



**FSN Position Classification Guidance**

**A Product of the REFORM Initiative**

*JUNE 1997*

**POSITION CLASSIFICATION TEAM**

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# **CLASSIFICATION OF FOREIGN SERVICE NATIONAL POSITIONS**

## **FSN Classification Guidance -- The Classification of Positions in Reengineered USAID Missions**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Reengineering Effort for Organization and Management (REFORM) Initiative has been launched to support the efforts of field missions to reengineer their operations. Under the guidance of a senior, multi-disciplinary Advisory Group, a number of administrative issues have been identified for review. REFORM provides advice and guidance to field missions and assists them in implementing Agency reforms.

REFORM is committed to producing several specific products, or results, and the Advisory Group has assigned small teams to work in each functional area. Position management and the classification of foreign service national (FSN) positions is one area where the assigned team is to produce guidance for the use of all USAID missions. The Advisory Group committed to achieving the following specific result:

"Develop and provide classification guidance to assist organizational units in classifying FSN position descriptions, taking into full account reengineered Agency operations and work accomplished in teams. The classification guidance will be accompanied by a select sample of FSN position descriptions."

The interagency regulations pertaining to foreign service national personnel systems and personnel administration are provided in 3 FAM 7000 and 3 FAH 2, Ch4 (formerly, the Local Employee Position Classification Handbook [LECPH]). The Agency is expected to apply the uniform regulations pertaining to FSN personnel administration and the specific classification procedures and standards provided in the LEPCH, and any modifications or Agency-specific exceptions must be coordinated with the Department of State.

Given the lengthy time frame required for making changes to LEPCH standards, it is advantageous to the Agency to explore and exploit the flexibility contained in existing regulations.

A key assumption of REFORM is that the existing administrative tools we have employed for many years, such as the FSN position classification standards, can be adapted to reflect the reengineering of Agency program operations. The classification guidance developed by the REFORM team is aimed at facilitating the application of existing classification standards.

The implementation of Agency reforms will affect all employees. In particular, when teams are established, job content will become richer and more relevant to development issues and to specific development objectives and results. But it is also expected that for a majority of the time, most employees will engage in work specific to the occupation or professional area for which they were originally hired. In some cases, participation on teams will substantially affect the grade classification of certain positions. But reengineering will not substantially change the majority of positions; it is hoped that it will enrich them, and the work experiences of the employees who occupy them.

This guidance is intended to facilitate the classification of FSN positions affected by the adoption of Agency reforms and the reengineering of program and administrative operations. Overall, changes in FSN roles serve to broaden the scope of positions and to involve employees in work they would not traditionally perform. Note that position grades may be enhanced in certain circumstances, but on occasion they may also be diminished.

## **I. WORKING WITHIN TEAMS**

ADS Chapter 202, Achieving (202.5.2), requires operating units to establish strategic objective teams (SOTs). Beyond that, the formation of other formal or informal teams is a discretionary management decision. Teams are commonly formed at the strategic objective (SO), intermediate result, results package, and activity levels.

The reengineering of program operations has required USAID missions to organize work differently than in the past. Most USAID missions have established formal or informal teams at a number of levels, both in the program and the administrative support areas. One of the changes emerging from the establishment of multi-disciplinary teams is the assumption of new duties and responsibilities by many FSN employees.

A team is defined as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable and are held accountable. USAID employees may work on teams and interact with team members in a variety of ways. Employees may participate on one or more teams on a part-time basis or as "virtual" team members. When team membership is full-time, they may serve in an expanded team or as core team members. Additionally, the teams in all these scenarios may be either formally established organizational units or informal teams that are not reflected in the Agency staffing pattern.

In this regard, it is noted that **the status of a team as a temporary (informal) organization shall not adversely or negatively effect position classification.** The

status of a team as a permanent or a temporary organization is primarily an organizational management decision that does not materially affect its functions or the range of duties and responsibilities of its constituent positions.

In most instances, it is anticipated that individuals participating on teams will perform essentially the same work at the same level as they would if they were working in a traditional office. Certain positions will be substantially altered, however, and those positions should be classified in a manner that fully takes into account their new duties and responsibilities.

## **II. CLASSIFICATION OF MIXED POSITIONS**

There is concern that the LEPCH general grade level guides and the interagency classification standards cannot adequately reflect the changes that working in teams have made in FSN roles. It should be noted, however, that the LEPCH is a tool for identifying representative duties and responsibilities -- position characteristics that are largely independent of the organizational structure, i.e., teams or traditional office structures. The LEPCH allows for the establishment of "mixed positions," and it is understood that many FSNs working on teams will be in positions encompassing several different occupational series and grades.

