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## Becoming a Foreign Service Officer

## Becoming a Foreign Service Specialist



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The U.S. Department of State promotes peace, prosperity and stability in areas of vital interest to America. Working with allies and partners around the world, American diplomats tackle global issues ranging from climate change to trafficking in persons. The Department is a key player in supporting democratic development. It is a source of support for American businesses abroad, working to achieve fair business practices in commerce, trade, manufacturing and other interests—while also identifying viable opportunities for American businesses. The U.S. Department of State also provides information and services for U.S. citizens abroad and issues visas to foreigners wishing to visit the United States.

The challenges to today's Foreign Service extend well beyond the confines of traditional diplomacy. There are many issues of critical importance to our nation's foreign policy:

- Strengthening democratization and human rights around the world
- Halting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction
- Enhancing peacekeeping capabilities
- Dealing more effectively with global environmental problems
- Focusing on global population, refugee and migration issues
- Fighting international crime, terrorism and narcotics
- Dealing with ethnic and religious affairs
- Addressing global public health issues and diseases like AIDS
- Penetrating new markets for American business
- Managing the growth of science and technology

The Department's employees, Foreign Service Officers and Specialists, Civil Service professionals and Locally Employed Staff (LES) work at more than 270 locations overseas, and throughout the United States. Together, they help to build and sustain a more democratic, secure, and prosperous world composed of well-governed states that respond to the needs of their people, reduce widespread poverty, and act responsibly within the international system.

The Department selects and hires employees who accomplish America's mission of diplomacy at home and around the world, including Foreign Service Officers, Foreign Service Specialists and Civil Service professionals. For those pursuing undergraduate, graduate or other advanced degrees, and professionals who are interested in an executive development program in public service, the Department offers a number of internships and fellowships.



## FOREIGN SERVICE LIFESTYLE

It takes fortitude and the ability to adapt to changing situations and cultures other than your own to represent America abroad. A career with the Foreign Service may appear glamorous – worldwide travel, government-paid housing, generous pay and benefits. While there are benefits, working as a Foreign Service Officer is challenging, demanding and sometimes dangerous. During this career you can expect to be assigned to hardship posts. These posts can be in remote locations, without many U.S.-style amenities. For instance, you may experience:

- Sporadic power outages and unreliable internet service
- Health and sanitation below U.S. standards
- Assignments to unaccompanied posts, where family members may not go with you

Foreign Service careers are global and require candidates to be worldwide available, ready to meet the needs of the Service. Typically, each assignment is for two to three years in a designated country. Careers in the Foreign Service offer challenging and interesting work and the satisfaction of serving the United States of America. The Foreign Service consists of a diverse group of highly motivated, intellectually curious, and culturally adaptable professionals who are dedicated to representing America's interests and responding to the needs of American citizens in other countries.

When hiring Foreign Service Officers, the Department looks for motivated individuals with sound judgment and leadership abilities who can retain their composure in times of great stress – or even dire situations, like a military coup or a major environmental disaster. To succeed in the Foreign Service, you must be strongly motivated, enjoy challenges, and possess an ardent dedication to public service.

The search for extraordinary U.S. citizens to serve as Foreign Service Officers is intense and the qualifying process is rigorous, demanding and highly competitive.

If you are interested in becoming an FSO, you must first register for and take the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT).

## BECOMING A U.S. DIPLOMAT

If you are interested in becoming a Foreign Service Officer (FSO), you must first register for and take the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT). To register for the FSOT, you must meet specific eligibility requirements. These include U.S. citizenship, an age requirement, and worldwide availability. Please see page 15 for more specific details and requirements.

## CANDIDATE RESOURCES

The Department has Diplomats in Residence (DIRs), located throughout the United States, and recruiters based in Washington, D.C., who are available to provide insight and guidance as you pursue this unique public service career. Interested candidates can engage directly with the Department by visiting:

### DIR Contacts, Forums, and Event Information

#### DOSCareers Mobile App

App Store & Google Play

#### Facebook

#### LinkedIn

#### Twitter

# FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER SELECTION PROCESS

The Foreign Service Officer Selection process begins with online registration, proceeds through the selection process, and, for those who succeed, culminates in hiring from the register for assignment to the training and orientation course known as A-100 that marks the beginning of every Foreign Service Officer career.

## 1 Choose a Career Track



Next to deciding to pursue a Foreign Service career, selecting a career track is the most important decision to make. Carefully consider which career track is the best fit for your interests and background.

## 2 Register for the Foreign Service Officer Test

The FSOT is administered online at designated test centers. It measures your knowledge, skills and abilities. It includes three multiple-choice sections: job knowledge, English expression and biographic information.

## 3 Take the Foreign Service Officer Test

The FSOT is administered three times each year in domestic and overseas test centers.



## 4 Submit Personal Narratives for the QEP Review

If you pass the FSOT multiple choice and essay sections, you will receive an email asking you to submit Personal Narratives (PNs) to the Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP) for review.

## 5 Take the Oral Assessment

This day-long assessment measures your ability to demonstrate the 13 dimensions that are essential to the successful performance of Foreign Service work.

## 6 Clearances: Medical and Security

After you pass the Oral Assessment, you will receive instructions about obtaining medical and security clearances.



## 7 Final Review Panel

Upon receiving the medical and security clearances, a Final Review Panel will examine your completed file (except medical records) to determine your suitability for employment with the Foreign Service.



## 8 The Register

After receiving medical and security clearances and passing the Final Suitability Review, your name is placed on the Register, which is a rank-ordered list of successful candidates.

## ADDITIONAL FYI

### Veterans Preference

Generalist candidates who can document creditable Veterans' service by submitting form DD 214 will be given additional points on the Register.

### Foreign Languages

While you are not required to know a foreign language, proficiency in a language will enhance your competitiveness on the register by giving you a slight increase in points.

### Candidates with Disabilities

The Office of Employee Relations determines reasonable accommodations for qualified candidates. Said candidates must meet all requirements for appointment to the Foreign Service.

### Commitment to Foreign Service Work

As a Foreign Service Officer one must have flexibility in assignments, public support of U.S. government policies and worldwide availability.

## 1 Choose a Career Track

When registering to take the FSOT, you will be asked to make the first big decision of your future Foreign Service Officer career – the choice of a career track. While all FSOs are known as “generalists,” the choice of a functional specialization will determine what type of work you will do for the majority of your career.

Whether you want to follow a professional path that grows your management skills, impacts economic policy or helps reunite families, you’ll find five different career tracks that can direct you towards realizing your goals. Please choose carefully, as your selection will have an impact on your job experiences once you become an FSO. In order to make the most informed decision, you’ll need to understand the similarities — and the differences — among career tracks. It’s advisable to conduct your own research, through the use of the online quizzes found at careers.state.gov, in speaking to Diplomats in Residence (DIRs) and finding an FSO who works in the career track you’re considering. When doing this research, it’s important to keep an open mind. No one career track promises unconditional happiness or accelerated promotion. One is not better or worse than another. You must decide which one is right for you, your personality, your interests and your background.

You should fully educate yourself about the five Foreign Service Officer career tracks: Consular, Economic, Management, Political and Public Diplomacy. Descriptions of the career tracks are contained in this guide and on careers.state.gov. You will be required to select your career track when registering for the FSOT. It is difficult to change your career track once you select it during the Foreign Service Officer Test registration process, so careful thought should be given to making this decision. Once you have taken the FSOT and moved forward in the process, you may not switch career tracks; a candidate wishing to do so will need to start a whole new candidacy, beginning with retaking the FSOT.

*There are several areas that all career tracks have in common:*

- Each engages with host government officials, private sector leaders and international organization officials. In every career track, you will work closely with people from other countries.
- Each fosters dialogue between the United States and the host country. In every career track, you will advocate U.S. policies, promote U.S. interests, and strengthen understanding between our country and other nations.
- Success in each career track requires the same characteristics — also known as the 13 dimensions.

While all U.S. diplomats are expected to communicate U.S. policy and interact effectively with host country governments to help advance American interests worldwide, each career track has a specific focus.

Periodically, the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Human Resources conducts a job analysis of the Foreign Service Officer positions to identify certain knowledge, skills and abilities that prospective Foreign Service Officers should possess prior to entry into the Foreign Service.

## THERE ARE FIVE FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER CAREER TRACKS:

- Consular
- Economic
- Management
- Political
- Public Diplomacy

Knowledge of the following areas has been identified as essential for success across all five career tracks (Consular, Economic, Management, Political and Public Diplomacy):

- Proper English usage
- U.S. society, culture, economy, history, government, political systems and the Constitution
- World history and geography
- World political and social issues

In addition, all Foreign Service Officers should have a general understanding of:

- Basic mathematics and statistics
- Computer usage
- Principles of management
- Effective interpersonal communication
- Basic economic principles

Greater or more in-depth knowledge is needed in some areas, depending on the career track. In-depth knowledge may be required in the following areas:

- U.S. and international political and economic principles, issues and history
- U.S. government and non-governmental agencies and organizations and their interactions with the Department of State
- U.S. diplomacy, democratic philosophy and educational practices
- U.S. policy issues and public and foreign policy formulation
- Legislation and laws related to Foreign Service issues
- International economics, finance and commerce
- Administrative methods and procedures
- Information and media resources

The most recent job analysis update reaffirms that the following skills and abilities are important in the work of a Foreign Service Officer across all career tracks:

- Strong interpersonal and communication skills
- Adaptability and stress tolerance
- Good problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Integrity and dependability
- Ability to plan and set priorities and manage time
- Initiative and leadership

## THE FIVE CAREER TRACKS

### CONSULAR OFFICERS

Consular Officers provide emergency and non-emergency services to American citizens and protect our borders through the proper adjudication of visas to foreign nationals and passports to American citizens. They adjudicate immigrant and non immigrant visas, facilitate adoptions, help evacuate Americans, combat fraud, and fight human trafficking. Consular Officers touch people's lives in important ways, often reassuring families in crisis. They face many situations in their careers as consular officers which require quick thinking under stress. They develop and use a wide range of skills, from managing resources and conducting public outreach to assisting Americans in distress.

**For example, a Consular Officer at the Embassy in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, documented one day in his life:**

*“The workday begins calmly, as local and American staff steadily arrive. After five months here, I have grown accustomed to the challenging daily schedule of an entry-level Consular Officer at a post experiencing surging demand for both immigrant (IV) and non immigrant (NIV) visas, as well as American Citizen Services. We start by responding to emails and reopening complicated cases from the previous day... Meanwhile, out in the waiting areas, hundreds of applicants complete intake procedures and wait anxiously for their visa interviews. Every officer has interviewed at least 50 applicants so far today; one interviewed 76. Although many applicants did not qualify for a visa, I met a few impressive and interesting ones, such as the student returning to Dartmouth on full scholarship and the scientist accepted to a PhD program in the United States. More interviews await us in the afternoon, but for now, I relax over lunch at a local restaurant with the four local staff members I supervise. I am one of only two Westerners in the place. We enjoy the local specialties, including beef noodle soup, spring rolls and fresh fruit shakes. Throughout the meal, my colleagues patiently indulge my desire to practice speaking Vietnamese.”*

*Excerpt from Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work, AFSA/FS Books, 2011, pages 139-141*

Following is an overview of a potential progression in your career track:

#### ENTRY-LEVEL

- Supervise several locally-hired employees
- Adjudicate visas
- Assist American citizens living or visiting overseas who find themselves in emergency situations involving arrests, hospitalization and major accidents and provide non-emergency services, such as reports of birth, passport applications and notarial services
- Respond to inquiries from a range of sources including attorneys, congressional offices, business contacts and host government officials
- Combat consular fraud

#### MID-LEVEL

- Manage a small consular section or part of a large one, such as the American Citizen Services (ACS), anti-fraud, or visa unit
- Supervise American entry-level officers and Locally Engaged Staff (LES)
- Make complex decisions regarding visas and services for American citizens and resolve challenging management issues involving workflow and human resources
- If posted to Washington, D.C., you will support consular officers in the field on visa, ACS, fraud and management issues

#### SENIOR-LEVEL

- Manage a large consular section, supervise a number of American officers and local staff members and be part of the embassy's senior management
- Serve as an office director or part of the senior staff within the Consular Affairs Bureau in Washington, which advises on all consular matters
- Engage in a variety of public outreach functions, such as speaking to the press or to American organizations
- As with senior officers in other career tracks, you may be a Deputy Chief of Mission or Ambassador, or a Principal Officer at a large U.S. consulate



“After five months here, I have grown accustomed to the challenging daily schedule of an entry-level Consular Officer...”

## ECONOMIC OFFICERS

Economic Officers build and maintain positive economic and trade relations between the U.S. and other countries. While having an economics background is useful, it's not required. They focus on developing relationships with important economic figures, including those in the business community, the government and opposition, non-governmental organizations, academia and multilateral organizations. They promote U.S. economic and commercial interests. Their reporting and analysis on economic conditions and trends in the host country influences U.S. policy formulation and implementation.

Economic Officers receive extensive in-house training in economics, trade, commercial diplomacy, energy, and environmental issues. They influence and implement economic and trade policy as they help unravel the complexities of a global economy.

