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# Precepts for Foreign Service and Senior Foreign Service Performance Boards

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 463

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**PRECEPTS FOR FOREIGN SERVICE and SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE  
PERFORMANCE BOARDS**

Effective May 2012

A. PURPOSE

These Precepts (including the FS Skills Matrix or SFS Skills Model, as appropriate) prescribe the criteria to be used by Performance Boards for determining promotion recommendations, retention, within-grade increases, performance pay and presidential awards, limited career extensions, and referrals to the Performance Standards Board or Tenure Board. The Precepts shall inform each Performance Board of the factors to be considered in evaluating the performance of employees and describe the performance levels necessary for promotion, retention, and separation.

B. GENERAL

The Performance Evaluation Files of employees shall be the sole source of information upon which Performance Boards shall base their decisions. Performance Boards shall use the FS Skills Matrix or SFS Skills Model, as appropriate, when reviewing an employee's Performance Evaluation File. Performance Boards shall determine whether the employee's performance is meeting, exceeding, or may not be meeting the standards of his or her class. The initial step in this process is the review of the employee's current Annual Evaluation Form. Once it has been determined that the employee is meeting the standards of his/her class, Performance Boards next determine whether the employee should be recommended for promotion, and, for the Senior Foreign Service, performance pay and/or Presidential Award.

1. Promotion

Performance Boards shall recommend for promotion employees who have met current work objectives and demonstrated potential throughout the past five USAID-approved performance evaluations, to fulfill on a sustained basis the standards at the next higher class, in addition to demonstrated exemplary performance with respect to the standards of one's class. Performance Boards shall use the FS Skills Matrix or SFS Skills Model, as appropriate, to make decisions concerning demonstrated potential. Further, in making promotion recommendations, Performance Boards shall also be guided by the criteria provided below in Section D3 and information contained in the employee's Performance Evaluation File. Performance is only one factor in arriving at a composite picture of an employee's ability to perform at the next higher level and potential for continued growth. The composite picture must combine the quality and level of performance to date with the acquisition of knowledge in USAID's work and the maturing of core skills necessary for successful performance at the next higher level.

## 2. Retention

Performance Boards shall review an employee's current Annual Evaluation Form and the FS Skills Matrix or SFS Skills Model, as appropriate, and determine whether the employee meets the standards of his/her class. To determine whether the employee is meeting the standards of his/her class, the Performance Boards shall also review the employee's performance against the employee's established work objectives and determine whether the employee achieved the performance measures established for each work objective. The Performance Board shall review the skills displayed by the employee and determine whether the employee is meeting the skills standards established for his/her class. If the employee achieved the work objectives in his/her current Annual Evaluation Form and is meeting the skills standards established for his/her class, the employee is meeting the standards of his/her class and shall be retained.

## 3. Referral to the Performance Standards Boards

Performance Boards shall refer to a Performance Standards Board career employees whose performance may not have met the standards of their class, based on a review of the employee's current Annual Evaluation Form. If an employee appears to be failing to meet the work objectives established in his/her current Annual Evaluation Form and/or if the employee is failing to meet the skill standards established for his/her class, the employee may not be meeting the standards of his/her class.

## 4. Performance Pay and Presidential Awards for the Senior Foreign Service

The Senior Foreign Service Consolidated Performance Board (C/Board) shall make recommendations concerning Senior Foreign Service performance pay and Presidential Award recommendations based on the Annual Evaluation Forms in the employees' Performance Evaluation File. Performance Boards are to refer to Mandatory Reference, [Sec. 405 of the FS Act of 1980, as amended](#), Precepts for Performance Pay and Presidential Awards, and [ADS 422](#).

## C. EQUALITY OF CONSIDERATION

Performance Boards shall evaluate all employees solely on merit with complete fairness and justice. In this respect, Performance Boards shall not discriminate against any employee, directly or indirectly, for reasons of race, color, religion, sex, age, disabling condition, sexual orientation, national origin or means of entry into the Agency. In addition, Performance Boards should be sensitive to discriminatory information or the appearance of discrimination in Annual Evaluation Forms and should report such findings to the Chief, HR/ELR. If a Board member believes that another Board member is being unfair or biased in his or her review of an employee's Performance Evaluation File, the member shall bring the matter to the attention of the Chief, HR/ELR for appropriate action.

