



AFSA Foreign Service Reform Priorities

Summary:

Foreign Service Size and Composition

1. Seek authorization for increased positions and personnel at all Foreign Service agencies
2. Seek funding to launch and sustain growth in positions and personnel and to modernize Foreign Service operations
3. Ensure a training float of 15%
4. Place more career Foreign Service personnel in senior positions and ambassadorships
5. Reduced use of Personal Services Contractors and Foreign Service Limited staff at USAID

Further Professionalization of the Foreign Service

- Make a professional development tour mandatory for entrance into the Senior Foreign Service. A professional development tour is defined as long-term training through: Pearson Fellowships, university training (minimum two semesters or equivalent), NDU and other service colleges, assignment outside parent agency, etc.
- Fill all Language Designated Positions (LDPs) at request levels and conduct a review of all LDPs to ensure the LDP program is meeting the substantive needs of the Foreign Service.
- Treat internet capability as a utility in overseas postings paid for by agencies. Standardize issuance of Opennet laptops for telework-eligible employees and provide a telework subsidy for direct-hire employees to purchase needed items to facilitate telework, including Internet, phones, hardware, and ergonomic equipment.
- Pay lodging costs for home leave and review and strengthen opportunities for Washington or U.S.-based consultations.
- Codify principle of Worldwide Availability (WWA) in Sec. 301 of the Foreign Service Act with the following text: *"Those appointed to the Service must be medically qualified at the time of appointment to serve at all Foreign Service posts except in cases where Secretary determines it to be in the public interest to appoint an applicant who is not medically qualified to serve in assignments throughout the world."*

Leadership Accountability in the Foreign Service

- Leverage existing White House, interagency and agency efforts to advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA), including (a) requiring maximum transparency and public availability of disaggregated DEIA data for all Foreign Service Agencies, and (b) increasing the number of paid internships in Foreign Service agencies.
- Require the use of 360s in leadership development and include the input of LES personnel in 360s.
- Add (or strengthen) an efficiency requirement in DS's security clearance mandate to ensure clearances are completed within a time frame compatible with workforce hiring requirements. Make clearances for Foreign Service family members permanent and portable to reduce wait time for family member hiring.

In Full:

Changes in the Size of the Foreign Service and in its Composition

Seek authorization for increased positions and personnel at all Foreign Service agencies.

Seek funding to launch and sustain growth in positions and personnel and to modernize Foreign Service operations.

There is a need for increased positions and personnel across the board in Foreign Affairs agencies. The additional positions enable Foreign Service personnel to more effectively complete their respective missions. It will also help address professional development and morale issues by building the capacity for employees to take necessary training and address burnout and staffing shortages. The staffing level of posts and offices should account for an anticipated amount of family and medical leave and, at hardship posts, regular rest and recuperation trips as designated for each post. Additional positions should be created as needed at all grade levels, not exclusively at the entry level. The increase in hiring should be at the entry-level; mid- and senior-level positions can be filled by increasing the pace of promotions or temporarily with employees taking stretch positions, rather than bringing new people in at the mid-level (at least for Foreign Service Officers).

Ensure a training float of 15%.

Create a permanent 15% training float through revision of the Foreign Service Act or another legislative vehicle. Those positions would not only be for long-term training at facilities operated by the Department of State and other U.S. government institutions but also long-term training and developmental detail assignments at partner organizations, including other federal agencies, universities, industry entities, and nongovernmental organizations.

Place more career Foreign Service personnel in senior positions and ambassadorships.

The United States is a distinct outlier among developed countries in the number of political appointees it has in its principal agencies. The Foreign Service agencies, taken together, are more heavily populated with political appointees than other agencies in the U.S. government. Not only does the dearth of career officials at the top of the Foreign Service agencies limit our diplomatic

and development capability, it also limits the ability of Foreign Service career officials to aspire to senior positions. Appointing more career employees to these positions would bring the Foreign Service into line with the small number of political appointee positions in the senior ranks of the military, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency.

Reduce use of Personal Services Contractors (PSCs) and Foreign Service Limited (FSL) staff at USAID.

USAID has approximately 1100 personal services contractors (PSCs), some 500 of whom are deployed to the field. In addition, the Agency has approximately 400 non-career Foreign Service Limited (FSL) appointees, the vast majority of whom are DC-based in positions many of which are better suited for career GS colleagues. Neither FSL nor PSC colleagues are held to the same standards as FSOs – security clearances, medical clearances, tour lengths, rank-in-person versus position, etc. The build-up of these mechanisms over the past 20 years is in large part due to USAID's outdated, bifurcated budget divide into Program funds and Operating Expense (OE) funds. These workarounds result in a virtual caste system of hiring mechanisms that adversely impact overall morale and FSO career pathways, professional opportunities, and field support. USAID needs to develop, publish, and implement a comprehensive, multi-year strategic workforce plan that demonstrates a rebalancing between increasing career FS and GS employees while ramping down its dependence on non-career, temporary mechanisms. The plan should be developed in conjunction with the unions, State, Congress, OMB and other stakeholders.

Further Professionalization of the Foreign Service

Make a professional development tour mandatory for entrance into the Senior Foreign Service.

A professional development tour is defined as long-term training through: Pearson Fellowships, university training (minimum two semesters or equivalent), National Defense University (NDU) and other service colleges, detail to another government agency or the private sector, PolAd assignments, the Transatlantic Fellowship, and other similar opportunities.