**For example, an Economic Officer in Dhaka, Bangladesh documented one day in his life in the Economic section of the Embassy:**

*"After breakfast and a quick scan of the local and U.S. headlines on the internet, I head off to the embassy....I check emails and cables for anything that may be of general interest or affect any of the issues I cover, which include commercial advocacy on behalf of U.S. companies, as well as environment, science, technology and health (ESTH) topics. Once a week, we have an "all hands" political/economic section staff meeting in the atrium. Fueled by pots of coffee and strong, sweet tea, American and Bangladeshi staff go around the table giving updates on our issues....I head out to meet with poultry industry association representatives to discuss the ongoing outbreak of avian influenza. I will visit several poultry farms in the nearby countryside that have reported infections, being careful not to spread infection or contaminate myself....Back at the embassy, I work on drafting and revising the Bangladesh portion of the Special 301 Report, an annual global review of how countries are doing in protecting intellectual property rights."*

Excerpt from *Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work*, AFSA/FS Books, 2011, pages 124-125

Following is an overview of a potential progression in your career track:

### ENTRY-LEVEL

- Work in an economic section under the direction of a more experienced officer
- Develop a network of contacts in the host government and local business community so as to keep informed on local developments
- Prepare economic analyses and recommend strategies for implementation of U.S. policies
- At a small post, you may supervise one or two locally-hired employees who work on trade issues and manage a small commercial library

### MID-LEVEL

- Serve as chief of a small economic affairs section, supervising local staff and one or two entry-level officers
- Brief the Ambassador and visiting dignitaries and business people on local conditions and issues that affect U.S. policy and support the visits of U.S. officials on these matters
- Report or supervise economic reporting to Washington
- With guidance, you will persuade the host government to support U.S. policies on a range of economic, environmental and commercial issues

### SENIOR-LEVEL

- Responsible for developing and implementing U.S. policy on bilateral and multilateral economic and trade issues, including debt relief, free trade, international finance and development assistance
- If posted in Washington, D.C., you will likely travel as the USG negotiator of bilateral or multilateral treaties on issues such as aviation, environment, or investment. You will have opportunities to be an office director, supervising a large number of officers
- Manage a large economic or political-economic section, advising the Ambassador on the full range of economic issues
- Make demarches to the host government and meet with host government officials at the Ministries of Finance, Trade, Economy, Communications, Transportation, Environment, Labor, as well as the Central Bank, Civil Aviation Authority, or Chamber of Commerce



“Working as a Foreign Service Officer in the Economic career track, I've been able to focus on something that means a great deal to me – environmental issues. Partnering with local officials in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, I've utilized my business and communication skills to promote renewable energy and negotiate water rights. And in my role, over the past six years, I haven't just had an impact on the world economy, I've also positively affected the global ecology.”

*Miriam, U.S. Diplomat, Economic Career Track*



Watch Miriam's Video

“Once a week, we have an ‘all hands’ political/economic section staff meeting in the atrium. Fueled by pots of coffee and strong, sweet tea, American and Bangladeshi staff go around the table giving updates on our issues...”

## MANAGEMENT OFFICERS

Management Officers are action-oriented “go to” leaders responsible for all embassy operations from real estate to personnel to budgets. Management Officers develop on-target solutions in fast-paced and mission-critical situations and have multi-disciplinary responsibilities in complex situations:

**For example, a Management Officer who served in Tirana, Albania, acted as a medic to help save an American serving in the Peace Corps:**

*“It was the middle of the night when a call came over our emergency radio network. A Peace Corps Volunteer had a medical emergency and needed help. I was on my second tour and was posted to Tirana, Albania, as the Management Officer. While I supervised the health unit, I was hardly the medical expert. We had a Department doctor working with us remotely and a local private American physician supporting our more immediate needs. But I was the one hearing the radio call. I jumped in my car, grabbing a colleague from USAID along the way. We raced to the Peace Corps offices to pick up the volunteer. Once we had him in the car, we picked up our local doctor and headed for the Embassy health unit. As the supervisor, I had the keys and knowledge of our medical inventory. Ten minutes after arrival, I found myself holding an IV bag aloft in one hand and giving a reassuring squeeze to the volunteer with my other. The doctor addressed our patient’s needs as my USAID colleague located the Peace Corp’s own medical personnel. There was no question of going to a local facility so we had to rely on what resources we had on-site.”*

Learn more about the experiences of Foreign Service Officers.

Following is an overview of a potential progression in your career track:

### ENTRY-LEVEL

- Run a unit within the management section of a large embassy, or be the sole Management Officer at a small post
- Plan and problem-solve for your customers, from the Ambassador to every local and American staff member (and their families)
- Maintain a wide array of contacts with host-country officials and local business people

- Hone your foreign language capabilities, test your negotiating skills and learn what works in the host country’s culture and what doesn’t
- Supervise more employees than your peers in other career tracks and have autonomy to resolve administrative problems

### MID-LEVEL

- Run a management section in a medium-size embassy or consulate, or perhaps supervise human resources or other major unit at a large embassy
- Develop and manage multi-million dollar budgets, lease and maintain government-owned and short-term leased residences and office buildings and provide the logistical platform to support dozens of high level visits
- Negotiate with host government authorities over diplomatic privileges and immunities, applications of tax reciprocity laws and family member employment

### SENIOR-LEVEL

- As with other career tracks, become a Deputy Chief of Mission, an Ambassador, or a Principal Officer at a large consulate, or a Management Counselor at a larger post
- If serving in Washington, D.C., you may be an Office Director, Executive Director, or Deputy Assistant Secretary, directing resources to support the work of posts throughout a region, managing the Department’s global logistics or building programs, or coordinating recruitment, training, or assignments of Foreign Service personnel

## POLITICAL OFFICERS

Political Officers are negotiators who interpret host country politics and advise on international issues.

They keep a trained eye on the political climate in the host country and decipher events as they relate to U.S. interests, negotiations and policies. Often working behind the scenes to analyze and report on local issues and events, they have in-depth knowledge of local culture and history, helping policy makers in Washington, D.C. to better understand events and tailor the U.S. message most effectively.

**For example, a Political Officer who served in Bukavu, Congo, experienced, first-hand, issues related to the human rights of the Congolese:**

*“I’m in a hotel in the eastern Congolese city of Bukavu, where I’ve traveled with our human rights desk officer for a reporting trip...Our guest, Murhabazi, arrives. (Like many Congolese, he uses just one name.) One of our best contacts in eastern Congo and a former participant in the State Department International Visitor Program, he runs an integration center for rescued child soldiers...Our mission is to investigate the conditions leading to the recent escape of 20 prisoners. We inspect dirt-floored cells and take photos of rotting ceilings. We make notes about the lack of medicine and the malnourished prisoners cooking scraps of food in fires on the ground in the courtyard. Far from hiding the miserable human rights situation, the prison director leads us from violation to violation. He begs us for money to feed the prisoners and then tells us they escaped when he let them out into the hills to look for food. I call a colleague at the embassy to tell her about a possible candidate for an Ambassador’s Self-Help Fund grant – a non-governmental organization that works with the prisoners in the jail to grow crops.”*

Excerpt from *Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work*, AFSA/FS Books, 2011, pages 144-146

Following is an overview of a potential progression in your career track:

### ENTRY-LEVEL

- Report on either one segment of society, or an issue (e.g., religion), or a geographic region
- Make contacts with leaders and officials at the appropriate level in the major political parties and government ministries

- Supervise a locally-hired political specialist who has developed contacts in important segments of society and who advises you on local politics and society
- Read local publications and accompany senior officers on calls, taking notes and reporting on the meetings

### MID-LEVEL

- Serve as political, or political-economic, section head at a small-to-medium size post and maintain contacts with political, labor, military and other figures at various levels of government and society
- Supervise entry-level officers and locally-hired political specialists
- Monitor, analyze and report on key issues; present demarches to the host government; explain U.S. positions to other diplomats; and gather information
- When Washington officials visit, arrange schedules that meet policy objectives and accompany them to take notes
- Serve at the U.S. mission to an international organization representing U.S. interests, coordinate responses to particular issues and work with the organization’s staff
- Gather information for Washington delegations to high-level or technical meetings

### SENIOR-LEVEL

- Manage a large political, or political-economic, section and supervise a number of officers
- Advise the Ambassador and present demarches to the host government
- Meet regularly with political and social leaders and perhaps give speeches explaining U.S. positions on a variety of issues when serving in Washington, D.C.
- Direct an office or be an advisor to a senior Department official
- Head delegations to meetings abroad, both bilateral and multilateral
- Draft policy documents and statements for senior Department officials and for use by embassies abroad



## PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OFFICERS

Public Diplomacy Officers communicate with and through a variety of media to promote U.S. interests abroad, which may include explaining to foreign audiences how American history, values and traditions shape U.S. foreign policy. They manage cultural and information programs and coordinate exchange programs to strengthen relationships that improve foreign insight into American society. They benefit from having a strong knowledge of local government and customs.

**For example, a Public Diplomacy Officer who served in Guangzhou, China, highlights the fast-paced careers where no two days are alike and multi-tasking is a required skill:**

*“It’s 7am and I jump into a cab early, aiming to beat Guangzhou’s notoriously unpredictable traffic... I arrive at the office and turn on the TV to check out the international and local news while sipping coffee and scanning cables... go over press guidance from Washington and respond to program-related emails... I check the consulate website*

*and move forward with the upcoming U.S. presidential inaugural event planning. Public affairs work requires maintaining momentum on numerous programs concurrently so I check in with our local staff member in charge of alumni programs to discuss a proposal to fund a series of professional development seminars. I touch base with the embassy’s transformational diplomacy officer in Beijing and then speedwalk to my favorite local Hunan hole in the wall to pick up lunch. I start summarizing Chinese-language news stories into English, which gives U.S. officials in Beijing and Washington a snapshot of South China media views on issues of importance to the U.S. Government. I give a talk to about 30 students, academics and media contacts on “Popular TV in the U.S. – Who’s Watching What.?” Instead of waiting for a cab just to sit in traffic, at 5:45pm I have a tasty Turkish dinner and then head home around 7pm. I watch the news and check my BlackBerry for the last time around 9pm.”*

Excerpt from *Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work*, AFSA/FS Books, 2011, pages 162-163

**“I start summarizing Chinese-language news stories into English which gives U.S. officials in Beijing and Washington a snapshot of South China media views...”**

Following is an overview of a potential progression in your career track:

### ENTRY-LEVEL

- Acts as an assistant cultural affairs or information officer
- Coordinate exchange programs to send selected individuals to the United States on fact-finding tours
- Oversee the website and use of other new technologies
- Serve on a local Fulbright selection board monitoring the travel and professional programs of grantees, both in your host country and in the United States
- Act as a contact for local and international reporters, editors and broadcasters, who seek up-to-date and accurate facts on U.S. policy or assistance with the methodology of fair reporting
- Promote U.S. core values of free speech and transparency

### MID-LEVEL

- Manage the staff of a cultural or information section of a U.S. embassy
- Oversee the budget on programming exchange opportunities
- Organize focus programs and discussion groups with local audiences on topics of mutual interest
- Manage an information resource center or language institute
- Serve on Fulbright boards or chair a Fulbright commission
- Handle inquiries from local and international media

### SENIOR-LEVEL

- Manage regional or global exchange programs in Washington
- Represent an embassy overseas as its spokesperson and as manager of its culture and media programs
- Be responsible for significant budget and staff resources
- Advise the Ambassador and other senior colleagues about the media, cultural and educational climate of the country

**“It’s 7am and I jump into a cab early, aiming to beat Guangzhou’s notoriously unpredictable traffic...”**



## 2 Register for the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT)

The FSOT is offered three times each year. For specific dates and applicable deadlines, please visit [careers.state.gov](https://careers.state.gov). The computer-based Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT) is offered three times each year and administered by the testing firm, Pearson VUE. Each test window is about eight days in length, with multiple testing times offered. There is no limit on the number of times an applicant may take the FSOT, but the test can be taken only once in an 11-month period. The FSOT is only given on the computer, although candidates with disabilities may request reasonable accommodation.

While not a prerequisite, most successful FSO candidates have at least a bachelor's degree. In recent years, many candidates have also had advanced degrees in international relations, economics, business administration, law, journalism, or other areas. Many also had work experience in various fields before their appointment and have worked, attended school, or traveled overseas.

### ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- You must be a U.S. citizen
- You must be at least 20 years old and no older than 59 on the day you submit your registration package. Appointment as a Foreign Service Officer must occur when you are at least 21 years old and before you reach the age of 60. Please note that the time from successfully taking the FSOT to a possible Foreign Service appointment often exceeds one year, and those who turn 60 after registering for the test but prior to a Foreign Service appointment will have their candidacies terminated. Preference eligible veterans may take the test after their 59th birthday – for specific information contact [FSOAQuestions@state.gov](mailto:FSOAQuestions@state.gov).
- You must be available for worldwide assignment, including assignments at posts where health, living conditions, or medical support may be rudimentary or in danger zones where family members are not allowed.\*
- No applicant will be considered who has previously been separated from the Foreign Service under sections §607, §608, §610 or §611 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended, or who resigned or retired in lieu of separation under these provisions. In addition, no applicant will be considered who has previously been separated for failure to receive a career appointment under section §306 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended, or who resigned or retired in lieu thereof.
- No specific educational level or proficiency in a foreign language is required.