Performance Boards are to ignore inadmissible comments contained in the Annual Evaluation Forms or Employee Statements. Such inadmissible comments are not to be discussed nor used as the basis for decision-making. Inadmissible comments include the following:

1. References to race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, genetic information, marital status, parental status, political affiliation or any other non-merit factor. (NOTE - References to a specific group in the context of promoting diversity are also prohibited.)
2. Retirement, resignation or other separation plans;
3. References to grievances, references to third party adjudicatory proceedings or decisions, involvement in Equal Employment Opportunity complaints, or references to discriminatory practices.
4. Method of entry into the Service, e.g., conversion from another personnel system. (Mention of entry as International Development Interns (IDIs), New Entry Professionals (NEPs), and Development Leadership Initiative (DLI) officers is permitted);
5. Reference to private U.S. citizens by name;
6. Negative references to participation or non-participation in union activities, either as a representative of the union or as a bargaining unit member;
7. Prior evaluations prepared by other Rating Officials;
8. Reluctance to work voluntary overtime;
9. Leave record (except absence without leave (AWOL) (consultation required)). This includes references to FMLA and extensive leave for medical reasons;
10. Decisions or proposals concerning disciplinary action;
11. Reference to the use of the dissent channel, which results in an adverse evaluation of performance. However, expressions of dissenting views on policy which are outside the dissent channel and which raise substantive questions of judgment relative to the skills matrix may be discussed in an evaluation, with specific instances cited;
12. Negative or derogatory discussion of another employee's performance; and
13. Reference to or identification of a disability (that is, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or a record of a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, or the perception that an individual has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity) or other medical condition.

D. GUIDANCE FOR PERFORMANCE BOARDS' REVIEW OF ANNUAL EVALUATION FORMS

Successful demonstration of performance meeting or exceeding the Foreign Service skill standards and the fulfillment of annual work objectives are the keys to retention and advancement. Failure to achieve a work objective and/or to meet a skill standard will preclude advancement and could lead to referral to the Performance Standards Board for career officers or the Tenure Board for career-candidates.

1. Achievement of Work Objectives

When reviewing an employee's Performance Evaluation File, Performance Boards are to review first, the employee's current Annual Evaluation Form. Performance Boards must determine whether the employee met, exceeded or did not meet the work objectives. In performing this task, Performance Boards shall determine whether the work objectives established in the Annual Evaluation Form were within the control of the employee and whether they were commensurate with the employee's personal grade. Performance Boards shall not use as a basis for referral to the Performance Standards Board or Tenure Board a failure to achieve work objectives if the work objectives were beyond the employee's control or if the work objectives were not commensurate with the employee's personal grade.

Employees who do not have a current Annual Evaluation Form shall be determined to have met the standards of their class.

2. Foreign Service Skills Matrix and SFS Skills Model

After determining that an employee has met his/her work objectives, Performance Boards shall review an employee's current Annual Evaluation Form and determine whether the employee met, exceeded or did not meet the skill standards of the class. In performing this task, Performance Boards shall refer to the FS Skills Matrix, or as appropriate, the SFS Skills Model.

The FS Skills Matrix and the SFS Skills Model establish the skill standards by which the employees in these categories are expected to perform. All FS employees shall be evaluated on each of the four FS skill areas and all SFS employees shall be evaluated on each of their 3 core skill areas. The FS and SFS skill areas are further defined in terms of key characteristics, into which the Agency's core values of customer focus, managing for results, teamwork, empowerment and accountability, and diversity, have been integrated.

The skills areas and sub-skills for the FS are as follows:

1. Resource Management
  - a. Budgeting and Financial Management
  - b. Human Resource Management

- c. Procurement and Contract/Grant Management
  - d. Asset Management
2. Leadership
    - a. Direction and Vision
    - b. Consensus Building
    - c. Motivation and Empowerment
    - d. Staff Development
    - e. Cultural Sensitivity and Respect for Diversity
  3. Technical and Analytical Skills
    - a. Professional Expertise
    - b. USAID Values and Business Processes
    - c. Information Gathering Analysis, and Problem Solving – including Knowledge Management
    - d. Customer Service
  4. Teamwork and Professionalism
    - a. Communication
    - b. Professional Conduct
    - c. Adaptability and Flexibility
    - d. Cultural Sensitivity and Respect for Diversity
    - e. Diversity, Equal Employment Opportunity, Knowledge and Implementation

