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USDA  
FOREIGN  
AGRICULTURAL  
SERVICE

# GUIDE TO THE FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER SELECTION PROCESS

Office of Foreign Service Operations

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## Section I

### The Foreign Service

The United States Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) is one of the U.S. Government's four Foreign Affairs Agencies under the Foreign Service Act of 1980. Chartered in 1953, FAS is a small agency with a global mission and presence. FAS is responsible for a broad range of programs, activities and tasks designed to carry out the U.S. Department of Agriculture's statutory responsibility to promote U.S. agricultural interests overseas. The core mission of FAS is to facilitate trade and international cooperation, which are critical to the vitality of the U.S. agricultural sector. Staff includes about 850 people stationed in Washington and about 135 Foreign Service Officers, and 350 locally employed staff overseas. Foreign Service officers represent the interests and needs of American agriculture at U.S. diplomatic missions abroad.

If you are interested in a Foreign Service career at FAS, there is plenty of opportunity, but entry is a competitive process that takes place only once every 12-24 months depending on the needs of the service.

### Is the Foreign Service right for you?

By joining the Foreign Service you will have opportunities to live in exotic places, to experience foreign cultures, to participate in making history, and to make friends all over the world. This lifestyle is not for everyone. Exotic places can expose you to exotic diseases and history in the making can be hazardous. A lot of posts are in smoggy, over-populated urban areas. You will be expected to spend two-thirds of your career overseas, moving every three or four years, and your family may not always be able to go with you. This State Department quiz may help you to decide if this is the right career choice for you at <http://www.careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service>.

### What does a Foreign Service Officer in the Foreign Agricultural Service Do?

The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) is unique within the U.S. government for its sole focus on global food and agricultural trade and food security issues. Foreign Service officers are posted across the globe, allowing FAS to address trade development, policy and market promotion issues as they arise. They are the front-line professionals representing the Department of Agriculture in 93 overseas field offices in U.S. diplomatic missions covering 169 countries. They can be sent anywhere in the world, at any time, to serve the diplomatic needs of the United States.

## A Day in the Life of an Agricultural Attaché – by Karisha Kuypers

Working in the FAS/Brussels office is a very different experience from working in other FAS offices around the world. Our office is almost exclusively a trade policy post, which means that we work with our host government counterparts – in this case, the European Union institutions – to reduce trade barriers and improve market access by analyzing legislation and regulations to determine their possible impact on U.S. agricultural exports. We closely follow the EU decision-making processes closely as new legislation is created to determine if U.S. products will be affected by new laws. Only rarely do we conduct the marketing and promotional events that many other FAS offices do.

Legislative procedures? Decision-making? Boring, right? Amazingly, they aren't. The complexity of the work at FAS/Brussels illustrates what I think are the key components of what it takes to be an agricultural attaché: always keep learning and always be flexible. Not only do you need to become the subject matter expert on the issues in your own portfolio but you will often be asked to become the expert on a new issue with little warning. You will need to grasp a topic quickly and well enough that you can explain it to others or advocate the U.S. position to your host country government. Flexibility is essential. No matter how well I plan my day, there is always a new problem to resolve, a new event to plan, a new meeting to attend. On short notice, you might need to step in for your boss and brief the Ambassador on the European Parliament's latest attempt to ban animal cloning. Or give a speech in front of representatives from major European food industry groups on the status of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations. Being well-versed in your subject matter – and those of your colleagues as well! – is necessary to be able to represent your office at all times.

The majority of my time is spent gathering trade and market intelligence and using that information to write reports and cables. Networking with host country counterparts and partners from other countries is really important, so I prioritize spending time meeting with EU officials and other nations' agricultural attachés. I usually get the most useful information over lunch or an informal coffee. Getting to know my international colleagues has been the best way to find out what is going on in the Parliament or what the European Commission is planning. I also cannot overemphasize how important writing is in your job as an attaché. Even the best information is wasted if you and your staff fail to put it into a report back to Washington.

But Foreign Service life isn't just about work (although don't tell my boss I said that). One of the biggest benefits of living in Brussels is the opportunity to travel to other countries. My husband and I take advantage of our location to travel to many of the surrounding countries, which offers a great perspective on the huge differences between the 28 EU Member States and the difficulties that the EU has in making legislation relevant for countries as developed as the Netherlands and as developing as Bulgaria at the same time. Plus of course, traveling in Europe is really fun.

