

# **Standard Embassy Design**

Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO)  
United States Department of State

## **Who is OBO and what does it do?**

The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) directs the worldwide overseas buildings program for the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Government foreign affairs community serving abroad under the authority of the chiefs of mission. With the input and support of the Congress, other agencies, and other State Department bureaus, OBO sets worldwide priorities for the design, construction, acquisition, maintenance, use, and sale of overseas real property and the use of sales proceeds. The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations is committed to providing safe, secure, and functional work environments for U.S. Government personnel at diplomatic and consular posts throughout the world.

## **What is Standard Embassy Design (SED)?**

SED is a tool to enable OBO to plan, award, design, and construct new embassy projects more quickly than in the past; to simplify the building process; and to provide economically feasible facilities overseas. The SED consists of a series of documents, including site and building plans, specifications, design criteria, an application manual describing its adaptation for a specific project, and contract requirements.

To accomplish more readily its mission, OBO created a process for developing New Embassy Compounds (NECs) with the Standard Embassy Design (SED) to be used for the majority of its capital security projects. Standard Embassy Design (SED) serves as the model for meeting the mandate to replace quickly and cost effectively the embassies and consulates that do not provide adequate security for U.S. diplomatic personnel serving abroad.

## **Why is Standard Embassy Design a preferred method of building design?**

Use of the SED reduces the overall duration of a project up to 34% from the initiation of site selection to project completion. This enables the Department to provide new facilities to a greater number of diplomatic posts in a shorter period of time. Savings of \$63 million, achieved on the Fiscal Year 2002 projects and reinvested in the capital program, allowed OBO to plan for one additional facility.

## **What is the difference in SED from the embassy design in the past?**

In developing the SED, OBO revised its standard space parameters to match private sector office standards, updated its design criteria, evaluated previous projects to identify and incorporate best practices, determined what items had been problematic in previous projects, and incorporated industry standards into the project.

## **What are the elements of the SED?**

The SED documents identify prescriptive requirements by incorporating embedded architectural and engineering concepts to assure that new facilities are safe, secure, and functional. The SED uses the design/build method of project delivery.

The SED provides plans for the site, perimeter facilities such as the Compound Access Control facilities and utility building, the office building, and quarters for an embassy's Marine Security Guards. The plans identify prescriptive requirements by incorporating embedded architectural and engineering concepts to assure that new facilities are safe, secure, and functional. Embedded requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Allowance for future expansion on the site, reserving space for additional facilities such as a large office annex, small office annex, warehouse, and additional parking.
- Allowance for future expansion of the office building.
- Site utilization concepts, including zoning the site into representational, building, and service sections.
- Established areas for official, staff, and visitor vehicle parking.
- Established building mass – two office blocks flanking a central atrium.
- Established building entrances and locations of core elements.
- Established structural grid.
- Established minimum permissible baseline standard for exterior materials.
- Established minimum interior finishes, considering maintenance, climate, and level of traffic.
- Consideration of high temperatures, humidity, dust, rain, and salinity of air when designing and selecting mechanical equipment.

## **What is the background of the circumstances that led to the development of SEDs?**

Toward the end of the 1990s, the State Department's capital building program had been dramatically reduced by years of cutbacks in resources. After the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Congress restored the capital program, intending to replace 180 facilities with substantial security defects. Under the leadership of President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell, the State Department embarked on an overseas construction program on a scale unprecedented in its history.

To accomplish this program, in March 2001 the Secretary of State upgraded the Office of Foreign Buildings Operations (FBO) to the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO), reporting directly to the Undersecretary for Management. He also appointed Major General Charles E. Williams, USA, retired, as the Director/Chief Operating Officer (Assistant Secretary equivalent) of OBO. General Williams crafted a framework for performance and completely restructured OBO to support the project life cycle concept by allocating staff resources to the primary functions of Planning & Development, Design & Engineering, and Construction & Commissioning. The new management focus is "Results Based" and the new organization structure supports the basic concepts of full accountability, top performance, and a clear understanding of OBO's mission.

SED was developed under the reorganized OBO structure as a tool to enable OBO to plan, award, design, and construct new embassy projects more efficiently than in the past; to simplify the building process; and to provide economically feasible facilities overseas.

**What are the benefits or results of using SEDs, such as cost or time savings or organizational efficiencies?**

- Assurance that safety, security, and functional requirements are met, since the SED incorporates these standards and precepts.
- Reduced time in preparing Requests for Proposals, due to standardized requirements.
- Reduced time to prepare contract documents and negotiate with contractors, due to the SED use of the D/B method of delivery.
- Reduced time for Integrated Design Reviews, since SED project submittals should be more correct and complete than those submitted in the past.
- Less room for error or omission, since the SED is based on established design prototypes, specifications, and minimum requirements developed and implemented by OBO.
- Simplified budget process, since SED project costs should be easier to estimate.
- Organizational efficiencies were incorporated into the SED, including shared use of conference areas, standardized building entrances, and flexible-use public spaces.
- The SED is designed to minimize the impact of operational security requirements for cleaning and maintenance personnel. The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations anticipates that this will have a positive impact on employee productivity as well as

operating costs at a post due to a lessened need to escort uncleared cleaning and maintenance personnel.

In addition to schedule savings, the price proposals received for the six SED projects bid in FY 2002 resulted in savings of over 13 percent or \$63 million in the estimated cost of these projects. This savings allowed OBO to add one additional NEC to the FY 2003 projects.

### **Is the SED concept transferable and can it be replicated by other Federal agencies ?**

The SED is so easily replicable that OBO is already using it for six projects with nine additional ones under preparation. It has been so successful that OBO has embarked on a second phase – to develop a standard annex design, intended principally for occupancy by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations is collaborating with USAID in developing the design of the standard annex.

The SED concept is applicable to any other Federal agency that manages multiple facilities. It could be used for a single building, such as the standard annex design, or for a campus environment, such as the NEC.

### **Is the use of SEDs consistent with the “Federal Asset Management Principles.”**

Prior to initiating a new building for an embassy or consulate, OBO undertakes a lengthy and exhaustive process to evaluate the best solution for a post. This process is considered in conjunction with other U.S. Government agencies that participate in the development of OBO’s Long-Range Overseas Buildings Plan. A NEC is considered only after OBO determines that renovating existing buildings will not provide suitable facilities.

The Department of State owns the majority of the non-residential properties it occupies overseas. OBO’s Real Estate and Property Management office coordinates with posts to determine the most appropriate strategy - usually sale - for disposing of vacated, obsolete facilities after moving to a new facility. The proceeds from the sale of vacated properties are used to partially fund OBO’s ongoing programs.

RMO/P: SED draft generic PR doc REVISED by DIR COO 10-18-04.aar