The core skills areas and sub-skills for the SFS are as follows:

1. Leadership
  - a. Strategic Vision
  - b. Building Coalitions and Partnerships
  - c. Political Astuteness
  - d. Credibility
  - e. Values and Seeks Diversity
2. Management for Results
  - a. Accountability for Results
  - b. Substantive Knowledge
  - c. Problem -Solving
3. Team Building and Interpersonal Skills
  - a. Team Building
  - b. Developing Others
  - c. Exhibiting Integrity and Honesty
  - d. Interpersonal skills

e. Communication

3. \*Framework for Developing A Composite Picture for Promotion

After Performance Boards have reviewed an employee's current Annual Evaluation Form and have made determinations concerning the standards of the class, they are to review the employee's **five most recent USAID-approved performance evaluations** to determine the employee's potential for continuing growth and to assess the employee's relative merit with regard to promotion.

Performance Boards use their collective experience as well as their individual judgments to develop a composite picture of an employee's performance from which they can make decisions concerning rankings and recommendations.

Specifically Performance Boards shall consider the following:

- a. Understanding of and ability to advance the Agency's mission.

As employees progress in the Agency by taking on various assignments, they are expected to show a deeper understanding of the Agency's objectives and how these evolve; how the Agency works (both in the U.S. and overseas); and how individual performances contribute to the achievement of the Agency's mission and purpose.

- b. Degree of difficulty, complexity, and challenge of the work objectives.

Performance Boards are to give more weight to employees who have consistently fulfilled particularly challenging work objectives within the context of the work environment.

- c. Potential.

Performance Boards are to focus on Rating Officials' discussion of the employee's potential. Employees are considered for promotion based on their demonstrated potential to serve at the next higher level.

Mastery of specific skills is cumulative; higher ranked employees should demonstrate skills at their current level as well as all those important at the junior levels.

4. Other Factors

When considering an employee's competitiveness for promotion, Performance Boards should also consider the factors listed below.

- a. Statements of Technical Competence.

The Offices of Financial Management, Acquisition and Assistance, and General Counsel are authorized to submit evaluation statements and or 360 information regarding technical competence of Controllers, Contracting Officers and Regional Legal Advisors who are not rated by a supervisor in the employee's technical specialty.

\*An asterisk and yellow highlight indicate that the adjacent material is new for this reference or substantively revised.

Performance Boards are to consider references to the statements along with the employee's Annual Evaluation Form. Because not all employees receive such statements, negative inferences shall not be made if an employee has not received a statement.

- b. Increasingly responsible USAID assignments.
- c. USAID overseas service and assignment variety such as two or more geographic bureaus in USAID/W or overseas.
- d. Non-Traditional USAID assignments such as:
  - i. Performance of work outside of or in addition to the classic work of a backstop should be considered equal in importance with normal backstop work.
  - ii. Participation in unique situations such as downsizing, closeouts, and phase-outs that are necessitated by changing international and political climates.
  - iii. Assignments in non-traditional programs as the Agency expands its focus.
  - iv. Special taskforces.
  - v. USAID-related outside assignment such as to other Federal agencies, Congress, International organizations, or non-government organizations.
  - vi. Professional development and training assignments.

#### E. REFERRAL TO THE PERFORMANCE STANDARDS BOARD

Performance Boards shall refer a career employee to the Performance Standards Board\* if the employee:

- (1) Fails to meet the work objectives established for the current rating cycle; and/or
- (2) Fails to meet one or more skill standards established for his/her grade level.

\*Career-Candidates who do not meet objectives or standards of their class are referred to the Tenure Board.

Performance Boards shall not refer an employee to the Performance Standards Board if the current Annual Evaluation Form is so deficient that the Board cannot make a confident decision concerning the employee's comparative performance against established work objectives and the skills standards. In this case, Performance Boards shall consider the employee's performance as meeting the standards of the class and shall also consider whether the employee is competitive for being recommended for promotion.

After reviewing an employee's Annual Evaluation Form, the Performance Standards Board is to determine whether the employee is performing to the skill standards established in the FS Skills Matrix or SFS Skills Model, as appropriate, which are discussed in the evaluation.

*\*Career-Candidates who do not meet objectives or standards of their class are referred to the Tenure Board.*

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