And as interesting as my current post is, I'm already looking forward to the next adventure.

*About the Attaché: Karisha Kuypers is currently serving in Brussels at the U.S. Mission to the European Union and manages the livestock, dairy, horticultural, certification, and food labeling issues. Before joining the Foreign Service, Karisha spent seven years working in a variety of positions for the Foreign Agricultural Service in Washington, DC. Karisha is a graduate of St. Olaf College (BA), the University of Minnesota (MPP), and the U.S. Command and General Staff College (MMAS) and a returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Romania, 2001-2003).*



## A Day in the Life of an Agricultural Attaché – by Josh Lagos

Every morning, parading through neighborhood alleyways on a rusty bicycle, a local merchant sings in Hindi that he is available to purchase unwanted household items. Like clockwork, his voice is a daily reminder that it is time to get out of bed. While sipping my morning coffee, outside my window green parrots flutter between trees, and a large hawk soars beneath a hazy sky. And if luck would have it, the local resident cow may find herself strolling by my apartment, lazily searching for the closest feeding station, often voluntarily stocked with food by a local caretaker. Although heavy traffic is a constant challenge in New Delhi, while riding to work I always enjoy watching the city emerge from its deep slumber. Temples of worship are bustling with flower merchants selling strings of marigolds for the devoted, and women are adorned with vibrant saris or the fashionable salwar kameez. Tiny streets and markets are packed with people from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds, each individually expressing himself through nuanced bodily expression, dress, and jewelry. It is then that I realize how little I know, and how much I need to learn.

In my experience, the greatest challenge and enjoyment of being an Agricultural Attaché is learning about the country, which includes not only its current political-economic and agricultural situation, but its history, religion, culture, food, and most important the people who live within its borders. I have found that during both of my assignments abroad, it is nearly impossible to understand a foreign government's political or economic policy if one does not understand the country context. With this knowledge, you are able to tackle challenges both large and small, and effectively address important issues ranging from food security to trade. But perhaps of greater value is that such knowledge allows you to bridge interests, diplomatically resolve impasse, and foster tangible results.

Learning also means understanding how an US Embassy operates overseas. One of the first things you may notice is that the bureaucracy is smaller. For example, I found it easier to hold interagency meetings since most USG Departments or agencies were located in the same building. But this also allowed for more collaboration on crosscutting issues. Moreover, Embassy work affords one the opportunity to be a leader, manager, and an expert. During your tour, you likely will find yourself providing facts, analysis, and opinion directly to decision-makers. But you also will manage locally-employed staff, and provide to them your vision on reporting and other assignments.

As an Agricultural Attaché, you have a wide range of responsibilities, including analysis, marketing, trade policy, and agricultural development. The backbone of FAS is information gathering and analysis, which is a major component of your job overseas. For reporting, you will travel and interview various actors to understand agricultural trends such as production, consumption, stocks, and trade. Your reporting helps US farmers and exporters understand foreign markets, but it also contributes to the policy decision-making process in USDA. For the marketing of US foods, you may work with US cooperators and local retailers, traders, and distributors to organize in-store promotions, reverse trade missions, and chef trainings. Agricultural trade policy can include addressing tariff issues, but has incrementally shifted to resolving nontariff barriers such as SPS measures. Moreover, you may help organize agricultural development activities ranging from scientist exchanges, food aid programming, market capacity building, and other trainings to improve food security and trade.

Outside of work, on a personal level you constantly are learning how to live abroad, which requires a certain amount of flexibility, openness, and curiosity. This can include learning how to keenly negotiate without raising your blood pressure, or deftly cross a street without being plummeted by vehicles, animals, and carefree pedestrians. You may discover that your interpretations of “history” are not the same as your neighbor’s, and as a result have long philosophical conversations on the subject. And that Tex-Mex food can never be replicated outside of Texas (which is true). In effect, you always are the teacher and student, which is a never-ending rollercoaster of intercultural excitement.

