

SECURITY CLEARANCE TALENT PIPELINE
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Maryland Department of Labor

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEY INFORMATION SHEET SUMMARY	3
Key Definitions	4
SECTION 1 – PROJECT OBJECTIVES & GENERAL INFORMATION	7
1.1 Goals of the Project	7
1.2 General Information	9
1.2.1 Summary Statement	9
1.2.2 Eligible Applicants	10
1.2.3 Funding	12
1.2.4 Contact Information	12
1.2.5 Revisions to the CGP	12
1.2.6 Pre-Proposal Conference	12
1.2.7 Proposals Due Date	13
1.2.8 Amendments, Cancellations, and Discussions	13
1.2.9 Oral Presentations	13
1.2.10 Applicant Responsibilities	13
1.2.11 Grant	13
1.2.12 Compliance with Laws / Arrearages	14
SECTION 2 – SCOPE OF WORK	14
2.1 Introduction	14
2.2 General Provisions and Other Requirements	16
SECTION 3 – PROPOSAL FORMAT	26
3.1 Proposals	26
3.2 Submission	26

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

KEY INFORMATION SHEET SUMMARY

Purpose:	To design and pilot innovative workforce models that expand Maryland's pipeline of talent for Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) and TS/SCI with polygraph positions by identifying and connecting qualified candidates to clearance-dependent employers, supporting candidates as they progress through the federal personnel security process, and ultimately increasing the number of workers entering highly cleared employment in Maryland's cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI), technology, intelligence, defense, and national security sectors.
Issue Date:	October 15, 2026
Issuing Office:	Maryland Department of Labor
Submission To:	Mary Keller at mary.keller@maryland.gov
Pre-Proposal Virtual Conference: October 30, 2026 at 1:00 PM	
Proposals Due:	11:59 pm EST on Friday, January 8, 2027.
Selection Announcement:	February 2027
Funding Available:	\$500,000
Funding Ceiling:	\$250,000
Period of Performance:	March 1, 2027 - February 28, 2029
Eligible Applicants:	Employers, training providers, workforce development boards, industry associations, non-profit and community based organizations, local or regional economic development entities, institutions of higher education, and other relevant partner entities at MD Labor's discretion
MD Labor Contact:	Tori Darby tori.darby@maryland.gov Program Manager, Office of Strategic Initiatives Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

Key Definitions

- **Bridge Employment** – Paid employment performed by a Candidate in Process while applicable federal investigation, adjudication, or access requirements for the candidate's intended clearance-dependent position are pending. Bridge Employment may include unclassified work or classified work at a level for which the candidate currently has the required eligibility and access.
- **Candidate in Process** – An individual who has been selected for a qualifying position by a participating employer or other authorized entity and for whom the applicable federal personnel security process has been initiated.
- **Certificate of Good Standing (also known as a "Certificate of Status" or "COGS")** – An official document from the State Department of Assessments and Taxation that indicates the status of the entity as of the date on the certificate. If an entity is in good standing, it means the entity is properly registered with the Department, all documents and fees required to be submitted to the Department have been received, and that no other State agency has notified the Department that the entity is delinquent in tax payments. Government entities and community colleges are ineligible to obtain a COGS.
- **Clearance-Dependent Employment** – Employment in a position for which the individual must satisfy applicable federal personnel security and access requirements, including positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph.
- **Competitive Grant Proposal** – Also known as a CGP, a formal application submitted to a government agency, foundation, or corporation to win discretionary funding through a merit-based selection process.
- **Federal Personnel Security Process** – The applicable federal investigation, adjudication, and related personnel security requirements associated with determining an individual's eligibility for access to classified information and, where applicable, access to Sensitive Compartmented Information or other requirements associated with a clearance-dependent position. Federal agencies retain authority over these processes and determinations.
- **Fiscal Agent** – Individual within the Lead Applicant organization who is responsible for performing all financial management duties of the grant and accepts responsibility for the proper use of grant funds, managing and documenting grant expenditures (including disbursement to Subrecipients), and submitting financial reports for the grant.

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

- **Grant Officer** – The State representative who will manage the resulting grant awards. The Department may change the Grant Officer at any time by written notice to the Lead Applicant.
- **Industry-Driven Model** – An employer-led approach, which may be implemented by a single employer or through a consortium of employers and other partners, that demonstrates the capabilities necessary to recruit, support, retain, and transition candidates through the cleared talent pipeline into clearance-dependent employment.
- **Lead Applicant** – The entity to serve as the Fiscal Agent for the purposes of the grant. The Lead Applicant will also be responsible for managing the grant and all aspects of implementing the proposal.
- **Participating Employer** – An employer participating in a grant-funded project that contributes to one or more stages of the cleared talent pipeline process, including identifying workforce demand, recruiting or assessing candidates, initiating or supporting the applicable federal personnel security process where authorized, providing bridge employment or other candidate support, or providing pathways into clearance-dependent employment.
- **Pipeline Candidate** – An individual identified for potential placement into a position requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph who is being recruited, assessed, matched, or considered for a position by a participating employer or Federal agencies. The applicable federal personnel security process does not need to have been initiated for an individual to qualify as a Pipeline Candidate.
- **Subrecipient** – Any person or entity that will receive funding through the Lead Applicant and is not a direct employee of the Lead Applicant, is a subrecipient. Subrecipients are accountable to the Lead Applicant for use of the funds provided. Entities that receive funding EXCLUSIVELY for the purposes of providing general supplies (i.e., pens, paper), travel and/or one-time facility rental are not Subrecipients.
- **Supplemental Participant Stipend** – Grant-funded financial support provided to an eligible Candidate in Process who is actively engaged in bridge employment, training, developmental activities, or other structured workforce activities while applicable federal investigation, adjudication, or access requirements are pending. A Supplemental Participant Stipend is intended to help candidates remain economically supported and engaged in the cleared talent pipeline and may supplement, but may not replace, compensation otherwise owed for work performed.