**It is anticipated that most positions which are significantly changed due to Agency reengineering can be successfully and accurately classified by recognizing the full range and impact additional work. The classification of mixed positions allows for this consideration.** The acquisition of additional knowledge, skills, and abilities and the demonstrated application of expertise by FSNs in professional areas outside their normal occupational areas, are considered positive work factors. Depending on their significance and other relevant factors, they may enhance position grades. However, it is cautioned that other position grades may be diminished.

For instance, the grade level of some positions may be largely based on personal responsibility for an activity or program element. In a team environment, however, this responsibility may be assumed by a number of individuals, and given this diffusion of responsibility, the entire "credit" for an activity can no longer be assigned to only one employee for purposes of classification.

LEPCH Part V, D. Classification Principles, section 1.a. concerning the establishment of mixed positions, states, in part:

"A mixed position is one composed of duties which are typically a part of two or more recognized occupations...The duties of a mixed position may be appropriate to two or more series and two or more grades."

Mixed positions are placed in a **occupational series** according to the duties which an employee performs for a **majority of the time**. Within the series, a **grade classification** is assigned to a mixed position by determining **the highest level work which the employee performs at least 25% of the time**.

The term "variety of work" in this context is defined as work from different occupational groups (e.g., a combination of financial administration, program, procurement and supply, or other functional areas). The LEPCH section discusses how a wide variety of work factors should be treated:

"The process of combining different duties in a mixed position introduces a factor of variety of work into the classification process. Whether or not the variety factor is of sufficient weight to warrant additional classification credit depends upon the level of the work and the extent to which each separate duty involves distinctly different skills and guiding regulations and procedures. The combination of several low level duties which, although different, do not involve detailed knowledge of regulations and procedures, would not warrant additional classification credit, whereas **combinations of duties involving high level functions the performance of which requires substantial knowledge of separate and complex regulations and procedures might warrant additional classification credit**. Combinations of tasks in mixed jobs vary infinitely; however, insofar as these mixtures affect classification, (and except for specific LEPCH standards which provide a special rule for classifying mixed positions involving the work of three or more series within a single occupational grouping), the rule-of-thumb is that where a mixed position involves performance of three or more different occupations, (i.e.; occupations found in 3 or more different occupational groups in this Handbook) all of which are allocable to the same grade, and all of which require **a substantial knowledge of a separate body of complex regulations and procedures, consideration may be given to allowing such additional credit. Additional credit for variety should never exceed one grade, and should be approached with considerable caution.**"

It is expected, therefore, that the classification of FSN positions in USAID missions will take full advantage of these LEPCH provisions. Please refer to the LEPCH for the full text of this section and to review applicable position standards.

### **III. CLASSIFYING TEAM LEADER POSITIONS**

Team leaders are "player coaches" who work with a group of members to achieve specific tasks, produce analytical work products and services, and meet long/short-term program goals. To be classified as a team leader, an employee must be able to perform such duties as: facilitating, coordinating, coaching, and integrating work processes and products.

**Team leaders are responsible to their supervisors or managers for ensuring that the work of their assigned team is carried out by performing a range of coordinating and supportive duties and responsibilities.** Team leaders utilize a variety of coordinating, coaching, facilitating, consensus-building, and planning techniques. They are listed below.

- Managing the effective functioning of the team by: articulating and communicating to the team the problem to be solved or program issues under review; coaching the team and/or individual members in identifying the parameters of a viable solution; and ensuring the organization's "vision" is integrated into the team's goals, strategies, activity plans, and work products.
- Coordinating the assessment of team success in meeting performance goals, assessments by customers, and presentation of successes to the supervisor, while applying a wide range of qualitative and/or quantitative methods that assess and improve program effectiveness and/or complex management processes.
- Training or arranging for training of team members in the techniques of team building and working in teams to accomplish tasks or projects and specific administrative or professional training necessary for accomplishment of team tasks.
- Distributing and balancing workload and tasks among employees in accordance with established work flow or job specialization, continuously interacting with team members to build consensus, ensuring timely accomplishment of the assigned tasks, and ensuring that each employee has an integral role in developing the final product.
- Making personnel adjustments in accordance with established team priorities by recommending tour of duty changes, promotions, reassignments, recognition of outstanding performance, or overtime or compensatory time; and obtaining other types of assistance from the supervisor only on major issues or when personnel problems arise.
- Providing expert advice on specific tasks and making available written instructions, reference materials, and relevant background material.

Team leader duties and responsibilities are not reflected completely in the existing position classification standards. Under reengineered Agency operations, team leaders will not necessarily act as supervisors in the traditional sense and will not necessarily exercise all of the responsibilities that are specific to supervisory positions (see Section 4).

