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Subject: Looking to Move from FS to CS Demystifying the Process

Key Points:

- Foreign service personnel can move into the Civil Service, even though there is no "conversion" program.
- Tenured foreign service personnel typically have non-competitive eligibility (NCE) for civil service positions at federal agencies.
- Foreign service personnel must apply to and be selected for open civil service positions (i.e., apply to an open vacancy announcement) at the Department of State.
- The Department has resources that can help an employee through the decision-making process, prepare them for applying to civil service positions, and support the employee's transition from overseas back to the United States.

- 1. Message from the Director General:** Employees' personal and professional priorities can change over the course of their careers, resulting in them wishing to remain in the United States long term. This does not mean that employment with the Department or supporting the United States' national security efforts is no longer possible; on the contrary, the Department values retaining employees and supporting their contributions to the Department's mission, while still offering career mobility and alternatives.
- 2.** The process for moving into the Civil Service from the Foreign Service is different from the process of converting from the Civil Service to the Foreign Service or converting between skill codes within the Foreign Service (Ref A-B). This ALDAC explains the foreign service to civil service employment category change process and provides additional resources for those considering this career change.

FS to CS versus CS to FS: Understanding the Differences

- 3.** The Department has established internal programs for converting from the Civil Service to the Foreign Service and between skill codes within the Foreign Service (Ref A-B), as detailed in [3 FAM 2216.3](#).
- 4.** In order to move from the Foreign Service to the Civil Service, foreign service personnel must apply to open civil service positions at the Department (note: other U.S. government agencies may have different rules). To be eligible for selection, they may have to meet eligibility requirements, and they must have the necessary qualifications for the grade and occupational series for which they are applying.
- 5. Excepted Service versus Competitive Service:** The terms competitive service and excepted service describe how federal employees are hired into their jobs. Most civil service positions in the executive branch are competitive service positions, and individuals must go through a competitive

hiring process. Foreign service positions qualify as excepted service, which are federal positions excepted from the civil service competition by statute.

6. When civil service vacancies are announced, they are sometimes open only to a limited group of applicants (e.g., those with [competitive status](#)), or they are open to anyone. Generally, employees in excepted service positions are not eligible to apply to vacancies that are open only to those with competitive status. However, as described in paragraphs 9-10 below, tenured career foreign service personnel and certain foreign service limited non-career appointees have competitive status (also known as non-competitive eligibility or NCE) that allows them to overcome this limitation.

7. Rank in Person versus Rank in Position: The foreign service system uses "rank in person," which means that the grade is carried by the person, not the position. Under this system, if a person takes a position at a different grade, the person's grade remains the same despite the position being a different grade. When eligible for promotion, foreign service personnel are reviewed annually alongside peers in the same grade for promotion.

8. In contrast to this, the civil service system is based on "rank in position," which means that the grade is in the position, not in the person. If a person moves to a position with a different grade, the person's grade changes. In order to be promoted, civil service personnel must compete for open positions at a higher grade level.

9. Applying for Civil Service Positions at the Department: OPM regulations and [Executive Order 11219](#) provide that tenured current foreign service personnel are eligible for appointment to any open Department civil service positions for which they are qualified and selected consistent with merit promotion procedures, including those open only to current Department employees. Additionally, [Executive Order 13749](#) provides for non-competitive eligibility for some foreign service limited non-career appointments. Employees may apply for open positions through the [USAJOBS website](#) listed as "[internal to an agency.](#)" They should indicate in their eligibility questionnaire their status as a member of the excepted

service with non-competitive eligibility and include in their application package copies of materials establishing their eligibility under the authorities noted in paragraph 10. This authority is not necessary when applying for direct hire positions or excepted service civil service positions, such as attorney positions.