No exceptions can be made to the eligibility requirements for Foreign Service Officer candidates.

### No exceptions can be made to the eligibility requirements.

\* Worldwide availability is an essential qualification for appointment to the Foreign Service. As noted above, applicants must be available for worldwide assignment, including assignments at posts where health, living conditions, or medical support may be rudimentary, or in danger zones where family members are not allowed. Additionally, regardless of who administers the medical exam, the Department's Office of Medical Services determines whether or not a candidate is medically available for assignment to Department of State posts worldwide. Certain medical conditions that require monitoring or follow-up care, or are prone to exacerbation in certain overseas environments, may result in a finding of non-worldwide availability and thus disqualify a candidate from eligibility. In cases where medical problems lead to a denial of medical clearance, the candidate may request a waiver of the worldwide availability requirement by the Employment Review Committee. The committee operates on a case-by-case basis and only grants waivers if it is clearly in the best interests of the Foreign Service.

### FSOT REGISTRATION STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

- Meet the eligibility requirements listed above.
- Determine the specific career track under which you will register – remember this career track stays with you for your entire career and is subject to change only in rare circumstances.
- Register at [careers.state.gov](https://careers.state.gov) any time. All registrations for the Foreign Service Officer Test must be completed online. The registration package consists of the eligibility verification and application forms. The application form gathers factual information about your academic background, work history, and other relevant data. The link to online registration is available at [careers.state.gov](https://careers.state.gov).
- Upon receipt of an invitation, reserve a test date at a test center. Pearson VUE will send seat scheduling invitations approximately 4-5 weeks prior to testing dates.
- Note that seats may be limited during each test window and invitations to reserve seats are offered on a first-come, first-served basis within each career track according to the date applications are received.

Please make sure you meet all the eligibility requirements listed on Page 7 and Page 15 before you register to take the Foreign Service Officer Test. No exceptions can be made to the eligibility requirements for Foreign Service Officer candidates. Those interested in taking the test must register in advance. Because of the personal information collected in the registration process, registrants must complete their own on-line application forms. Please carefully read this guide before completing your on-line registration.

### IMPORTANT REGISTRATION INFORMATION

If you are having difficulty registering for the test, please contact Pearson VUE. Those calling from the United States may call Pearson VUE at **866-389-8339**; the number for those calling from overseas is **(952) 905-7483**. Pearson VUE is available to receive and answer calls on weekdays (excluding holidays) between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Central Time. You may also contact Pearson VUE at [pearsonvue.com/fsot/contact](https://pearsonvue.com/fsot/contact) to use the live chat option. Alternatively, you may email [FSOTQuestions@state.gov](mailto:FSOTQuestions@state.gov) for assistance and inquiries.

- If you schedule a seat appointment and later decide you are unable to test on that day, you must notify Pearson VUE. You can try to reschedule for a different test day (within the available appointments) or cancel the appointment less than 48 hours before the scheduled test date. Cancellation must occur at least 48 hours prior to the date of the scheduled appointment. If you fail to appear for the test appointment or cancel the appointment less than 48 hours before the test date, you will be required to pay a \$50.00 no-show fee.
- To help you prepare for the FSOT, you may order or download a copy of Pearson VUE's FSOT Study Guide (the current price is \$29, but subject to change).
- You should print or make a copy of your application before submitting it, as you will not be able to access this information again during the selection process.
- A registration remains active until you take the FSOT or up to a maximum of 12 months from the date of submission, whichever comes first. If you do not schedule a test date and do not take the test, or are not selected to schedule a test date within that period, you must wait 11 months from the date of the original registration submission and then submit a new registration.
- Registrants must have e-mail addresses to use throughout the selection process and must ensure their spam filters accept e-mails from Pearson VUE, the testing firm that prepares and administers the test. Messages will be sent from the following address: [PearsonVUEConfirmation@pearson.com](mailto:PearsonVUEConfirmation@pearson.com). Neither Pearson VUE nor the U.S. Department of State will be responsible for the failure of applicants' internet servers to deliver e-mail in a timely fashion.
- Applicants are responsible for contacting Pearson VUE directly should they not receive test results or other information within the timeline indicated on Page 21.

Those planning to request reasonable accommodation should register at least four weeks before the requested test date. Every effort will be made to approve and arrange the requested accommodation by the test date. In order to meet certain requests, there may be a delay, but it should not be greater than one test cycle. See the separate section on requesting accommodation for further information.

## REGISTRANTS WITH DISABILITIES

In accordance with Federal law, the U.S. Department of State will provide reasonable accommodation to enable qualified applicants with disabilities to take the FSOT. Accommodation may include such actions as provision by Pearson VUE of:

- a reader or a person to record answers
- a separate testing room
- extra testing time
- a Braille or cassette version of the test
- large-print versions of the exam

All registrants, including those requesting reasonable accommodations, must register for the FSOT at [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov). In addition to preparing and administering the FSOT, Pearson VUE is responsible for all special accommodation requests for candidates with disabilities. Candidates who need accommodations to take the test must apply for special accommodations at least 30 days before the next testing window.

The accommodation approval process can be lengthy. To allow sufficient time for approval and the necessary arrangements, submit accommodations request in writing with accompanying documentation to Pearson VUE at least 30 days before the requested test date. Follow the detailed instructions for accommodations requests provided at: <http://www.pearsonvue.com/accommodations>.

Incomplete requests and those received without supporting documentation by the registration deadline may not be approved. Candidates who need accommodations are requested to register as early as possible in order for Pearson VUE to have sufficient time to make the necessary arrangements.

Those granted accommodation receive a letter from Pearson VUE confirming the accommodation to be provided. If the request is incomplete or does not support the accommodation request, Pearson VUE notifies the registrant in writing. The registrant may then provide complete or updated documents prior to the deadline. Every effort will be made to provide accommodation at the registrant's chosen test center and on the chosen date. In order to meet certain requests, there may be a delay, but it should not be greater than one test cycle. Moreover, some test centers may be unable to provide certain types of accommodation.



## APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ANY TYPE OF DISABILITY

- Completed registration. All registrants, including those requesting accommodations, must register at [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov)
- A written request for accommodation, including:
  - a detailed description of the disability
  - a detailed description of the accommodation necessary for the registrant to take the written examination. If additional testing time is necessary, the registrant request must include the precise amount of time needed; for example, time and a half, or regular test time but longer breaks between sections
- A letter, prepared within the last five years and on office letterhead, from the registrant's physician or other specialist licensed or certified to diagnose and treat the disability. The physician's or specialist's letter must include:

- current professional diagnosis of the registrant's disability
- the specific accommodation required as a result of the disability
- an explanation of the need for the accommodation and how the functional limits of the disability relate to test-taking activity; and
- the treatment provided and the last date of treatment
- A statement from the specialist or doctor describing past testing accommodation, if any

If the accommodation required includes additional testing time, the registrant's physician or specialist must include the precise amount of time needed as well as the diagnostic basis for the additional time. If the accommodation required is due to a diagnosis of a cognitive (learning) disability, the physician or specialist must include additional documentation.

## ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS FOR DIAGNOSIS OF COGNITIVE (LEARNING) DISABILITY

If a registrant requires testing accommodation due to a cognitive disability, the registrant's physician or specialist must provide the following documentation in addition to what is described above. All tests used by the physician or specialist to support a diagnosis of cognitive disability must be reliable, valid, standardized and age appropriate. All standard scores and percentiles (including those of sub-tests) must be included in the documentation.

- A report that includes a description of the presenting problem(s) and its (their) developmental history, along with a specific diagnosis and evidence that alternative explanations were ruled out
- A neuropsychological or psychoeducational evaluation that includes the results of an aptitude assessment using a complete and comprehensive battery. (The preferred instrument is the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-III. Another acceptable instrument is the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery Revised: Tests of Cognitive Ability)

- The results of a complete achievement battery, including a report of current levels of academic functioning in relevant area such as reading (decoding and comprehension) and written language (e.g., the Woodcock- Johnson Psychoeducational Battery-Revised: Tests of Achievement; the Nelson-Denny Reading Skills Test; or the Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults)
- The results of an assessment of information processing (e.g., short- and long-term memory, sequential memory, processing speed, executive functioning) using appropriate instruments (e.g., the Wechsler Memory Scale or relevant sub-tests from the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery-Revised: Tests of Cognitive Ability)
- The results of other appropriate assessment measures to support a differential diagnosis or to disentangle the cognitive disability from co-existing neurological and/or personality disorders
- If the diagnosed cognitive disability is attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), the physician or specialist should provide relevant batteries as described above to determine patterns that support attention problems

The physician or specialist also must provide:

- a measure of reading speed
- a review of DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for ADHD
- a description of which impairment-causing symptoms were present in childhood
- a description of which current symptoms have been present for at least the past six months and how the symptoms relate to the test-taking activity

The Department of State is committed to equal opportunity and fair and equitable treatment for all without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disabling condition, sexual orientation, political affiliation, marital status, or prior statutory, constitutionally protected activity. The Department provides reasonable accommodation to applicants with disabilities. Applicants requiring a reasonable accommodation for any part of the application or hiring process should so advise the Department. All decisions for granting reasonable accommodation are made on a case-by-case basis.

## 3 Take the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT)

The FSOT consists of the following components:

- **Job Knowledge:** The job-related knowledge test measures the candidate's depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding of a range of subjects identified as important for performing the tasks required of Foreign Service Officers. Topics covered appear later in this guide.
- **English Expression and Usage:** This test measures knowledge of correct grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation and organization required for written reports and for editing the written work of others. The test includes questions in each of these areas. Sample questions appear later in this guide.
- **Biographic Information:** The biographic information section provides a self-assessment of candidates' prior work, education and job-relevant life experiences, highlighting attributes such as the way they resolve conflicts, interact with others, adapt to other cultures and set priorities. The questionnaire does not penalize candidates who have not gone to college, who have no previous work experience, or who have varied patterns of education and experience. Rather, it credits candidates for what they have achieved relative to the opportunities they have had.
- **Essay:** Candidates draft an essay on a computer on assigned topics. Essays are evaluated on the quality of writing, including development of ideas, structure, clear language and the standard use of conventions—not on what opinions are expressed.

### HOW TO PREPARE

To prepare for the Foreign Service Officer Test a candidate should be widely read or have taken a wide variety of courses prior to the test. The job analysis of Foreign Service Officer positions identified the following general knowledge areas as critical to success on the job across all five career tracks (Consular, Economic, Management, Political and Public Diplomacy):

- **Communication.** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of principles of effective communication and public speaking techniques, as well as general knowledge of the common sources of information, public media and media relations.
- **Computers.** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of basic computer operations such as word processing, databases, spreadsheets, and preparing and using e-mail.

- **Correct grammar, organization, writing strategy, sentence structure, and punctuation required for writing or editing reports.** This knowledge area encompasses English expression and language usage skills required for preparing or editing written reports, including correct grammar and good writing.
- **Economics.** This knowledge area encompasses an understanding of basic economic principles, as well as a general understanding of economic issues and the economic system of the United States.
- **Management.** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of basic management and supervisory techniques, and methods. It includes knowledge of human psychology, leadership, motivational strategies and equal employment practices
- **Mathematics and Statistics.** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of basic mathematical and statistical procedures. It may include calculations.
- **United States Government.** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of the composition and functioning of the Federal Government, the Constitution and its history, the structure of Congress and its role in foreign affairs, as well as the United States political system and its role in governmental structure, formulation of government policies, and foreign affairs.
- **United States Society and Culture.** This knowledge area encompasses an understanding of major events, institutions, and movements in national history, including political and economic history, as well as national customs and culture, social issues and trends, and the influence of U.S. society and culture on foreign policy and foreign affairs
- **World History & Geography.** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of significant world historical events, issues, and developments, including their impact on U.S. foreign policy, as well as knowledge of world geography and its relationship to U.S. foreign policy.

See page 27 of this guide for sample questions.

Performance on the FSOT is based on scored items only. In each section of the test, there are a small number of unscored items that are included for research purposes. Since these items are indistinguishable from those that are scored, it is important that examinees answer all the items in each section of the test to the best of their ability.

A minimum score for the multiple choice sections of the FSOT is established for eligibility for essays to be scored. Candidates who obtain this minimum score on the multiple choice sections of the FSOT have their essays graded. Candidates who have achieved the minimum score on both the multiple choice and essay tests receive instructions for completing personal narratives, which must be submitted prior to the deadline in order to advance to the Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP) stage of the selection process. Those candidates whose scores do not reach the minimum are notified by e-mail that their candidacies end at this stage.

### TEST CENTER ADMISSION AND REGULATIONS

- You must register at [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov) even if you are requesting a testing accommodation.
- Bring your scheduling confirmation e-mail (notification e-mail confirming your test location, test date and time) with you to your test center.
- You must bring a valid (not expired) government-issued state or federal photo ID such as a driver's license, passport, or military ID. Test center supervisors are authorized to refuse admittance to applicants whose identities cannot be positively established.
- Your appointment is not transferable to another person.
- A test center administrator will continuously monitor your test session. You must consent to video and audio taping of your test session and to the examination of the video and/or audio tape of your test session in the event that any questions should arise concerning possible violations of the procedures.
- You must follow the instructions of the test administrator, represent yourself honestly and conduct yourself quietly to avoid interfering with the performance of other test takers.

