

Comprehensive Guide to Applying for Defense Contractor Jobs

You can use this detailed guide for guidance in applying for defense contractor jobs. Working as a defense contractor offers unique opportunities in sectors like aerospace, cybersecurity, IT, logistics, and engineering, often supporting critical government operations and national defense missions. This guide will cover the entire process, from the initial application through interviewing and negotiating your compensation package, including salary, benefits, and incentives.

1. Understanding the Defense Contractor Job Market

Defense contractors provide goods and services to government agencies, particularly the Department of Defense (DoD). Jobs in this field can range from engineering and IT roles to logistics, program management, and intelligence analysis. Here's what you need to know about the field before applying:

- **Security Clearances:** Many positions with defense contractors require a security clearance. If you don't already have one, the company may sponsor you for one if the role requires it.
- **Government Contracting Experience:** If you have prior experience working with the military or other government agencies, highlight this on your resume as it's highly valued.
- **Specialized Skills:** Defense contractors often seek specialized skills, such as cybersecurity certifications, engineering credentials, or experience in government-specific systems like classified networks.

2. Application Process for Defense Contractor Jobs

The process of applying for a defense contractor job is slightly different from applying to other private sector roles due to the focus on specialized skills and, often, security clearances. Here's a step-by-step guide:

Step 1: Research Job Openings

Start by identifying companies that offer defense contracting services and review their open positions.

- **Use Job Boards and Company Websites:** While you can find defense contracting jobs on general job boards (e.g., Indeed, LinkedIn), it's best to search directly on contractor career sites or government-focused job boards like **ClearedJobs.net** and **ClearanceJobs.com**.

Step 2: Tailor Your Resume

Defense contractors typically seek candidates with experience relevant to government projects. Be sure to:

- **Highlight Security Clearances:** If you have an active clearance (Secret, Top Secret, TS/SCI), list it prominently on your resume.
- **Include Relevant Certifications:** Certifications such as **CompTIA Security+**, **Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP)**, **PMP**, or engineering certifications are highly valuable in defense contracting roles.
- **Showcase Experience with Government Clients:** If you've worked directly with federal agencies like the DoD, NSA, or DHS, be sure to emphasize this experience.

Step 3: Submit Your Application

When applying online, follow these key steps:

- 1 **Apply via Company Career Portals:** Most defense contractors require candidates to apply through their career portals, uploading your resume and completing an application form.
- 2 **Prepare for ATS (Applicant Tracking System):** Use keywords from the job description in your resume and application to ensure it passes through the company's ATS filters.

Step 4: Provide Necessary Documentation

- **Security Clearance Information:** If required, disclose whether you have an active clearance.
- **Certifications:** Be ready to upload proof of any technical or security certifications.
- **Transcripts:** Some technical roles may require academic transcripts, especially if the job requires a specific degree.

3. Interviewing for Success in Defense Contractor Jobs

The defense contractor interview process is structured and often involves multiple rounds of interviews. Here's how to prepare:

Step 1: Research the Company and Project

- **Study the Contractor's Clients:** Be prepared to talk about your knowledge of the contractor's primary clients (DoD, intelligence agencies, etc.).
- **Understand the Contract:** In many cases, contractors will hire you to work on a specific government project. Research the contract and what it entails.

Step 2: Prepare for Technical and Behavioral Questions

- **Technical Interviews:** If you're applying for a technical role, expect to be tested on your expertise in specific systems or technologies. For example, cybersecurity professionals

may be asked about incident response, network defense, or compliance with government regulations like NIST and FISMA.

- **Behavioral Interviews:** Use the **STAR method** (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to answer behavioral questions. Be ready to discuss examples of teamwork, leadership, and handling classified or sensitive information.

Step 3: Prepare for Security-Related Questions

Interviewers may ask about your experience handling sensitive information, your understanding of government regulations, and how you adhere to security protocols. Be prepared to discuss:

- **Classified Work:** If you have experience working with classified information, explain how you maintained security standards.
- **Compliance Knowledge:** Discuss your familiarity with defense-related compliance requirements, such as ITAR (International Traffic in Arms Regulations) and CMMC (Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification).

Step 4: Demonstrate Adaptability and Client-Focused Mindset

Defense contractors often work in dynamic environments, supporting government clients with rapidly changing needs. Highlight your ability to adapt to new challenges and your focus on delivering value to government stakeholders.

4. Salary Negotiation for Defense Contractor Jobs

When it comes to salary negotiation, defense contracting can be a competitive space, especially if you bring valuable skills or an active security clearance. Here's how to approach it:

Step 1: Research Salary Ranges

Use sites like **Glassdoor**, **Indeed**, and **Payscale** to research average salaries for your role, location, and level of experience.

