

## 8: METHOD 3: HOW TO “APPLY” FOR 1099 JOBS

### 1099 JOB HUNTING TECHNIQUE

One of the reasons I disliked being an employee was that to get another job, you had to go through a tedious application and interview process that requires you to be somewhat of an “actor.”

When looking for 1099 gigs, I found the discussions to be much more genuine because the program manager is not screening you for your ability to adapt to company culture and all that.

However, one of the upsides of going through the job application process is that generally speaking, it is very easy to find open positions. A simple Google search for [Your Job Title] + [Government Contracting] + “Jobs” should yield a bunch of open job postings.

The method in this chapter outlines a process that will allow you to convert a traditional online job application process into a 1099 position discussion.

The primary benefits to this approach are:

- It is relatively passive and doesn’t require much energy. You can do this while watching TV
- If the 1099 opportunity doesn’t work out, it can potentially lead to a better W2 job as a consolation prize

The primary downside of this approach is that the results are a little more random. 95% of your job applications probably won’t lead anywhere unless your skills and experience are in particularly high demand.

I suggest using this approach in conjunction with the other two methods. I actually found one of

my current 1099 projects this way which I was not expecting.

### MAKE SURE YOUR RESUME HAS A NARRATIVE

One of the most “conventional” pieces of advice for online applications is to tailor your application to the specific position opening.

I do not recommend this at all. It takes too much work to tailor your resume if you are simply submitting your resume via online job boards or applications.

What I do recommend is crafting a single resume around a narrative that makes sense for the type of position you are looking for.

If you just put down random jobs and professional history and every single non-relevant skill you have, the recruiter or program manager will be a bit confused and you likely won’t get contacted about the position.

However, if you have a cohesive resume that allows the recruiter to instantly make a decision about whether or not you are potentially a good fit, then you’re in good shape.

For example, on my resume, I wanted to convey that I am a hybrid consultant and analytics professional. My “professional summary” at the top of my resume read:

*“An experienced data analyst specializing in customer collaboration to develop analytics-based solutions to critical business problems. Focused on answering “the question behind the question” through collecting, shaping, analyzing and*

*visualizing data to provide actionable recommendations and effective next steps to senior leadership.”*

I knew that in the analytics world, customers/clients don't always know what they want. Program managers could relate to that situation. In addition, I had the ability to actually execute on the customer needs which was attractive. If they hired me, I could be a one-stop shop for both requirements determination and execution.

The rest of my resume included highlights from projects that supported this statement.

What was interesting was that I received phone calls from recruiters about both program management jobs and analytics jobs. My resume did not indicate a perfect fit for either but I'm guessing the fact that I had a resume with a narrative was enough for a recruiter to make a judgment.

You can choose whatever resume format you like but I recommend thinking about the type of position you want, and then coming up with a compelling narrative around that type of position.

If you are looking for an IT systems design type of role, choose one particular common problem within IT and frame your narrative around how you are uniquely positioned to solve it. If you specialize in systems integration, emphasize that. If you can successfully manage competing stakeholder needs and drive alignment, make that the headline.

As counter-intuitive as it seems, being specific about the type of work you are best at may lead to more opportunities, not less.

## HOW TO FIND JOB OPPORTUNITIES ONLINE

There are really only two sources of government contracting jobs to consider: multi-company job board websites and company specific job boards.

For example, one of the more popular job boards for people with security clearances is ClearanceJobs.com and ClearedJobs.net. These are obviously almost exclusively federal contractor positions.

I just submitted my resume to the website and recruiters from different companies would e-mail or call about open positions.

The nice part about job boards is you'll be contacted by recruiters from many companies, exposing you to a wide variety of opportunities.

The other way to find federal contracting jobs is to find government contracting firms and then apply directly to jobs on their company job board.

Generally speaking, once you find a specific job to apply for, you can submit your resume for that job but then your resume will be in their database in case other opportunities pop up.

As a starting point, Google the type of job you want along with the term "federal contracting" and you'll get both the job portals and companies that are hiring. You might even find new types of positions that you hadn't considered but for which you are a good fit.

