

Intelligence Officer

Collect and make sense of information governments need. A long hiring process, a polygraph, and a job you cannot talk about.

TYPICAL PAY

\$93,790

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$55k to \$161k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 6 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Federal agency offices, military commands, embassies overseas,...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Keep your record clean. Everything you do from about now on gets looked at during the background investigation, including your social media.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
 International relations, political science, history, economics, a regional studies major, computer science or a hard science. Agencies hire across all of them and are short of technical people.
- 3 Apply and wait** Months
 You must be a United States citizen and at least 18. Applications go through the agency's own site or the intelligence community hiring portal. Expect months of silence.
- 4 Security and medical screening** 9 to 18 months
 A full background investigation of your finances, travel, contacts and drug history, plus a polygraph interview and a medical and psychological examination. This is where most candidates fall out.
- 5 Training** 6 months to 2 years
 Each agency runs its own. Analysts learn tradecraft and writing; operations officers go through a long, separate and mostly unpublicized course.

Pros and cons

- + Work that genuinely matters and problems nobody else is allowed to see
- + Stable federal pay, benefits and a real pension contribution
- + Agencies pay for languages, graduate degrees and overseas postings
- The hiring and clearance process can take well over a year with no guarantee
- You cannot discuss your work with family or friends, and that wears on people
- Your private life is investigated, and stays subject to review

Good to know

Most of it is not secret at all

A large share of intelligence work is open source: newspapers, broadcasts, trade journals, shipping records, satellite imagery anyone can buy. The skill is not stealing information, it is noticing what the av...

You cannot take your phone to work

Classified work happens inside a sensitive compartmented information facility, a room built to stop signals getting in or out. Phones, smart watches and personal laptops stay in a locker by the...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Detectives and Criminal Investigators (33-3021.00)
 Central Intelligence Agency: careers
 IntelligenceCareers.gov, the intelligence community's hiring site
 USAJOBS, the federal government's hiring site

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/intelligence-officer>



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