- You must not bring into the testing room any unauthorized items such as food, drinks, purses, briefcases, backpacks, cell phones, pagers, notes, note pads, photographic equipment, or any electronic devices other than those provided by or expressly approved by the test center staff.
- You must return all materials, including scratch paper, provided to you by the test center staff when you have completed your test and before you leave the test center.
- You must neither give nor receive any form of unauthorized assistance during the test or any breaks.
- If you have any questions or concerns about the test or environment, you must quietly leave the testing room to notify the test center staff. You must report all problems to test center staff.
- You must not remove any written, printed, or recorded materials of your test from the test center. The test questions remain the property of the Department of State and you agree to maintain the confidentiality of the questions and answers.
- You must sign in and out every time you enter or leave the testing room. You should use the restroom or otherwise address personal needs prior to beginning your test. During testing, the timer remains running during any unscheduled breaks. You must remain in the test center and may leave only to use those restroom facilities that are closest to the test room. You must not leave the building. You cannot access a phone or your personal belongings, except in the case of an emergency. Under such circumstances, you must notify the test center staff before accessing a phone or your personal belongings. The test center staff must monitor you.
- You will be provided earplugs upon request. You may not use your own.
- Test center staff must be allowed 30 minutes to resolve any technical problems that may arise (including power failure). You have the option of continuing the test or requesting a rescheduling of the test for technical or other problems outside of your control taking more than 30 minutes to resolve.

- You are required to sign a form agreeing to abide by the above information and regulations of the test center.
- Your Foreign Service Officer Test is given only on the day and time scheduled. Makeup tests cannot be authorized for any reason.
- You should report to the test center at the time shown on your scheduling e-mail. If you report to the center later than the time stated on your scheduling e-mail, you will not be admitted.
- You are not permitted to continue any part of the test beyond the established time limit.
- Scoring is based on the number of questions you answer correctly. There is no penalty for guessing.
- Your failure to comply with any of the regulations listed above may affect the outcome of your test and further may have additional consequences as determined by the Department of State.
- Your scheduled appointment is not transferable to another person. You will be assessed a fee of \$50.00 for failure to cancel the seat at least 48 hours before your FSOT test date or for failure to appear for the test. You cannot reserve a seat for another test date until any outstanding no-show fee has been paid.
- If you lose your email confirmation notification and do not know when you have scheduled your test appointment, you may notify Pearson VUE customer service. Visit [pearsonvue.com/fsot/](http://pearsonvue.com/fsot/) contact for contact options.

## OBTAINING YOUR RESULTS

Results letters will be available approximately three weeks after the date you take the Foreign Service Officer Test. You are sent an e-mail providing directions for downloading your results letter. The results letter specifies if you are invited to the QEP phase of the Foreign Service Officer Selection Process. If you are invited, then the letter also provides instructions on writing and submitting the six personal narratives. Pay careful attention to the three-week deadline for submitting the personal narratives. It is vital that you notify Pearson VUE of any change in your e-mail address, so you can receive the invitation to complete the personal narrative responses as soon as it is sent. All candidates should be vigilant about checking their spam filter mailbox. Messages will be sent from [PearsonVUEConfirmation@pearson.com](mailto:PearsonVUEConfirmation@pearson.com). Neither Pearson VUE nor the Department of State is responsible

for the failure of candidates' internet servers to deliver email in a timely fashion.

- The results of the QEP are provided in a second results letter. The letters for those invited to the oral assessment will include information for scheduling the date and location of the oral assessment and instructions for the forms (SF-86 and related forms) needed for the security clearance process (e-QIP.)
- Based on QEP results, candidates are either invited or not invited to the oral exam. The determination is based on an assessment of the candidate's total file, his/her relative score as compared to other candidates in the career track, and hiring numbers for the fiscal year. Hiring needs may preclude many well-qualified candidates from being invited to the orals, and it is possible for the same candidate to receive an invitation to the oral one year but not the next. The point to keep in mind is that the number of candidates invited to the oral assessment is based on hiring needs, and is not a fixed standard.
- FSOT and QEP results will not be reported on the telephone for any reason. If you expect your name or address to change prior to the exam result notification date, or if your name appears incorrectly, you may contact Pearson VUE directly at [pearsonvue.com/fsot/contact](http://pearsonvue.com/fsot/contact).

If you expect your name or address to change prior to the exam result notification date, or if your name appears incorrectly, you may contact Pearson VUE directly at [pearsonvue.com/fsot/contact](http://pearsonvue.com/fsot/contact). All inquiries concerning exam results should be sent in writing to [FSOTQuestions@state.gov](mailto:FSOTQuestions@state.gov)

Any other inquiries about the examination should be addressed to:

**Staff Director, Board of Examiners  
U.S. Department of State  
301 4th Street SW, Room 324  
Washington, D.C. 20547**

## Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Contact

Candidates who believe that they have been discriminated against during the pre-employment process must contact the Department of State's Office of Civil Rights, at (202) 647-9294, within 45 days of the alleged discriminatory act.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

### What can I do to prepare to take the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT) and Oral Assessment (FSOA)?

Over time, a thorough daily reading of major news sources will help develop the kind of general knowledge in world and national affairs that is necessary to do well. An officially sanctioned study guide is also available and can be ordered or downloaded at [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov). Sample questions and the 13 dimensions of Foreign Service work are also provided in this registration guide.

### What should I study in college?

No specific educational background is required to become a Foreign Service Officer. However, most successful officers have a broad knowledge of international and domestic affairs, U.S. and world history, government and foreign policy, and American culture. The best preparation is a good education, including courses in English, management, history, government, international relations, geography, literature, economics, business, public administration, U.S. politics, political science, language, social sciences and international trade.

### Why can't I take the Foreign Service Officer Test if I'm past my 59th birthday?

To join the Foreign Service you must have entered an Entry-Level Officer class (A-100) before your 60th birthday (except for preference eligible veterans). The process between the FSOT and entering a class is a lengthy one: Candidates take the oral assessment approximately six months after the FSOT. After passing the oral assessment, the candidate's clearances can take considerable time, and then the cleared candidate has to wait until his or her name is reached on the Register for an invitation to enter an A-100 class. Although we try diligently to move the process as quickly as possible, it is unrealistic to allow less than eight months for successful completion of all these steps.

### Can I be assigned to the country of my choice?

All Foreign Service Officers must be worldwide available (i.e., willing to serve anywhere the State Department determines is necessary). Officers are transferred routinely according to the needs of the Service. Increasingly, Foreign Service Officers are serving at posts where health, living conditions or medical support may be rudimentary, or in danger zones where family members are not allowed.

### Is there a policy in regard to applicants who have dual citizenship?

The Department of State has not implemented, and does not intend to implement, any "blanket rule" regarding dual citizenship. In making security clearance determinations, Diplomatic Security (DS) will continue to evaluate dual citizenship issues on a case-by-case basis. Potential candidates will be questioned about dual citizenship as part of their interview. Those who have any serious issues which could prevent them from receiving their clearance should give some thought to the likelihood of their being found ineligible before starting this process.

### Will my family get to travel overseas with me?

Medically cleared spouses, children under 21, and dependent parents may accompany an FSO at government expense. However, the lack of adequate educational or health facilities at some posts may dictate against the family accompanying the officer. Family members also are not allowed to travel with the FSO to certain posts in danger zones.

### Are provisions made for spousal employment?

Foreign Service families, like American families everywhere, are often two-income families. The Department of State has tandem couples in the Foreign Service where both spouses are employees of the Foreign Service, as well as tandems with sister agencies such as the Foreign Commercial Service or the Foreign Agricultural Service. When overseas, some non-tandem family members find work at the embassy or consulate, while others find employment in the economy of the host country. In addition, qualified family members may be eligible to teach at international or American schools abroad, or work as freelancers.

### How long does the FSO selection process take?

After the FSOT, the process can be as short as six months or as long as two years, but will typically fall between those extremes. The Department has taken steps to shorten the processing time.

## 4 Submit Personal Narrative for the QEP Review

Candidates whose FSOT scores reach or exceed the minimum passing score have three weeks to write personal narratives consisting of six short essays about the skills, knowledge and abilities they would bring to the Foreign Service. The questions seek a great deal of information in a limited space (200 words per question). Applicants should highlight their most salient qualifications. For example, recent graduates with little work experience would likely focus on academic and volunteer experience; candidates who have been in the work force for a number of years would likely focus on jobs and associated responsibilities. Candidates should think broadly about their personal, educational and professional experience, including paid and volunteer work experience, educational achievements, training, awards, hobbies, sports and travel. Candidates are also asked to provide references who can verify the information provided. All information is subject to verification and factual misrepresentation may be grounds for terminating a candidacy.

The QEP reviews the work and education portions of the application form, the personal narratives and the FSOT/essay results to select those candidates to be invited to the Oral Assessment. All applicants who reach this stage receive an electronic letter from Pearson VUE once the QEP review is complete, inviting them to the Oral Assessment or ending their candidacies.

## 5 Take the Foreign Service Oral Assessment

The invitation to the full-day oral assessment is based on anticipated hiring needs and budget. Assessments are conducted in Washington, D.C. and, budget permitting, in a limited number of major cities in the United States. All candidates should pay careful attention to the instructions in their results letter concerning completing an SF-86 (also referred to as e-QIP) to apply for a security clearance.

Candidates forwarded by the QEP process are invited to travel to Washington, D.C. or another location where assessments are conducted, at their own expense. At the Foreign Service Assessment Center candidates will participate in an oral assessment that consists of three components: (1) a group negotiation exercise, (2) a structured interview, and (3) a case management writing exercise.

(1) **The Group Exercise:** All the candidates in a group of up to six will be given information about a hypothetical country, and each candidate will be given a specific project to present to the group. After reading the materials, each candidate will present his or her project and the group will negotiate which project(s) they recommend to the Ambassador in the time allowed. Beginning in 2014, after the Group Exercise each candidate will participate in a debrief with the Ambassador.

- (2) **Structured Interview:** The interview will be conducted by two Foreign Service examiners. The interview takes 60 minutes. There are three parts to the structured interview. In the first part of the interview, the candidate is asked about motivation for joining the Foreign Service and about background experiences that might be relevant to work in the Foreign Service. In the second part of the interview, the interviewers present hypothetical workplace problems to resolve. In the third part of the interview, the candidate is asked about past work, school and other experiences that may have required him/her to demonstrate job skills needed in the Foreign Service.
- (3) **Case Management Writing Exercise:** Candidates will be asked to write a two-page memo on how to resolve the problem(s) presented. The candidate will have 90 minutes for the writing exercise. He/she will have a computer available to use, but may write the essay or memo in longhand.
- (4) **Exit Interview:** At the end of the day, the examiners consolidate their scores. Then the examiners inform each candidate whether or not he or she reached the cut-off score which enables the State Department to continue the candidacy. If the candidate reaches the cut-off score of 5.25 (out of 7), the examiners brief him/her on the next steps in the pre-employment process.

Candidates are evaluated solely against the 13 dimensions by trained examiners. Before the assessment begins, candidates are required to sign a non-disclosure statement that requires the candidate not to divulge the contents of the examination.

When a candidate comes to the Oral Assessment, he or she will be asked to read and sign the following three forms pertaining to the conditions for taking the Oral Assessment and conditions of employment in the Foreign Service. **If a candidate is not willing to accept these conditions, the person should notify the Board of Examiners that he or she is withdrawing the candidacy.**

- Three Conditions of Foreign Service Employment
- Medical Clearance for Eligible Family Members
- Non-Disclosure Form

## 6 Clearances: Medical and Security

Those entering the Foreign Service must be able to serve at any post abroad. Many facilities are remote, unhealthy, or have limited medical support. Therefore, each candidate must meet medical fitness standards which are, of necessity, often more rigorous than those of other professions. Prior to being appointed to the Foreign Service, candidates must have a thorough medical examination and receive an unlimited medical clearance for assignment worldwide.

Candidates who pass the oral assessment are provided with instructions for the examining physician(s) that outline the precise requirements and a voucher that authorizes the Department of State to pay for the remaining costs of the exam after the candidate's medical insurer has paid its customary fee. Candidates and their dependents over the age of six can either schedule exams at the State Department's Office of Medical Services or have them done by their own physicians. Children under the age of 6 must be examined by their own family physicians. While candidates must be medically cleared for full overseas duty, the Department of State no longer considers the medical condition of family members for pre-employment purposes. However, the Department still requires medical clearances for family members before they can travel overseas to accompany an employee on assignment at U.S. Government expense. Family members who, for medical reasons, cannot accompany an employee on an overseas assignment may be eligible to receive a separate maintenance allowance.

