



Precepts for Foreign Service Performance Boards

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 463

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PRECEPTS FOR FOREIGN SERVICE PERFORMANCE BOARDS

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A. PURPOSE

These Precepts (including the Skills Matrix-Tab H and Tab K) 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 Boards. 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 Skills Matrix when reviewing an employee's Performance Evaluation File. (Tab K) 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 Rank Award.

1. Promotion

Performance Boards shall recommend for promotion employees who have demonstrated potential, throughout the past six rating cycles (current plus previous five), to fulfill on a sustained basis the standards at the next higher class in addition to demonstrated exemplary performance of the standards of one's class. Performance Boards shall use the Skills Matrix 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 Skills Matrix 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 an employee whose performance may not have met the standards of his/her 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 Rank Awards for the Senior Foreign Service

Performance Boards shall make recommendations concerning Senior Foreign Service performance pay and Presidential Rank 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 Rank 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 discrimination information or the appearance of discrimination in Annual Evaluation Forms and should report such findings to the Chief, M/HR/LERB. 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 Files, the member shall bring the matter to the attention of the Chief, M/HR/LERB 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. Reference to race, religion, sex, national origin, color, disability, political affiliation, age, family or marital status, or sexual orientation;
2. Retirement, resignation or other separation plans;
3. Grievance, Equal Employment Opportunity complaint or other third party adjudicatory proceeding or decision;
4. Method of entry into the Agency, e.g., conversion from another personnel system. Excluding, International Development Intern (IDIs) and New Entry Professionals (NEPs).
5. Reference to private U.S. Citizens by name;
6. 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);
10. Decisions 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 pejorative discussion of another employee's performance; and
13. Specific identification of physical disabilities or medical problems including addictions to alcohol or drugs, and any rehabilitation efforts. General reference may be made to confirm knowledge of a medical condition to the extent that it affects job performance or ability to accept overseas

assignments. Rated employees, however, may discuss their medical condition in specific terms if such condition affected performance.

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

Successful demonstration of 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 a Performance Standards Board.

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 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

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 Skills Matrix. (Tab K)

The Skills Matrix establishes the skill standards for all grade levels, including the Senior Foreign Service, by which all employees are expected to perform. All employees shall be evaluated against each of the six skill areas. The four 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 skill areas are as follows:

1. Resource Management
2. Leadership
3. Technical and Analytical Skills
4. Teamwork and Professionalism

After reviewing an employee's current Annual Evaluation Form, Performance Boards are to determine whether the employee is performing to the sub-skill standards, established in the Skills Matrix, which are discussed in the evaluation.

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 Annual Evaluation Forms for the last six rating cycles (current plus previous five) 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, Procurement, and the General Counsel are authorized to submit evaluation statements and or 360 information of technical competence on Controllers, Contracting Officers and Regional Legal Advisors that are not rated by a supervisor in the employee's technical specialty. The statements will be attached to Annual Evaluation Forms and will address the employee's subject matter knowledge and skills and adherence to laws, regulations, Agency policies and procedures. Performance Boards are to consider 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 expand 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.

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.