In recognition of the assumption of significant new duties and responsibilities by employees designated as team leaders, the following incentives are considered appropriate and may be considered by mission managers.

It has been determined that assuming the role of team leader would not justify additional classification credit. However, an adjustment in compensation may be appropriate.

Any additional compensation is only warranted for the period that an employee actually serves as a team leader. Such additional compensation would only be warranted and justified if:

- The duties of team leader are assumed for a period of 6 months or more;
- The role of team leader constitutes a major duty requiring 25% or more of the individual's time;
- The team (at either the strategic objective or results package levels) must have defined purposes and full and part-time members and their roles must be identified; and
- The team leader responsibilities must be over and above the designated individual's normal duties and responsibilities, as shown in their current position description.

In countries where temporary increases and/or decreases in compensation may be effected:

**When individuals assume team leader responsibilities on a full-time basis, but are not supervisors, a temporary two of three step increase may be allowed as additional compensation for the period in which team leader duties are performed.** The amount of the temporary increase will be determined by the level of the team and its relative complexity. For example, where an employee assumes team leader responsibilities for an Strategic Objective team, it is presumed that a strong case can be made for a temporary three step increase; team leader responsibilities at the activity or results package (RP) levels may warrant a temporary two step increase.

Due to the legislative environment and specific labor laws of some host country governments, it may be difficult to make temporary changes in compensation in some instances. Therefore, the following guidance is provided.

In countries where it is impracticable to effect temporary increases and/or decreases in compensation:

Managers should recognize and appropriately reward employees by using incentive awards and non-monetary recognition. It is recognized that incentive programs are not to be used as a type of compensation; awards are not an entitlement and are subject to review and approval by mission and/or post awards committees. The nature of the work undertaken by team leaders, however, is likely to be appropriate for recognition under post incentive awards programs, and due consideration should be given to utilizing these programs appropriately.

The incentives for team leader responsibilities are considered temporary and are allowed only when supervisory responsibilities are not assumed by the employee. The temporary increases do not replace or change the date of eligibility for the employee's normal annual within-grade increase.

#### **IV. SUPERVISORY AND NON-SUPERVISORY POSITIONS**

The work performed on teams has many implications for positions that traditionally have been considered supervisory. Supervisory responsibilities are necessary to the effective management of operating units, as the authority, inter alia, to assign work, approve leave, and discipline employees remains an essential function. The need for the supervisory function continues to exist, whether employees are working within empowered teams or in traditional, hierarchical offices in USAID missions.

Note that the assignment of an individual to a team may involve the assumption of new duties and responsibilities, including supervisory duties. A newly-designated team leader, for example, may assume additional new supervisory duties and responsibilities, and the position description should be modified and re-classified, accordingly.

**Supervisory responsibilities normally include many of the "player coach" characteristics listed in section 3**, and in addition, include responsibility and authorities for:

- Evaluation of work performance of subordinates;

- Interviewing candidates for positions in the unit; recommending appointment, promotion, or reassignment to such positions;
- Effecting disciplinary measures, such as warnings and reprimands, and recommending other action in more serious cases;
- Identifying developmental and training needs of employees, and providing or arranging for needed development and training;
- Developing performance standards;
- Hearing and resolving complaints from employees, and referring group grievances and more serious unresolved complaints to a higher level supervisor or manager.

Supervisory positions shall be classified, as in the past, with reference to 3 FAH 2, Ch4 (LEPCH). Classification credit for supervisory duties should be approached with considerable caution. A supervisor is defined as an employee who accomplishes work through the direction of other people. When that direction constitutes a major duty in addition to continuing management and program operations of the unit, **additional classification credit of one or two grade levels may be allowed.**

The degree of classification credit allowed for supervisory responsibilities -- whether a one or two grade increase -- depends on the merits of each case and the context of the work performed. Variable factors to consider include the relative complexity of the work performed, the actual nature and level of individual authorities, duties, base grade level of the work supervised, and responsibilities.

**Supervisors may work with or within teams in reengineered operating environments, and they also may be designated a team leaders. However, no classification credit additional to, or beyond, the classification credit normally allowed a supervisor is warranted, because supervisors are expected to have all of the "player coach" responsibilities discussed in section 3.**

Note that other circumstances may require adaptation of this guidance in accordance with specific local circumstances. Individual "supervisory" situations will require interpretation of the guidance and flexibility in its application. For example, when an individual supervises from three to six employees and also performs the most difficult and important work of the unit, but does not have continuing management responsibility for the operation of the unit, there is insufficient supervisory credit to warrant the one grade bonus normally allowed supervisory positions. In such an instance, the position draws most of its strength from the technical, non-supervisory work performed. A substantial responsibility for the continuing operations of the organizational unit must be demonstrated before additional classification credit can be

awarded.