A comprehensive security background investigation, conducted by the U.S. Department of State in cooperation with other federal, state and local agencies, provides information necessary to determine a candidate's suitability for appointment to the Foreign Service and for a top secret security clearance. The process considers such factors as: failure to repay a U.S. Government-guaranteed loan or meet tax obligations, failure to register for the Selective Service; past problems with credit or bankruptcy; unsatisfactory employment records; a criminal record or other violations of the law; drug or alcohol abuse; and less than honorable discharge from the armed forces. Extensive travel, education, residence and/or employment overseas may extend the time it takes to obtain a clearance. Candidates who cannot be granted security clearances are ineligible for appointment. Candidates who hold an active top secret security clearance from another U.S. Federal agency and whose last background investigation is no more than seven years old can usually have their security clearances transferred. However, for purposes of determining candidates' suitability (see section below), candidates whose background investigation is more than two years old still need to update their documentation.

## 7 Final Review Panel

When the security clearance process is completed, the Board of Examiners convenes a Final Review Panel. The Panel assesses all of the information related to the applicant, excluding medically privileged information, to determine suitability for appointment to the Foreign Service. This is separate from the security clearance. The Panel considers factors that might make a candidate unsuitable for the especially stressful and unusual conditions of a Foreign Service career such as misconduct in prior employment; criminal, dishonest, or disgraceful conduct including lack of financial responsibility; misrepresentation in the examination or appointment process; repeated or habitual use to excess of alcohol; abuse of controlled substances; or conduct which shows poor judgment or lack of discretion. All Foreign Service applicants must receive valid medical, security and suitability clearances as a final condition to be eligible for employment.

## 8 The Register

Candidates who pass the oral assessment and who have successfully passed the security background investigation, the medical clearance and the final suitability review process are placed on rank-ordered career track hiring registers (based on the career tracks chosen by the candidates). Appointments to entry-level positions are made from the five registers. If a candidate declines two job offers, that candidate is removed from the register. Candidates with veteran points and/or a demonstrated speaking proficiency in a foreign language can earn bonus points and improve their rank-order positions on the hiring lists. Information about these bonuses is provided upon successful completion of the oral assessment.

### ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION FACTORS

#### Foreign Languages

You may be awarded bonus points for proficiency in a foreign language, depending on the need for those with skills in that language. For some languages, additional points may be awarded if you commit to serve in countries where that language is spoken at least twice in your career.

Effective January 1, 2012, the Foreign Service Institute will offer phone tests only for languages in which the Department has language designated entry-level positions abroad. The languages tested and the bonus points awarded for proficiency in those languages is subject to change. Therefore, you should check [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov) to ensure you get the latest information regarding pre-employment language tests.

For information to help you assess your own speaking level, visit [the Interagency Language Roundtable website](http://www.interagencylanguage.com) and click on “Speaking” under the skill level descriptions for a general description of the expected proficiency. The speaking self-assessment tool, available on the same site, will also help you estimate your language proficiency.

#### Candidates with Disabilities

Reasonable accommodation for applicants with disabilities: we welcome candidates who have special needs. In accordance with Federal law, we will provide reasonable accommodation to enable candidates with disabilities to take the Foreign Service Oral Assessment.

For qualified candidates who will require accommodation upon appointment, the Office of Employee Relations determines reasonable accommodations. To qualify, a candidate must meet all requirements for appointment to the Foreign Service.

Contact [reasonableaccommodations@state.gov](mailto:reasonableaccommodations@state.gov) at least three weeks before your scheduled Oral Assessment.

### OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

#### Entry-Level Salary Range

Since the Foreign Service is a career service, appointments are made at one of three entry levels based on the candidate’s education, professional experience and, if applicable, current Federal base salary. Fluency in certain foreign languages may qualify candidates for language incentive pay while serving at posts where these languages are used. Information on the current entry-level FSO salary ranges is available at our website, [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov).

#### Training

On entering the Foreign Service, all new officers receive several weeks of basic orientation at the George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center in Arlington, Virginia. An officer can expect up to seven months of subsequent training prior to the first overseas assignment, much of it involving foreign language instruction, as needed. New officers whose first overseas assignment is to a country where they already have professional competence in the language spoken there may have a significantly shorter training period.

#### Tenuring and Commissioning

FSOs are reviewed for tenure and commissioning over a five-year period and are first reviewed after three years of service. Most career candidates can expect to be commissioned as FSOs before the end of their time-limited appointment, following approval by the Foreign Service Commissioning and Tenure Board.

### DATA COLLECTION OF PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION (PII)

Responses to items in the application form related to your education and work experience and all responses to the personal narrative are used by the Qualifications Evaluation Panel to determine your qualifications and experience relative to selection as a Foreign Service Officer. Moreover, the information requested on the application form is used for printing admission tickets and attendance rosters, improving future tests and conducting research based on the results of the test. Your cooperation in providing responses to all items is greatly appreciated.

The collection of information concerning disabilities is authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 92-112). The information you furnish is used for the purpose of producing statistical reports to show agency progress in the hiring, placement and advancement of individuals with disabilities and to locate individuals for voluntary participation in surveys. The reports are used to inform agency management, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Congress and the public of the status of programs for employment of individuals with disabilities. All such reports are in the form of aggregate totals and do not identify you as an individual in any way. While self-identification is voluntary, your cooperation in providing accurate information is critical.

Information on the race, national origin and sex of the applicants is collected in accordance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended and Federal Sector Equal Employment Opportunity Regulations (29 C.F.R. 1614.601). It is disclosed only in the form of gross statistics in reports, studies or other analyses to help ensure that agency personnel practices meet the requirements of Federal law.

## SAMPLE FSOT QUESTIONS

To access additional sample questions from prior FSOT tests, download the **DOSCareers mobile app** (available in the App Store & Google Play).

**Job Knowledge Test**

The following sample questions are intended to familiarize you with representative types of questions that appear in this part of the Foreign Service Officer Test. They are examples of the subject matter covered by this test, not the degree of difficulty. There is an answer key at the end of the Sample Tests.

**Directions:** Each question or incomplete statement below is followed by four suggested answers or completions. Select the one that is best in each case. (N.B. In the actual on-line FSOT, once you complete and exit a test section, you may not return to that section.)

**Knowledge Area:** United States Government (general understanding of the composition and functioning of the Federal Government, the Constitution and its history, the structure of Congress and its role in foreign affairs, as well as the United States political system and its role in governmental structure, formulation of government policies, and foreign affairs).

- A political device of drawing irregular district lines in order to favor one political power over another is called:
  - gerrymandering
  - filibustering
  - federalizing
  - rezoning
- Congress can override a Presidential veto of a congressional bill by:
  - not signing the bill
  - passing the bill again by a two-thirds majority in both houses
  - filibustering
  - voting to place the bill in the congressional record
- Which of the following amendments to the Constitution affect the political process by declaring that the Federal government should not interfere with the press?
  - First
  - Fifth
  - Seventh
  - None – no amendment refers to the press

**Knowledge Area:** United States Society and Culture (general understanding of major events, institutions, and movements in national history, including political and economic history, as well as national customs and culture, social issues and trends, and the influence of U.S. society on foreign policy and foreign affairs)

- The primary medium for the diffusion of American popular culture throughout the world following World War I was:
  - motion pictures
  - newspapers
  - radio
  - books
- The architect Maya Lin is known for designing the:
  - Paris Las Vegas Hotel, Las Vegas
  - Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C.
  - Sears Tower, Chicago
  - Getty Museum, Los Angeles

**Knowledge Area:** World History and Geography (general understanding of significant world historical events, issues, and developments, including their impact on U.S. foreign policy, as well as knowledge of world geography and its relationship to U.S. foreign policy).

- The most economical route for an oil pipeline from Turkmenistan to world export markets would cross:
  - Iran
  - Afghanistan
  - Uzbekistan
  - Pakistan
- The purpose of the South African policy of apartheid was best described as the:
  - segregation of blacks from English-speaking whites
  - control of immigration from neighboring countries
  - protection of the economic, political, and social status of Afrikaners
  - promotion of equal opportunity for various racial groups

**Knowledge Area:** Economics (general understanding of basic economic principles, as well as a general understanding of economic issues and the economic system of the United States)

- The Council of Economic Advisers advises which of the following on monetary and fiscal policy?
  - The Federal Reserve Bank
  - The Joint Economic Committee of Congress
  - The President of the United States
  - The Senate Budget Committee
- All of the following are examples of United States products that would typically fail to be produced to optimal output without government intervention EXCEPT:
  - national defense products.
  - light provided by lighthouses.
  - new automobiles.
  - new highways.

**Knowledge Area:** Mathematics and Statistics (basic mathematical and statistical procedures and calculations)

- After a 3 percent raise and a \$3,000 bonus, a worker's salary increased to \$50,000. What was the worker's salary before the raise and bonus?
  - \$48,544
  - \$47,000
  - \$46,910
  - \$45,631
- The test scores for seven students are 90, 90, 70, 40, 80, 90 and 100. What is the median score for this group?
  - 70
  - 80
  - 85
  - 90

**Knowledge Area:** Management (general understanding of basic management and supervisory techniques and methods. Includes knowledge of human psychology, leadership, motivational strategies and equal employment practices)

12. The primary guideline for effective delegation of tasks to subordinates is to:
  - A. delegate to subordinates only when necessary
  - B. delegate both pleasant and unpleasant tasks to subordinates
  - C. provide subordinates information on a “need-to-know” basis
  - D. provide assistance to subordinates whenever it is requested
13. A work group that has high performance norms and low cohesiveness will most likely have which of the following levels of performance?
  - A. Very high
  - B. High
  - C. Moderate
  - D. Low

**Knowledge Area:** Communication (general understanding of principles of effective communication and public speaking techniques, as well as general knowledge of the common sources of information, public media and media relations)

14. Posing rhetorical questions, telling a story, and providing a quotation are all techniques that help a public speaker to:
  - A. arouse audience curiosity
  - B. avoid audience questions
  - C. increase audience anxiety
  - D. avoid visual aids
15. Unless told otherwise, a professional journalist will most likely consider anything said by a source to be:
  - A. off the record
  - B. on the record
  - C. on background
  - D. not attributable

**Knowledge Area:** Computers (general understanding of basic computer operations such as word processing, databases, spreadsheets, and preparing and using e-mail)

16. It is common practice of e-mail users to have some specific text automatically appear at the end of their sent messages. This text is called their:
  - A. attachment
  - B. subject
  - C. signature
  - D. protocol

**Knowledge Area:** U.S. and International Political and Economic Principles, Issues and History

17. The National Labor Relations Act established:
  - A. a “cooling off” period before workers in a critical industry could strike
  - B. the right of federal workers in non-defense agencies to organize and strike
  - C. the government’s right to prohibit strikes by industrial workers during wartime
  - D. collective bargaining and the right to organize as national policy

**Knowledge Area:** Legislation and Laws Related to Foreign Service Issues

18. The Freedom of Information Act, enacted by the Congress in 1966, was expanded in 1996 to encompass:
  - A. audiotaped transcripts
  - B. Supreme Court deliberations
  - C. electronic records
  - D. Presidential campaign contributions

**Knowledge Area:** Administrative Methods and Procedures

19. In federal government budgeting, “mandatory” spending differs from “discretionary” spending in which way?
  - A. Legislative committees may not cut mandatory spending levels
  - B. Mandatory spending is not subject to the annual appropriations process
  - C. Discretionary spending increases in one budget category must be offset by reductions elsewhere
  - D. Bills to re-categorize mandatory funding as discretionary must originate in the House

**Knowledge Area:** Information and Media Resources

20. Which of the following Web-based international news sources is published by the Council on Foreign Relations?
  - A. <http://www.pressdigest.org>
  - B. <http://www.foreignaffairs.org>
  - C. <http://www.associateprogram.com>
  - D. <http://www.info-strategy.com>





# The 13 Dimensions of Foreign Service Officers

“When I was preparing to take the FSOT, one of the main questions I had was, “How can I study for the test?” I consulted the Department’s suggested reading list to read books in certain areas that I felt weak in, I made sure I stayed informed of current events by reading a good daily newspaper, and I practiced my timed writing. After taking the test, I was convinced that there is no specific way to study for it and now I give the same answer when I am asked about how to study for the FSOT!”

*Navarro, U.S. Diplomat, Political Career Track*

Review the 13 dimensions on the following pages to discover the qualities we look for in Foreign Service Officer candidates.



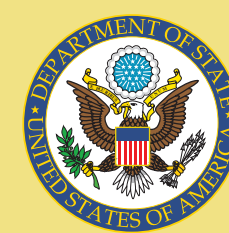
[Watch Navarro’s Video](#)



I am diplomacy. I am America.



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★ CAREERS REPRESENTING AMERICA ★  
[careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov)

# The 13 Dimensions of Foreign Service Officers

Successful candidates will demonstrate the dimensions covered in this section that reflect the skills, abilities and personal qualities deemed essential to work in the Foreign Service.

1

**Composure.** To stay calm, poised, and effective in stressful or difficult situations; to think on one's feet, adjusting quickly to changing situations; to maintain self-control.

4

**Information Integration and Analysis.** To absorb and retain complex information drawn from a variety of sources; to draw reasoned conclusions from analysis and synthesis of available information; to evaluate the importance, reliability, and usefulness of information; to remember details of a meeting or event without the benefit of notes.

