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**Pass Line:** FOR ALL DCMS, MANAGEMENT OFFICERS AND HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICERS  
**Subject:** HR/PE FACT SHEET: UNDERSTANDING THE FOREIGN SERVICE SELECTION BOARD CORE PROCEDURAL PRECEPTS

1. The Office of Performance Evaluation in the Bureau of Human Resources (HR/PE) would like to provide an overview of both the Core Precepts and the Selection Board Procedural Precepts. The Selection Boards use these guidelines to make promotion recommendations of Foreign Service employees. The HR/PE Fact Sheet series, in combination with the Straight Talk cable series, is part of an ongoing educational initiative on Foreign Service promotions and professional development.

### **What are the Core Precepts?**

2. The Decision Criteria for Tenure and Promotion in the Foreign Service, known as the ***Core Precepts***, describe the baseline qualities and capabilities considered essential for professional success in the Foreign Service. These Core Precepts are negotiated every three years with the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA). The recently updated version, which includes more emphasis on diversity and inclusion, will be released early in 2019. The six competencies reflected in the Core Precepts are: 1) leadership skills; 2) managerial skills; 3) communication skills; 4) intellectual skills; 5) interpersonal skills; and 6) substantive knowledge. These competencies are often seen arranged in a grid--the left column defines the skill, and the progressive possession and exercise of that skill are captured in boxes from left to right. The descriptions for each level assume the employee has mastered those at the lower levels. The 2015-2018 Core Precepts are located on the HR/PE intranet site. (See <https://intranet.hr.state.sbu/offices/pe/Pages/default.aspx> then click on "All Precepts" in the left-hand column)

### **Six Competencies and Three Areas of Effectiveness**

3. In an EER, the Rater must "appraise the employee's accomplishments in the areas of informational, operational, and relational effectiveness" and "cite specific policy and

programmatic outcomes and their impact on the Department’s mission.” Employees should view the six competencies described in the Core Precepts as the building blocks for achieving informational, operational, and relational effectiveness. While each of the six competencies is important in its own right, each also interrelates in achieving success in the three areas of effectiveness. These areas of effectiveness represent the ways in which we strive to excel as members of the Foreign Service by leading and managing policies, programs, and people.

4. Substantive knowledge, intellectual and communication skills show ***Informational Effectiveness***. How effectively does the employee gather, analyze, and use information to advance U.S. national interests? Does the employee convey timely, accurate, relevant information and exhibit self-awareness, active listening skills, and the ability to convince others in the design and implementation of sound policy options?

5. Management, leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills demonstrate ***Operational Effectiveness***. How well does the employee understand the mission/unit’s purpose and direction? How successful is the employee in turning that understanding into programs that achieve meaningful outcomes? Does the employee demonstrate good judgment, initiative, resilience, resourcefulness, and integrity?

6. Interpersonal, management, communication, and leadership skills, in addition to substantive knowledge, guide ***Relational Effectiveness***. How well does the employee communicate and cooperate with supervisors; support the work of peers, inside and outside the work unit; and advance the professional development of subordinates? Does the employee build strong teams and a productive work environment?

#### **Does the Rater Have to Address Each of the Six Core Competencies in an EER?**

7. The Rater does not have to address each of the six core competencies directly in an EER. The Rater should draft a narrative that evaluates the employee based on goals, outcomes, and impact of his/her contributions in the areas of informational, operational, and relational effectiveness. The employee in his/her section of the EER should reflect on the most important outcomes achieved during the rating cycle, and how they contributed to the advancement of U.S. policy and program goals, and the development of the Department’s human capital. The Rater and Reviewer should likewise describe outcomes achieved by the employee in the areas of informational, operational, and relational effectiveness, why those outcomes mattered, and what they suggest about the prospects for success in positions of greater responsibility.