*About the Attaché: In 2005, Mr. Joshua Emmanuel Lagos started working for FAS as a civil servant employee and joined the Foreign Service in 2007. His previous posting includes Beijing, China. He is currently posted in New Delhi, India. Joshua grew up in San Antonio, Texas and received his undergraduate education from the University of Texas at Austin, where he graduated with three degrees: Latin American Studies, History, and Communication Studies. He received a Master’s of Arts in International Affairs from American University.*

## **A Day in the Life of an Agricultural Attaché – by Evan Mangino**

If you get posted to Tokyo, then you really can’t complain ... about anything. The work is never dull. The people are (perhaps overly) polite and friendly. And you’re living in the middle of one of the global centers of art, fashion, finance, culture, and cuisine. Tokyo is a great place to work as a Foreign Service Officer, but it’s an even better place to work when your job revolves around food and drink. Tokyo has more Michelin-starred restaurants than the entire United States combined, and Japan has more Michelin 3-star restaurants than any other country on the planet (yup, even France). Food is central to Japanese culture and daily life, and it is your job to ensure that high quality U.S. food and ag products continue to be a part of Japanese daily dining experiences.

Japan is often referred to as a mature market. Even though Japan is no longer one of the top three destinations for U.S. agricultural exports (it’s #4), it is still larger than the next 5 markets combined, so the volume and value of trade is significant. Soon after I arrived, I learned that there really is no such thing as a typical day as an Ag Attaché. Some days you’ll spend hours writing and editing a single report. Others you’ll be engaged in marathon negotiating sessions with representatives from the Government of Japan. And yet other days you might be delivering a speech in Japanese to over 5,000 Future Farmers of Japan, briefing a visiting trade mission of U.S. small business owners, or taking a bullet train into the countryside to learn about Japanese cattle feeding firsthand. And because of the time difference, you’ll occasionally be making work calls from home at 10:00pm or 11:00pm.

A big part of your job is to have information, and if you don't have it then you and your staff had better find out (usually pretty quickly). As an Attaché, you have to think on your feet, problem solve, be ready for anything at a moment's notice, articulate positions clearly, and keep a level head. There's no training manual for how to do this job. You'll probably have a dozen long-term projects that you have to keep chipping away at while you're juggling another dozen urgent requests that crop up each day. And in between all of that, you'll probably be asked to give a speech at a marketing event on the benefits of walnuts for neuroplasticity (really).

And just as importantly, my job in Tokyo has been great for my family. I have two small kids (our second was born here), and even though there are plenty of work events after business hours and regular business travel, I'm home for dinner and bedtime almost every night. Part of that has to do with the 10-minute walking commute between the Embassy and the housing compound, where most Embassy employees live, but part of that also has to do with the work-life balance that I have found working for the U.S. Government. Tokyo is probably the safest city on the planet, it's immaculately clean, and it's bursting at the seams with interesting places to explore. It's not very stroller-friendly, but we got over that pretty quickly and are happy to call Tokyo home...for now.

*About the Attaché: Evan Mangino arrived in Tokyo in August 2013, and currently divides his time between the Office of Agricultural Affairs (OAA) and the Agricultural Trade Offices (ATOs) in Tokyo and Osaka. As an Agricultural Attaché in the OAA, Evan manages the livestock, oilseeds, forestry, and fisheries portfolios, in addition to covering food labeling issues. As the ATO Deputy Director, Evan supports the Director and the greater mission to expand U.S. agricultural exports through market promotion activities. Prior to Japan, Evan served the Foreign Agricultural Service in a variety of positions over six years in Washington, DC.*

*Evan is joined in Tokyo by his wife Kate as well as their almost 4 year-old daughter and 9 month-old son. Evan is a New Jersey native, a returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Kingdom of Tonga 2003-2005), and a graduate of Middlebury College and Johns Hopkins SAIS.*



## Section II

### The Foreign Service Officer Selection Process

#### Requirements

- Possess at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-9 level in Federal service or completion of at least three full years of progressively higher level graduate education leading to a Ph.D. degree in marketing, economics, agricultural economics, agricultural business or other field of study directly related to this position from an accredited university.
- To be eligible for consideration, the applicant must meet specialized experience and/or education requirements no later than the closing date of the vacancy announcement, tentatively scheduled for the end of February 2016.
- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Be available for a worldwide assignment and willing to relocate approximately every 3-4 years.
- Be able to pass a U.S. Government background check and obtain and maintain a top secret security clearance (costs covered by FAS).
- Be able to obtain and maintain medical clearance.

