

# It's Time to Reform Intelligence Community Hiring Practices

By Lindy Kyzer

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The intelligence community is generally good at [keeping secrets](#). But its career management process shouldn't be one of those [secrets](#). That was a key takeaway at a panel of intelligence community talent managers and leaders at Wednesday's [#NatSecGirlsSquad conference](#) in Washington.

"Change is very hard inside a bureaucracy, and it's doubly hard inside a bureaucracy where secrecy and security is paramount," said Terri Randall, deputy director of talent acquisition at CIA. "How we can speed up our process—which is extensive and intensive—with tools that are more user friendly?"

The intelligence community has traditionally hired people through one of its 17 member agencies, most of which have their own suitability standards and security clearance processes. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence wants to change that to make it easier to consider qualified candidates for positions across the community.

"We have got to figure out how we can compete for talent more efficiently and effectively," said Erin Reitkopp, human capital program manager at ODNI. Through the Right, Trusted, Agile Workforce initiative, ODNI is looking at looking at ways to create career paths throughout the IC, not specific to any one agency, and make it easier for people to move between the intelligence community and the private sector.

"We know that the hiring timeline is too long. Leadership across the IC knows it; we get it," said Reitkopp. "We have to be really intentional about how we work. Not everyone has to hold the [same level of clearance](#). As the IC evolves, there will be space for all different kinds of work."

Government hiring managers are beginning to recognize that if they want to attract the right people, they need to open up the hiring process. That requires hiring reform, and it also requires [security clearance reform](#).

"We need to understand the world, but we can't clear the world," said Tish Tucker of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. She emphasized the need for including a diversity of opinions and perspectives, including those who may not traditionally be attracted to national security careers, or have a squeaky clean background to make for a quick clearance process.

## Systemic Barriers

The goal of #NatSecGirlsSquad is to promote competent diversity in national defense. The conference audience was representative of that mission—men and women at various stages of their careers, all interested in the success of the national security community.

Government leaders acknowledge the process can often be a barrier to entry, particularly those new to the government or military.

"For our salaries to be competitive, we have to classify jobs in particular ways," noted John Kroger, chief learning officer at the Navy, when asked why so many jobs require individuals with at least eight years of experience, or specific degree

requirements, even if the candidate otherwise has the skills for the position. “The most important thing for me is what you can learn to do. We’re going to have to work on the pay side to delink compensation with requirements.” He noted that government hiring managers are often forced to create specific requirements in order for the position to have a salary that can remain competitive with the private sector.

Hiring managers were quick to point out the flaws in the process, many related to the failure to change and adapt how candidates are attracted and onboarded.

“The hiring process has not changed at all in 35 years,” noted Kroger. But while the government hiring process may not have evolved, the [civilian](#) career marketplace has and that means candidates have options. It’s harder to attract workers to national security positions when the commercial sector is also calling— without lengthy time to hire and unpredictable suitability requirements.

“The people we want in the Navy are in high demand in other jobs, and they’re going to get snapped up quickly,” said Kroger. “We’re going to have to make sure we’re intentionally developing a more diverse workforce.”

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