A professional development tour (academic study including advanced degrees, out-of-agency detail, etc.) is vital to making a well-rounded Senior Foreign Service officer. In the current Career Development Plan for State Department Foreign Service officers, a professional development tour is not one of the four mandatory requirements for promotion into the SFS but is instead one of seven electives (FSOs tenured after 2004 must fulfill 5 of 7 electives). The State Department should change doing a professional development tour from being an elective to a mandatory requirement. The change should be effective in eight years to allow time for current FS-1s to do a professional development tour. The change can only be made if State expands professional development opportunities to accommodate the increased demand. The State Department should also amend the Promotion Precepts to instruct boards to consider positively long-term training and out-of-agency detail assignments. Other Foreign Affairs agencies should explore commensurate professional development requirements for senior leadership.

Fill all Language Designated Positions (LDPs) at request levels and conduct a review of all LDPs to ensure the LDP program is meeting the substantive needs of the Foreign Service.

Foreign language proficiency is a defining characteristic of the Foreign Service, but there have long been shortfalls in the percentage of language-designated positions (LDP) staffed at the appropriate level of proficiency and it is not clear if all LDPs are set at the proper level of proficiency. Language training should be expanded, including for Foreign Service Specialists, so all LDPs can be filled. Also, all overseas positions should be audited with an eye toward increasing the required level of language proficiency where appropriate while potentially reducing or eliminating LDPs in countries where most citizens speak English (for example, Denmark).

Treat internet capability as a utility in overseas postings paid for by agencies. Standardize issuance of Opennet laptops and other requisite technology for telework-eligible employees and provide a telework subsidy for direct-hire employees to purchase needed items to facilitate telework, including Internet, phones, hardware, and ergonomic equipment.

AFSA urges that the Foreign Service look to the future of the workplace and take seriously all modernization efforts, including the provision of 21st century technology. The internet is now, for all intents and purposes, a utility like electricity and should be treated as such by embassies and consulates. If members are expected to work when home and be on duty outside regular work hours, the agencies should fund these technologies.

Pay lodging costs for home leave and review and strengthen opportunities for Washington or U.S.-based consultations.

The cost of home leave is often prohibitive, especially for entry level personnel and parts of the Foreign Service Specialist corps. As it is required by law, and important to the interests of the USG, it makes sense that people should be compensated for their lodging during this time. Flexibility for home leave length should also be considered – both allowing for extensions and for shorter leave as needs wax and wane depending on family and other situations.

We believe all Foreign Service Officers and Foreign Service Specialists should undertake consultations in Washington or elsewhere in the United States. These consultation days allow them to better understand the situation at their post and the resources available to them domestically.

Codify principle of Worldwide Availability (WWA) in Sec. 301 of the Foreign Service Act with the following text: "Those appointed to the Service must be medically qualified at the time of appointment to serve at all Foreign Service posts except in cases where Secretary determines it to be in the public interest to appoint an applicant who is not medically qualified to serve in assignments throughout the world."

The Foreign Service serves around the world in many places of real hardship and danger. Upon entrance, every officer understands they could be sent anywhere to staff a post if the needs of the Service require it. While the Service makes adjustments as people's health and family needs

change, it is imperative that we do not create a two-tiered service where some enter knowing they could be sent to the most difficult locations, while others are guaranteed postings in developed countries that also reduce the options for those in the difficult areas. The Foreign Service has standards, and rather than run from them, we should embrace them. Service in Iraq and Afghanistan at one point required certain physical requirements, because it was dangerous and unfair to others if an officer could not physically handle the challenge. We should stand firm in acknowledging similar risks exist across the globe, and at least at the beginning, we need people fully capable of addressing the myriad challenges.

Leadership Accountability in the Foreign Service

Leverage existing White House, interagency and agency efforts to advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA), including (a) requiring maximum transparency and public availability of disaggregated DEIA data for all Foreign Service agencies, and (b) increasing the number of paid internships in Foreign Service agencies, and (c) establishing mechanisms to address toxic work environments in the Foreign Service.

The maximum use of publicly available diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility data is a pre-requisite for DEIA leadership accountability in the Foreign Service agencies and will provide tangible benchmarks for identifying problem areas and measuring DEIA success.

We call on the State Department and other Foreign Service agencies to allocate FY22 appropriated funds given by Congress to increase paid internships, especially in U.S. embassies and consulates overseas. Toxic behaviors the workplace must be addressed as an urgent matter. They create morale issues, increase workplace stress, and are a serious drain on productivity. AFSA recommends the Foreign Service agencies create the needed mechanisms to reduce instances of toxic workplace behavior and hold accountable those leaders who allow, through action or inaction, such behavior.

Require the use of 360s in leadership development and include the input of LES personnel in 360s.

The use of 360s, particularly for career development purposes, has been shown to be effective at increasing self-awareness among leaders and emerging leaders. The current use of 360s in the Foreign Service agencies, primarily in the State Department, is limited and used more as a mechanism to exclude candidates for positions than as a mechanism to develop leadership excellence. More widespread and responsible use of 360s could moderate toxic behavior in the workplace and increase accountability both of leaders and employees.

Please provide both a qualitative and quantitative assessment on your supervisor's leadership: "The employee has modeled all the behaviors described in the Department's leadership and management principles as defined in 3 FAM 1214"? Yes or No? If No, in your interactions and experiences with the employee, what leadership and management principles do you see needs additional development?

Add (or strengthen) an efficiency requirement in Diplomatic Security's (DS) security clearance mandate to ensure clearances are completed within a time frame compatible with workforce hiring requirements. Make clearances for Foreign Service family members permanent and portable to reduce wait time for family member hiring.

The duration of time it takes to complete security clearances, especially for family members seeking overseas employment, is a major obstacle to a smooth and expeditious hiring process. The addition to DS's security clearance mandate of a requirement to consider the impact of delays on workforce operations could shorten the amount of time it takes to hire personnel – a key requirement in an environment in which employees turn over every 2 to 3 years.