#### How to apply

##### 1. Complete the online application package.

To begin this process, create an account in USAJOBS (<https://my.usajobs.gov/>). Search Jobs by typing ***“Foreign Agricultural Affairs Officer”*** in ***“Washington DC.”*** View the job you have selected and then click ***“Apply Online.”*** Applicants must complete an online application for an announced vacancy by the closing date of the announcement. This job requires a USAJOBS resume to apply. The resume must contain the following information: 1) job information for which you are applying; 2) personal information; 3) education; 4) work experience; and 5) other qualifications. After submitting your resume, follow the prompts to complete the occupational questionnaire. **Applications are not screened for required documents. It is your responsibility to ensure that all required documents are received by the closing date of the announcement.** If you are unable to apply online, you may fax your application materials to the fax number stated on the announcement.

##### 2. The selection process

Applications will be screened to determine if the basic qualifications specified in the announcement have been met. Applications that pass through this first screening are rated relative to the qualifications specified in the announcement. The highest ranking applicants are invited to participate in the Foreign Agricultural Service Assessment Forum held in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Applicants will be notified by email if they have passed this first stage. **FAS will not pay any travel costs.**

The Assessment includes a group exercise, several combined written and oral exercises, and a structured interview. Those candidates who pass all of the exercises of the Assessment will be placed on a list called the Certificate of Eligibles. The Certificate is valid for a maximum of twenty-four months from the date certified by the Director General of the Office of Foreign Service Operations of FAS. Candidates





who do not receive a conditional offer before the Certificate of Eligibles expires may reapply. Candidates who decline an offer are removed from the Certificate. The number of candidates who are selected for a conditional offer depends on funding availability and the needs of the service.

### **Agricultural Advocacy Exercise**

The candidate will be asked to analyze and incorporate information drawn from a variety of sources in order to advocate for U.S. agriculture. This exercise will assess the following skills:

- Communication skills, both oral and written;
- Intellectual skills, such as gathering and analyzing information, applying the information, making decisions, and prioritizing;
- Interpersonal skills, such as interacting with others, adaptability and professionalism; and
- Client servicing skills, such as customer service.

### **Staff Member Counseling Exercise**

The candidate will be asked to perform basic supervisory and leadership skills, such as task and people management. This exercise will assess the following skills:

- Communication skills, both oral and written;
- Intellectual skills, such as gathering and analyzing information;
- Supervisory skills; and
- Interpersonal skills, such as interacting with others, adaptability and professionalism.

### **Client Services**

The candidate will be asked to provide a written response that will assess the following skills:

- Written communication skills;
- Intellectual skills, such as gathering and analyzing information, applying the information, making decisions, and prioritizing;
- Interpersonal skills, such as interacting with others, adaptability and professionalism; and
- Client servicing skills, such as identifying customer expectations, communicating with stakeholders, and taking initiative to increase awareness of FAS programs.

### **Group Exercise:**

Candidates are brought together in a group of four to six to constitute an Embassy task force charged with allocating resources to competing projects in their host country. Each candidate receives a package of common background materials to read and absorb. At the end of that time, each candidate makes a presentation to the group. After the last presentation has been made, the group negotiates and debates pros and cons with the goal of reaching a consensus on which people or projects should be supported and at what level. Assessors observe the group to see how well individuals demonstrate communication, intellectual, and interpersonal skills that are essential in FAS Officers.

### **Oral Interview:**

In this portion of the oral assessment, interviewers will assess your fitness for the Foreign Service and the experience and skills you would bring to a job in the Foreign Agricultural Service. These skills include oral communication, supervisory/leadership skills, interpersonal skills and initiative/outreach skills. You might think of the oral interview as the formal job interview.

### **Worldwide Availability:**

Worldwide availability is an essential requirement for appointment to the Foreign Service. 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 of State's Office of Medical Services determines whether or not a candidate is medically available for assignment to FAS 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. A decision to grant a waiver is made on a case-by-case basis and only if it is clearly in the best interests of the Foreign Service.

You will also be asked to reaffirm in writing that you accept the following two conditions of Foreign Service employment:

- First, support of U.S. Government policies and objectives, regardless of your personal views;
- Second, Worldwide Availability: Even though the Foreign Agricultural Service attempts to work with each employee's individual and family needs, all employees must be willing to serve anywhere that FAS determines to be necessary. This can mean in isolated, potentially unhealthy or dangerous environments, or where you might not have training in the local language. While you will have some input into the assignment process, everyone is expected to serve part of his or her career at hardship posts. FAS also has unaccompanied posts; if assigned to one, you would not be able to take family with you.

