

POLICY-REMINDER **USAID/General Notice**
HR/ELR
10/18/2010

Subject: 2010 FS/SFS Performance Boards Observations/Comments and HR Reminders

Provided below is feedback from the 2010 Foreign Service and Senior Foreign Service Performance Boards performance boards and the Office of Human Resources (HR) for the benefit of all Foreign Service Officers, their raters, Appraisal Committee (AC) members and AMS/EXO staffs.

A summary of the boards' observations/comments/recommendations are as follows:

-- Remember your audience: AEFs should be written keeping in mind that a performance board, including a public member, evaluates FS/SFS evaluation files. The boards this year, as in previous cycles, noted that some AEFs continue to focus too much on process and not enough on "so what?" They observed that the best AEFs are those that, where possible, clearly identify the development results to which the employee substantially contributed. Concrete examples of skills and achievements are important to ground-truth generalizations/conclusions articulated in the AEF. Boards also commented that a number of AEFs generally over-emphasized employee's contributions to internal USAID processes with little or no discussion of the substantive development impact of the employee's work. Board members recommended that raters and employees pay more attention to the Role in the Organization and the Work Objectives in helping set the context which allows the reader (board member) to make the connection between the work of the employee and development result(s). This is especially important for employees in backstops such as EXO, Controller, Contracts, and RLA.

-- While monitoring performance is ongoing and continues throughout the rating cycle, employees and raters need to carefully distinguish Work Objectives (WOs)/Performance Measures (PMs) and performance achievements from year-to-year. WOs should be distinct and significant for the rating period and articulate direct linkage to a planned result or impact. It is important for employees and raters to ensure that each AEF "tell a story" about the employee and demonstrate progressively more robust and complex WOs and accomplishments. Sub-skills should be linked to work skill areas and be clearly distinguished in order for raters/performance board members to properly evaluate the employee's performance. Additionally, consider using simple and clear language to explain the impact of the employee's performance.

-- The Role in the Organization should illustrate the individual's responsibilities over time, including numbers and types of staff supervised, clarify to whom the individual reports, and be clear on budget amounts both at the macro mission/bureau level and under the officer's direct management. Periods when an employee is Acting or taking on

special responsibilities for a substantial period of time should also be noted in this section. The value of the time is strengthened when described in terms of results attained during the Acting period. The size of a program with which the employee is working/managing and what his/her responsibilities are for the program is helpful during the evaluation process. The role of the individual is not always, but should be, spelled-out in the Role in the Organization section and sometimes inappropriately included non-work related activities. While the board applauds such participation in the community and considers it important, it should be noted that this participation is not a work requirement and as such, should not be included in the AEF except, perhaps, in the Employee Statement. The best AEFs provide evidence-based evaluation of an employee's performance, contain examples of the employee's actions or produced results, positive impact and connection to specific Skills (as defined by the FS Skills Matrix or SFS Skills Model, whichever is appropriate), and includes descriptions of team achievements and appropriate credit for the contribution of individual employees to those achievements.

-- Completion of a successful AEF should be a collaborative effort between the rater, employee and Appraisal Committee. Employees should provide a thorough self-assessment of performance against planned WOs and PMs and a clear illustration of Sub-skills demonstrated against each Skill area. The employee should ensure the rater has accurately interpreted the employee's self-assessment and reflected accomplishments against all WOs and PMs, as well as included discussion of at least one Sub-skill in each Skill area and highlighted a Subskill at the next higher level (for FS-01s and below). AEFs that are not substantiated with details detract from the overall effectiveness of the AEFs and could show cause for "loss points". AEFs should blend discussion of accomplishments against Sub-skills with reference to the outcomes or impact of effective use of these skills. The FS Skills Matrix/SFS Skills Model serve as guides or foundation references for the development of WOs, drafting an employee self-assessment, and writing the end-of-cycle AEF.

-- WOs that exceed personal grade requirements make it difficult for the performance boards to review and evaluate the "Met Work Objectives" standard and are inappropriate. WOs are most easily understood if they are written using action words, e.g., develop, create, construct, etc. When the PMs are written as action items, they will logically follow as smaller parts of the larger WOs. Employees and Raters need to carefully distinguished WOs, PMs and performance achievement from year to year. In instances where the employee has spent three or four years at the same post and with same rater, the WOs and PMs tend to be similar each year making it difficult to determine what distinguished one year from the next. Raters and employees who transfer between posts and/or training should clearly indicate on their AEF at least the month of transfer and at to/from what locations in order to indicate how much time is covered. Raters who are assigned to more than one post during the rating period, should state where the employee was assigned, as well as the period of the time and job title for each assignment.

--The Employee Statement - Performance Boards value the Employee Statement as an opportunity to impart the employee's sense of mission and values through adding new

perspective or new information about his/her performance. The Employee Statement is an excellent vehicle for employees to articulate how they view themselves fitting into the context of the Agency and its development work. The Employee Statement can also provide an indication of the employee's maturity of judgment and emotional intelligence. Employee Statements that merely served as a continuation of the rater's assessment, complete with long quotes of non-illuminating 360-feedback, or that contained typos, misspellings, and/or grammatical errors, mentioned only themselves, complained, or focused heavily on personal matters did not reflect well on the employee.

-- The Appraisal Committee comment section is not for making additional statements/comments on the employee's performance or to reinforce the rater's assessment. The AEF guidance advises this section should only be used when there might be disagreement between the rater and the Appraisal Committee (ADS 461.38). Oftentimes AEFs contain an overuse of quotes or other jargon and the actual work that the employee has performed may get lost in the translation. It might be helpful to avoid the quotes or other jargon and highlight not only what an individual did, but also acknowledge what an officer's team or staff accomplished under his/her direction. To this end, raters might not want to reference things that are not commonly known unless there is some context that provides further explanation.

The Office of Human Resources reminds everyone involved in the FS/SFS AEF process of the following:

- Manipulating the FS AEF macro (underlining, bolding, italicizing) is prohibited.
- Although the guidance (ADS 461.3.1.5a.5.) and the FS AEF form clearly state that employees are limited to no more than three Work Objectives, with no more than two Performance Measures for each Work Objective, it was noted this year that some officers had three Performance Measures for their Work Objectives.
- It is strongly recommended that FS/SFS officers who have non-FS/SFS raters take advantage of the option of having the AC review, and provide input on, their Work Objectives at the time the WOs are established/revised.
- The AC box (Section 8) - This box is not to be used to expand upon the rater's assessment of the employee. The exclusive purpose of this box is for the AC to use when, in accordance with ADS 461.3.8, the rating official does not agree to the substantive changes recommended by the AC or fails to adhere to approved AEF-preparation policy and procedures.
- ADS 461.3.6.1 states, "Rating Officials of non-SFS officers must highlight at least one sub-skill area from the next higher level for the employee to work towards. This will include areas of excellence or potential for developing specific FS competencies that might positively affect career development." The narrative should detail how an officer either: (a) has already demonstrated a higher-level Sub-skill; (b) has demonstrated potential to perform at the next higher Sub-skill level; or (c) can address, in his/her future

work, the requirements of a higher level Sub-skill in order to meet its definition. A heading of "Sub-skill at Higher Level" to introduce the Sub-skill being highlighted is recommended.