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

- **Supportive Services** – Supportive services provide financial assistance to participants who would not otherwise be able to participate in a program. Grantees may offer supportive services to eligible participants to assist with transportation, uniforms, tools, work or training equipment, child or dependent care, stipends, graduation fees, union fees, and/or clothing for interviews or job fairs. Other supportive services may be allowable with MD Labor’s prior approval.
- **Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI)** – For purposes of this CGP, a position requiring Top Secret eligibility and access to Sensitive Compartmented Information in accordance with applicable federal requirements.
- **TS/SCI with Polygraph** – For purposes of this CGP, a position requiring Top Secret eligibility, access to Sensitive Compartmented Information, and completion of an applicable polygraph requirement as determined by the relevant federal agency or authorized entity.

SECTION 1 – PROJECT OBJECTIVES & GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 Goals of the Project

Maryland’s national security and defense ecosystem, especially cybersecurity employers, depends on a steady pipeline of workers able to fill positions requiring Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) and, for some of the state’s most sensitive missions, TS/SCI with polygraph. Yet Maryland employers face persistent challenges recruiting qualified candidates, navigating the federal personnel security process, and retaining them through the often lengthy period before they can begin performing clearance-dependent work.

In 2025, 15,898 (31.5%) of the 50,469 Maryland job postings across key defense and technology sectors referenced a security clearance requirement. The demand is especially pronounced in cybersecurity, where nearly half (49.6%) of the State’s 23,992 cybersecurity job postings referenced a clearance requirement.

This solicitation implements Strategy 4.1 and Initiative 4.1.1 of the 2025 Maryland Cybersecurity Talent Strategy¹, which call for strengthening partnerships with federal agencies and government contractors and developing employment and work-based learning pathways that incorporate the security clearance process. Initiative 4.1.1 specifically identifies Talent Bridge and Rotational Program models as potential approaches to enable individuals awaiting clearance to perform non-sensitive, cybersecurity-relevant work, gain experience, and remain connected to prospective employers.

As cybersecurity becomes increasingly integrated into the design, development, and operation of AI, autonomous systems, and other emerging technologies, a growing range of national security occupations require cybersecurity skills and functions. An effective cybersecurity TS/SCI talent pipeline must therefore include cyber-related roles across technology, AI, engineering, defense, intelligence, and other national security fields.

The time required to complete applicable federal investigation, adjudication, and access requirements can create a significant gap between when employers need talent and when qualified workers are able to begin clearance-dependent work. Tier 5 investigations, required for a Top Secret security clearance, average 243 days, with an estimated 3,255 DoD-industry security clearance cases currently pending in Maryland. During this period, candidates may face lost income, declining technical currency, or weakened connections to prospective employers and mission-critical work. Employers—particularly small and mid-sized defense contractors—may also face significant financial and operational challenges retaining candidates who cannot yet perform the classified work for which they were recruited.

¹ https://labor.maryland.gov/cybermaryland/TEDCO%20Cyber%20Maryland%20Strategy_Final.pdf

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

At the same time, Maryland has an opportunity to strengthen the front end of the cleared talent pipeline. Because individuals generally cannot obtain a security clearance independently, they must first be sponsored by an employing organization or other authorized entity with a qualifying need. This creates an opportunity to identify promising talent and connect them directly with employers equipped to initiate and support the federal personnel security process.

Call for Innovative Cleared Talent Pipeline Strategies

While federal agencies control security clearance investigations, eligibility determinations, and applicable access requirements, Maryland can strengthen the workforce infrastructure surrounding that process.

Through this Competitive Grant Program (CGP), the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor) seeks innovative, scalable approaches that expand and strengthen how Maryland recruits, supports, retains, and employs talent for positions requiring TS/SCI and TS/SCI with polygraph.

Core Objectives

Objective 1 - Keep Candidates in the Pipeline: Reduce candidate attrition while applicable federal investigation, adjudication, and access requirements are pending by testing strategies that provide economic support, keep candidates economically supported, maintain professional engagement, build relevant skills and experience, and strengthen connections between candidates and employers.