## MAXIMIZE APPLICATION EFFICIENCY

I have a few personal rules that I follow when applying for jobs online:

- A single application should take no more than 10 minutes
- I never submit a cover letter
- I never fill in the salary requirements

Online applications are a numbers game. If you spend too much time on any single application, you're not going to make any progress.

If an application has overly tedious requirements like responding to an essay-like question on its online form, I either just type "N/A" in the field or don't apply.

The ideal application process simply involves creating a profile and uploading a resume. You might have to copy and paste some text from your resume into the fields for their software to parse but otherwise that should be it.

If it looks like an application is going to take more than 10 minutes, ignore it.

### METHOD 3: HOW TO “APPLY ONLINE” FOR 1099 JOBS

Okay, but what about cover letters? Don't do them. The marginal value of writing one for a random application is not worth it. A cover letter might be valuable in other circumstances, but not for this approach.

If the cover letter is “required,” just upload your resume again to that field. It doesn't matter. You just need to get past the software that checks if there was anything uploaded.

Salary requirements is another field that you should not fill out. Most job applications will make you put something in there. Just put “N/A” or “0.” You can only hurt yourself by revealing your desired salary. If they were willing to pay more than you listed, they will only pay you 5% more than what you put down. If your salary requirement is too high, they won't talk to you.

If you follow those rules you'll have a good shot of getting at least a few phone screens with the recruiter, which leads me to my next step.

#### GET PAST THE RECRUITER

Recruiters are incentivized to place people into positions as W2 employees. If they are third party recruiters, they literally get paid per W2 employee they place. If they are in-house recruiters, the incentives are still such that making a direct hire is the most advantageous for the recruiter. I also find that many recruiters don't know that much about 1099s and will simply not move you forward if you press too hard on that point with them.

If you do get contacted by a recruiter, simply play along as if you are interested in the job as a W2. Your goal is to get an interview or a phone call with the program manager.

I will note that if you don't want to waste time pretending you are interested in a W2 position, I have had some success saying at the outset that I'm only interested in a 1099 position. Sometimes the recruiter will check with the hiring manager to see if they are open to it. If you are getting lots of e-mails and phone calls from recruiters or hiring managers, this might be a good way to reduce your workload.

The phone screen is not a “real interview” per se. The recruiter's goal is to simply determine you're not a total weirdo and to confirm that your experience is relevant to the position. Make sure you are prepared to talk about your professional history and accomplishments in a concise way.

The recruiter is also going to ask about your salary requirements. Do not tell them. Use this line to start: “Great question. I'm sure we can work out a compensation package that makes sense if we both decide the position is a good fit.”

If the recruiter is persistent, turn the question around on them. “It sounds like you have a hard limit on compensation. What do you have budgeted for the role?”

At that point they should either reveal it or back off. If they still insist on you giving a number as a condition for moving forward, give them a “total compensation package” range which includes things like health insurance, PTO, etc. You can say something like, “My total compensation target is between \$150,000 and \$225,000.”

Some recruiters are more aggressive than others about getting a number out of you. Just do your best to avoid giving it but if you have to, so be it.

The phone screen is also a good opportunity to get as much intel as possible about the position and the contract. You should try to get the following information:

- Information about the customer and the specific department
- The details of the contract
- Whether the position is contingent upon award or an active vacancy
- The relationship of the company to the contract (are they a prime or the sub)
- The name of the program manager

The recruiter probably won't know all the details (particularly if they are a third party recruiter) but remember, every conversation you have is an opportunity to get more information.

If you make it through the phone screen, there is a good chance you'll get to talk with a hiring manager or program manager as a next step.

### MAXIMIZE THE HIRING MANAGER OR PROGRAM MANAGER INTERVIEW

My experience with using the job hunting method is that if you speak with a recruiter about a position on a specific contract, you will be put in touch with a PM or hiring manager that is responsible for filling positions on the contract as a next step.

If you are applying to positions that aren't tied to a specific contract, you will probably be funneled through the normal, often rigorous interview process. This usually happens with larger government contracting companies (think Booz Allen or Deloitte) that can hire people without an assignment and then find work on a contract for them once they're in the door.

