

# FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER APPLICATION PROCESS – Strategy for Success

## OVERVIEW

The Foreign Service Officer Application process includes the following in chronological order: your career track choice, an online registration, a structured resume and computer-based test, a personal narrative statement, an oral exam, a security background investigation, a medical examination and the final review panel.

Candidates submit a structured resume when they register. The structured resume enables candidates to provide information on their academic and work experience. Next, candidates take a streamlined computer-based test that is administered three times each year at commercial test centers and at some overseas posts. The test is a critical part of the entry process. The test will measure the knowledge, skills, and abilities, including writing skills that are necessary to the work of a Foreign Service Officer. The test includes three multiple-choice sections:

- Job knowledge
- English expression
- Biographic information – a section that asks you to describe your work style, your manner of interacting and communicating with others, and your approach to other cultures

Candidates who pass the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT) multiple choice and essay sections will receive an email asking them to submit a Personal Narrative (PN) containing questions enabling candidates to describe the knowledge, skills, and abilities they would bring to the Foreign Service. The firm deadline for submission will be three weeks after the request is sent.

The PN and FSOT scores will be reviewed by a panel who will determine which candidates to invite to the oral assessment (which is described in greater detail below). If the candidate is chosen after completing the oral assessment, a security background investigation and medical examination are the last steps toward becoming a Foreign Service Officer.

Additional information regarding the application process can be obtained from the State Department's website at: [www.careers.state.gov/officer/selection-process](http://www.careers.state.gov/officer/selection-process).

## ESSENTIAL ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- All applicants must be US citizens on the date they submit their registration package.
- On the day you submit your registration, you must be at least 20 years old and no older than 59 years of age.
- On the day you are appointed as a Foreign Service Officer, you must be at least 21 years old and not yet 60.
- You must also be available for worldwide assignments, including Washington, DC.

The US State Department does not require a specific education level, academic major, or proficiency in a foreign language for appointment as a Foreign Service Officer. However, the US Department of State welcomes applicants who have foreign language competence.

### Highly Critical Languages

- Arabic: Modern Standard, Egyptian, and Iraqi
- Chinese: Mandarin
- Dari
- Farsi
- Hindi
- Urdu

### Critical Languages

- Arabic: forms other than Modern Standard, Egyptian, and Iraqi
- Chinese: Cantonese
- Azerbaijani
- Bengali
- Kazakh
- Korean
- Kurdish
- Kyrgyz
- Nepali
- Pashto
- Punjabi
- Russian
- Tajik
- Turkish
- Turkmen
- Uzbek

### CAREER TRACKS

The Foreign Service has five different career tracks: **Consular Affairs**, **Economic Affairs**, **Management Affairs**, **Political Affairs**, and **Public Diplomacy**. At the beginning of the hiring process, you must choose a track. The State Department has developed a questionnaire to help you match your interests to the career track. The questionnaire can be found at: [careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/officer/career-track-quiz](https://careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/officer/career-track-quiz).

### THE SELECTION PROCESS: FOUR MAJOR STEPS

#### 1. Registration: Application Form

Registration consists of an **Application Form** in which you convey factual background information including school and work history.

*Please be aware that all the information you give is subject to verification, and that any exaggeration of your experience and qualifications, including your language ability, would weaken your candidacy. Misrepresentations may be grounds for terminating your candidacy, or for dismissing you after you have begun work, and may be punishable by fine or imprisonment.*

You can begin registration for the Foreign Service Selection Process by filling out the online Application Form. Your registration remains valid for one year from the day you submit it. Once your Registration is received and confirmed to be complete, you will receive an e-mail authorizing you to make an online reservation to take the Foreign Service Officer Test at any one of approximately 230 test centers in the United States. **The link to online registration is usually available at [www.careers.state.gov](https://www.careers.state.gov) in July.**

You can also download the most recent **Guide to the Foreign Service Officer Selection Process** from: [careers.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/FSOT-Information-Guide-2.pdf](https://careers.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/FSOT-Information-Guide-2.pdf).

## 2. Taking the Foreign Service Officer Test

The second step in the selection process is the **Foreign Service Officer Test**, which is administered online at designated test centers and generally takes about three hours to complete.

The test will be given during an eight-day window, and there will be approximately three test windows every year. Reservations for a seat during any given test window must be made at least 48 hours prior to the first day in that test window. When you go online to reserve a seat, you will be informed of the exact deadline date. After you have made your reservation, you will receive instructions for downloading the admissions letter that you will need to bring with you to the test center.

Test center seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Please be advised that the number of seats for each window is limited. If seats at the test center you want are filled, you are free to search for a seat at a different test center. If the eight-day test window you want is already full, you will be able to schedule later for a subsequent test window. **Note that you must reserve a test seat within one year of submitting your Registration Package.** Your actual test date may be later than a year after you registered, but you must have reserved your seat within the one year limit. You may take the test only once in a 12-month period.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** If you are unable to take the test on the scheduled date, you will need to cancel your seat at least 48 hours before the test date. Your admissions letter will contain information on how to do so. **If you fail to provide this notification, you will be assessed a \$50 fee.**

The test measures your knowledge, skills, and abilities, including writing skills that are necessary to the work of a Foreign Service Officer. The test includes three multiple-choice sections: job knowledge, English expression, and a biographic information section that asks you to describe your work style, your manner of interacting and communicating with others, and your approach to other cultures.