Objective 2 - Convert the Pipeline into Employment: Build scalable models that move candidates from recruitment and entry into the federal personnel security process through the clearance waiting period and ultimately into clearance-dependent employment with Maryland employers.

Objective 3 - Expand Entry into the TS/SCI Talent Pipeline: Increase the number of qualified candidates entering the federal personnel security process for positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph by identifying new and underutilized sources of talent and connecting candidates with employers or other authorized entities capable of initiating and supporting the applicable process.

MD Labor is seeking proposals that build, pilot, or expand industry-driven models addressing multiple points in the cleared talent pipeline. Strategies may include, but are not limited to:

- **Strategic Recruitment and Sponsorship:** Identify promising sources of talent, including but not limited to veterans and transitioning service members, former federal employees, individuals with current or prior security clearances, and experienced technical

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

professionals, and connect qualified candidates with employers that have clearance-dependent workforce demand and the ability to initiate and support the applicable federal personnel security process.

- **Clearance Navigation and Candidate Support:** Provide case management, application preparation, and ongoing navigation services designed to guide candidates and participating employers through the federal personnel security process, maintain active candidate engagement, and reduce attrition during processing.
- **Candidate Retention and Employer Support:** Develop approaches that help employers retain candidates while applicable federal investigation, adjudication, and access requirements are pending and reduce the financial and operational challenges associated with supporting talent that cannot yet perform classified work.
- **Bridge Employment and Experience:** Create opportunities for candidates to earn income, perform meaningful work they are currently eligible and authorized to perform, build mission-relevant skills, or participate in other developmental activities while progressing through the federal personnel security process.
- **Shared Talent and Employer Consortium Models:** Develop collaborative approaches through which employers can share project capacity that candidates are currently eligible and authorized to support, candidate support infrastructure, training resources, or associated costs, particularly where such models enable small businesses and HUBZone-certified defense contractors to participate more effectively in developing highly cleared talent.

1.2 General Information

1.2.1 Summary Statement

MD Labor is releasing this Security Clearance Talent Pipeline CGP to support industry-driven consortiums in designing, launching, or expanding innovative workforce strategies that strengthen Maryland's pipeline of talent for positions requiring TS/SCI and TS/SCI with polygraph. MD Labor's Cyber Maryland Program will administer this grant on behalf of the State of Maryland.

Successful applicants will build or expand an industry-driven model that brings together employers and other partners with the capabilities necessary to address multiple stages of the cleared talent pipeline. Driven by demonstrated employer demand, projects should recruit and connect qualified candidates to employers or other authorized entities capable of initiating and supporting the applicable federal personnel security process, retain and advance candidates while

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

federal investigation, adjudication, and access requirements are pending, and create viable pathways into clearance-dependent employment.

Projects may use a range of strategies, including targeted recruitment, clearance navigation, paid bridge employment, wage support, shared-talent models, technical training, and other approaches responsive to identified employer and candidate needs. Proposed strategies must be tied to demonstrated employer demand for positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph.

Each applicant must establish or expand an industry-driven model capable of implementing the proposed model and sustaining key elements of the work beyond the grant period. Projects are strongly encouraged to incorporate small and HUBZone-certified defense contractors and other partners that can expand the reach and long-term impact of Maryland's cleared talent pipeline.

1.2.2 Eligible Applicants

Organizations that are eligible to apply for this opportunity are:

1. Employers;
2. Training Providers;
3. Workforce Development Boards;
4. Industry Associations;
5. Non-profit and Community Based Organizations;
6. Local or Regional Economic Development Entities;
7. Institutions of Higher Education;
8. Other organizations at MD Labor's discretion.

Applicants do not need to be based in Maryland, but should have a significant presence in the State. Applicants must demonstrate meaningful employer connections in Maryland and be familiar with state-level workforce and education systems. Applicants must be in good standing with the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation and MD Labor's Division of Unemployment Insurance.

The lead applicant must establish or lead an employer-driven model that demonstrates the capabilities needed to build and sustain a cleared talent pipeline. While single-employer applications are permitted, preference will be given to applicants demonstrating meaningful

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

participation from multiple employers by forming a consortium. At a minimum, the proposed model must demonstrate the following capabilities:

1. **Federal Personnel Security Process Capability:** At least one participating employer or other authorized entity with active classified workforce needs and the demonstrated ability to initiate and support the applicable federal personnel security process for individuals filling positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph;
2. **Pre-Clearance Employment and Support Capability:** One or more participating employer, authorized entity, or other partner capable of providing meaningful employment or other workforce support to candidates progressing through the federal personnel security process. Employment may include unclassified work or classified work at a level for which the candidate currently has the required eligibility, access, and need-to-know. Other supports may include training, developmental opportunities, navigation, or related activities that maintain candidates' workforce attachment and prepare them for clearance-dependent employment; and
3. **Clearance-Dependent Employment Capability:** At least one participating employer with current or anticipated demand for positions requiring TS/SCI and/or TS/SCI with polygraph and a demonstrated pathway for qualified participants to transition into clearance-dependent employment upon successful completion of applicable federal personnel security and access requirements.