I don't recommend going through this latter process because it probably won't lead to a 1099 gig. You will go through a multi-stage interview process that will heavily emphasize "culture fit" and behavioral interviewing. In the end, you may get a job offer, but because it is not tied to a specific contract, there is no one to negotiate a 1099 contract with.

If you are open to the possibility of becoming an employee of a mega-corp, then sure, go for it. Otherwise, turn down the interview.

When you speak with the PM or hiring manager they are under the assumption that you want to be an employee. You have a few objectives with this conversation:

- Demonstrate you can make the hiring manager or PM's life easier if they hire you
- Gather intel about the contract, the client, etc.
- Open up the possibility of a 1099 arrangement without shutting off the W2 opportunity

The goal of any interview should be to demonstrate how you can add value to the company and make

your future boss' life easier. For a 1099, it's the same goal except you replace "boss" with "PM" or client.

The PM will probably have a few standard behavioral interview questions lined up "tell me about a time when you X." You should be prepared with good stories about your professional experience in response.

However, as soon as possible, start asking the PM about the work and the client. Try to figure out what the real problems are, what solutions have been attempted, where the bottlenecks are, etc.

You won't have all the answers, but by asking the questions in a way that shows you are truly trying to understand the PMs, you'll set yourself apart from people that are simply interviewing for a job.

Once you show that you are a high value professional, you can bring up the possibility of a 1099 arrangement. You can say something like this:

*"I think I can help you quite a bit with some of the issues we just discussed. I'm excited to continue the conversation. I want to let you know though that while I'm open to a W2 role, I am primarily interested in a 1099 arrangement. Are you completely opposed to exploring that option?"*

If 1099 is at all possible, the PM will offer to "check a few things" and get back to you. If it's definitely not possible, they will just tell you right then.

If the position is interesting enough or opens up new opportunities with another customer or expands your skill set, it might be worth continuing the conversation about becoming a W2 employee. If you do get an offer you can use it as a backup position if you are implementing my 1099 job conversion method at the same time.

### NEGOTIATE

I covered the basic negotiation points in the 1099 job conversion chapter and the networking chapter. The same basic principles apply. Try to get the PM to reveal the rate range first, anchor your rate range at the high end, and don't take bad deal.

### METHOD 3: HOW TO “APPLY ONLINE” FOR 1099 JOBS

I also want to highlight that if the recruiter or PM gave you any indication about what the salary range would be, you can use divide by 1000 +/- 20% estimate to get a sense of what the hourly rates can be. Assuming those rates are acceptable to you, anchor the low end of your proposed rate range to the high end.

For example, if the recruiter gave a salary of “around \$150,000,” the rate range might be between \$120/hour and \$180/hour. Tell the PM something like, “I generally charge between \$175/hour and \$200/hour.”

#### **FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE JOB APPLICATION METHOD**

This method is nice because it is low energy and you can apply for 5-10 positions a week in an hour or two so it is a nice complement to the job conversion method and the networking method, which require far more energy and effort.

The trade-off is that the hit rate will be pretty low. It is a pure numbers game. Don't breathlessly wait for that “perfect” open position you found. Apply and forget about it.

Spend a little bit of time on your resume, apply for few jobs every week, and talk to recruiters for positions that are potentially acceptable to you.





## 12: HOW TO MANAGE YOUR SECURITY CLEARANCE AS A 1099

### SECURITY CLEARANCES FOR 1099S

If you currently have a security clearance (or have had one in the past), you know that it makes you valuable to employers. There are many contractor positions that require a security clearance and companies have a hard time filling them.

Remember when I had you conduct a self-assessment to determine how replaceable you are? Well, if you have a security clearance, you are more difficult to replace. As a result, you have more leverage when trying to make the transition to becoming a 1099 sub-contractor.

However, just like with other aspects of becoming a 1099, you must now be more diligent than you were as an employee about maintaining your security clearance.

I am not going to go into all the details about security clearances for this chapter. I am only going to cover the steps you need to take as a 1099 to help you leverage your clearance, maintain it, and minimize problems that cost you money.