Job knowledge questions will cover a broad range of topics including, but not limited to, the structure and workings of the United States government, United States and world history, United States culture, psychology, management theory, finance and economics, and world affairs. In addition, you will be given 30 minutes to write an essay on an assigned topic.

**To register for the Foreign Service Test, please visit:** [www.pearsonvue.com/fsot](http://www.pearsonvue.com/fsot).

## 3. Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP)

If you pass the test, you will be asked to complete a **Personal Narrative**. All of your materials will be forwarded to the Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP), the third step in the process. The panel will take a comprehensive "total candidate" approach in evaluating your candidacy, taking into account all of the information in your candidate file including your education and work background, your personal narrative, your self-evaluated language skill level and your FOST score. The panel will determine which candidates to invite to the Oral Assessment.

Once the QEP has completed its work, you will be informed of your status via an online letter that you will be able to access using the personal login ID and password you chose when you registered.

#### 4. Oral Assessment

The **Oral Assessment** is conducted in Washington, DC and in various major cities around the United States. This day-long program seeks to determine whether you have the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are essential to the performance of Foreign Service work. It includes a group exercise, a structured interview, and a case management writing exercise.

The Oral Assessment is an assessment for selection as an entry-level Foreign Service Officer. Oral Assessment exercises are based on a job analysis of the work of the Foreign Service and reflect the skills, abilities and personal qualities deemed essential to the performance of that work. It is not an adversarial process: you do not compete against other candidates, rather, you are judged on your capacity to demonstrate the skills and abilities necessary to be an effective Foreign Service Officer.

#### **Oral Assessment Information Guide:**

<https://careers.state.gov/uploads/1d/51/1d51274caa589dec407d7341861320/FSO-OA-Information-guide-December-2015.pdf>

#### **AFTER THE SELECTION PROCESS: ADDITIONAL STEPS**

After you pass the Oral Assessment, you will receive instructions about the process of obtaining **medical and security clearances**. When you receive your medical and security clearances, your candidacy will be reviewed for overall suitability for the Foreign Service by the **Final Review Panel**. If the panel finds you suitable for the Foreign Service, you will be placed on a rank-ordered Register. You should be aware that, depending on your place on the Register and the number of Foreign Service Officers needed, it is still possible that you may not receive an offer of employment.

#### **FINAL REVIEW PANEL**

Upon completion of the background investigation, a Final Review Panel will examine the candidate's completed file (except medical records) to determine the candidate's suitability for employment with the Foreign Service.

The attainment of United States foreign policy objectives depends substantially on the confidence of the public (both American and foreign) in the individuals selected to serve in the Foreign Service. The Department of State, therefore, requires the highest standards of conduct by employees of the Foreign Service, including an especially high degree of integrity, reliability, and prudence. Given the representational nature of employment in the Service, employees must observe proper standards at all times. The purpose of the Final Review is to determine, from the candidate's total record, whether the candidate is indeed suitable to represent the United States. The Final Review Panel has the authority to terminate a candidacy.

**In evaluating suitability, the Final Review Panel takes into consideration the following factors:**

- Misconduct in prior employment, including marginal performance or inability to interact effectively with others
- Criminal, dishonest, or disgraceful conduct
- Misrepresentation, including deception or fraud, in the application process
- Repeated or habitual use to excess of intoxicating beverages affecting the ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of the employee's position
- Trafficking in or abuse of narcotics or controlled substances
- Reasonable doubt as to loyalty to the United States Government
- Conduct which clearly shows poor judgment and/or lack of discretion which may reasonably affect an individual's or the agency's ability to carry out its responsibilities or mission
- Financial irresponsibility, including a history of not meeting financial obligations or an inability to satisfy debts

The most common grounds for a finding of unsuitability are a recent history of drug or alcohol abuse and delinquency in repaying debt or other evidence of financial irresponsibility. Candidates whose file indicates such issues are unlikely to be found suitable for the Foreign Service. The Director of the Board of Examiners can reconvene a Suitability Panel should new information become available prior to hiring a candidate.

### **THE REGISTER**

After receiving medical and security clearances and passing the **Final Suitability Review**, your name is placed on the Register, which is a rank-ordered list of successful candidates, grouped by career track.

You may raise your standing on the Register by receiving Veteran's Preference points or credit for foreign language proficiency.

Information on language proficiency can be found at: [careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/officer/test-process](https://careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/officer/test-process).

Information on Veteran's Preference points can be found at: [careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/specialist/selection-process](https://careers.state.gov/work/foreign-service/specialist/selection-process).

You should be aware that your placement on the Register does not guarantee an appointment as a Foreign Service Officer, for the number of appointments depends on the needs of the Foreign Service. Your name may stay in the Register for a maximum of 18 months. After 18 months, your name will be removed from the Register. You may decline one appointment offer before your name is removed from the Register; that is, if you decline a second offer your name will be removed from the Register. If you wish to try to improve your place on the Register, you may begin the process anew at any time after your original 12-month registration validity has expired.