### **Medical Clearance**

Those entering the Foreign Service must be able to serve at any overseas post. 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. Candidates who are offered tentative job offers are provided with instructions for obtaining their medical clearances. Candidates can either schedule exams at the Department of State's Office of Medical Service or have them done by their own physicians. The candidate's medical insurance should be used to cover the cost of the exam. FAS will pay any remaining costs after the candidate's medical insurer has paid its customary fee. 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 of State 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.

## Security Clearance

A comprehensive security background investigation, conducted by the Office of Personnel Security in cooperation with other federal, state and local agencies, provides information necessary to both determine a candidate's suitability for appointment to the Foreign Service and their eligibility 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 an 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 a security clearance are ineligible for appointment. Candidates who have held an active Top Secret security clearance with another U.S. federal agency within the past two years and whose last background investigation is no more than five years old may be able to have their security clearances granted by USDA under the criteria of reciprocity. However, for the purposes of determining candidates' suitability, candidates whose background investigation is more than two years old still need to update their documentation to support an updated investigation.

### 3. The Skills Necessary to be Successful in the Foreign Service

The Assessment is designed to test for skills, abilities and personal qualities which demonstrate whether the candidate possesses specific skills needed to perform successfully the job of a Foreign Agricultural Affairs Officer. The skills tested in the Assessment were determined after conducting a thorough job analysis. Specifically, these skills include:

1. **Oral and Written Communication Skills** – To communicate fluently in a concise, grammatically correct, organized, precise and persuasive manner; to convey nuances of meaning accurately; to listen well to others; to interpret and use appropriate non-verbal cues; to use appropriate styles of communication to fit the audience and purpose, in both written and oral formats.
  - a. Speaking
  - b. Listening
  - c. Writing
  - d. Editing
2. **Intellectual Skills** – 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 weigh relative merits of competing demands; to analyze and draw correct conclusions from pertinent data; to recognize patterns and trends in numerical data; to perform mathematical operations.
  - a. Gathering and Analyzing Information
  - b. Market access analysis
  - c. Application of analyses
  - d. Making Decisions and Judgments
  - e. Prioritization

3. **Supervisory/Leadership Skills** – To responsibly and positively oversee others through the direction of action, people and resources; to motivate others to collaborative success.
  - a. Task and Assignment Management
  - b. People Management
  - c. Resource Management
4. **Interpersonal Skills** – To interact with others in a constructive, cooperative and harmonious manner, maintaining high standards of integrity and ethical conduct; to work effectively as a team player; to establish positive relationships and gain the confidence of others; to adjust or adapt to changing work situations.
  - a. Using Social Skills
  - b. Cultural Adaptability
  - c. Teamwork
  - d. Professionalism
  - e. Networking
5. **Client Service Skills** – To assess client needs and provide related information or assistance; to meet or exceed client expectations; to proactively support client initiatives; to formulate creative alternatives or solutions and flexibly respond to client needs.
  - a. Meeting Expectations
  - b. Stakeholder Communication
  - c. Outreach and Awareness

## 4. Frequently Asked Questions

### The Application Process

1. Do I have to apply via USA Jobs?
  - Yes.
2. Should my resume include anything specific?
  - Your resume should include job information, personal information, education and work experience, and any other qualifications that you think are relevant. For job information, make sure you include your employer's name and your dates of employment.
3. Are there any limits to what can be provided on the resume?
  - You should provide all the information you feel is relevant in determining your qualifications and eligibility for the position outlined in the announcement.
4. Do I have to meet the qualifications and eligibility requirements by the closing date of the announcement?
  - No but you do need to complete all experience and/or education requirements by the closing date of the vacancy announcement, February 17, 2015.
5. If I apply as a GS-12, will you still consider me for a GS-11?