Because I have maintained an active security clearance for the last decade, I have been able to earn significantly more than I would have for comparable non-cleared work. However, because of security clearance delays at various points, I've also lost out on probably two hundred thousand dollars worth of billable hours.

Let me save you some trouble and money.

### SECURITY CLEARANCE BASICS

Let's go through a few basic facts about security clearances.

#### » *What is a security clearance?*

A security clearance is an administrative eligibility to access classified information. If you have a security clearance, it is the government's way of saying they trust you enough to possess information that, if released to unauthorized persons or entities, would damage national security to various degrees.

There are several levels of clearance, including Confidential, Secret, and Top Secret. There are also what are called "access" eligibilities like SCI (Sensitive Compartmentalized Information) and SAP (Special Access Programs) that indicate you can be trusted with information that is even more restricted.

The nuances aren't super important except to say that you should know what level of clearance you have been granted.

#### » *How do you get a security clearance?*

There are a couple of steps to getting a clearance. First, an authorized organization or company must sponsor you for a security clearance. This could be a government agency or your company. Their justification will be "hey this guy will be working on classified projects and therefore needs a security clearance."

Second, you will submit a security clearance packet (for example, the SF86 form or eQIP which is the online version) that will ask you about all sorts of personal information going back many years (dependent on the clearance level).

Third, the government will conduct a background investigation, validate all the information you

provided, and gather additional information they find relevant. This could be relatively quick if you have been submitted for a low-level clearance or it could take over a year for a high-level clearance.

The re-investigation for my Top Secret clearance took three years if that helps you get a sense of how slow this process can be sometimes.

Fourth, the government will “adjudicate” your completed investigation which is just a bureaucratic way of saying they will review the investigator’s information and provide final approval (or rejection in the case they find out you are trying to overthrow the government).

It is at this point that you “have a clearance” for all intents and purposes. In theory after you are adjudicated you will be “read on” to whatever project or job that requires the clearance and you will sign a non-disclosure agreement and have access to classified information.

### » *Do security clearances “expire?”*

There is a ton of confusion around how and when security clearances expire. You may have heard that Top Secret clearances expire after five years or that your clearance will expire two years after you leave a job requiring a clearance (and haven’t been in a cleared job since).

The truth is there aren’t that many hard and fast rules. There are guidelines the government has issued and there are also agency-specific guidelines and rules that may be more strict or more flexible.

This can be incredibly frustrating because you may be told your clearance is all set and you can start on a classified project, but then it is held up because the government security officer follows his agency’s procedures and wants to conduct further investigation into your background.

Generally speaking, your security clearance will “expire” if you haven’t been in a cleared position for an extended period of time and/or haven’t had a recent investigation as defined by the level of clearance you have (6 years for Top Secret, 10 years for Secret, etc.).

The impact we’re concerned about as 1099 federal sub-contractors is that we will be shut out of gigs that require clearances because our clearances are not current or are expired (again, loose definitions here).

### » *How do you maintain a clearance?*

There are two primary things you should attempt to do if you are trying to maintain an “active” security clearance.

First, do your best not to let too much time lapse in between cleared gigs. Gaps of a few months are fine, even a few years. In fact, my company just hired an employee who hadn’t been in a job that required a clearance for just over two years. It was fine for this particular government agency. Remember how I said there were no hard and fast rules? Two years is a rule of thumb but try to make it less if you can.

Second, make sure the company that is holding your clearance (as in, administratively manages your clearance in JPAS, the Joint Personnel Adjudication System or DISS, the Defense Information Security System<sup>1</sup>), takes the proper steps to submit you for a re-investigation at the appropriate time. If you have a TS clearance and you’re coming up on six years since your last investigation closed, get in touch with the Facility Security Officer (FSO) to get the ball rolling on that.

That is pretty much it, but let’s go through a few examples that I’ve personally experienced because they are illustrative of the strange, nuanced, and often frustrating world of cleared gigs.

## 1099 SECURITY CLEARANCE SCENARIOS

### » *Scenario 1: You are in a cleared position and will stay in that position as a 1099*

This is the situation I was in for my first 1099 gig. I had successfully convinced my employer to keep me on as a 1099 in the cleared position I was already performing as an employee.

