



Precepts for the Senior Foreign Service Consolidated Performance Board

A Mandatory Reference for ADS 463

New Edition Date: 03/30/2020
Responsible Office: HCTM/CPE
File Name: 463mak_033020

PRECEPTS FOR THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE CONSOLIDATED PERFORMANCE BOARD

A. Purpose

These Precepts (including the [Foreign Service/Senior Foreign Service \(FS/SFS\) Skills Framework](#)) prescribe the procedures and criteria to be used by the Senior Foreign Service Consolidated Performance Board (C/Board) for determining ratings for performance, promotion recommendations, retention, performance pay and presidential awards, limited career extensions, and referrals to the Performance Standards Board (PSB). The Precepts inform the C/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

SFS Officers will be reviewed each year by the C/Board. The performance evaluation files (PEFs) of employees are the sole source of information upon which the C/Board must base their decisions. The C/Board must use the [FS/SFS Skills Framework](#) when reviewing an employee's PEF. The C/Board must 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 (AEF). Once it has been determined that the employee is meeting the standards of his/her class, the C/Board next determines whether the employee should be recommended for promotion, performance pay and/or Presidential Award.

C. Information Provided to Boards

1) Senior Foreign Service (SFS) Performance Evaluation Files

All SFS Officers must submit AEFs for review by the SFS Consolidated Board (C/Board) each year, regardless of eligibility for promotion. This is to ensure that they are considered for performance pay and presidential awards and reviewed to determine whether they are meeting the standards of performance for their class.

The SFS PEF includes the current year AEF plus AEFs or promotion package material (Annual Accomplishment Records, Operating Unit Context Statements, Annual Performance Evaluations, and Multisource Ratings) from the four most recent prior years, disciplinary action decisions, and the bioEDR and training record. The PEFs of employees are the sole source of information upon which C/Board must base their decisions.

The C/Board will be provided copies of this Mandatory Reference, Sec. 405 of the FS Act of 1980 as amended, and Precepts for Performance Pay and Awards. The Office of Human Capital and Talent Management's Center for Performance Excellence

(HCTM/CPE) will provide additional resources to guide the Board's recommendations on performance pay and presidential awards.

2) Foreign Service/Senior Foreign Service Skills Framework

The SFS Boards must refer to the FS/SFS Skills Framework and the criteria established in Section D2 below when they assess candidates for promotion. The FS/SFS Skills Framework illustrates how expected proficiency levels in the four core skills change as one 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 (for FSOs/SFSOs who are in a supervisory position)

3) Rating Scales and Scoring Sheets

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

D. 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.

The SFS C/Board must evaluate all employees solely on merit. Boards will not discriminate 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. In addition, the Board should be sensitive to discriminatory information or the appearance of discrimination in AEFs and Promotion Packages and should report such findings to HCTM/CPE immediately. If a Board member believes that another Board member is violating the Agency's nondiscrimination policy in his or her review of an employee's PEF, the member must immediately bring the matter to the attention of the Director, HCTM/CPE for appropriate action.

The C/Board is to report to HCTM any inadmissible comments it finds in the files it is reviewing but must not allow them to influence its assessments of candidates. Inadmissible comments include the following:

- a. References to race, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, sexual orientation or transgender status), age, religion, genetic information, physical or mental disability, prior EEO protected activity, marital status, veteran status, status as a parent, geographic or educational affiliation within the United States, political affiliation or any other non-merit factor. (Note – References to a specific group in the context of promoting diversity are also prohibited);
- b. Retirement, resignation or other separation plans;
- c. References to grievances, references to third party adjudicatory proceedings or decisions, involvement in Equal Employment Opportunity complaints, or references to discriminatory practices;
- d. Method of entry into the Service, e.g., conversion from another personnel system. (Method of entry as International Development Interns (IDIs), New Entry Professionals (NEPs), Development Leadership Initiative (DLI), or Career Candidate Corps (C3) employees is permitted);
- e. Reference to private U.S. citizens by name;
- f. Negative references to participation or non-participation in union activities, either as a representative of the union or as a bargaining unit member;
- g. Reluctance to work voluntary overtime;
- h. Leave record (except absence without leave (AWOL) (consultation with HCTM/CPE/PM required)). This includes references to Leave without Pay (LWOP), FMLA and extensive leave for medical reasons;
- i. 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;
- j. 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;
- k. 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); and

- I. 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.

E. Guidance for Performance Reviews and Promotion Recommendations

1) General Guidance for Reviews

Only information included in the files provided to the Board may be considered in the Board's 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 whereby varying performance records may be measured and weighed with mathematical accuracy. Board members must apply the relevant criteria as realistically and fairly as possible, discuss their views where differences exist, and exercise their judgment to the fullest extent of their wisdom and experience.

Board recommendations for SFS promotions are to be based solely on ratings on the six primary promotion decision factors and secondary factor, and the composite picture of the candidate that emerges from these ratings.

