

ARTICLE 27: ASSIGNMENT POLICY

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

27.1 This Article prescribes Agency policy, operations, and procedures for assigning FAS Foreign Service (FS) employees to positions in the United States and abroad.

SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

27.2 The provisions of this policy are authorized under the FS Act, the Agricultural Trade Act of 1978, and the Foreign Affairs Manual, Volume 3.

POLICY OBJECTIVE AND CONSIDERATIONS

27.3 The objective of this policy is to maintain the most effective staffing of positions possible consistent with:

- a. The principles and requirements of the FS Act;
- b. The Agency's mission, budget, and staff-year limitations; and
- c. Career interests and aspirations of FS employees.

27.4 Consistent with the stated policy objective, the Agency selects and assigns individuals to domestic and international positions based on the following considerations:

- a. Fulfilling current and long-range staffing needs of the Agency;
- b. Matching FAS domestic and international staffing needs with the expertise, career development goals, and assignment preferences of individuals;
- c. Ensuring a reasonable sharing of assignments to hardship (differential) posts;
- d. Engaging individuals in the process by providing information on projected position vacancies and the opportunity to indicate preferences which will be carefully considered;
- e. Effectively utilizing individual abilities and providing potential for progressive career development;
- f. Ensuring that individuals serve in a variety of domestic and international positions in order to foster diversity of experience and development of

specialized competencies, such as functional expertise and language proficiencies;

- g. Fulfilling individual preferences by taking into account:
 - 1. specific area, post, and assignment requests;
 - 2. training and long-range career interests and aspirations;
 - 3. family status, including educational needs of dependents and the availability of spousal employment;
 - 4. limitations to worldwide availability due to health issues affecting the individual and/or dependents;
 - 5. personal issues, including those of a compassionate nature;
 - 6. prior service, particularly at hardship (differential) posts;
 - 7. statutory requirements governing domestic and international service; and
- h. Effectively utilizing the abilities and skills of individuals to the mutual advantage of the individual and the Agency by providing appropriate orientations and on-the-job training and encouraging individuals to expand their qualifications and capabilities through self-improvement.

DOMESTIC ASSIGNMENTS

27.5 Both parties recognize that:

- a. A Washington Placement Plan (WPP) is the primary vehicle by which employees returning from international and other assignments outside FAS/W will be placed in domestic assignments;
- b. A primary objective of a WPP is the placement of FAS employees in positions best suited to advance the Agency's mission; and
- c. While Foreign Service employees may be placed in positions below their grade, such placements made without the consent of the individual should be minimized.

27.6 The SPO will monitor and coordinate assignments of FS employees to domestic positions. Available positions will be announced in a WPP. Prior to announcing a

WPP, management will provide AFSA sufficient time to review the announcement, if there is a change from the previous plan.

- 27.7 Management will strive to make as many position vacancies available under a WPP as possible in order to avoid placing individuals in positions below their grade against their consent. To this end, the SPO will closely monitor the balance between position vacancies and FS employees returning to domestic assignments.
- 27.8 FS employees may be assigned to domestic positions announced under a WPP or to other domestic positions announced concurrently with a WPP. Individuals are eligible to apply for any announced position, including stretch assignments within one grade of their personal rank and rotation assignments at grade.
- 27.9 Individuals may also be reassigned from one position to another outside a WPP, based on the needs of the Agency and the Foreign Service, and consideration of individual assignment preferences.
- 27.10 If members of the Foreign Service are assigned under Section 503 of the FS Act, the provisions of Section 503 will apply to all members as appropriate.

SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES

- 27.11 In general, domestic assignments will be determined based on the following criteria:
 - a. The position description and requirements; and,
 - b. The rank, experience, skills, and stated preferences of the individual.
- 27.12 The SPO will prepare and submit to the Executive Advisory Group (EAG) a matrix of individual bids and selecting official recommendations. The EAG will assess and recommend placements based primarily on the matrix submitted by the SPO. The Administrator/FAS will review EAG recommendations and make final placement decisions.

MAXIMUM LENGTH OF DOMESTIC ASSIGNMENTS

- 27.13 While U.S. tours of duty are for an indeterminate period, an individual may not be assigned to such duty for a period of continuous service exceeding eight (8) years, unless an extension is approved by the Administrator/FAS. All extension decisions will be subject to the guidelines, criteria and procedures contained in Article 28 of this Agreement.
- 27.14 Individuals may be reassigned from one position to another position during a tour of

duty in the United States, based on the needs of the Agency and the Foreign Service, and consideration of individual assignment preferences.

INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

- 27.15 Agricultural Trade Officer positions located in the United States are considered international assignments.
- 27.16 Consistent with Section 502 (b) of the FS Act, positions designated as Foreign Service positions, including ATO positions, normally will be filled by assigning Foreign Service employees to these positions. Foreign Service positions will be filled to best match the talents, expertise and interest of the Foreign Service with the Agency's mission requirements.
- 27.17 The Foreign Agricultural Affairs Office (FAA) will maintain an updated list of international vacancies and expected vacancies.

ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

- 27.18 Individuals serving in domestic assignments four (4) years or longer as of November 1, individuals completing the final year of an international tour of duty the following summer (excluding individuals completing consecutive tours), and potential career candidates are automatically in the mandatory assignment pool and are expected to bid on announced positions. All individuals interested in field assignments should bid. Management will notify AFSA in a timely manner of any change to the assignment process.
- 27.19 Generally, the assignment process is as follows:
- a. As soon as possible after the announcement of FS Selection Board results, FAA will announce first round bidding instructions for all international positions expected to be available for assignment the following summer, including positions at hard language posts for which long-term language training is required. Additional positions will be announced as they are identified. AFSA will be provided an opportunity to review bidding instructions at least two days prior to their release.
 - b. All bids must be received by the DA/FAA by the bid closing date stated in the announcement, barring circumstances beyond the control of those bidding.
 - c. The EAG and DA/FAA will provide recommendations to the Administrator as explained under selection procedures below.
 - d. The Administrator will determine final post assignments and inform the

DA/FAA.

- e. If necessary, subsequent bid rounds will be conducted following the same procedures. As part of subsequent bid announcements, the DA/FAA will provide the number of bids, by grade, received for each position announced during the prior round. AFSA will be informed in a timely manner of delays in implementing a bid round.
- f. As soon as possible after final assignments are determined, the DA/FAA will inform each selected individual of his/her assignment and tour of duty details, including the duration of the assignment.

27.20 Both parties expect that the assignment process will normally be completed in a timely manner. This means that barring circumstances outside management's control, the process will be completed by the second week of December. AFSA will be informed in a timely manner of any delays.

27.21 Agricultural Affairs Office positions will be assigned as follows:

- a. Only FS career members and candidates may bid for positions announced for the first or second time. All bids must be submitted to the DA/FAA using form FAS-193 "Foreign Service Assignment Bids" with a copy provided to SPO. Individuals may include the one page supplemental statement to FAS-193, to highlight their qualifications for each position for which they apply.
- b. Positions not filled after one announcement will be announced a second time. If a position is not filled after a second announcement, the Administrator will normally invoke worldwide availability to fill the position. The Administrator may, however, consider other options to fill the position.

27.22 ATO positions will be assigned as follows:

- a. All bids must be submitted to the DA/FAA using form FAS-193 "Foreign Service Assignment Bids" with a copy provided to SPO. Individuals applying for a stretch ATO position must submit the one page supplemental statement to form FAS-193 for each such position. The supplemental statement is optional for individuals applying for a position at grade.
- b. Positions not filled after one announcement will be announced a second time. If a position is not filled after a second announcement, the Administrator will either invoke worldwide availability or consider other options to fill the position.

27.23 Temporary duty to international positions will be advertised for competitive bidding consistent with the established practice of the Agency.

SELECTION CRITERIA

27.24 When selecting individuals for international assignments, management will consider the following criteria:

- a. Needs of the Agency and the Foreign Service;
- b. Managerial and supervisory training and experience;
- c. The number of years of continuous domestic service;
- d. Demonstrated language skills;
- e. Individual rank relative to the assignment;
- f. Professional experience relative to the needs of the position;
- g. Stated assignment preferences;
- h. Career development considerations;
- i. Prior service in difficult or hardship assignments; and
- j. The individual's TIC/TIS situation.

SELECTION PROCEDURES

27.25 The DA/FAA, will identify candidates for international assignments and prepare a list of candidates and selection recommendations for each position using the criteria provided above. The DA/FAA will consult with an individual to the extent possible, before recommending an individual for consideration for a post not listed on his/her form FAS-193.