10. What It Means to Have Noncompetitive Appointment Eligibility: NCE is usually based on current or prior federal service, and it means that the individual may be appointed to a position in the competitive service without going through an open competitive process. Tenured foreign service personnel typically have NCE for civil service positions at federal agencies under [5 CFR § 315.606](#) and [Executive Order 11219](#). Foreign service personnel applying for positions using NCE may include copies of these authorities in their application packages to aid agency human resources personnel who may not be familiar with these provisions. Tenured foreign service personnel also are eligible to apply for positions listed as open to individuals with special hiring eligibility, indicated by the [Special Authorities](#) category on USAJOBS, which specifies that current and former foreign service employees and Department employees on certain Foreign Service limited non-career appointments are included.

Making Effective Career Decisions - Resources to Help

11. The Department has a variety of resources available to help employees consider their goals and make career decisions that support their own and their family's needs. We encourage employees to take advantage of these resources:

- **Civil Service Talent Management:** [GTM/CSTM's SharePoint site](#) provides a wealth of recorded webinars and informational guides regarding civil service careers. Check out the civil service career guides page for descriptions of [roles by grade level](#), [Civil Service 101 webinar](#), and other [video resources](#).
- **Career Development Resource Center (CDRC):** Career counselors provide free individualized, one-on-one career counseling, assistance

in creating resumes (including for USAJOBS applications), and other career-related skills building, for all Department employees.

- [Employee Consultation Services \(ECS\)](#): Free and confidential support services with licensed clinical providers to assist members of the foreign affairs community who may be experiencing professional or personal life challenges.
- **Career Development and Assignments (CDA)**: Employees may wish to consider exploring workplace flexibilities that can help address personal or family needs without necessitating change in employment status. Employees are encouraged to discuss options with their Career Development Officers, such as domestic assignments constituting up to eight years of [continuous domestic service](#). Employees may also avail themselves of the extended [leave without pay \(xLWOP\)](#) pilot program (Ref C), or [part-time and job-sharing arrangements](#).
- [Foreign Service Resignation](#): Instructions for employees on working with their Career Development Officer in GTM/CDA to ensure questions and decisions related to separation are addressed.

Impact on Retirement

12. Moving from Foreign Service to Civil Service also necessitates a change in pension systems from the Foreign Service Pension System (FSPS) to the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS, FERS RAE, or FERS FRAE). Shifting from one pension system to another will change the years of service and age at retirement required for the employee to receive an immediate annuity. It also affects the percentage of salary the employee pays into the federal retirement system and the percentage used to calculate the annuity amount at retirement, differences that can be financially significant over the long term.

13. Employees are encouraged to access the Employee Retirement Portal available in [HR Applications](#) to review their estimated retirement benefits and consult with a [retirement counselor in GTM's Office of Retirement \(GTM/RET\)](#).

14. Employees and eligible family members may also enroll in retirement planning courses through the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) to fully understand impacts to their annuity:

- Two-day FSI Early/Mid-Career Retirement Planning Seminar ([RV105](#));
- Four-day Retirement Planning Seminar ([RV101](#)), which offers a more comprehensive review of financial planning topics;
- One-day course embedded in RV101: Annuities, Benefits and TSP Workshop ([RV104](#)); or
- Half-day webinar with pre-work: Financial Planning/TSP and Annuity Benefits ([RV106](#)).

Course descriptions, course materials, and registration information are linked above and are also on the [Career Transition Center website](#). For further information, email fsictc@state.gov.

Additional Resources

15. PCS from Overseas: Refer to the annual Permanent Change of Station (PCS) and Related Travel Claims ALDAC (Ref D) for guidance on travel authorization and shipment of personal effects upon reassignment to a domestic position or separation from the Department.

16. Exit Survey / Exit Interview: Employees separating from the Department or converting to a different employment category are encouraged to provide their feedback via GTM's centralized [exit survey](#) and [exit interview](#), conducted by the [GTM Retention and Employee Experience Unit \(GTM/REX\)](#). Both exit touchpoints with employees allow the Department to better understand and improve the employee experience.

17. Reappointment: Former career members of the Foreign Service may be eligible for reappointment, allowing return to the same grade and career track they left. Applications are accepted during an annual open season. Reappointments are not automatic and are based on the needs of the Foreign Service. Eligibility for reappointment will depend on the current

hiring needs of the Department and employee deficits for each grade and skill code. Please see [3 FAM 2131](#).

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