2) Framework for Developing a Composite Picture for Ratings and Promotion Ranking

SFS C/Board members 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. They will use the AEFs submitted for the current year, plus performance evaluations (AEFs or the documents in the PEF prepared for FSOs in grades FS-01 and below beginning in 2019 which include Annual Accomplishment Records, Operating Unit Context Statements, Annual Performance Evaluations, and Multisource Ratings) from the previous four years.

Successful demonstration of performance meeting or exceeding the skill proficiency expectations provided in the “Teacher” level examples of the FS/SFS Skills Framework, 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 proficiency expectation will preclude advancement and could lead to a C rating. Two C ratings will result in mandatory retirement unless a PSB determines that there are extenuating circumstances (see section F below). Employees who do not have a current AEF must be determined to have met the standards of their class unless there is a letter in the file documenting that the absence of the AEF was not deemed justified by HCTM/FSC.

- a. Achievement of Work Objectives:** When reviewing an employee’s Performance Evaluation File, the C/Board is to review first the employee’s current Annual Evaluation Form. The C/Board must determine whether the employee met, exceeded or did not meet the work objectives. In performing this task, the C/Board must determine whether the work objectives established in the AEF were within the control of the employee and whether they were commensurate with the employee’s personal grade. Employees who failed to achieve a work objective that was within their span of control and appropriate to their grade will receive a C rating. A C/Board must not use as a basis for assignment of a C rating 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.
- b. SFS Skills:** After determining that an employee has met his/her work objectives, the C/Board must review an employee’s current AEF and determine whether the employee met, exceeded, or did not meet the skill standards of the class. In performing this task, the C/Board must refer to the FS/SFS Skills Framework and evaluate all SFS employees on all four core skill areas. The skill areas are further defined in terms of subskills and proficiency indicators, into which the Agency’s core values of passion for mission, excellence, integrity, respect, empowerment, inclusion, and commitment to learning, have been integrated. Candidates judged to be not meeting the standards of performance for their class will be assigned a C rating.

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, the Board will consider the employee’s performance as meeting the standards of the class and will also consider whether the employee is competitive for being recommended for promotion.

- c. Promotion Ranking:** After Performance Boards have reviewed an employee’s current AEF and made determinations concerning the standards of the class, they are to review the employee’s current AEF and the four most recent USAID-approved performance evaluations and other documents in the PEF in order to determine the employee’s potential for continuing growth and to assess the

employee's relative merit with regard to promotion.

Specifically, the SFS C/Board must consider the following factors in their rating and ranking of candidates for promotion: The six primary factors Boards must assess in developing their composite picture of candidates include the following:

Primary Factors

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

A C/Board is to 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, outlines 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 assistance being based on the needs and capabilities of the recipient country and used to strengthen this capacity to achieve self-sustaining growth). Employees 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 B/IOs), or in partnership with local actors and other key external stakeholders.

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

The C/Board is to consider the degree to which an employee has consistently undertaken and successfully completed challenging work within the context of his/her work environment.

3) Proficiency and consistency in demonstrating the four required FS/SFS Core Skills.

The C/Board is to focus on information in the PEF relevant to the employee's skills and competencies. The SFS Core Skills are defined in the FS/SFS Skills Framework, and backstop competencies are referenced in the Technical and Substantive Expertise subskill under the Results and Impact Focused core skill. Employees with the greatest potential to be successful at the next level will have proven their mastery of skills required at the current level and will have demonstrated the ability to exceed the skill proficiency expectations of their current level. The Board, from its review of the performance evaluation files, and according to the approved criteria, will complete its initial ranking of candidates.

Secondary Factors

Ratings against the primary factors will be used to make initial rankings. When highly qualified candidates need to be further differentiated, the C/Board must consider the nature and variety of employees' assignments in addition to the primary factors, as a way to differentiate among candidates who otherwise appear equivalent. Illustrative examples of the kinds of past assignments/work experience that may enhance an employee's ability to add value to the Agency in future include:

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

F. Guidance for Retention Reviews

In reviewing SFS Officers' five-year PEFs, the C/Board must consider an individual's performance relative to the performance of other SFS Officers being reviewed. 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 individuals who receive a C will receive written feedback in the form of 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. The memorandum will be submitted to HCTM/CPE, who will provide a copy to the HCTM/FSC Assignments and Career Counselor (ACC) for the Senior Leadership Group (SLG). The HCTM/FSC SLG ACC will share the memorandum with the employee no later than the date that the report cards are issued.

Individuals who receive two C's in a five-year period will be retired from the Foreign Service under Section 608 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, unless a PSB determines

that there are extenuating circumstances which might warrant retaining the individual. The PSB will review performance data from the past five years and forward their findings and recommendations to the HCTM Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) for a final decision and appropriate action (see [ADS 464maa, Precepts for the Performance Standards Board \(PSB\)](#)).

463mak_033020