Career Opportunities in INTELLIGENCE

Description of the field
A career in intelligence involves the collecting, analyzing, and distribution of information used for strategic and tactical national security decision making. These professionals translate foreign language documents, develop new intelligence technology, design software and hardware, write reports for the president, analyze the conduct of other countries, provide policy makers information to assist them with determining national security strategies in relation to particular countries, and more. Not every person in the Intelligence Community (IC) works in the field; for every field officer employed, there is a large network of essential support staff. Those in intelligence address key challenges by exploring advanced research and development; focusing on disruptive technology leaps; integrating the Intelligence Community Science and Technology enterprises; and developing, evaluating, and promoting innovation in intelligence activities.

Career Paths
While there is no single career template in intelligence, there are some characteristics common throughout the Intelligence Community. Entering the field can prove daunting, as lengthy application procedures (often up to a year or longer) include multiple tests, interviews, security checks, and/or polygraphs. Each IC agency will have its own application examinations, and some have a trial period for new employees. In many cases, those with undergraduate degrees will enter with a GS-7 level, while graduate degree holders start at a GS-9 level. Typically, one will remain in the same agency throughout one’s career, and advance in position and pay according to increasing experience and expertise. However, working in a joint environment with multiple IC agencies is becoming increasingly common. Specific career paths will depend on the particular intelligence agency one works for, as well as the position in that agency. The nature of the field requires, however, that one must be able to shift focus and acquire new expertise if world events and national security demand it.

Sample Employers

U.S. Intelligence Community
- Air Force – airforce.com/careers/browse-careers

QUALIFICATIONS TO ENTER THE FIELD

+ Those wanting to become intelligence analysts must have the ability to think and analyze information both strategically and dynamically.

+ Intelligence professionals must be able to squeeze the most comprehension possible from fragmented information and be willing to work on the toughest and least rewarding problems if there are national security-based reasons to do so.

+ Candidates with overseas experience, a bachelor’s or graduate degree in international affairs or other related fields, fluency in foreign languages (especially non-European languages), and an ability to translate original material (rather than conversational ability) are desired.

+ In many situations, military experience is required or highly desired.

+ One must also be able to pass a security clearance, which evaluates the candidate’s reliability, trustworthiness, and integrity.
DEMAND

The size and emphasis of recruitment of intelligence agencies varies each year.

Generally, demand has plateaued in recent years due to budget cuts. But, there are some indications that hiring in the Intelligence Community is beginning to pick up again. However, there are also growing opportunities in intelligence in the private sector.

Individual Intelligence Community agencies will have their own particular demands and needs, making it important to check the various IC member sites.

Resources for Additional Information

Internet Resources
- Association of Former Intelligence Officers – afio.com/14_careers.htm
- Clearance Jobs – clearancejobs.com
LinkedIn Groups
- The Intelligence Community – linkedin.com/groups/1271127/profile
- Intelligence & Security – linkedin.com/groups/3331037/profile

Publications
American Intelligence Journal, National Military Intelligence Association

FUTURE CHALLENGES OF THE PROFESSION

+ As detailed by Volko Ruhnke in Careers in International Affairs, more is required from the intelligence community than ever before, as the United States confronts a greater diversity of threats and challenges.

+ The defining characteristic of globalization requires global intelligence coverage. In addition, US national security challenges will be shaped by the dramatic advances in telecommunications, technology, new centers of economic growth, and the consequences of crises within traditional cultures.