7

**Objectivity and Integrity.** To be fair and honest; to avoid deceit, favoritism, and discrimination; to present issues frankly and fully, without injecting subjective bias; to work without letting personal bias prejudice actions.

10

**Resourcefulness.** To formulate creative alternatives or solutions to resolve problems; to show flexibility in response to unanticipated circumstances.

2

**Cultural Adaptability.** To work and communicate effectively and harmoniously with persons of other cultures, value systems, political beliefs, and economic circumstances; to recognize and respect differences in new and different cultural environments.

5

**Initiative and Leadership.** To recognize and assume responsibility for work that needs to be done; to persist in the completion of a task; to influence significantly a group's activity, direction, or opinion; to motivate others to participate in the activity one is leading.

8

**Oral Communication.** To speak fluently in a concise, grammatically correct, organized, precise, and persuasive manner; to convey nuances of meaning accurately; to use appropriate styles of communication to fit the audience and purpose.

11

**Working With Others.** To interact in a constructive, cooperative, and harmonious manner; to work effectively as a team player; to establish positive relationships and gain the confidence of others; to use humor as appropriate.

3

**Experience and Motivation.** To demonstrate knowledge, skills or other attributes gained from previous experience of relevance to the Foreign Service; to articulate appropriate motivation for joining the Foreign Service.

6

**Judgment.** To discern what is appropriate, practical, and realistic in a given situation; to weigh relative merits of competing demands.

9

**Planning and Organizing.** To prioritize and order tasks effectively; to employ a systematic approach to achieving objectives; to make appropriate use of limited resources.

12

**Written Communication.** To write concise, well-organized, grammatically correct, effective and persuasive English in a limited amount of time.

13

**Quantitative Analysis.** To identify, compile, analyze, and draw correct conclusions from pertinent data; to recognize patterns or trends in numerical data; to perform simple mathematical operations.



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[careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov)

Please note that we require no specific education level, academic major, or proficiency in a foreign language for appointment as a Foreign Service Officer.

# The 12 Dimensions of Foreign Service Specialists

“ I discovered that a Foreign Service Specialist career would allow me to combine, and put to practical use, my undergraduate degree in Computer Engineering and master’s degree in International Studies. This knowledge opened so many doors for me and led me to a truly global career where I get to support diplomatic initiatives all over the world.

As a Chinese-American raised in Switzerland, I consider my background to be quite diverse and attribute my international upbringing to my interest in the Foreign Service. Well, along with the U.S. diplomats I met while studying abroad in China and Guatemala. ”

*Tony, Foreign Service Specialist, Information Management*

Review the 12 dimensions on the following pages to discover the qualities we look for in Foreign Service Specialist candidates.



[Watch Tony's Video](#)



I am diplomacy. I am America.



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10

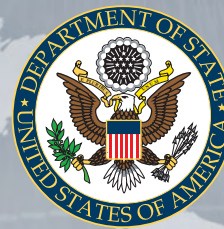
**Resourcefulness.** To formulate creative alternatives or solutions to resolve problems; to show flexibility in response to unanticipated circumstances.

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12

**Written Communication.** To write concise, well-organized, grammatically correct, effective and persuasive English in a limited amount of time.



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[careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov)

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The U.S. Department of State promotes peace, prosperity and stability in areas of vital interest to America. It is a source of support for American businesses abroad, working to achieve fair business practices in commerce, trade, manufacturing and other interests – while also identifying viable opportunities for American businesses. The U.S. Department of State also provides information and services for U.S. citizens abroad and issues visas to foreigners wishing to visit the United States.

The challenges to today's Foreign Service Specialist extend well beyond the confines of traditional diplomacy. There are many activities of critical importance in support of our nation's foreign policy, some of which are:

- Communicating diplomacy through non-traditional channels using the latest technologies
- Halting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction
- Defending from cybersecurity threats and attacks
- Protecting U.S. leaders and dignitaries
- Maintaining the physical and emotional health and well-being of all employees serving abroad
- Managing embassy resources to ensure a successfully functioning operation
- Constructing and maintaining state-of-the-art, architecturally and environmentally sound facilities
- Providing cultural exchanges and educational opportunities to foreign audiences



The Department selects and hires employees who can accomplish America's mission of diplomacy at home and around the world, including Foreign Service Officers (FSO), Foreign Service Specialists (FSS) and Civil Service (CS) professionals. For those pursuing undergraduate, graduate or other advanced degrees, and professionals who are interested in an executive development program in public service, the Department offers a number of internships and fellowships.

The Department's employees, Foreign Service Officers and Specialists, Civil Service professionals, and Locally Employed Staff (LES) work at over 265 locations overseas and throughout the United States. Together, they help to build and sustain a more democratic, secure, and prosperous world composed of well-governed states that respond to the needs of their people, reduce poverty, and act responsibly within the international system.

## FOREIGN SERVICE LIFESTYLE

Representing America abroad takes fortitude and the ability to adapt to changing situations and cultures other than your own. A career with the Foreign Service may appear glamorous — worldwide travel, government-paid housing, generous pay and benefits. In reality, though, working as a Foreign Service Specialist is challenging, demanding and sometimes dangerous. During this career you can expect to be assigned to hardship posts. These posts can be in remote locations, without many U.S.-style amenities. For instance, you may experience:

- Sporadic power outages and unreliable internet service
- Health and sanitation below U.S. standards
- Unaccompanied posts which mean family members may not go with you

Foreign Service careers are global and require candidates to be worldwide available, ready to meet the needs of the Service. Typically, each assignment is for two to three years in a designated country. Careers in the Foreign Service offer challenging and interesting work and the satisfaction of serving the United States of America. The Foreign Service consists of a diverse group of highly motivated, intellectually curious, and culturally adaptable professionals who are dedicated to representing America's interests and responding to the needs of American citizens in other countries.

When hiring Foreign Service Specialists, the Department looks for motivated individuals with sound judgment and leadership abilities who can maintain their composure in times of great stress — or even dire situations, like a military coup or a major environmental disaster. To succeed in the Foreign Service, you must be strongly motivated, enjoy challenges, and possess an ardent dedication to public service.

The search for extraordinary U.S. citizens to serve as Foreign Service Specialists is intense and the qualifying process is rigorous, demanding and highly competitive.

## BECOMING A FOREIGN SERVICE SPECIALIST (FSS)

If you are interested in becoming an FSS, you must first decide the area of specialization that's right for you. There are eight major categories:

1. Administration
2. Construction Engineering
3. Facility Management
4. Information Technology
5. International Information and English Language Programs
6. Medical and Health
7. Office Management
8. Security

Once you have selected a category, you must meet specific eligibility requirements, including U.S. citizenship, an age requirement, worldwide availability, and the education and experience requirements based on that category. Candidates for some specialist positions must also meet certain supplementary physical requirements, as described in the Vacancy Announcement, sufficient to satisfactorily perform that position's duties. Please see page 13 for more specific details and requirements.

## CANDIDATE RESOURCES

The Department has Diplomats in Residence (DIRs), located throughout the United States, and recruiters based in Washington, D.C., who are available to provide insight and guidance as you pursue this unique public service career. Interested candidates can engage directly with the Department by visiting:

### DIR Contacts, Forums, and Event Information

**DOS Careers Mobile App**  
App Store and Google Play

**Facebook**

**LinkedIn**

**Twitter**

# FOREIGN SERVICE SPECIALIST SELECTION PROCESS

## SEVEN STEPS TO BECOMING A FOREIGN SERVICE SPECIALIST (FSS)

- 

**1 Choose a Specialization**  
Visit [careers.state.gov](https://careers.state.gov) to learn about the career paths and determine the one(s) in which you are interested and for which you may be qualified.
- 2 Submit Your Application**  
Now that you have chosen the Foreign Service Specialist position for which you may qualify, the next step is to refer to the specific vacancy announcement and complete all additional required procedures.
- 3 Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP)**  
Once you have completed the initial review stage, your application will go before the Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP).
- 4 Take the Foreign Service Specialist Oral Assessment**  
Candidates forwarded by the qualifications process are invited to travel to Washington, D.C. at their own expense, to the Foreign Service Assessment Center to participate in an oral assessment test.



To be eligible as a Foreign Service Specialist you must be a U.S. citizen, between the ages of 21 and 59 (hired before 60th birthday), or between 21 and 36 (hired before 37th birthday – this is waived for veterans with preference as defined by current law) for Diplomatic Security Agent positions, and be available for worldwide assignment.

The Foreign Service Specialist selection process begins with an application, proceeds through the selection process, and for those who succeed, culminates in hiring from the Register for assignment to an orientation course that marks the beginning of every Foreign Service career.

- 5 Clearances: Medical and Security**  
All candidates must receive medical and security clearances in order to be hired and serve abroad.
- 

**6 Final Review Panel**  
Upon completion of the background investigation, a Final Review Panel will examine your completed file (except medical records) to determine your suitability for employment with the Foreign Service.
- 7 The Register**  
After receiving medical and security clearances and passing the Final Suitability Review, your name is placed on the Register, which is a rank-ordered list of successful candidates.

## ADDITIONAL FYI

### Veterans Preference

Generalist candidates who can document creditable Veterans' service by submitting form DD 214 will be given additional points on the Register.

### Foreign Languages

While you are not required to know a foreign language, proficiency in a language will enhance your competitiveness on the Register by giving you a slight increase in points.

### Candidates with Disabilities

The Office of Employee Relations determines reasonable accommodations for qualified candidates. Said candidates must meet all requirements for appointment to the Foreign Service.

### Commitment to Foreign Service Work

As a Foreign Service Specialist one must have flexibility in assignments, public support of U.S. government policies and worldwide availability.

## 1 Choose a Specialization

The U.S. Department of State offers career opportunities to professionals in specialized functions needed to meet Foreign Service responsibilities around the world. As a Foreign Service Specialist, you will provide important technical, management, healthcare or administrative services at one of over 265 posts overseas, in Washington, D.C., or elsewhere in the United States.

In total, there are more than 20 different specialist jobs that are grouped into eight different categories:

1. **Administration:** General Services Officer, Financial Management Officer and Human Resources Officer
2. **Construction Engineering:** Construction Engineer
3. **Facility Management:** Facility Manager
4. **Information Technology:** Information Management Specialist, Information Management Technical Specialist – Digital, Radio or Telephone
5. **International Information and English Language Programs:** English Language Officer, Information Resource Manager
6. **Medical and Health:** Health Practitioner, Regional Medical Laboratory Scientist, Regional Medical Officer, and Regional Medical Officer/Psychiatrist
7. **Office Management:** Office Management Specialist
8. **Security:** Diplomatic Courier, Special Agent, Security Technical Specialist, Security Engineering Officer

IN TOTAL, THERE ARE MORE THAN 20 DIFFERENT SPECIALIST JOBS THAT ARE GROUPED INTO EIGHT DIFFERENT CATEGORIES.

When deciding to apply for a Foreign Service Specialist position, you will be asked to make the first big decision of your future Foreign Service career — the choice of a career track. Based on your current experience, knowledge and skills, your choice of a functional specialization will determine what type of work you will do for the majority of your career.

Whether you have a degree in International Relations and experience in information technology, studied a language, possess exceptional organizational skills, or you are a licensed healthcare professional, you will find more than 20 different career tracks that can provide a professional opportunity to contribute your skills and serve your country. Please choose carefully, as your selection will direct your job experiences once you become an FSS. In order to make the most informed decision, you will need to understand any similarities — and differences — among specific positions. It is advisable to conduct your own research, through the use of the online questionnaires found at [careers.state.gov](https://careers.state.gov), in speaking to Diplomats in Residence (DIRs) and finding an FSS who works in the career track you're considering. When doing this research, it is important to keep an open mind. No one career track promises unconditional happiness or accelerated promotion. One is not better or worse than another. You must decide which one is right for you, your personality, your interests, and your skills and experience.

It will be beneficial for you to either fill out a qualification questionnaire, or view the vacancy for requirements and qualifications. Either one will help you identify the positions for which you are most qualified under that category.

## SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION

Now that you have chosen the Foreign Service Specialist position for which you may qualify, the next step is to refer to the specific vacancy announcement and complete all additional required procedures. A completed application package contains all of the material listed in the announcement. An application can be terminated whenever the materials do not support the basic eligibility requirements for employment in the Foreign Service.

Applications must be submitted through the online application system via USAJobs. Please visit the Opportunities section of the careers site to view a list of open — and closed — vacancies, and to subscribe to receive email updates.

## THE SPECIALIST CAREER TRACKS

### ADMINISTRATION

General Services Officers (GSO) are responsible for a broad range of functions including the management of physical resources and logistical functions at diplomatic and consular posts. You will develop, plan, implement, and manage an ongoing program of support that includes contracting, inventory/property, physical facilities, space management, travel and transportation, motor pool, and maintenance and repair schedules. These services will also be provided to other U.S. Government agencies. Read more.

*“As a GSO, I supervised a staff of 45 locally employed staff (LES) who run the embassy warehouse, motor pool, travel section and shipping department, as well as manage the customs, procurement, contracting and housing operations. I’m always on the move, solving problems in the embassy and in the residences, problems that can be quite urgent. I manage expectations and competing demands coming in from all over the mission.”*

Excerpt from Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work, AFSA/FS Books, 2011, pages 34-36.

