



TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

The following tips and best practices have been collected from members of AFSA's Speakers Bureau who are active sharing their expertise and raising awareness about the Foreign Service and important role of diplomacy.

Finding Opportunities to Speak

- Integrate into your local community first, then see who might be interested.
- Explore local groups interested widely in international affairs and add FS experience when relevant.
- Send a letter to organizations to introduce yourself, including a short bio, and offer to speak.
- Affinity organizations seek speakers regularly.
- Get involved as a community volunteer and meet other motivated individuals.
- Contact local civic groups like Kiwanis, Rotary, and retirement communities.
- Get out and talk to Political Science professors in universities. Volunteer at a local college or university, including community colleges.
- Use alumni ties.
- Try to get a foot in the door at the local college/university. Teach a few mini-classes. Share your experience.
- Update your LinkedIn profile often, and mention that you give public remarks on your experiences in the Foreign Service.
- Write for local newspapers.
- Find an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) or similar group and offer to teach a class. Or join a class and lend your experience to the discussion.
- Find a local Great Decisions program.
- Contact the nearest Diplomat in Residence to see how you can be helpful; check in with local Committees on Foreign Relations and the like.
- Contact local military bases.
- Try think tanks, NGOs active at recent posts, social justice groups, churches.

Speaking

Tell your story

- The important thing to know is that FS experience is a rare and well-respected commodity.
- Audiences like personal stories that illustrate the main points of your talk.
- People love stories - not self-aggrandizing stories but stories of true human connection.
- Pick out stories of members of the Foreign Service in critical moments and if it's something that relates to the state or city where you are speaking, even better.

- Relate your story and what diplomats do generally to the daily lives of the people in your audience.
- Stick to personal experiences and first-hand knowledge.
- Talk about the topic through the eyes of the people who work on it, but don't be wonky.
- Draw them in with the stories but engage them throughout to help them realize they could do it too - stories should not alienate your audience because they can't relate.

Prepare with a purpose

- Seek to enhance your audience's understanding of a topical subject.
- Keep up to date on issues of interest, publish and consider a blog.
- Offer your expertise when it is still fresh.
- Know your subject cold, but, in speaking to general lay groups, save your detailed knowledge for the Q-and-A period.
- Volunteer for an ADST Oral History interview to help you put your topic and your personal experience into perspective.
- Don't stray into major issues that do not immediately bear on your topic, e.g., when talking about SE Asia, don't spend most of the time talking about China.
- Think back and identify the major themes of your career - what excited you. Share your enthusiasm.
- Tell your story and with it, tell the benefits of diplomacy and foreign assistance programs.
- Show them the federal budget breakdown. Americans get tremendous mileage from State Department, USAID, and Foreign Service agency budgets. The cost/benefit equation is tremendous, but people don't know that.

Tailor remarks and be flexible

- Learn what your audience wants. Don't assume anything as to the level of knowledge about the Foreign Service and about foreign affairs.
- Understand that thanks to the media, there are a lot of stereotypes to overcome, including on regional policy issues.
- Don't just give one standard talk to all audiences.
- Prep some basic material in advance so that you can accept a short-notice invitation and do it well.
- Invest time in a few different PowerPoints - one for students, one for career people and adults.
- College students are very interested in the Foreign Service as a career. Be familiar with all the resources online about the Foreign Service exam. Your experience with the exam process might not be what they would experience since the process has changed.

Use visuals, structure it well, and keep it interesting

- Tell your story with a beginning, middle, end and a so-what.
- Use photos and teaching aids such as local handicrafts, art or music from your posts, to present something concrete.
- Pick "sexy" titles for your talks - be provocative.
- Leave plenty of time for questions.
- Avoid gov-speak.
- For more general audiences in informal settings, make it short, friendly, and at least some of it funny.

- When possible express a balanced, reasonable position on contentious issues and avoid being drawn into a controversy.
- Provide paper maps - these are much appreciated.
- Provide a paper outline so the audience can easily take notes and use it for reference to names and places.

Don't forget to answer the "How can we help?" question

- Find a way for your audience to become engaged in supporting foreign policy – it answers the How Can We Help? question which you will sometimes get at the end of a talk. You can advise the audience to:
 - Join internationally-minded groups (if they haven't already.)
 - Stay informed. Take a class through life-long learning organizations like OLLI, Road Scholar, or Encore. Read internationally focused magazines and journals.
 - Volunteer to host someone from overseas.
 - Promote diplomacy and international affairs in schools.
 - Write to your Member of Congress.
 - Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper.
 - Be vocal in your social networks.
 - When planning a trip, use Department of State resources for safe travel.
 - Recognize Foreign Service Day (for FS retirees).