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Precepts for Foreign Service Promotion Boards

A Mandatory Reference for ADS 463

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PRECEPTS FOR FOREIGN SERVICE PROMOTION BOARDS

A. Purpose

These precepts (including the Foreign Service/Senior Foreign Service Skills Framework) prescribe the procedures and criteria to be used by Foreign Service (FS) Promotion Boards for determining which Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) will be recommended and ranked for promotion, and which will be assigned a C rating for failing to meet the standards of performance for their class.

B. Information Provided to Boards

All FS employees in grades FS-04 to FS-01 who meet the promotion eligibility and review requirements established in [ADS 463.3.1.1](#) are required to prepare and submit promotion packages for review by FS Promotion Boards by the prescribed deadline. Promotion Boards must base their decisions solely on the current year promotion package and the other documents included in the employee's five-year performance evaluation file (see [ADS 463 3.1.9](#)).

1) Performance Evaluation File

The five-year performance evaluation file is used for both promotion and relative performance reviews.

The performance evaluation file **for FS** consists of the current year promotion package plus performance information from prior years. Prior-year information will include **Annual Accomplishment Records** (AARs) and associated Operating Unit Context Statements, **Annual Performance Evaluations** (APEs), and **Multisource Ratings** (MSRs) as available **for years the FSO was required to complete the FS promotion package**, plus AEFs from past years until they are no longer needed to complete the required five years' worth of performance data. Additional information included in the five-year performance evaluation file includes: the employee's training record, awards, assignment history, disciplinary actions (decision letters), and language scores.

2) Foreign Service/Senior Foreign Service Skills Framework

The FS Boards must refer to the [FS/SFS Skills Framework](#) and the criteria established in Section D2 below when assessing FSOs for promotion. The FS/SFS Skills Framework illustrates how expected proficiency levels in the four core skills change as the employee moves up the career ladder. Behavioral examples for each subskill are provided at four levels: Apprentice (FS-06 to FS-04), Journey (FS-03/FS-02), Master (FS-01), and Teacher (SFS). These examples, combined with the core skill and subskill definitions in the framework, provide a common frame of reference for Board member deliberations and discussions as they integrate information from multiple sources into their assessments of candidates' core skills.

The core skills areas and subskills are as follows:

1) Leadership

- a. Building Consensus and Partnerships**
- b. Contextual Awareness and Political Astuteness**
- c. Motivation and Empowerment**
- d. Vision**

2) Results and Impact Focused

- a. Accountability for Results**
- b. Problem Solving**
- c. Taking and Managing Risks**
- d. Technical and Substantive Expertise**

3) Professionalism

- a. Adaptability and Flexibility**
- b. Communication**
- c. Cross-Cultural Competence**
- d. Interpersonal Skills**
- e. Teamwork**

4) Talent Management

- a. Supports Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Diversity, and Inclusion**
- b. Professional Development**
- c. Supervision and Human Resources Management**

3) Rating Scales and Scoring Sheets

To facilitate and standardize the assessment and rating process, Board members will receive rating scales to guide their assessments of the six promotion factors. They will

also be provided with scoring sheets to maintain consistency across Boards and ensure that all six criteria are given equal weight when final scores are tallied. Directions for using these forms will be fully explained in the training all Boards will receive prior to starting their deliberations.

C. Equality of Consideration

Diversity and equal employment opportunity are core values of the Agency. Accordingly, all employees are expected to comply with USAID EEO policies and core values.

FS Promotion Boards must evaluate all employees solely on merit. FS Boards are:

- Prohibited from discriminating against any employee, directly or indirectly, for reasons of race, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, sexual orientation or transgender status), age, religion, genetic information, physical or mental disability, retaliation for prior EEO protected activity, marital status, veteran status, status as a parent, geographic or educational affiliation within the United States, political affiliation, or means of entry into the Agency, or any other non-merit factor.
- Expected to be alert to evidence of discrimination reflected in promotion packages and prior evaluations and report such findings to the Office of Human Capital and Talent Management's Center for Performance Excellence (HCTM/CPE) immediately.

If a Board member believes that another Board member is violating this policy in his or her review of an employee's Performance Evaluation File, the member must immediately bring the matter to the attention of HCTM/CPE for appropriate action.