#### **Results that Matter!**

8. Because Selection Boards rely on the core precepts in assessing relative performance, it is important that EERs address those core precepts and do so in a manner that highlights results and goals as opposed to tasks and outputs. Employees should use and build on their competencies and skill sets so that their accomplishments have impact: the focus being on goals, results, and outcomes, rather than tasks, activities, and output. In short, employees should aim to deliver results – on behalf of people, programs, and policy – that matter. Employees should spend less time on process (how they got work done) and more on results (what happened

because of the work). Below is an example of how to describe *results and goals* which is what the selection boards seek, rather than *tasks and output*:

- Example that is task/output-oriented/not recommended: Thomas did a stellar job as a second tour officer. During the past year he adjudicated nearly 21,000 visas, including over 6,000 H2 agricultural worker visas. During this time period he exhibited excellent leadership and managerial skills and acted as a mentor for the first tour officers. He successfully led three brown bag lunches discussing 6C1 and other ineligibilities.
- Example that is result/goal-oriented/recommended: Knowing the importance of the \$2 billion a year agricultural industry, Thomas developed training programs with first tour officers and organized brown bag lunches to demystify visa ineligibilities. With stronger teamwork, we achieved: consistency and rigor in adjudicating applications; a reduced error rate; more efficient handling of 45,000+ H2 applicants; a better image for the United States; and facilitation of the entry of qualified H2 recipients who contribute to the U.S. economy.

### **What are the Procedural Precepts?**

9. The ***Procedural Precepts*** establish the scope, organization, and responsibilities of the Foreign Service Selection Boards and describe the criteria used by the Boards in making their recommendations for the promotion of Foreign Service employees. The Procedural Precepts, which are negotiated annually with AFSA, direct the Selection Boards to identify those Foreign Service employees who best demonstrate, relative to their peers, sustained superior performance in achieving concrete outcomes that advance U.S. foreign policy goals, and who are most likely to succeed in positions of greater responsibility.

10. As an example of the Procedural Precepts guidance provided to the Selection Boards, the 2018 Procedural Precepts directed the Boards to undertake a full spectrum review of the employee's service and accomplishments as contained in his/her Performance Folder, based on the Career Development Plan (CDP) principles for specialists and generalists, Professional Development Plan (PDP) principles for generalists, and the Office Management Specialist Professional Development Plan Requirements for Promotion to FP-02. These principles and requirements include: Operational effectiveness, including the employee's breadth of experience; Leadership and managerial effectiveness; Sustained professional language and/or technical proficiency; and Responsiveness to Service Needs. The 2018 Procedural Precepts also provided guidance to the Selection Boards on low ranking and referral to a Performance Standards Board. The 2018 Procedural Precepts are located on the HR/PE intranet site. (<https://intranet.hr.state.sbu/offices/pe/Pages/default.aspx>) Other Selection Board functions that are described include counseling, commendation, criticism, recusal, and Board recommendations. These Board recommendations are reviewed and summarized for Foreign Service employees through HR/PE Straight Talk cables. (See 18 State 99602 Straight Talk 2018: General Observations from the 2018 Foreign Service Selection Boards.)

11. Particularly with respect to promotion within and into the Senior Foreign Service, the Procedural Precepts noted that the 2018 Senior Boards should give due credit to evidence of

achievement and competency in strong policy formulation capabilities; outstanding executive leadership qualities; and highly developed functional, foreign language, and area expertise as well as public outreach abroad based on policy objectives. The 2018 Procedural Precepts also noted that Boards should “give weight to evidence of competency and accomplishment in carrying out these executive responsibilities (i.e., the ability to plan, organize, administer, and evaluate programs, as well as the ability to lead teams and manage and mentor employees) in both the employee's primary skill code and, particularly, across functional lines.”

12. HR/PE posts information on performance-related topics on its intranet site throughout the year. If you have any questions or concerns about a performance issue, please reach out to us on HRPEQuestions@state.gov and we will do our best to advise you. In addition, HR/PE organizes webinars and DVCs on EER-related topics. Please contact HR/PE Program Analyst, Jamila Moumeni, at MoumeniJS@state.gov for more information.

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