- **Clearance Impact:** Positions that require high-level security clearances (Top Secret, TS/SCI) often come with higher salaries due to the limited pool of qualified candidates.
- **Job Location:** Salaries in metropolitan areas with a high cost of living, like Washington, D.C., or San Diego, may offer higher compensation compared to rural areas.

Step 2: Prepare to Negotiate

- **Base Salary:** When discussing salary, know the market rate and ask for a number at the higher end of your range. Be sure to justify it with your skills, experience, and clearance level.

- **Salary vs. Hourly:** Some defense contractors offer hourly contracts instead of salaries, especially for cleared roles. Hourly positions can lead to higher earnings if overtime is available.

Step 3: Negotiate for Benefits

In addition to salary, you can negotiate benefits, which can make a significant impact on your overall compensation package.

5. Negotiating Benefits, Sign-On Incentives, and Bonuses

Defense contractors often offer competitive benefits packages, and you may also be eligible for sign-on bonuses or performance-based incentives.

Step 1: Review Benefits Packages

Typical benefits in defense contractor jobs include:

- **Health Insurance:** Comprehensive medical, dental, and vision insurance.
- **Retirement Plans:** Many contractors offer **401(k)** plans with employer matching.
- **Paid Time Off (PTO):** Negotiate the amount of vacation and sick leave.
- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Some positions may allow for telework or flexible hours.

Step 2: Negotiate Sign-On Bonuses

- **What to Expect:** Sign-on bonuses are often offered for high-demand roles, especially if you have an active clearance or specialized skills.
- **How to Negotiate:** If a sign-on bonus is not initially offered, you can bring it up during the negotiation process, especially if you're considering competing offers.

Step 3: Performance Bonuses and Relocation Assistance

- **Performance Bonuses:** Many contractors offer bonuses based on project completion or performance reviews. Be sure to ask if this is part of the compensation structure.
- **Relocation Assistance:** If the position requires you to move, ask about relocation packages that cover moving expenses or temporary housing.

Conclusion

Landing a job in the defense contracting field requires a strategic approach, from tailoring your resume to passing security checks and negotiating salary and benefits. Follow these steps to

improve your chances of success, and don't hesitate to explore opportunities with the top defense contractors. Being well-prepared and informed about the application and negotiation process will help you stand out and secure a rewarding career in this field.

Top 50 Government Contractors Categorized by Services Provided

Defense & Aerospace

Lockheed Martin:	Career Website
Raytheon Technologies:	Career Website
Boeing:	Career Website
Northrop Grumman:	Career Website
General Dynamics:	Career Website

Information Technology & Cybersecurity

Leidos:	Career Website
SAIC:	Career Website
CACI International:	Career Website
Booz Allen Hamilton:	Career Website
General Dynamics IT:	Career Website

Engineering & Infrastructure

Jacobs Engineering Group:	Career Website
Bechtel Corporation:	Career Website
Fluor Corporation:	Career Website
Parsons Corporation:	Career Website
AECOM:	Career Website

Intelligence & Security

L3Harris Technologies:	Career Website
Kratos Defense & Security:	Career Website
Perspecta (now Peraton):	Career Website
ManTech:	Career Website
Sierra Nevada Corporation:	Career Website

Logistics & Support Services

Amentum:	Career Website
Vectrus:	Career Website
KBR:	Career Website
Chenega Corporation:	Career Website
PAE:	Career Website

Consulting & Management

Deloitte Consulting:	Career Website
Accenture Federal Services:	Career Website
Guidehouse:	Career Website
McKinsey & Company (Federal):	Career Website
KPMG:	Career Website

Construction & Development

Huntington Ingalls Industries:	Career Website
Balfour Beatty US:	Career Website
HII Fleet Support Group:	Career Website

M.C. Dean: [Career Website](#)
Zachry Group: [Career Website](#)

Telecommunications & Technology Solutions

AT&T Government Solutions: [Career Website](#)
Verizon Federal: [Career Website](#)
LMI: [Career Website](#)
Carahsoft Technology: [Career Website](#)
Teledyne Technologies: [Career Website](#)

Health & Medical Services

Magellan Health: [Career Website](#)
Maximus: [Career Website](#)
Humana Government: [Career Website](#)
Centene Corporation: [Career Website](#)
UnitedHealth Group: [Career Website](#)

Research & Development

Battelle Memorial Institute: [Career Website](#)
SRI International: [Career Website](#)
Applied Research Associates (ARA): [Career Website](#)
Dynetics (a Leidos company): [Career Website](#)
MITRE Corporation: [Career Website](#)