- No. You will need to indicate each grade level or the lowest grade level you are willing to accept at the time you apply. Consider this carefully because if you only mark GS-12 you will not be considered for any GS-11 openings. Please note that under certain circumstances only GS-11 applicants may be considered for the Assessment Forum.
6. Do I need to submit my transcripts at the same time as I submit my application?
    - Yes, but unofficial transcripts are acceptable. You will be required to submit the official version before you actually report for duty. Your transcript will need to include department, courses and course numbers and grades. Please remember to black out your social security numbers on your transcripts.
  7. What else do I need to include with my application?
    - If you want to qualify your experience on the basis of your federal employment, do not forget to include your most recent SF-50. You should also make sure to include your email address as we will mainly be communicating via email. If you are a veteran and would like to qualify for veteran's preference, you will need to include a DD-214.
  8. Do I have to complete the assessment tool (prescreen questionnaire)?
    - Yes.
  9. How long is the assessment stage of the hiring process?
    - See the timeline on the last page.

### **Assessment Forum**

10. Are accommodations provided for people with disabilities?
  - The Agency will provide reasonable accommodation to applicants with disabilities. If you need a reasonable accommodation for any part of the application and hiring process, please contact the POC on the vacancy announcement. Decisions on granting reasonable accommodation will be made on a case-by-case basis.
11. What is the best way to prepare for the written portion of the Assessment Forum?
  - The main objectives of the written exercises are to assess whether you have basic knowledge of correct grammar, organization, diction, spelling, and punctuation; the ability to express your ideas and information in written form, and the ability to edit the work of others.. Writing well takes time, perseverance and practice; it is not necessarily something that you can learn just to pass this assessment.
12. Are all the exercises conducted on the same day?
  - Yes.
13. How many candidates take the group exercise together?
  - The goal is for each group to consist of 4 to 6 candidates.
14. How long will the entire Assessment Forum take?
  - You should plan to be at the testing facility all day. Additional instructions will be provided for those candidates who are invited to the Assessment Forum.

## World Wide Availability

15. Can I choose to spend my entire career on foreign assignments, or conversely only a few years outside of Washington?
  - No. In order to assure that all officers stay well connected to both headquarters and the overseas mission of FAS, the Foreign Service has rules about the maximum number of consecutive years that an officer can spend outside the United States (15 years) or in Washington (8 years).
16. If I really have an expertise or passion about one country or one part of the world, can I insist that all my overseas assignments are in that country/area?
  - No. The key to having a successful career in the FAS Foreign Service is to be flexible. If you are only interested in living in one place overseas, the FAS Foreign Service may not be the best career choice for you.

## Security

17. If I already have a security clearance, do I need to get another one for this job?
  - All FSOs require a Top Secret clearance. If you have held an active Top Secret security clearance granted by another federal agency within the past two years, you may meet the criteria for reciprocity. The minimum criteria for reciprocity includes no more than a two year break in service, the last investigation was no more than five years ago, and there has been no new information or incidents that could impact your eligibility for a clearance since your last investigation.
18. Where can I get assistance completing my security clearance package or inquire into the status of my security clearance?
  - For assistance with completing your security clearance package or to inquire into the status of your security clearance, you may email the FAS Security Office at [Security.Emergencyprep@fas.usda.gov](mailto:Security.Emergencyprep@fas.usda.gov), or you may talk with a personnel security specialist between the hours of 8:30am and 4:30pm, EST, by calling (202) 720-4908.
19. How long does it take to process a typical security clearance?
  - Each case varies, but the general time averages between 60-120 days.
20. What happens if I'm denied a security clearance? Is there an appeal process?
  - If you are denied a security clearance, or your continued eligibility for access to classified information is revoked, you will be notified of the reason(s) and be provided with the procedures for filing an appeal. You will be given the opportunity to address any derogatory information that was gathered during the investigation and either correct or clarify the situation.
21. For what reasons would I be denied a security clearance?
  - Various reasons exist for why someone may be denied a security clearance. The most important factors in an investigation are the individual's honesty, candor, and thoroughness in the completion of their security clearance forms. Every case is individually assessed, using the National Security Board's 13 Adjudicative Guidelines, to determine whether the granting

or continuing of eligibility for a security clearance is clearly consistent with the interests of national security.

The adjudicative guidelines include: allegiance to the United States; foreign influence; foreign preference; sexual behavior; personal conduct; financial considerations; alcohol consumption; drug involvement; emotional, mental, and personality disorders; criminal conduct; security violations; outside activities; and misuse of information technology systems.

22. Are members of my family or people living with me subject to a security check?

- There are circumstances in which limited records checks or an investigation may be conducted on a spouse or cohabitant\*. National agency checks are conducted on spouses and/or cohabitants of individuals being processed for a Top Secret level clearance, with the spouse or cohabitant's authorization. Additional investigations may be conducted when the spouse or cohabitant is a foreign national.