MD Labor will give preference to applicants that form a consortium to meet the goals of the proposed project. A strong consortium will consist of multiple employers and may include other strategic partners such as local workforce development boards, industry associations, and non-profits. While single-employer applications are permitted, they must include a compelling rationale detailing their capacity to fulfill all required program roles without partner organizations in order to be competitive.

Applicants must demonstrate meaningful employer involvement in the design and implementation of the proposed project and provide Letters of Commitment from core partner organizations, as applicable, as described in Section 2. Applicants that demonstrate broader employer participation, such as candidate recruitment & bridge employment, particularly from small businesses and HUBZone-certified defense contractors, will receive preference in the evaluation process.

In order to avoid any conflicts of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest, any organization that had staff participate in the creation of this CGP or any policies and procedures

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

relevant hereto is not eligible to apply for a grant, be awarded a grant, or receive funding as a subcontractor or subgrantee.

1.2.3 Funding

Funds for this initiative have been allocated in the FY 2027 state budget and this initiative is being administered pursuant to the Maryland Code Annotated, Labor and Employment Art., §11-701 et. seq and Section 4 of 2025 Maryland Laws Ch. 218 (S.B. 867). MD Labor has allocated \$500,000 in funding for this initiative but reserves the right to modify that allocation based on the strength and number of applications received. This solicitation is being issued after consultation with the Cyber Maryland Board. This grant is based on reimbursable funding. Funds are reimbursed after the Grantee provides a proper fiscal invoice for completed work. Funding for these projects will be available for a 24-month period of performance beginning March 1, 2027 - February 28, 2029.

1.2.4 Contact Information

Prior to the award of a grant, all questions, correspondences, etc. of this CGP are to be sent to Tori Darby, Program Manager at tori.darby@maryland.gov.

MD Labor may change the Program Manager at any time by written notice to prospective Applicants.

1.2.5 Revisions to the CGP

If it becomes necessary to revise this CGP before the due date for proposals, amendments will be provided to all prospective Applicants who were sent this CGP or otherwise are known by the Program Manager to have obtained this CGP. Amendments made after the due date for proposals will be sent only to those Applicants who submitted a timely proposal and remain under consideration for award as of the issue date of the amendment.

If the applicant receives notice of an amendment to the CGP before the applicant submits their completed proposal, then that applicant shall also include as part of their application a formal acknowledgment of receipt for said amendment. Acknowledgement of the receipt of amendments to the CGP issued after the proposal due date shall be in the manner specified in the amendment notice. Failure to acknowledge receipt of amendments does not relieve the Applicant from complying with all terms of any such amendment.

1.2.6 Pre-Proposal Conference

MD Labor will host a Pre-Proposal Conference in preparation for application to this CGP opportunity to review the application process, answer applicants' questions, and provide general

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

technical assistance. The Pre-Proposal Conference will take place on October 30, 2026 at 1:00 PM (Eastern Time).

1.2.7 Proposals Due Date

Proposals must be submitted online no later than 11:59 PM (Eastern Time) on January 8, 2027 in order to be considered.

Requests for extension of the closing date or time shall not be granted. Proposals received by the Program Manager after the due date, 11:59 PM (Eastern Time) on January 8, 2027, shall not be considered.

1.2.8 Amendments, Cancellations, and Discussions

The State reserves the right to amend or cancel this CGP at any time; to accept or reject any and all proposals, in whole or in part, received in response to this CGP; to waive or permit cure of minor irregularities; and to conduct discussions with all qualified or potentially qualified Applicants in any manner necessary to serve the best interests of the State of Maryland. The State also reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to award a grant based upon the written proposals received without prior discussions or negotiations with the applicant.

1.2.9 Oral Presentations

Applicants may be required to make oral presentations to MD Labor representatives in an effort to clarify information contained in their proposals. Significant representations made by an Applicant during the oral presentation must be put into writing within five business days of the presentation. All such written representations will become part of the Applicant's proposal and are binding if the Grant is awarded and should be submitted to the Program Manager. The Program Manager shall notify Applicants of the time and place of any oral presentations.

1.2.10 Applicant Responsibilities

The selected Applicants shall be responsible for rendering services as required by this CGP. Any subcontractors or sub-grantees shall be identified and a complete description of their role relative to the proposal shall be included in the Applicant's proposal. The selected applicants are responsible for ensuring that any subcontractor or sub-grantee is aware of the terms and conditions of the grant and has fully agreed to comply with the terms and conditions. The Applicant will be responsible for any breaches of the terms and conditions by its subcontractors or sub-grantees.

1.2.11 Grant

By submitting a proposal in response to this CGP, an Applicant, if selected for award, shall be

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

deemed to have accepted the terms of the CGP.