FS Promotion Boards must report to HCTM/CPE any inadmissible comments they find in the files they are reviewing but must not allow them to influence their assessments of candidates. Inadmissible comments include the following:

- References to race, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, sexual orientation or transgender status), age, religion, genetic information, physical or mental disability, retaliation for prior EEO protected activity, marital status, veteran status, status as a parent, geographic or educational affiliation within the United States, political affiliation, or means of entry into the Agency, or any other non-merit factor. (Note: References to a specific group in the context of promoting diversity are also prohibited.);
- Retirement, resignation or other separation plans;
- References to grievances, references to third party adjudicatory proceedings or decisions, involvement in EEO complaints, involvement in whistleblowing actions, or references to discriminatory practices;

- Method of entry into the Service, e.g., conversion from another personnel system (however, mention of entry as International Development Interns (IDIs), New Entry Professionals (NEPs), Development Leadership Initiative (DLI), or Career Candidate Corps (C3) employees is permitted);
- Reference to private U.S. citizens by name;
- Negative references to participation or non-participation in union activities, either as a representative of the union or as a bargaining unit member;
- Reluctance to work voluntary overtime;
- Leave record, except absence without leave (AWOL) (consultation with HCTM/CPE is required). This includes references to Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), **Leave without Pay (LWOP)** and extensive leave for medical reasons;
- Reference to the use of the **dissent channel**, which results in an adverse evaluation of performance. However, expressions of dissenting views on policy that are outside the dissent channel and that raise substantive questions of judgment relative to the skills matrix may be discussed in an evaluation, with specific instances cited;
- **Negative or derogatory discussion of another employee's performance (this does not include references by managers to describe efforts to improve the performance or conduct of a subordinate or otherwise address performance or conduct issues in a manner relevant to the skills matrix. If Board members are unsure of the admissibility of such references, they should consult HCTM/CPE);**
- 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 or association with an individual who has a disability; and
- Decisions or proposals concerning disciplinary action **(this does not include references by managers to describe efforts to improve the performance or conduct of a subordinate or otherwise address performance or conduct issues in a manner relevant to the skills matrix. If Board members are unsure of the admissibility of such references, they should consult HCTM/CPE).**

D. Guidance for Promotion Reviews

1) General Guidance for Reviews

Board recommendations for FS promotions must be based on its ratings on the six promotion decision factors, **the secondary factor as appropriate**, and the composite picture of the FSO that emerges from these ratings. Only information included in the files provided to the Boards may be considered in the Boards' deliberations. Demonstrated exemplary performance and exceptional skills relative to others in one's class are required of all those recommended for promotion.

Assessing and comparing the performance, skills, and accomplishments of employees will require difficult judgments. While not an exhaustive list, some examples of outstanding achievement may be found in professional and courageous handling of emergency situations; significant accomplishments may result from resourceful completion of specific projects or negotiations; major benefits may result from imaginative and sensitive policy initiatives or from thoughtful and efficient management of people or important programs or missions. There is no formula to measure and weigh with mathematical accuracy varying performance records. Board members must apply the relevant criteria as fairly as possible, discuss their views where differences exist, and exercise their judgment to the fullest extent of their wisdom and experience.

2) Framework for Developing a Composite Picture for Promotion Ranking

FS Promotion Boards, following the procedures outlined in the ADS, will apply their collective experience as well as their individual judgments to develop a composite picture of an employee's performance and potential from which they can make decisions concerning ratings, rankings, and recommendations. FS Promotion Boards use the criteria below and their associated rating scales to rate each promotion candidate. After using the rating scales associated with the primary factors and establishing a composite score for each promotion candidate (which establishes an initial ranking of the candidates), Boards **will assign A, B, or C ratings to each candidate. All candidates recommended for promotion receive an A rating and a preliminary rank order based on their composite score.** Candidates not meeting the standards of performance for their class, per guidance in section E. below are assigned a C rating. All other candidates receive a B rating. **Boards must develop their composite picture of candidates using the following six primary factors:**

Primary Factors

1) Understanding of and ability to advance the Agency's mission.

Boards must consider an employee's contributions to the Agency through demonstrated success in various and increasingly responsible assignments within and outside the Agency. Employees 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 performance contributes to the achievement of the Agency's mission and U.S. foreign assistance objectives. (Note: The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, outlined in Sections 101 and 102 U.S. development assistance policy and the principles to be followed in administering

development assistance. These emphasize the responsibility of developing countries to successfully marshal their own resources to lead their own development with participation of their people in decision-making; the U.S. supporting such efforts and working collaboratively with developing countries and other partners to mobilize public and private resources to cover gaps; and of assistance being based on the needs and capabilities of the recipient country and used to strengthen this capacity to achieve self-sustaining growth). FSOs also are expected to demonstrate increasing effectiveness in contributing to the Agency's mission and objectives, acting individually, as a member of a team (e.g., interagency, across Bureaus/Independent Offices (B/IOs)), or in partnership with local actors and other key external stakeholders.