Because I already had a badge and accounts set up at the agency for which I would continue to work, I didn’t anticipate many issues.



## HOW TO MANAGE YOUR SECURITY CLEARANCE AS A 1099

However, before I became a 1099, I asked the Facility Security Office (FSO) to start the process to begin my Periodic Re-investigation (PR, now coded as a T5R). It had been around five years since my last clearance had closed so I knew it needed to be done.

I also confirmed with the FSO that I would be able to continue in my current position at the agency without having to turn in my badge, get submitted again for indoc, and then get a new badge. I also wanted to know if not having a completed PR would be an issue.

On the former issue, she did not believe that I would need to leave the agency and then come back since I wasn't changing contracts or companies. The only thing that changed was my status in the Joint Personnel Adjudication Systems (JPAS), which would show me as a consultant to my former employer rather than an employee.

On the latter, she said that clearances don't expire or lapse while your PR is ongoing. Because I was staying in the same position at the same agency, everything should stay the same.

That was re-assuring. It was also at this point that I made sure that my company would continue to "hold" my clearance. The FSO confirmed that would be the case until I no longer had a relationship with them that would require them to hold or service my clearance.

So what ultimately ended up happening? Fortunately, this played out exactly as anticipated. I submitted my information for the PR, kept my badge, and continued to do my job as a better compensated 1099. No problem!

The lesson here is that you should, at minimum, check with your FSO to see if there are any issues you should watch out for.

### » ***Scenario 2: Switching to a different job and contract at the same government agency***

My first 1099 gig (the one mentioned in Scenario 1) ended and I found another company who needed someone to fill a position on a different contract.

As an aside, the government client put me in touch with the company because I had done good

work for her in the past. This is one of the benefits of using networking and client referrals to get gigs.

Because the position was at the same agency where I already had a badge and accounts, I thought it would be no big deal to start on the new contract, once all the paperwork cleared.

My PR still wasn't complete (it had been about 9 months since I submitted it) but I wasn't too concerned since, again, I already had a badge and accounts set up.

Well...this time, things did not go according to plan.

After the prime submitted my paperwork to NGA to start on the new contract, I began to get concerned when I didn't receive approval to begin work after a few weeks.

I received notice from the prime contractor that because my PR hadn't been completed and it had been over two years since NGA last adjudicated me (when I first started at NGA), they needed me to submit an updated hard copy of my SF86. This is the same paperwork I submitted online for my PR. NGA didn't have the ability to see it directly.

Annoying but okay. I submitted the SF86 to NGA directly.

I waited another few weeks but hadn't heard back. The prime didn't hear anything. At this point my last contract was over so even though I still had an active badge and could get into the building and access my accounts, I still was not permitted to start on the new contract.

Time is very literally money in this case, as each week of not working is \$4,000 - \$5,000 I was not earning.

The prime didn't know what was going on. NGA security did not provide any details or estimates about when they would be done.

I read online that sometimes your Congressional representative can send an inquiry on your behalf which can potentially get it "unstuck." I did that.

At the same time the program manager leveraged his contacts at the agency to finally get in touch with the head of personnel security.

## GOING 1099: HOW TO BECOME A SOLO FEDERAL SUB-CONTRACTOR

I don't know if either action had any impact but after about three months of nothing, I was finally cleared to start work.

Three months was about \$40,000-\$50,000 of earnings I missed out on.

In retrospect, I don't know what I could have done differently in my situation. My first contract was over no matter what; there was no option to extend while I was waiting for approval to start on the second contract.

However, if I were in a position to keep working until I was approved, I would have done so.

I would urge appropriate caution if any of these apply to you in a scenario where you are switching contracts at the same agency.