27.26 The EAG will propose assignment recommendations for Heads of Office and ATO Directors. The DA/FAA will propose recommendations for all other assignments.

27.27 The Administrator will make all final assignment decisions based on the recommendations from the EAG and DA/FAA.

APPEAL OF ASSIGNMENTS

- 27.28 The following procedures govern international assignment appeals:
- a. The individual must state in writing to the Administrator/FAS, the reasons for the appeal;
 - b. The EAG will review the request and recommend a decision to the Administrator/FAS; and
 - c. The Administrator/FAS will decide all appeal requests.
- 27.29 If an individual refuses to accept the Administrator's decision, disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with applicable statutes and regulations. Since Foreign Service members must be available for worldwide assignment, refusal to accept an international assignment could result in removal from the Foreign Service.
- 27.30 The DA/FAA will promptly announce all changes to original assignments. Positions available as a result of an appeal will be filled in an expeditious manner, normally following the assignment process outlined above.

INTERNATIONAL TOURS OF DUTY

- 27.31 Commissioned Officers and Career Candidates: A normal tour of duty for commissioned officers and career candidates is three (3) years with an automatic one (1) year extension, subject to proper notification by the officer and satisfactory work performance. A request for a second one (1) year extension based on compassionate reasons will normally be considered during the annual assignment process, but may be submitted at any time for management consideration.
- 27.32 Administrative Assistants: A normal tour of duty for Administrative Assistants is three (3) years, with the option of one (1) year extensions, if jointly requested by all Administrative Assistants. Administrative Assistants normally are assigned to duty aboard: domestic assignments are primarily for career development purposes.
- 27.33 Limited Appointments: A normal tour of duty for individuals serving under a limited appointment, other than career candidates, is the same as those for commissioned officers, subject to the statutory five (5) year limit for such appointments. Specifically, consistent with the FS Act, Section 309 (a), a limited appointment in the Foreign Service, including an appointment of an individual who is an employee of another agency, cannot exceed five (5) years in duration and cannot be extended or granted more than once to an individual.

CHANGES IN INTERNATIONAL TOURS OF DUTY

- 27.34 All tour-of-duty change requests must be submitted in writing to the DA/FAA. The Administrator/FAS will decide all requests. When considering tour changes, the Administrator will give careful consideration to the potential impact on the employee's family, career, future entitlements, and leave already taken.
- 27.35 While requests for tours of duty beyond four years for commissioned officers for career candidates may be made at any time for compassionate reasons, such requests will normally be considered during the annual assignment process and primarily determined based on the needs of the Agency.
- 27.36 If an involuntary curtailment or extension is being considered, the affected individual will be notified of the reasons and provided an opportunity to comment to the DA/FAA before a final decision is rendered.
- 27.37 If an individual refuses to accept the Administrator's decision, disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with applicable statutes and regulations. Since Foreign Service members must be available for worldwide assignment, refusal to accept an international assignment could result in removal from the Foreign Service.
- 27.38 When tours are adjusted, all entitlements must be amended accordingly and the individual provided with a revised assignment letter containing the new tour of duty end date. All tour of duty adjustments, including curtailments, will be publically announced in a timely manner.
- 27.39 Curtailments: The DA/FAA will forward all curtailment requests to the EAG which will provide recommendations to the Administrator/FAS.
- 27.40 Extensions: Notification to extend a tour of duty to four years must be submitted by September 15 of the year following arrival at post. In cases when arrival is during the first half of the calendar year, notification must be submitted at the discretion of the DA/FAA. Late notifications will normally be rejected. Notification from a commissioned officer or a career candidate will usually be automatically processed, assuming satisfactory work performance, as will requests from Administrative Assistants, if all Administrative Assistants jointly request an extension.

MISCELLANEOUS

- 27.41 Tours of duty will be officially defined in an assignment letter. Assignment letters will be signed by the individual and a copy provided to the individual prior to departure for post.
- 27.42 For international assignments of six months or more, the individual will be entitled to all allowances provided to other individuals at post, as authorized in 3 FAM 3200 and

5 U.S.C. 5924.

27.43 Policies on home leave and R&R will follow 3 FAM 3430 and 3720, respectively.

27.44 With the exception of Administrative Assistants, no employee should serve more than 15 consecutive years abroad, unless the Administrator/FAS determines that compelling agency needs require a longer period and the individual agrees.