**Financial Management Officers (FMO)** are responsible for the management of the financial activities of diplomatic and consular posts, including financial services to other U.S. Government agencies. As an FMO, you will develop budgets and financial plans, control obligations and expenditures, prepare and audit payment vouchers, administer payroll plans, approve salary and allowance payments, and monitor cash operations. Applicants must have a BA or BS with a minimum of 24 semester hours in finance or accounting, and at least three years of specialized experience. Read more.

**Human Resources Officers (HRO)** are responsible for recruitment, employee training and development, performance management, employee relations, salary and benefits administration, employee policies and procedures, and position classification. You will supervise and ensure effective performance of the Human Resources Office staff at diplomatic and consular posts. These services will be extended to other U.S. Government agencies. Applicants must have a bachelor’s degree in business administration, human resources or other related field and at least three years of specialized work experience in human resources, or six years of specialized work experience in human resources. Read more.

### CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING

**Construction Engineers (CE)** monitor and report on contract work overseas to ensure that the construction of new properties and renovation of existing properties are completed properly, on time and within budget. All applicants must have at least a bachelor’s degree in Architecture or Architectural Engineering, Construction Engineering or Construction Management, Civil/Structural Engineering, Electrical Engineering, or Mechanical Engineering, and a minimum of three years of specialized experience. Read more.

*“I oversee and manage the contractor that builds our embassies. I make sure the U.S. government gets what it pays for. In some parts, I have to do inspections but it’s mostly for a quality assurance aspect.*

*There is a fair amount of walking around in the dirt and the mud and around the concrete, but a lot of it is a managerial job. I oversee a staff of site engineers, who review shop drawings and submittals and it definitely takes the managerial side that you have to, as an engineer, sort of think with the other side of your brain and get into the managerial aspects of it.*

*With the earthquake in Haiti, the embassy there was one of the few buildings that was basically untouched; I understand the damage that it received was only superficial. We still had electricity with our generators, we still had clean water. We had a structurally sound building and that was a big success. That was a prime example of why the U.S. embassy is there, they were there to help the host country rebuild and they’re still serving that function.”*

Learn more about the experiences of Stephanie, a Foreign Service Specialist, Construction Engineer.

### FACILITY MANAGEMENT

**Facility Managers (FM)** work closely with General Services Officers and are responsible for the management and the upkeep of government buildings, grounds, fixtures and utilities abroad. FMs in the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations manage the Department’s real property assets abroad and oversee large holdings of U.S. Government-owned and leased properties, and ensure they are maintained within accepted U.S. standards in a safe and operable condition. The FM is a member of the Embassy management team and provides a wide range of building-related services, managing physical resources and asset management in a specific country. Applicants must have a minimum of BA or BS in any of the following areas: Facility Engineering or Facility Management, Mechanical Engineering, Construction Engineering or Management, Civil/Structural Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Architectural Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Architecture, or Project Management. Read more.

*“As an FM, I ensure the availability of services — electricity, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, water, etc. — necessary for the U.S. mission to function effectively. In Embassy Cairo, I manage approximately \$8 million worth of projects, as well as a \$1.2 million budget for routine maintenance and repairs. Coordination is one of the most important aspects of the job. My mantra is communicate, coordinate and notify. The work of a facility manager helps form the first, and often most lasting, impression on new officers and their families, local staff, and official visitors, as well as the public.”*

Excerpt from Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work, AFSA/FS Books, 2011, pages 55-57.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

**Information Management Specialists (IMS)** manage and operate worldwide information technology infrastructure, including PC local and wide area networks, telecommunications systems, telephone and UHF/VHF programs, and diplomatic pouch and mail services. Learn more about specific educational requirements and details about the position responsibilities.

**Information Management Technical Specialists (IMTS-Digital)** perform site surveys and install and maintain associated hardware and software for PC local and wide area networks. Qualified candidates must have in-depth technical knowledge of telecommunications and computer equipment and must be knowledgeable in testing techniques and problem resolution. Both degreed and non-degreed candidates may be considered. Non-degreed candidates and candidates without proven related military school training must hold one of several approved certifications. Find list.



**Information Management Technical Specialists (IMTS-Radio)** perform site surveys and install and maintain associated hardware and software for UHF/VHF land mobile systems. Qualified candidates have hands-on experience surveying, installing, maintaining, component-level repairing, and operating radio systems and must be knowledgeable in the use of associated test equipment for testing and trouble resolution. These include HF/VHF/UHF land mobile two-way radio systems used in intercity radio services, tactical satellite systems and peripheral devices (antennas, remote control units). Experience must be directly related to these systems with at least 60 percent of the time in the maintenance and repair of these systems. [Read more.](#)

**Information Management Technical Specialists (IMTS-Telephone)** conduct site surveys, and install and maintain associated hardware and software for telephone PBX systems. Qualified candidates must have hands-on experience surveying, installing and maintaining new or upgraded traditional telephone PBX systems and must be knowledgeable in the use of associated test equipment for testing and trouble resolution. These include Avaya, Mitel and Nortel PBX systems, VoIP systems and peripherals (call accounting, voice mail and threat recording systems). Experience must be directly related to these systems with at least 60 percent of the time in the maintenance and repair of these systems. [Read more.](#)

Learn more about the experiences of Foreign Service Information Management Specialists.

## INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

**English Language Officers (ELO)** are responsible for all U.S. Department of State-sponsored English teaching activities in the host country, or, if a Regional ELO, is responsible for English language program activities in several countries, necessitating extensive travel. When assigned to Washington, D.C., you will provide general administrative support to overseas programs, work on the research and development materials, conduct seminars, and provide consultative services to overseas posts or host-country institutions. Applicants must have a Master's degree in the field of TESL, TEFL, TESOL, or Applied Linguistics. [Read more.](#)



“As I craved a career in public service, I became a Foreign Service Construction Engineer – and I continue to serve in this role today.

Being a construction manager for new embassy projects gives me the opportunity to represent American values overseas while still using my technical expertise as a licensed professional engineer. It is also a way for me to show women in other countries that careers in traditionally male fields are truly possible for our gender.

I am proud of the work we do, and I feel fortunate to have a career that takes me all over the world.”

*Stephanie, Foreign Service Specialist, Construction Engineer*



[Watch Stephanie's Video](#)

“I am proud of the work we do, and I feel fortunate to have a career that takes me all over the world.”

**Information Resource Officers (IRO)** provide professional guidance and direction to over 180 Information Resource Centers (IRCs) located at U.S. embassies abroad. Through extensive travel within an assigned region, IROs counsel mission officials on effective information program resources and services, assess staff needs, carry out regional training programs, demonstrate and promote U.S. electronic information resources, and establish contacts with host-country information and library institutions. IROs are a vital part of the U.S. Department of State's Office of International Information Programs, the principal international strategic communications service for the foreign affairs community. Qualified applicants must have an M.L.S. (Master's in Library and Information Science) from an American Library Association-accredited graduate program and at least five years of progressively responsible experience in library or information center programs or services. [Read more.](#)

## MEDICAL AND HEALTH

All FS medical and health providers support the routine and emergency health and medical needs of U.S. Embassy and Consulate personnel and families overseas, including in places where healthcare, living conditions, and outside medical support may be rudimentary. These employees are considered “essential personnel” and are on-call to provide services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**Regional Medical Officers (RMO)** may work independently or in conjunction with other Foreign Service medical personnel. The RMO’s duties include providing primary medical care and appropriate health information and disease prevention programs at each post of responsibility as well as a host of other medical and health-related responsibilities. Learn more about educational and licensing requirements and more detailed responsibilities.

**Regional Medical Officers/Psychiatrists (RMO/P)** may work independently or in conjunction with other Foreign Service medical personnel. The RMO/P’s duties include providing primary psychiatric care for each post in the supported geographical region as well as a host of other psychiatric and mental health-related responsibilities. Learn more about educational and licensing requirements and more detailed responsibilities.

**Foreign Service Health Practitioners (FSHP)** — Family Nurse Practitioners or Physician Assistants with family practice backgrounds assume the role of a primary care provider in diagnosing and treating patients and are responsible for administering a full range of community healthcare services, including preventive health education for the official mission community. Learn more about educational and licensing requirements and more detailed responsibilities.

**Regional Medical Laboratory Scientists (RMLS)** work in conjunction with other Foreign Service medical personnel. Duties include performing routine visits to regional area health units to evaluate and monitor performance of local laboratory technologists. They also maintain their own laboratories at posts of assignment and across assigned regions. Read more.

*“I am the primary care provider for the Foreign Service community across several countries (Russia, Belarus, and Finland); the in-house medical consultant for the executive offices of the embassies I cover; an arbitrator of finances of the medical program; and a disaster medicine doctor ready to evacuate a critical patient when necessary. Primarily, though, I’m a family doctor — a personal physician. A few days a week I attend morning meetings, but today I’m in a clinic. I’m seeing two pregnant patients and then return to the office to be an administrator, running a self-insured company, making recommendations, going to meetings, and managing money...I’m off to a local hospital to check in with an embassy employee who was admitted yesterday and may need additional surgery....part of my job here is overseeing the medical safety of my patients.*

*As a Foreign Service doctor, I am also a medical sociologist....other countries have different ideas about what causes illnesses and how they should be treated. RMOs practice a unique type of diplomacy.”*

Excerpt from Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work, AFSA/FS Books, 2011, pages 160-161.

## OFFICE MANAGEMENT

**Office Management Specialists (OMS)** perform a variety of duties at diplomatic and consular posts, including general office management, conference and visitor support, and administrative and secretarial support. You must be familiar with databases, spreadsheets, and word processing and be able to use office equipment (PCs, faxes, phones, copying machines, etc.). Read more.

## SECURITY

**Diplomatic Couriers (DC)** are entrusted with ensuring the inviolability of diplomatic pouches and their secure delivery throughout the world. Couriers are required to safeguard and escort diplomatic pouches containing classified and sensitive material between U.S. diplomatic missions overseas and the Department of State. Couriers operate under the auspices of international agreements and treaties as governed by the Vienna Convention. Read more.

**Diplomatic Security Special Agents (DSSA)** are specially trained Foreign Service security professionals; they are also sworn Federal law enforcement officers. Overseas, as a Regional Security Officer (RSO), they advise ambassadors on all security matters and manage a complex range of security programs designed to protect personnel, facilities, and information. In the U.S., Special Agents protect the Secretary of State and visiting foreign dignitaries, investigate passport and visa fraud, and conduct personnel security investigations. Read more.

**Security Technical Specialists (STS)** provide support and assist in worldwide technical security programs. These programs, for which STSs give overall program management, maintenance and support, provide

protection for U.S. Department of State facilities and personnel from technical espionage, acts of terrorism, and crime. The mission of STS personnel is accomplished through the use of sophisticated electronic and electro-mechanical security systems. Read more.

**Security Engineering Officers (SEO)** provide technical security support and engineering expertise to protect U.S. Foreign Service posts. They work overseas, in Washington, D.C, or Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and will be responsible for selected duties ranging from security system design, development and analysis to installation and testing. Read more.

*“My two-year long, behind-the-scenes experience as the United States Olympic security coordinator in Beijing felt almost as complicated and daunting as hosting the games themselves...any overseas Olympics creates its own sizable security footprint with the need to protect, in this case, a 1,250-member U.S. Olympic team, visiting Cabinet-level officials, 20,000 U.S. corporate sponsors and tens of thousands of U.S. citizen spectators.”*

Excerpt from Inside a U.S. Embassy: Diplomacy at Work, AFSA/FS Books, 2011, pages 201-202.



## Eligibility Requirements

- You must be a U.S. citizen.
- You must be at least 20 years old and no older than 59 on the day you submit your registration package. Appointment as a Foreign Service Specialist must occur when you are at least 21 years old and before you reach the age of 60. Please note that the time from successfully applying and passing the Qualifications Evaluation Panel to a possible Foreign Service appointment often exceeds one year. Those who turn 60 after registering for the test but prior to a Foreign Service appointment will have their candidacies terminated.\* Preference eligible veterans may take the test after their 59th birthday — for specific information contact [FSOAQuestions@state.gov](mailto:FSOAQuestions@state.gov).
- Career candidates must be available for worldwide assignment, including assignments at posts where health and living conditions, or medical support may be rudimentary, or in danger zones where family members are not allowed.\*\*
- No applicant will be considered who has previously been separated from the Foreign Service under sections §607, §608, §610 or §611 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended, or who resigned or retired in lieu of separation under these provisions. In addition, no applicant will be considered who

has previously been separated for failure to receive a career appointment under section §306 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended, or who resigned or retired in lieu thereof.

- No proficiency in a foreign language is required.

No exceptions can be made to the eligibility requirements, except as noted above.