- It has been more than two years since you initially started or switched contracts at your agency. For example, if it is January 2021 and you were on-boarded on or before January 2019 at your agency, that is more than two years.
- You are currently in the middle of a PR/T5R for your security clearance, particularly if the position is at the Top Secret level or higher (as in TS/SCI).
- You have foreign national relatives and/or significant foreign national relationships. My mother is Japanese and apparently if you have an immediate relative who is a foreign national your clearance requires a waiver.
- This is the type of risk you have to manage as a 1099. If I were an employee in this situation, my employer would have kept paying me while the situation was being resolved. They might have put me on other projects to keep me busy.

As a 1099, you just have to eat the opportunity cost. Fortunately, you're making significantly more money (if you negotiated correctly) when you are working so you can save for times like this when you have a gap in projects.

In fact, the three months off could have been relaxing if I knew from the outset how long it would take. It was the combination of expecting to

start almost right away and the uncertainty of my clearance situation that made me anxious.

It also pays to be aggressive when something appears stuck. Keep bugging the prime, get your Congressman involved, work your network. Just be firm and polite about what you need. I can't guarantee that this will fix everything but it won't hurt.

If you can, keep working your existing project until you get approval to start on the next one. If you know your contract is ending, at least a few months out, begin the process of transferring to the new contract.

If you want to take time off, get set up on the new project and then schedule in a vacation once you're "in the door." This will minimize risk and lost income.

### » ***Scenario 3: You are in the middle of an investigation and are sub-contracting to a new company***

After the contract in Scenario 2 ended, I had found another project at the same agency, but with a different prime contractor and on a different contract.

Since NGA (the agency I was working at) had just finished re-adjudicating me in the previous few months, in theory, switching to a new contract should have been no problem. Of course, I had made an assumption like that in Scenario 2 and I was out of work for several months.

Fortunately, there was no issue on NGA's side of the house and I was approved to start on the new contract.

However, the previous prime contractor I worked for still "owned" my clearance and my PR was still processing. Since I was no longer going to be working for them, I didn't want my PR to get lost or have to start over.

I made sure to reach out to the FSO at the new prime, and he assured me they would "take over" my investigation in their company's JPAS account and would administratively own my clearance.

And you know what? They did! I was out-processed from the previous company and the

new company took over my security clearance responsibilities.

It's important to note here though that just because you start a contract with a new company, it doesn't mean they have an "owning" relationship with your profile in JPAS.

Let's say you sub-contract to two different companies: A and B. Both are cleared projects. Generally speaking, one will have the "owning" relationship and the other will have a "servicing" relationship.

It's not a big deal, except that you want to make sure that at least one company has a owning relationship as that company will be responsible for administrative actions (like re-investigations) on our behalf.

Sometimes FSOs aren't good about clearing out their inactive personnel in JPAS. So even though you stopped working for Company A a few months ago, they may still have an owning relationship in your profile while you are working for Company B. The FSO at Company B won't necessarily tell you they only have a servicing relationship with you, they just did the minimum to get you started on the project.

If, several months into work with Company B, Company A drops you from their account, then you might get stuck in re-investigation administrative limbo.

If that happens, it's not unsolvable, however, who knows what kind of weird things happen with investigations. The government might just go "oh he no longer needs an investigation because no one 'owns' his JPAS profile.

To prevent that from happening, just make sure that whoever you are actively sub-contracting to has the owning relationship. Talk to the FSO and confirm that they are taking over your PR if you are in one.

The lesson here is to make sure there is always continuity of ownership for your security clearance. Being pro-active can save you some trouble down the road.

### » ***Scenario 4: You had a recently completed investigation and are starting on a new project***

I took some time off from full-time billable work starting in January 2019 to focus on a few other things. I wanted to try to grow the business and take a few vacations.

In August 2019, I wasn't making much progress so it made more sense to go back to my old project, which was under a new contract and prime contractor.

We got all the paperwork done and the only remaining barrier left was approval by NGA security.

At this point, my company had its own facility clearance (FCL) , meaning my company "owned" my clearance. I knew that my most recent PR (the one that I had submitted in March 2015) had closed in April 2018.

Combined with the fact that I had left NGA only 7 months prior, I assumed there would be no problem with me getting approved.

I think I just love being abused by NGA because by December 2019, I still hadn't been approved!

I tried working through the prime FSO who kept telling me NGA hasn't shared any information and that my case was still processing.

