



AFSA Retention, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Recommendations

Results of an AFSA retention survey conducted in the winter of 2020-2021 indicate that 32% of survey respondents reported that they were seriously considering leaving the Foreign Service, while 23% were not considering leaving and 45% might consider leaving but would probably stay. The top reasons given and/or suggested by all respondents for possible departures were family concerns, assignments, promotions, leadership, and bias. Family issues were cited as the top driver of Foreign Service members who had made the decision to leave and departed the Foreign Service. The priority order of these responses varied with membership in specific demographic groups.

AFSA recommends that the measures below be taken to arrest the growing problem of declining retention and to restore and repair morale in the Foreign Service.

- **A Larger Foreign Service:** AFSA recommends the Foreign Service should gradually add a combined total of up to 1,000 State Department Foreign Service Officer and Foreign Service Specialist positions as well as an increase of 650 USAID FSO positions. We understand some of the position growth would be in support capacities to address larger personnel numbers. We recommend that the Foreign Service element at AFSA's other constituent agencies, the Department of Commerce, Agriculture, the Animal and Plant Inspection Service, and the U.S. Agency for Global Media, should also be enlarged.
 - A larger Service would mean the United States could better meet 21st century global diplomatic challenges. More positions would add to promotion opportunities at some grades and within larger specialties such as DS and OMS; increased diversity; a possibly more family-friendly work culture; and a realized training float.
- **Creation of New Foreign Service Specialties:** Along with a larger Service, AFSA recommends a creation of new categories of Specialists in fields needed to fill expertise gaps like cyber-security and data science. We recommend that hiring for the skills gaps recognizes the need for specialized advanced degrees and a high skill level, with entry at classes FS-2 or FS-1.
- **A More Flexible, Family-Friendly Foreign Service:** Family issues are paramount if retention is to be strengthened.
 - AFSA recommends the adoption of clear policies in domestic and overseas environments that permit appropriate telework and RWAs and streamlining the Domestic Employees Teleworking Overseas (DETO) assignment process.
 - Foreign Service agencies should immediately authorize a modernization of FAM technology and security policy to better support mobile/remote work, and an improved technology and a telework subsidy for all employees to support blended work environments and remote work.

- Foreign Service agencies should focus on more equitable treatment of tandems in assignments; permanent clearances for family member employees; and increased fungibility between agency positions, i.e., State ECON FSOs working as EG USAID FSOs or Commerce FSOs and vice-versa.
- **More Transparent and Streamlined Assignments System:** Respondents to the AFSA bias survey, conducted in the summer of 2020, and the current AFSA retention survey conducted this winter, both point to the bidding and assignments process as prone to bias and one of the leading reasons why Foreign Service members would seriously consider leaving the Foreign Service. AFSA recommends:
 - the use of a centralized, algorithmic preference matching system;
 - the standardization of all aspects of the assignments process, from interview questions to position descriptions;
 - a much more transparent and independently reviewed assignment preclusion (restriction) decision-making process.
- **A Less-Biased EER and Promotion Process:** EERs and the pace of promotions/promotion process reliably appear as top three drivers of discontent in the Foreign Service. In the summer of 2021, AFSA will negotiate the core precepts with State Department management.
 - AFSA will support the transition of the current performance pay box on the EER for SFS to one focused on institution building, including creating an institutional culture that values diversity and inclusion.
 - The AFSA bias survey, conducted in the summer of 2020, asked respondents to list what advocacy elements AFSA should promote. The largest group recommended gender-neutral, name-free EERs. AFSA should support the use of name-free, gender-neutral EERs if the results of the remaining years of the Meritorious Service Increase (MSI) pilot program point to clear benefits of such a step.
- **Targeted, Early Mentorship:** AFSA endorses early mentorship, such as the Thursday Luncheon Group's Perkins Mentorship program. The 2020 GAO studies on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the State Department found that State Department minority Foreign Service officers were disadvantaged when competing for promotion from 4 to 3. The Perkins Mentorship Program would be open to all FS-4 and FS-3 officers, whether they are Pickering/Rangel Fellows or not.
- **Leadership Accountability through 360s:** AFSA recommends the use of a new 360 proposal, primarily for professional development of Foreign Service leaders. Twice a year in October and March, ePerformance or the non-State agency equivalent would ensure that the following question is posed to employees in each supervisory chain: *Please agree or disagree with the following statement(s) with regard to your supervisor, using a 1-5 scale: "The employee models the behaviors described in the Department's leadership and management principles as defined in 3 FAM 1214."* Although the information is primarily to be used for developmental purposes, if there are repeated red flags, the information could be mentioned in the employee's EER.
- **Well-Resourced CDEIO:** AFSA urges that the Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer is well-resourced and staffed adequately to bring about real change – this would mean at a minimum a viable budget and a senior line authority. The CDIO should ensure that existing, effective bureau programs are not diminished in the creation of a common approach across the Department.