1.2.12 Compliance with Laws / Arrearages

By submitting a proposal in response to this CGP, the Applicant agrees that if selected for award, it will comply with all Federal, State and local laws applicable to its activities and obligations under the grant. In addition, the Applicant agrees to ensure that all subcontractors or sub-grantees involved in the consortium possess and maintain any and all necessary licenses and approvals, certifications, and are in compliance with all applicable State and federal laws and regulations. Such approvals, licensing, certifications, and compliance include, but are not limited to, the laws, regulations, and policies of:

- i. Maryland Unemployment Insurance
- ii. The Comptroller of Maryland
- iii. Maryland Higher Education Commission
- iv. Maryland Family and Medical Leave Insurance

By submitting a response to this CGP, each Applicant represents that it is not in arrears in the payment of any obligations due and owing the State of Maryland, including the payment of taxes and employee benefits, and that it shall not become so in arrears during the term of the grant if selected for grant award.

SECTION 2 – SCOPE OF WORK

2.1 Introduction

MD Labor is seeking applications from organizations to establish or expand industry-driven models, which may be implemented through a consortium of employers and other strategic partners, or by a single employer when applicable, that increase Maryland's pipeline of talent for positions requiring TS/SCI and TS/SCI with polygraph.

Unlike most workforce programs, individuals generally cannot independently obtain a security clearance and then seek cleared employment. An employing organization or other authorized entity must have a qualifying need and initiate the applicable federal personnel security process for an individual selected for a position requiring access to classified information. This creates a unique workforce challenge. Employers may have significant demand for highly cleared talent but face difficulty identifying qualified candidates, bringing them into the federal personnel security process, and retaining them during the potentially lengthy period before they are able to perform the classified work for which they were recruited.

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

Through this CGP, MD Labor seeks to test innovative workforce models that address these challenges across the cleared talent pipeline. Projects should:

- Expand the pool of qualified candidates for positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph by sourcing from new and underutilized talent populations;
- Connect qualified candidates with employers or authorized entities capable of initiating and supporting entry into the federal personnel security process;
- Keep candidates in the pipeline while federal investigation, adjudication, and access requirements are pending through economic support, professional engagement, technical skill building, and direct employer attachment; and
- Convert the pipeline into employment by transitioning successful candidates into clearance-dependent roles with Maryland employers.

MD Labor is particularly interested in models that build lasting workforce infrastructure rather than provide a single program or service. Successful applicants will demonstrate how their proposed model creates meaningful, sustainable pathways for cleared talent rather than temporary support.

The aim of this CGP is aligned with Governor Moore’s strategic vision for Maryland, as outlined in the Moore-Miller Administration 2024 State Plan²:

- Creating an Equitable, Robust, and Competitive Economy by developing key sectors including IT/cybersecurity;
- Setting Maryland’s learners up for Success; and
- Connecting Marylanders to Jobs by helping workers move to in-demand occupations and supporting Marylanders in connecting to quality jobs.

The CGP also supports a key strategy outlined in Maryland’s Cybersecurity Talent Strategy¹, to “work with NSA, US Cyber Command and other cyber-focused federal agencies to promote internships, registered apprenticeships, and other early job pathways that incorporate clearance processes where feasible” by creating a talent bridge program. More specifically, this CGP implements Strategy 4.1 and Initiative 4.1.1 by testing the Talent Bridge and Rotational Program

² <https://governor.maryland.gov/priorities/Documents/2024%20State%20Plan.pdf>

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

concepts identified in the Strategy, as well as other employer-driven approaches that address security clearance-related barriers to Maryland's cybersecurity talent pipeline.

Projects may incorporate technical training, credentialing, or other upskilling activities where those activities support candidate readiness and retention for identified clearance-dependent positions. **Training alone will not satisfy the requirements of this grant.** Proposals consisting primarily of training without demonstrated employer demand, a viable pathway into the applicable federal personnel security process, and a strategy for retaining and transitioning candidates into clearance-dependent employment will not be considered competitive.

2.2 General Provisions and Other Requirements

1. Within the proposal, applicants must describe:

- a. **Project Model**

Applicants must propose an innovative workforce model, or combination of strategies, informed directly by employer needs and challenges associated with recruiting, developing, and retaining talent for positions requiring TS/SCI and TS/SCI with polygraph.

The proposed model must demonstrate how the project will:

- i. identify and recruit qualified candidates for positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph;
 - ii. connect candidates with employers or other authorized entities capable of initiating and supporting the applicable federal personnel security process;
 - iii. retain and advance candidates while applicable federal investigation, adjudication, and access requirements are pending; and
 - iv. transition successful candidates into clearance-dependent employment.

MD Labor is intentionally allowing flexibility in how applicants address these challenges. Applicants are encouraged to combine multiple strategies where appropriate.

Examples of potential strategies include, but are not limited to:

- **Strategic Recruitment and Entry into the Federal Personnel Security Process:** Develop targeted approaches to identify and recruit individuals with relevant experience, backgrounds, or prior national security service for positions

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph, directly connecting diverse talent pools with employers capable of initiating and supporting federal security processing.

