for processing.

#### ***Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP)***

An OPM system used for entering and submitting all information into the electronic SF 85, 85P, and 86.

### ***Acceptable Identification Documents***

List of acceptable documents used for proof of identify. The names on the suitability documents must match each other and SSA's official record in order for OPM to process the necessary background investigation.

## **Key Participants**

### ***Company Point of Contact (CPOC)***

Representative for the awarded Employment Network.

### ***Contracting Officer Representative - Contracting Officer Technical Representative (COR-COTR)***

Representative authorized and designated in writing to perform *certain technical or administrative* functions as they relate to an award.

### ***Contractor (EN) Personnel***

Employee(s) of the awarded company, employee(s) of the subcontractor, any consultant retained by the contractor or subcontractor, any volunteer or intern of the contractor or subcontractor, and if the contractor or subcontractor is a sole proprietorship, it refers to the sole proprietorship.

### ***EN Service***

The designated lead for all Employment Network agreements and personnel. Send general EN questions to [ENService@ssa.gov](mailto:ENService@ssa.gov).

### ***Office of Human Resources, Office of Personnel, Center for Suitability and Personnel Security (DCHR, OPE, CSPS)***

Screens SSA employees, contractors, and affiliates. Initiates background investigations and makes suitability determinations. Point of contact for form completion, the OPM investigation process, fingerprint responses from FBI, name discrepancies between identification documents and SSA's records, e-QIP issues, final adjudication upon completion of the OPM investigation, and ongoing assessments as necessary. Send questions related to these topics to [DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov](mailto:DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov).

### ***Office of Personnel Management (OPM), National Background Investigations Bureau (NBIB)***

The federal agency that conducts the background investigation after the completion of e-QIP.

## **Contact Information**

### **CSPS**

- **Hotline at 1-844-874-9940** – Status inquires on pending suitability requests and e-QIP assistance. Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. ET, excluding all Federal holidays.
- [DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov](mailto:DCHR.OPE.Suitability@ssa.gov) and your CSPS POC– Questions on SSA's suitability process, the OPM investigation process, and name discrepancies between identification documents and SSA's records.

### **CSPS Points of Contact**

Boston (Region I): Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont	<a href="mailto:Samuel.Brown@ssa.gov">Samuel.Brown@ssa.gov</a>
New York (Region II): New York & New Jersey and the territories of Puerto Rico & U.S. Virgin Islands	<a href="mailto:Robert.Medeiros@ssa.gov">Robert.Medeiros@ssa.gov</a>
Philadelphia (Region III): Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia	<a href="mailto:Tamara.Jefferson@ssa.gov">Tamara.Jefferson@ssa.gov</a>
Atlanta (Region IV): Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee	<a href="mailto:Kim.Campbell@ssa.gov">Kim.Campbell@ssa.gov</a>
Chicago (Region V): Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Minnesota	<a href="mailto:Robert.Freeman.Jr@ssa.gov">Robert.Freeman.Jr@ssa.gov</a>
Dallas (Region VI): Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas	<a href="mailto:Lori.Sizemore@ssa.gov">Lori.Sizemore@ssa.gov</a>
Kansas City (Region VII): Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska	<a href="mailto:Takeysha.Neal@ssa.gov">Takeysha.Neal@ssa.gov</a>
Denver (Region VIII): Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming	<a href="mailto:Robert.Freeman.Jr@ssa.gov">Robert.Freeman.Jr@ssa.gov</a>
San Francisco (Region IX): Arizona, California, Nevada & Hawaii and the territories of Guam, American Samoa, & Saipan	<a href="mailto:Shalise.L.Smith@ssa.gov">Shalise.L.Smith@ssa.gov</a>
Seattle (Region X): Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington	<a href="mailto:Marcia.Hawkins@ssa.gov">Marcia.Hawkins@ssa.gov</a>

## Investigation Types & Risk Levels

OPM updated the investigative case types for their government-wide investigations. The following chart includes the old and new case types by risk level:

Federal Investigation Standards							
Consideration For	Suitability			National Security Access			
Position Risk Level	Low Risk	Moderate Risk Public Trust	High Risk Public Trust	Confidential	Secret	Top Secret	SCI
Position Sensitivity	Non-Sensitive			Non-Critical Sensitive		Critical Sensitive	Special Sensitive
New Tiered Investigation Case Type	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 4	Tier 3		Tier 5	
Prior Equivalent Investigation Case Type/Level	NACI (Level 1)	MBI (Level 5)	BI (Level 6)	NACLC/ANACI (Level 2)		SSBI (Level 3 & 4)	
Standard Form Used Within e-QIP	SF-85	SF-85P		SF-86			

Depending on when the investigation was initiated by OPM, the suitability determination letter may refer to e.g., MBI or Tier 2 for a moderate risk-level investigation.

## Encrypted Email Procedures

Secure emails may be sent via:

1. An SSA email account or SSA secure partner email account
2. A Government Services Online (GSO) email account
3. Password protected email (detailed instructions below)

### ***To Encrypt a File using WinZip***

1. Save the file to your hard drive
2. Open Windows Explorer and locate the file
3. Right click on the file
4. Select "WinZip"
5. Select "Add to Zip File"
6. An Add box pops up. Near the bottom of the box you will see an "Options" area
7. Click the "Encrypt added files" check box
8. Click the "Add" button
9. Check the "Hide Password" checkbox if not already checked
  - a. Enter the password of TTWE and last 4 digits of your award number (e.g., TTWE1234)
  - b. Select the 256-Bit AES encryption radio button
  - c. Click "OK"
10. You have successfully encrypted the new Zip file that can now be attached to an email

***Sending an encrypted Zip File via email:***

1. Compose a new message
2. Attach the Zip File
3. Send message

***Alternate Option***

If the contract company is unable to use WinZip, they may be able to use <https://www.7-zip.org/> (free software).

**E-QIP User Guides**

<https://nbib.opm.gov/e-qip-background-investigations/>

**Forms**

**[e-QIP Applicant Listing](#)**

A form completed by the CPOC and submitted to CSPS to initiate suitability screening/background investigations on applicants in order to work on an SSA award.

**[Declaration for Federal Employment \(OF-306\)](#)**

A form completed by an applicant and submitted to CSPS. Required for SSA's assessment of an applicant's suitability for access to federal systems, information, data, or premises and required for an OPM background investigation.

**[Fair Credit Reporting Act \(FCRA\) Authorization Form](#)**

A consent form completed by an applicant and submitted to CSPS to authorize the collection of credit information associated with the background investigation.

**[Contractor Rollover Request Form](#)**

If personnel authorized to work on an SSA award are to perform work under a new award, the CPOC must submit this form to the COR-COTR (e.g., [ENService@ssa.gov](mailto:ENService@ssa.gov)) of the new award. The COR-COTR must then submit the form to CSPS for processing. CSPS will notify the CPOC and the COR-COTR of suitability to work on the new award.

**[Cover Sheet](#)**

If an applicant does not use SSA's electronic fingerprint services option, they must use this cover sheet to mail hardcopy fingerprint cards to CSPS. Mailed fingerprint cards will result in a delay in processing.