2) Degree of difficulty, complexity, and challenge of the work performed.

Boards are to consider the degree to which an FSO has consistently undertaken and successfully completed difficult, complex, and challenging work within the context of his/her work environment.

3) Proficiency and consistency in demonstrating each of the four required FS/SFS Core Skills (Leadership, Results and Impact Focused, Professionalism, and Talent Management).

Promotion Boards must focus on information in the promotion package relevant to the employee's skills and competencies. The FS/SFS Core Skills are defined in the FS/SFS Skills Framework, and employees with the greatest potential to be successful at the next level will have demonstrated both mastery of skills required at the current level and the ability to meet some of the skill proficiency expectations of the next higher level. Backstop competencies are referenced in the Technical and Substantive Expertise subskill under the Results and Impact Focused core skill. Behavior resulting in a disciplinary action should be considered when Professionalism scores are assigned, since the definition of professionalism includes "Conducts self and accomplishes work in a manner that is consistent with the highest ethical standards and USAID values."

The Boards complete their initial rating of candidates on the primary factors, and these ratings are the basis for the initial rank ordering of candidates.

Once each Promotion Board has provided their A list to HCTM staff, HCTM/CPE will provide Boards with the three previous years' A lists from each Board. The Promotion Boards may adjust the rank order of employees recommended for promotion based on this information as well as on their assessment of the secondary factor described below. The Promotion Board cannot remove or add FSOs to the A list based on prior-year rankings.

Secondary Factor

Once the Boards have identified employees with A ratings based on the primary factors, Boards will then consider the secondary factor—past and current

assignments/experiences that may enhance an employee's ability to add value to the Agency in the future. Illustrative examples of the kinds of past and current assignments and/or experience that may enhance an employee's ability to add value to the Agency in the future are listed below:

- Assignments in two or more geographic and/or functional Bureaus in USAID/Washington or overseas;
- Special assignments including, but not limited to, task forces, details, and councils;
- USAID-related outside assignment such as to other Federal agencies (e.g., Department of State, **National Security Council**, Department of Defense's Military Commands), Congress, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations;
- Professional development and training assignments;
- Assignments in hardship, conflict, post-conflict and crisis environments; and
- Work related to uniquely challenging situations such as start-ups, downsizing, closeouts, and phase-outs that are necessitated by changing international and political climates.

Boards may adjust their preliminary rank order of the A group based on the secondary factor, as well as on the information obtained from the A lists from each Board for the past three years.

Per [ADS 463.3.1.1](#), employees are ineligible to receive an A rating if they did not submit or submitted late their documentation and their justification was deemed insufficient by HCTM/CPE.

E. Guidance for Relative Performance Reviews

In reviewing FSOs' performance evaluation files, FS Boards must also consider an individual's performance relative to the performance of other employees in their class who are eligible for promotion in the current year. This is a distinct analysis from the analysis a supervisor makes as to whether an employee's performance is satisfactory or unsatisfactory in the employee's particular job, meaning that an employee could be satisfactorily rated by their supervisor, but receive a C rating relative to the employee's peers. If careful examination of the files of those ranked at or near the bottom of their class suggests inadequacies in the knowledge, skills, abilities, values, or other factors expected of individuals at that grade, such as those related to conduct, the Board may assign those individuals a C rating. All FSOs who receive a C will receive written feedback in a formal memorandum, describing the specific areas where they were deemed to be performing below expected levels or did not meet the skill proficiency expectations illustrated in the FS/SFS Skills Framework. The memorandum may also

provide specific recommendations for professional development. This memorandum will be submitted to HCTM/CPE, who will provide a copy to HCTM's Foreign Service Center, Assignments and Career Counseling Division (HCTM/FSC/ACC) and HCTM's Office of Employee and Labor Relations (ELR). The HCTM/FSC/ACC will share the memorandum with the employee no later than the date the report cards are issued. HCTM/CPE will reach out to the employee's first line supervisor to provide support in addressing performance inadequacies, where appropriate.

Per [ADS 464, Foreign Service Performance-Based Actions](#), career employees who receive two C ratings in a five-year period and career candidates who receive one C rating will be referred to the Performance Standards Board (PSB).

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