- **Clearance Navigation and Candidate Support:** Provide case management, candidate preparation, and navigation services designed to guide applicants and employers through the federal personnel security process while maintaining continuous candidate engagement.
- **Bridge Employment and "Parking Lot" Models:** Consistent with the Talent Bridge and Rotational Program concepts identified in Initiative 4.1.1 of the Maryland Cybersecurity Talent Strategy, utilize consortium members to provide meaningful interim work (including unclassified tasks or authorized lower-level cleared work), training, developmental opportunities, and navigation that maintain candidate workforce attachment while awaiting clearance processing. Models may also enable candidates to rotate among participating employers or projects based on employer demand and candidate eligibility.
- **Shared Talent and Employer Consortium Models:** Develop collaborative frameworks through which participating employers share authorized project opportunities, candidate support infrastructure, training capacity, and associated costs, prioritizing models that engage small and HUBZone-certified defense contractors.
- **Skills and Experience Development:** Deliver opportunities for candidates to build mission-relevant capabilities while progressing through security processing, leveraging applied project work, work-based learning, technical training, industry credentials, and registered apprenticeships tied to direct employer demand.
- **Employer Co-Investment and Public-Private Partnership Models:** Establish co-investment models in which participating employers contribute wages, staff time, project capacity, equipment, training, or other operational resources to support candidates and reduce long-term reliance on public funding.

Applicants may propose other innovative strategies that demonstrably address candidate recruitment, entry into the federal personnel security process, candidate attrition, employer costs, or other barriers affecting Maryland's highly cleared talent pipeline.

b. Industry-Driven Model

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

Each applicant must establish or expand an industry-driven model capable of supporting Maryland's cleared talent pipeline during and beyond the grant period. The model may be implemented by a single employer or through a consortium of employers and other partners and must meet the Eligible Applicants requirements stated in Section 1.2.2.

The model is intended to create durable workforce infrastructure through which participating employers and other partners, as applicable, can identify talent needs, recruit candidates, connect candidates to entities capable of initiating the applicable federal personnel security process, provide support and meaningful workforce participation while candidates progress through that process, and transition candidates into clearance-dependent employment.

Letters of Commitment: Applicants must provide strong Letters of Commitment from core partner organizations, as applicable, documenting their respective roles and commitments. Generic or boilerplate statements of support will not suffice. A Letter of Commitment must be provided for every partner organization listed in the application.

Employer Participation Preference: Applicants demonstrating meaningful participation from multiple employers by forming a consortium will receive preference in the evaluation process. MD Labor strongly encourages models featuring small businesses and HUBZone-certified defense contractors, as well as other strategic partners such as local workforce development boards, industry associations, and non-profits. While single-employer applications are permitted, they must include a compelling rationale detailing their capacity to fulfill all required program roles without partner organizations in order to be competitive.

Applicants must demonstrate how the relationships, operating model, employer commitments, and resources developed through the project will remain sustainable to support Maryland's cleared workforce after the grant period.

c. Talent Recruitment and Readiness

Applicants must present a comprehensive strategy to identify, recruit, assess, match, and support qualified candidates for positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph.

Projects may only serve individuals at the following two stages of the cleared talent pipeline:

- **Pipeline Candidates:** Individuals identified for potential placement into positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph who are being recruited, assessed,

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

matched, or considered for positions by a participating employer or other authorized entity. This includes both candidates newly identified prior to entering the federal personnel security process and candidates who are already in the pipeline.

- **Candidates in Process:** Individuals who have been selected for a qualifying position by a participating employer or other authorized entity and for whom the applicable federal personnel security process has been initiated.

All proposed projects **must** include Candidates in Process, but **may also** serve Pipeline Candidates as an optional component.

Applicants may use grant funds for approved recruitment, assessment, employer matching, navigation, and other pipeline-development activities for Pipeline Candidates, including both identifying new talent and supporting candidates already in the pipeline, where those activities directly support movement toward clearance-dependent employment. Grant-funded wage or stipend support associated with the clearance waiting period may only be provided to **Candidates in Process**. Applicants must establish a clear intake and verification process appropriate to each stage of participation.

Applicants are encouraged to develop targeted recruitment strategies for populations that may represent strong sources of talent for clearance-dependent positions, including veterans and transitioning service members, former federal employees, individuals with current or prior security clearances, and experienced professionals in cybersecurity, AI, technology, intelligence, and other high-demand defense occupations.

d. Candidate Retention and Bridge Period

Applicants must demonstrate how they will reduce the risk that qualified candidates leave the cleared talent pipeline while awaiting completion of applicable federal investigation, adjudication, and access requirements.

Proposals must provide candidates with meaningful bridge employment or candidate support during this period. Depending on the proposed model, activities may include paid employment that candidates are currently eligible and authorized to perform, shared project work across consortium employers, applied or work-based learning, clearance navigation, mentoring, case management, or other support.