Well, after almost a year of not working a project, I was anxious to figure out what was going on.

My business partner/FSO looked at my JPAS profile and saw that though my investigation had closed in April 2018, I had not yet been adjudicated by DoD Central Adjudication Facility (CAF)! Because of our lack of experience managing security clearances, we did not know that a closed investigation did not mean I was approved.

So something got screwed up on the government's side. Once an investigation closes, the adjudication process should start. My partner called the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency's (DCSA) customer service line and confirmed with a representative there that indeed, my investigation was never handed off to an adjudicator.

## GOING 1099: HOW TO BECOME A SOLO FEDERAL SUB-CONTRACTOR

The rep put in request to have the process expedited and by March 2020, DoD CAF adjudicated me.

Once they did that, my partner notified a security POC at NGA that DoD CAF adjudicated me and once that occurred, NGA also adjudicated me within the next few days.

This is the kind of crap you put up with as a 1099 with a security clearance.

Had my PR been adjudicated after my investigation closed in 2018 and before I left NGA in January 2019, NGA would have had no problem approving me when I wanted to return in August 2018.

Because of a screw-up by OPM/DCSA, I lost out on about seven months of income (August 2019 - March 2020). It was even more because COVID measures were put in place in March 2020 and I couldn't start work at all! I didn't start on a project until November 2020 (a different one at NGA).

I had about a 15 month unplanned gap in work because of security clearance issues + COVID.

While I was lucky enough to have a company with an FCL and a business partner/FSO who was much more pro-active, competent, and motivated to fix this issue, you can do your part to make sure you're not just a passive victim of bureaucratic screw-ups.

If you have been in the re-investigation process for a while, ask the prime FSO to let you know a) if/when the investigation has closed and b) if/when the investigation has been adjudicated.

If there has been a significant amount of time that has passed (more than three months) since your investigation closed, ask the FSO to put in a request to check on its adjudication status. While this won't necessarily make the adjudication process move faster, if it's "stuck" somewhere that should start the process to get it unstuck.

Once you are adjudicated, ask the FSO to let your agency's security office know. CAF is a part of DoD so if you are working at a DoD agency it's probably not necessary but do it just to be safe.

If you are working at a non-DoD agency (an intelligence agency, State Department, Department of Homeland Security, or other), you should definitely have the FSO let the agency security office know so that they can update their records.

A relevant piece of security clearance trivia is that different agencies use different systems to track security clearances, and these systems generally don't sync well with each other. Some security officer has to hand jam your stuff into the system and if another agency's security officer wants to verify your clearance, they have to manually request that information be sent to them!

Be diligent about knowing the status of your investigation and adjudication. Maintain consistent communication with your prime FSO and persuade them to take necessary actions on your behalf. Ensure that your client agency is notified of any clearance updates.

If you can do that you can potentially prevent long gaps in billable work, the 1099 equivalent of being "unemployed."

### » ***Scenario 5: You are switching to a new project at a different agency***

Once COVID hit, the project I was scheduled to start at NGA fell through (see scenario four). However, another project at the Department of Homeland security (DHS) popped up.

I thought adjudication would be a breeze because I had just been adjudicated by both DoD CAF and NGA a few months prior. Due to reciprocity guidelines, DHS should have seen that and said "okay great, you're good to go." Reciprocity just means that an agency will accept clearance eligibility that was granted by another agency.

I'm sure you can predict what happened next...

I submitted my security paperwork in June 2020. I heard nothing for a while, then received some follow-up questions about my family. My mother is a foreign national and my sister and I were both born overseas on US military bases so they asked a few things about that. They also asked a few questions about travel and some of my foreign bank accounts



(if you want to hear about US Dollar hyperinflation concerns., shoot me a note).

I didn't get approved until November of 2020!

What I learned during that time is while yes, DHS does have a reciprocity policy, but, if your clearance has a waiver attached to it, DHS can review it independently.

What is one of the most common issues that make you clearance ineligible and requires a waiver? Having immediate family members who are foreign nationals.