- \* DS Special Agents must be at least 20 years old to apply and at least 21 years of age to be appointed. Special Agent candidates must be appointed prior to their 37th birthday. Veterans with preference as defined by current law are exempt from the age 37 requirement.
- \*\* Worldwide availability is an essential qualification for appointment to the Foreign Service. As noted, applicants must be available for worldwide assignment, including assignments at posts where health and living conditions, or medical support may be rudimentary, or in danger zones where family members are not allowed. Additionally, regardless of who administers the medical exam, the Department's Office of Medical Services determines whether or not a candidate is medically available for assignment to Department of State posts worldwide. Certain medical conditions that require monitoring or follow-up care, or are prone to exacerbation in certain overseas environments, may result in a finding of non-worldwide availability and thus disqualify a candidate from eligibility. In cases where medical problems lead to a denial of medical clearance, the candidate may request a review of the denial or request a waiver of the worldwide availability requirement by the Employment Review Committee. The committee operates on a case-by-case basis and only grants waivers if it is clearly in the best interests of the Foreign Service.

## 2 Submit Your Application

Now that you have chosen the Foreign Service Specialist position for which you may qualify, the next step is to check USAJobs to see if there is a vacancy announcement currently open for that position. If there is, refer to the specific vacancy announcement and complete all additional required procedures.

A completed application package contains all of the material listed in the announcement. An application can be terminated whenever the materials do not support the basic eligibility requirements for employment in the Foreign Service.

Applications must be submitted through the online application system via USAJobs. Please visit the Opportunities section of the careers site to view a list of open — and closed — vacancies, and to subscribe to receive email updates.

## 3 Qualifications Evaluation Panel

Candidates who are successful in the initial review stage by meeting the basic eligibility requirements will move to the Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP) for review. The Panel will evaluate the candidates' professional experience, job history, and motivation as well as their problem solving, decision making, customer service orientation, interpersonal skills, and their cross-cultural adaptability.

The Panel, composed of trained members of the Board of Examiners and/or Foreign Service Subject Matter Experts in the related field, will look at the total candidate and rank order applications based on how well the application meets the criteria listed above. So beyond relying on the test scores alone, we are looking for those job-related qualities that define a person's chance of successfully performing the work of that specialty. This credential and experiential review is similar to

what major international corporations do in reviewing applications for their positions.

There is no pre-set cut-off score. Rather, candidates receive a relative ranking compared to other candidates. Only the most highly competitive candidates are invited to the oral assessment.

Although the QEP is a total file review, with no one element dominating all the factors considered, the one area that you have the most control over is your response to the individual questions. Did what the panelist read relate your event to a skill needed in the Foreign Service? Demonstrating strong English skills is a key part of the selection process. Did you proof your submission to ensure it was cogent, well-written, and correct grammatically? Did anyone who knows you well review your application with an eye to whether your narratives answered the questions?

- The responses to the questions are an important part of your application and are read carefully by the Qualifications Evaluation Panel. Your responses are influential in determining your score and thus your rank order. This is the place for you to highlight not just what you have done, but how you have done it and what you have learned.
- It is a place for you to emphasize how what you have done would be useful in the Foreign Service. Candidates are encouraged to draw from all aspects of their life.
- In your responses to the questions, remember this is a job application. Focus on answering the question in its entirety. Focus on answering it completely.
- Be your own best advocate but don't stretch the truth. The security background check and suitability review can be revealing.

## 4 Take the Foreign Service Specialist Oral Assessment

The invitation to the full-day oral assessment is based on anticipated hiring needs and budget. Assessments are conducted in Washington, D.C. and in a limited number of other major cities in the United States. All candidates should pay careful attention to the instructions in the results letter concerning completing an SF-86 (also referred to as e-QIP) to apply for a security clearance.

Candidates forwarded by the QEP process are invited to travel to Washington, D.C. or another location where assessments are conducted, at their own expense. Candidates for non-Diplomatic Security specialist positions will participate in an oral assessment at the Foreign Service Assessment Center that consists of these key components: (1) a writing exercise, (2) a structured interview, and, in most cases, (3) an online competency exam. The online competency tests are technical, job-related multiple choice tests. The information below pertains to these assessments.

Learn more about assessments for Diplomatic Security Specialist positions.

- (1) **Writing Exercise:** Candidates will be presented hypothetical problems set in an embassy environment related to the candidate's area of specialization. The candidate will be required to write a two-page memo outlining how to solve the problem(s) presented. The candidate will have 45 minutes for the writing exercise. He/she will have a computer available to use, but may write the essay or memo in longhand.
- (2) **Structured Interview:** The interview will be conducted by two examiners, a Foreign Service Generalist and a Foreign Service Specialist or Generalist working in your field. The interview generally takes about 75 minutes. There are three parts to the structured interview. In the first part of the interview, the candidate will be asked about his/her motivation for joining the Foreign Service and about background experiences that might be relevant to work as a Foreign Service Specialist. In the second part of the interview, the second interviewer will ask questions pertaining to the candidate's field and provide hypothetical workplace problems to resolve. In the third part of the interview, the candidate will be asked about past work, school and other experiences that have required him/her to demonstrate job skills required by Foreign Service Specialists.
- (3) **Competency Exam:** Candidates may be given a computer based multiple-choice exam that presents a series of technical and/or situational judgment

questions. It is intended to measure job-related knowledge and how the candidate might apply that knowledge on the job. This exam is timed and lasts approximately 60 minutes. The exam is designed to present more questions than can generally be answered in the time allowed, so candidates should not expect to answer every question.

**Exit Interview:** At the conclusion of the interview, candidates will return to the waiting room while the examiners consolidate their scores. They will then be asked to return to the interview room where the examiners will inform them whether or not they reached the cut-off score which will enable the State Department to continue the candidacy. If the candidate reaches the cut-off score, the examiners will brief him/her on the next steps in the pre-employment process.

Candidates are evaluated solely against the 12 dimensions by trained examiners. Before the assessment begins, candidates are required to sign a non-disclosure statement that requires them not to divulge the contents of the examination.

When you come to the Oral Assessment, you will be asked to read and sign the following three forms pertaining to the conditions for taking the Oral Assessment and conditions of employment in the Foreign Service. **If you are not willing to accept these conditions, you should not schedule an Oral Assessment.**

- Three Conditions of Foreign Service Employment
- Medical Clearance for Eligible Family Members
- Non-Disclosure Form

**What You Should Prepare and Bring:** In addition to valid U.S. state or Federal government-issued photo identification, you will need to bring various completed forms to show or submit if you pass the Oral Assessment. Some of the release forms must be signed by your spouse or estranged spouse, co-habitant, or fiancé(e).

## 5 Clearances: Medical and Security

Those entering the Foreign Service must be able to serve at any post abroad. Many assignments are in areas that are remote, unhealthy, or have limited medical support. Therefore, each candidate must meet medical fitness standards which are, of necessity, often more rigorous than those of other professions. Prior to being appointed to the Foreign Service, candidates must have a thorough medical examination and receive an unlimited medical clearance for assignment worldwide. Candidates who pass the oral assessment are provided with instructions for the examining physician(s) that outline the precise requirements and a voucher that authorizes the Department of State to pay for the remaining costs of the exam after the candidate's medical insurer has paid its customary fee. Candidates and their dependents over the age of six can either schedule exams at the State Department's Office of Medical Services or have them done by their own physicians. Children under the age of six must be examined by their own family physicians. While candidates must be medically cleared for full overseas duty, the Department of State no longer considers the medical condition of family members for pre-employment purposes. However, the Department still requires medical clearances for family members before they can travel overseas to accompany an employee on assignment at U.S. Government expense. Family members who, for medical reasons, cannot accompany an employee on an overseas assignment may be eligible to receive a separate maintenance allowance.

A comprehensive security background investigation, conducted by the U.S. Department of State in cooperation with other federal, state and local agencies, provides information necessary to determine a candidate's suitability for appointment to the Foreign Service and for a top secret security clearance. The process considers such factors as: failure to repay a U.S. Government-guaranteed loan or meet tax obligations; failure to register for the Selective Service; past problems with credit or bankruptcy; unsatisfactory employment records; a criminal record or other violations of the law; drug or alcohol abuse; and less than honorable discharge from the armed forces. Extensive travel, education, residence and/or employment overseas may extend the time it takes to obtain a clearance. Candidates who cannot be granted security clearances are ineligible for appointment.

Candidates who hold an active top secret security clearance from another U.S. federal agency may be eligible to have their security clearances transferred. However, for purposes of determining candidates' suitability (see section below), candidates whose background investigation is more than two years old still need to update their documentation.

## 6 Final Review Panel

When the security clearance process is completed, the Board of Examiners convenes a Final Review Panel. The Panel assesses all of the information related to the applicant to determine suitability for appointment to the Foreign Service. This is separate from the security clearance. The Panel considers factors that might make a candidate unsuitable for the especially stressful and unusual conditions of a Foreign Service career such as misconduct in prior employment; criminal, dishonest, or disgraceful conduct including lack of financial responsibility; misrepresentation in the examination or appointment process; repeated or habitual use to excess of alcohol; abuse of controlled substances; or conduct which shows poor judgment or lack of discretion. All Foreign Service applicants must receive valid medical, security and suitability clearances as a final condition to be eligible for employment.

## 7 The Register

Candidates who pass the oral assessment and who have successfully passed the security background investigation, the medical clearance and the final suitability review process are placed on rank-ordered hiring registers in their specialty. If a candidate declines two job offers, that candidate is removed from the register. Candidates with veteran points and/or a Foreign Service Institute-tested speaking proficiency in a foreign language can earn bonus points and improve their rank-order positions on the hiring lists. Information about these bonuses is provided upon successful completion of the oral assessment.

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION FACTORS

### Foreign Languages

You may be awarded bonus points for proficiency in a foreign language, depending on the need for specialists with skills in that language. For some languages, additional points may be awarded if you commit to serve in countries where that language is spoken at least twice in your career.

Effective January 1, 2012, the Foreign Service Institute will offer phone tests only for languages in which the Department has language-designated entry-level positions abroad. The languages tested and the bonus points awarded for proficiency in those languages are subject to change. Therefore, you should check [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov) to ensure you get the latest information regarding pre-employment language tests.

For information to help you assess your own speaking level, visit the Interagency Language Roundtable website and click on “Speaking” under the skill level descriptions for a general description of the expected proficiency. The speaking self-assessment tool, available on the same site, will also help you estimate your language proficiency.

## You may be awarded bonus points for proficiency in a foreign language.

### Candidates with Disabilities

Reasonable accommodation for applicants with disabilities: we welcome candidates who have special needs. In accordance with Federal law, we will provide reasonable accommodation to enable candidates with disabilities to take the Foreign Service Oral Assessment.

For qualified candidates who will require accommodation upon appointment, the Office of Employee Relations determines reasonable accommodations. To qualify, a candidate must meet all requirements for appointment to the Foreign Service.

Contact [reasonableaccommodations@state.gov](mailto:reasonableaccommodations@state.gov) at least three weeks before your scheduled Oral Assessment.

### Veterans Preference

You may increase your ranking on the register if you are entitled to veterans’ preference. Information on the bonuses awarded can be found on [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov). Those Specialist candidates whose Oral Assessment is scored on a 1-7 point scale will receive instructions on how to claim these points if they pass the Oral Assessment.

### Commitment to Foreign Service Work

Anyone applying to be in the Foreign Service must be willing to accept the following three commitments of Foreign Service work:

1. Flexibility in assignment
2. Public support of U.S. government policies
3. Worldwide availability



## OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

### Entry-Level Salary Range

Since the Foreign Service is a career service, appointments are made at one of three entry levels based on the candidate’s education, professional experience and, if applicable, current Federal base salary. Fluency in certain foreign languages may qualify candidates for language incentive pay while serving at posts where these languages are used. Information on the current entry-level FSS salary ranges is available at [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov).

### Training

On entering the Foreign Service, all new Specialists receive several weeks of basic orientation at the George



P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center in Arlington, Virginia. Specialists will receive differing amounts of training, depending on their area. In addition there may be some language training.

### Tenuring and Commissioning

FSSs are reviewed for tenure and commissioning over a five-year period and are first reviewed after three years of service. Most career candidates can expect to be commissioned as FSSs before the end of their time-limited appointment, following approval by the Foreign Service Commissioning and Tenure Board.



## DATA COLLECTION OF PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION (PII)

Responses to items in the application form related to your education and work experience and all responses to the personal narratives are used by the Qualifications Evaluation Panel to determine your qualifications and experience relative to selection as a Foreign Service Specialist. Moreover, the information requested on the application form is used for printing admission tickets and attendance rosters, improving future tests and conducting research based on the results of the test. Your cooperation in providing responses to all items is greatly appreciated.

The collection of information concerning disabilities is authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 92-112). The information you furnish is used for the purpose of producing statistical reports to show agency progress in the hiring, placement and advancement of individuals with disabilities and to locate individuals for voluntary participation in surveys. The reports are used to inform agency management, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Congress and the public of the status of programs for employment of individuals with disabilities. All such reports are in the form of aggregate totals and do not identify you as an individual in any way. While self-identification is voluntary, your cooperation in providing accurate information is critical.

Information on the race, national origin and sex of the applicants is collected in accordance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended and Federal Sector Equal Employment Opportunity Regulations (29 C.F.R. 1614.601). It is disclosed only in the form of gross statistics in reports, studies or other analyses to help ensure that agency personnel practices meet the requirements of Federal law.



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[careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov)

U.S. citizenship is required. An equal opportunity employer.



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