Applicants must demonstrate how proposed bridge activities:

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

- provide economic or professional value to participating candidates;
- maintain meaningful connections between candidates and participating employers;
- build or maintain skills relevant to identified employer and mission needs; and
- support eventual transition into clearance-dependent employment.

e. Employer and Industry Engagement

Applicants must demonstrate substantive employer involvement throughout the project. Employer partners are encouraged, as applicable, to participate in the following activities:

- identifying workforce demand and target occupations;
- defining candidate profiles and qualifications;
- recruiting, referring, or assessing candidates;
- initiating and supporting applicable federal personnel security processes where authorized;
- providing bridge employment or project opportunities that candidates are currently eligible and authorized to perform;
- mentoring and supporting candidates;
- informing technical training and developmental activities; and
- considering qualified candidates for clearance-dependent employment.

Applications must include formal Letters of Commitment documenting the specific responsibilities of participating employers and other partners. Refer to Section 2.2, Item 3 for detailed Letter of Commitment requirements.

Applicants must also establish a mechanism for employers to provide ongoing feedback so that recruitment strategies, work assignments, training, and other project activities remain aligned with evolving mission and workforce needs.

f. Transition to Clearance-Dependent Employment

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

The objective of the project is not simply for participants to complete training or receive a favorable federal eligibility determination. Successful models should demonstrate the ability to translate Maryland's investment into a larger and more sustainable pool of workers filling high-demand, clearance-dependent positions. Applicants must articulate a clear and actionable strategy for transitioning candidates into clearance-dependent employment following successful completion of applicable federal personnel security and access requirements. The proposal should identify anticipated career pathways, participating hiring employers, target occupations, and the process through which candidates will transition from bridge activities into positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph.

g. Sustainability and Scalability

Applicants must provide a plan for sustaining the workforce model beyond the grant period.

The sustainability plan should identify potential long-term funding and operating mechanisms, which may include employer consortium contributions, fee-for-service models, pooled industry support, employer-funded wages, federal or philanthropic resources, or other approaches.

Applicants should describe which components of the proposed model will continue after grant funding ends, how participating employers will remain engaged, and how the model could be expanded or replicated to serve additional employers, occupations, regions, or candidates across Maryland.

h. Organizational Capacity and Timeline

Applicants must present a 24-month implementation plan demonstrating the organizational and partner capacity, as applicable, to execute the proposed project.

Applications should identify key staff and participating organizations, as applicable, along with their respective responsibilities and qualifications, existing infrastructure and employer relationships, candidate-support capacity, and relevant past performance.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to develop an implementation timeline that allows core project strategies to be operational by June 30, 2027.

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

2. Applicants must provide projected outcomes for the 24-month period of performance. At a minimum, awardees will be required to track and report:

- Participant-level demographic data required by MD Labor, including but not limited to date of birth, race, sex, county of residence, highest level of education, and veteran status³;
- Number of individuals participating in approved project activities;
- Number of Pipeline Candidates recruited, assessed, or matched to participating employers;
- Number of Candidates in Process for whom the applicable federal personnel security process has been initiated;
- Number of Candidates in Process receiving grant-funded wage or stipend support;
- Number/percentage of Candidates in Process who remain employed or otherwise professionally engaged while applicable federal investigation, adjudication, and access requirements are pending;
- Number of individuals who successfully complete applicable federal eligibility and access requirements for positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph; and
- Number of individuals who transition into clearance-dependent employment.

Applicants may include other deliverables or metrics that will be tracked and approved by MD Labor.

MD Labor recognizes that federal agencies, rather than grantees or participating employers, control security clearance eligibility and applicable access determinations. Performance will therefore be assessed based on both final employment outcomes and the project's effectiveness in expanding, supporting, and retaining candidates throughout the cleared talent pipeline.

3. Applicants must include Letters of Commitment from each core partner organization identified in the proposed model. Where a single employer proposes to fulfill all required

³ Awardees will be required to ensure the confidentiality, privacy, and security of data provided to or accessed by the awardee and exchanged between the Department and the awardee, and compliance with the Protection of Information by Government Agencies ("PIGA") provisions in Title 10, Subtitle 13 of the State Government Article ("SGA"), Annotated Code of Maryland, and any other applicable State or federal privacy laws.

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

capabilities without partner organizations, the applicant must provide a compelling rationale for operating without partner entities and clearly document the employer's commitments and capabilities within the proposal.

Collectively, the Letters of Commitment must demonstrate the proposed model's ability to:

1. identify actual employer demand for positions requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph;
2. identify and recruit qualified candidates;
3. connect candidates with a participating employer or other authorized entity capable of initiating and supporting the applicable federal personnel security process;
4. provide meaningful workforce participation and support while candidates progress through the process; and
5. provide viable pathways into clearance-dependent employment.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to partner with organizations with national security missions.

Applicants are also encouraged to partner with institutions of higher education, training providers, local workforce development boards, nonprofit organizations, industry associations, and other stakeholders that can support the goals of the project. MD Labor will consider applications that are geographically diverse across the State of Maryland and that develop regional consortiums.