So, DHS took their sweet time to do their own review and adjudication of my package. Their security office would not provide estimates on how long something should take.

I never started on the DHS project because my other NGA project came through first. Plus it was higher paying.

This is just another example of my lack of knowledge about security clearance eligibility policies leading me to make assumptions about how long things "should take."

There is nothing I could have done to prevent this issue in this particular scenario, short of going back in time and being born to a mother who was a US citizen.

However, the lesson here is to be particularly conservative in your planning when you are switching to a project at a different agency. This is doubly true when the agency is under a different agency umbrella. For example, moving from a DARPA project to a Navy project "should" move relatively quickly since they are both a part of the Department of Defense.

However, going from the Navy to NGA might lead to delays because NGA is part of the Intelligence Community (IC), not the Department of Defense.

In this scenario, DHS is neither part of DoD nor the IC, so my adjudications with them did not hold as much sway despite the broad reciprocity policy in place.

### » **Scenario 6: You are in the Continuous Vetting Program and are switching projects or starting a new project**

This one is a bit tricky as I have not been put in the Continuous Vetting (CV) program. The idea behind CV is that instead of a PR every 6 years or 10 years, the government monitors key pieces of information about you on a regular basis. They pull from databases they have access to (say...credit checks to determine if you are having financial problems) and assess the security risk you pose.

In theory, if you are in CE, any agency you work for is supposed to accept your last adjudication prior to CE. You maintain your eligibility until you are removed from CE and no longer have any association with DoD.

Here is the language from the DCSA website:

*"The Executive Agents have directed all Federal departments and agencies to reciprocally accept the prior favorable adjudication for deferred reinvestigations that are out of scope (overdue). Existing eligibility remains valid until the individual is removed from CE, no longer has any DoD affiliation, or has their eligibility revoked or suspended."*

In practice, I suspect that if you are in CE and transferring to say, an IC agency or DHS, they might add additional checks that can delay your transfer.

There isn't really anything you can do to force the agency to accept your CE,. The best you can do is to expect that their adjudication process will take a long time and to plan accordingly. Don't leave your current project (if that is an option) until you are approved by security at the new agency to start.

## 1099 SECURITY CLEARANCE LESSONS

1. Though "reciprocity" is the official policy of the US government, there are always exceptions that can lead to delays
2. Never assume anything will ever go "quickly," even if the official policy as you understand it indicates it would.

## GOING 1099: HOW TO BECOME A SOLO FEDERAL SUB-CONTRACTOR

3. If you have the option of continuing on your current contract, do not leave the contract or give notice until you have approval to start on the new contract.
4. Ensure that at least one company actively “owns” your clearance at all times.
5. Try to minimize gaps in cleared projects. While your clearance may still be valid on paper, gaps longer than two years might lead to delays.
6. Be pro-active about your clearance. Maintain a good relationship with the owning organization’s FSO. If anything is “weird” or taking a long time with your clearance, ask the FSO to look into it or follow up.
7. Be cautious when you are switching contracts and you have an open investigation. The agency will likely use your older investigation to make their adjudication decision
8. Keep good records. Save a copy of your investigation paperwork so that you can refer/submit it to the government if they ask. If you travel overseas frequently or have foreign national relationships, document it in a spreadsheet somewhere.
9. Call your Congressman or Senator’s office if you have a security clearance delay. They can send an inquiry to the appropriate agency on your behalf. I can’t promise results but it doesn’t hurt.
10. Bonus: If you have a lower level clearance like Secret for example, ask the FSO if they’d be willing to put you in for a higher level clearance. Worst case is they can say is no, but best case is you’ll have more cleared opportunities in the future.

This may seem like I’m just ranting but I want to re-emphasize that the 1099 sub-contracting life is not risk free. In the particular case of cleared gigs, while you are certainly more valuable with a clearance, there are a lot of things that can cause delays which means lost income for you.

I still think it’s worth it. I’m on track to make >\$300k this year which is far more than I would make as an employee. Even with all the delays and

gaps, I am still net ahead in my earnings over my six year 1099 career.

Actively manage your clearance and the risks of cleared works and you can do even better than I have over the years.