\*A cohabitant is defined as someone with whom you live together as husband and wife and the relationship involves the mutual assumption of marital rights, duties, and obligations, which are usually manifested by married people, including, but not necessarily dependent on, sexual relations.

23. What does FAS do to ensure the safety of its officers overseas?

- The security conditions and requirements at each post are assessed and set by the State Department and these requirements apply to FAS officers. Prior to departing for an overseas assignment, an officer is required to take security training. When overseas, further training is provided. FAS takes the security of its employees very seriously.

### Other Questions

24. How are candidates selected from the Certificate of Eligibles? Are there additional criteria?

- The Director General will have a file for each candidate on the Certificate that includes the candidate's resume and assessment scores. The Director General will consider candidates based on the needs of the service. Language and technical skills may come into play here.

25. How will my experience with FAS be different from my previous overseas experience in the Peace Corps?

- There are some similarities between the Foreign Service and the Peace Corps. Both require the ability to be successful in a foreign environment and both demand a high commitment to public service; however, they are also very different. In the Peace Corps, you often live in remote rural villages and work on a grass-roots level within a single community. The type of work a volunteer does is ultimately determined by the needs of the host country. Your main focus is on the individual. In the Foreign Service, you often live in dense urban areas and work in an office setting with regular interaction with business people and senior government officials. The type of work an FSO does is ultimately determined by the needs of the U.S. Government. Your main focus is obtaining access for U.S. suppliers to the foreign market.

26. How long will I remain in the United States before actually getting posted overseas?

- Typically new employees are placed in Washington assignments for 12-24 months before being posted overseas. Some of this time may include language training.
27. How often will I be able to come back to the United States to see my family?
- You will accrue annual leave and home leave. You can use annual leave at any time to travel home, or elsewhere, at your own expense, just as you would if stationed in the United States (subject to your supervisor's approval of course). Home leave is a special leave category for Foreign Service officers. All tours provide for at least one home leave break at the end of your tour.
28. How long is a normal tour?
- Most of our overseas tours are for three years with the option to extend for the fourth year. In posts that warrant a hardship differential (e.g. China but not France), a three-year tour provides for two rest and recuperation breaks (R&R). For hardship posts a four-year tour provides for two R&Rs and a home leave break after two years and again at the end of the tour.
29. Will I be able to begin work while waiting for my medical and security clearances to be completed?
- No, successful candidates will receive a tentative offer of employment contingent upon successfully completing pre-employment requirements, including medical and security clearances. Candidates will receive a selection confirmation and a start date once they have completed these requirements.
30. Who should I contact if I have other questions?
- If you have other questions about the vacancy announcement, assessment process, or Foreign Service, please send an email to [Kathy.L.Kullik@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:Kathy.L.Kullik@aphis.usda.gov).

## 5. A few suggestions to help you prepare for the process.

- Suggested websites:
  - Foreign Agricultural Service (<http://www.fas.usda.gov/>)
  - Current FAS World Production, Markets, and Trade Reports
  - Global Agricultural Information Network
  - FAS Production, Supply and Distribution (PS&D) Online Database World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates
  - Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin Crop Explorer (<http://www.pecad.fas.usda.gov/cropexplorer>)
  - Economic Research Service: International Markets & Trade (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/international-markets-trade.aspx>)
  - Feed the Future (<http://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/foreign-agricultural-service-food-education-program-fuels-food-thought>)
  - World Trade Organization (<http://www.wto.org/>)
  - Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (<http://www.ustr.gov/>)
  - Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (<http://www.iatp.org/>)



## 2016 Timeline

*Note: Timeline is subject to change without notice.*

Activity	Dates
Vacancy Announcement	February 1-17, 2016
Public Information Session Patriots Plaza III 355 E Street SW Washington, DC Auditorium B, 1 <sup>st</sup> Floor 1:00 – 2:30 pm	February 4, 2016
Application Review	February – March 2016
Results letters and schedule information for Assessment Forum to applicants via email	March 14-18, 2016
Assessment Forum	April 11-22, 2016
Results and pre- employment invitation letters sent to applicants via email	May 2016
Hiring selections are made	May 2016
Applicants obtain medical and security clearances	May 2016 – January 2017