4. Allowable Use of Funds include:

- Salaries and fringe benefits for staff directly supporting grant implementation, including but not limited to clearance navigators, case managers, employer engagement staff, project managers, and other necessary personnel;
- Candidate recruitment, assessment, matching, onboarding, and navigation activities;
- Partial wage support or supplemental participant stipends of up to \$10,000 per eligible **Candidate in Process** while applicable federal investigation, adjudication, and access requirements are pending, where such support helps the candidate remain

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

economically secure and engaged in approved bridge employment or other structured workforce activities;

- Costs associated with bridge employment during the federal personnel security process and collaborative talent-sharing models among participating employers;
- Training, credentialing, registered apprenticeship, and other approved technical or professional development costs directly connected to identified employer demand and clearance-dependent career pathways;
- Development and coordination of consortium infrastructure necessary to implement and sustain the proposed workforce model; and
- Other costs directly related to implementing an approved strategy, at MD Labor's discretion.

Candidates receiving grant-funded wage or stipend support must:

1. Be actively progressing through the applicable federal personnel security process for a position requiring TS/SCI or TS/SCI with polygraph through a participating employer or other authorized entity;
2. Be pursuing or selected for a position within cybersecurity, AI, technology, intelligence, or another high-demand defense or national security occupation; and
3. Possess the foundational qualifications necessary to participate successfully in the proposed employment, training, or other project activities.

Where grant funds are used for wage support, the participating employer must provide a co-investment or wage match. Supplemental Participant Stipends do not require an employer match but may supplement, and may not replace, compensation otherwise owed to a candidate for work performed.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to leverage employer and partner resources in support of the project. Leveraged resources may include wages, staff time, training, classroom or project space, equipment, technology, unclassified project work that candidates are eligible and authorized to perform, or other in-kind or financial contributions.

5. Risk Assessment

2026 Security Clearance Talent Pipeline Request for Proposals

MD Labor prioritizes grantees' financial integrity and responsible stewardship of public funds. Applicants should be aware that the Department reserves the right to exclude any organization from consideration for funding if, through the Department's due diligence review, the organization is determined to pose a significant risk to the proper execution and oversight of the grant agreement. This assessment may involve a thorough review of the applicant's previous program and fiscal monitoring reports, public financial statements, audit reports, tax filings, organizational solvency, prior grant management history, compliance with any requirements of the State Department of Assessments and Taxation or other State agency, and any other relevant indicators. The goal of this process is to ensure that grant funds are awarded to organizations with the necessary financial stability and capacity to meet the programmatic and fiscal responsibilities outlined in the grant solicitation and subsequent agreement.

Organizations deemed to present an unacceptable financial risk, including but not limited to those with a history of material audit/monitoring findings, significant financial instability, pending litigation that threatens solvency, or a demonstrable inability to properly manage federal or State funds, may be deemed ineligible for an award, or the Department may otherwise take the entity's financial risk into account in administering grants or selecting grantees.

MD Labor may also take into consideration an organization's status concerning any current or past debts to the State of Maryland or the federal government, including but not limited to unpaid taxes or Unemployment Insurance obligations. Submission of an application constitutes the applicant's acknowledgment of this financial risk assessment policy and the applicant's commitment to provide all necessary and accurate financial documentation upon request to facilitate this determination. Failure to meet MD Labor's standards for financial responsibility may result in disqualification from the funding opportunity.

6. Reporting Requirements

Awardees must submit quarterly financial and narrative program progress reports to MD Labor. Templates for these reports will be provided by MD Labor. Reports will be due on the 15th of the month following the reporting period. MD Labor will conduct regular programmatic and fiscal monitoring to ensure that activities of its service providers are on target to meet grant goals.

SECTION 3 – PROPOSAL FORMAT

3.1 Proposals

Online applications must be submitted no later than 11:59 PM (Eastern Time) on January 8, 2027 in order to be considered.

3.2 Submission

To submit an application, applicants must complete the online application form and upload the following required attachments:

- Completed Project Budget
- Letters of Commitment from each consortium member, as applicable
- Completed and signed W-9 form for the lead applicant and each partner organization receiving funds (subrecipient)
- A Certificate of Good Standing with the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation for the lead applicant and each partner organization receiving funds (subrecipient)
- If tax-exempt pursuant to I.R.C. 501(c), a copy of official notice of tax-exempt status from the IRS

The Applicant must submit a detailed line item project budget using the forms provided for their project's period of performance. The budget must reflect the cost per participant.

Applicants applying as a consortium must include Letters of Commitment from all core partner organizations. The application must demonstrate active classified workforce demand and the capacity to provide meaningful employment or other workforce support to candidates progressing through the federal personnel security process.

MD Labor will give preference to applicants that form a consortium to meet the goals of the proposed project. Applications demonstrating meaningful participation from multiple employers, particularly small businesses and HUBZone-certified defense contractors, will receive preference. While single-employer applications are permitted, they must include a compelling rationale detailing their capacity to fulfill all required program roles without partner organizations in order to be competitive.