ADS Chapter 503

Correspondence Management

Document Quality Check Date: 08/23/2012
Partial Revision Date: 12/05/2011
Responsible Office: M/MS/IRD
File Name: 503_082312

Functional Series 500 – Management Services
ADS 503 – Correspondence Management
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Table of Contents

503.1 OVERVIEW 3

503.2 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES 3

503.3 POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES 4

503.3.1 Managing Agency Correspondence 4

503.3.2 Correspondence Style 4

503.3.3 Types of Correspondence 4

503.3.4 Reply to Correspondence 5

503.3.5 Classification and SBU Correspondence Designations 6

503.3.6 USAID/W Stationery Standards 6

503.3.6.1 USAID Missions Stationery Standards 7

503.3.7 Correspondence Control 7

503.4 MANDATORY REFERENCES 7

503.4.1 External Mandatory References 7

503.4.2 Internal Mandatory References 7

503.5 ADDITIONAL HELP 7

503.6 DEFINITIONS 7

*An asterisk and yellow highlight indicate that the adjacent material is new for this chapter or substantively revised.

ADS 503 – Correspondence Management

503.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter prescribes policy for the control and creation of correspondence to ensure that the Agency creates timely, responsive correspondence that is properly coordinated between central bureaus and geographic bureaus and is consistent in tone, style, and presentation.

503.2 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

a. Bureau for Management, Office of Administrative Services, Information Support Services Division (M/AS/ISS) is responsible for developing Agency standards and instructions governing the preparation and handling of correspondence, not including executive correspondence. M/AS/ISS is also responsible for establishing Agency stationery standards. The Chief, M/AS/ISS, serves as coordinator for USAID's Correspondence Management Program.

b. The Executive Secretariat (ES) is responsible for developing Agency standards and instructions governing the preparation, handling, and control of executive communications.

c. USAID Employees: Drafting and clearing officials, secretaries, and typists are responsible for preparing correspondence that meets the Agency standards.

d. The drafting officer is responsible for selecting the best type of communication which fits the purpose, writing responses that are substantive, clear, concise, fully responsive to the incoming correspondence, and are courteous and respectful. The drafting officer is also responsible for ensuring classified documents or Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) correspondence is properly marked.

e. Bureau/Office Heads: Each bureau/office head is responsible for establishing an internal clearance process for Agency correspondence and for establishing internal controls and procedures to assure prompt attention and action for all communications.

f. Heads of Overseas Missions: The head of each overseas mission is responsible for establishing internal controls and procedures to assure prompt attention and action for all communications.

g. Clearing Officers: Clearing officers are responsible for ensuring responses are substantive, clear, concise, fully responsive to the incoming correspondence, and are courteous and respectful.

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503.3 POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES

The following policy directives and required procedures apply to correspondence management.

503.3.1 Managing Agency Correspondence

USAID must establish and maintain an active, continuing program for managing Agency correspondence, commensurate with Agency size, organization, mission, and record keeping activity.

503.3.2 Correspondence Style

Every USAID employee must strive to improve the quality, tone, clarity and responsiveness of correspondence, and provide for its creation in a timely, economical, and efficient manner.

All correspondence must be planned and prepared carefully so that it can be read and understood with ease. Written responses must be substantive, clear, concise, fully responsive to the incoming correspondence, and be courteous and respectful.

Sex-biased language must be avoided in all methods of communications.

Letters and memoranda must be centered vertically on the page and be neat in appearance. Begin the body of the letter two lines below the salutation or previous text. Use the standard paragraph indentation (1/2-inch from the left margin), single space lines in paragraphs, and double-space between paragraphs. For short letters of 10 lines or less, double-space between lines and triple-space between paragraphs. (See U.S. Government Correspondence Manual 1992, U.S. General Services Administration, for guidelines).

503.3.3 Types of Correspondence

When writing official Agency communications, USAID employees must comply with agency standards regarding the types of correspondence used and the kinds of copies required and their distribution and purpose.

The Agency corresponds by memoranda, letters, telegrams (cables), and other written and electronic communications.

The memorandum is used for correspondence within the Agency. It may also be used between the Agency and other U.S. Government agencies.

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Letters are used for correspondence with members of Congress, heads of other U.S. Government agencies, business firms, universities, private and international organizations, officials of foreign government, and the public

Telegrams and other electronic communications are used for transmitting correspondence when speed and responsiveness are important and a written record is required. For telegram preparation procedures see Chapter 549.5.2. (**See 549.5.2**) For electronic mail procedures see Chapter 549.5.4. (**See 549.5.4**)

Routing and Transmittal Slips are used for routing material or transmitting short informal messages within or between agency offices.

The author office must use agency stationery for letters and for memoranda that go outside the agency. The first page of the original document will be prepared on Agency Letterhead Stationery. Succeeding pages and all other copies will be prepared on plain white bond.

The Official File copy (record copy) shall be identified by typing or writing "Official Record Copy" in the right top corner of the page. The Official Record Copy must bear the name and signature or initials of the drafting, clearing, and signing officers.

503.3.4 Reply to Correspondence

The author office must reply to all types of correspondence within prescribed time frames.

Written acknowledgements, replies, or interim replies, will be sent within the following time limits:

a) LETTERS AND MEMORANDA

White House: Refer to due date on instruction sheet from ES

Cabinet: Refer to due date on instruction sheet from ES

Congressional: Refer to due date on instruction sheet from ES

Other Letters and Memoranda not included above within 7 working days

b) TELEGRAMS

FLASH, NIACT IMMEDIATE, and IMMEDIATE Telegrams within 24 hours

PRIORITY Telegrams within 2 working days

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CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRY Telegrams within 3 working days

Routine Telegrams within 5 working days

c) OTHER

When a Reply is Requested by a Specific Date observe requested reply date

Complaint Mail (and follow-up request for replies to previous communications) within 1 working day

d) INTERIM REPLIES

Interim Replies within 5 working days, follow-up every 30 days until final reply.

An interim reply must provide all available information and include the anticipated date of the final reply.

503.3.5 Classification and SBU Correspondence Designations

Classified correspondence must be marked with one of three designations: "Top Secret," "Secret," or "Confidential." The marking "Sensitive But Unclassified" should not be used to identify classified information, but only for sensitive information. (**See 12 FAM 513 through 545**).

503.3.6 USAID/W Stationery Standards

When writing agency correspondence, USAID employees must use Agency stationery that has been approved by M/AS/ISS for current use. The following types of letterhead are currently available:

U.S. Agency for International Development (for General Use)
The Administrator
Office of the Administrator
The Deputy Administrator
Assistant Administrators
Inspector General
General Counsel
Director, Office of Equal Opportunity Programs
Director, Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization/Minority Resource Center

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503.3.6.1 USAID Missions Stationery Standards

USAID Mission letterhead stationery 8 1/2" x 11" or metric size A4, with appropriate envelopes (both plain and window) is authorized for use in USAID Missions.

503.3.7 Correspondence Control

Every office must establish and use internal controls and procedures to assure prompt attention and action for all communications.

503.4 MANDATORY REFERENCES

503.4.1 External Mandatory References

a. United States Code, Title 44, Chapters 29, 31, and 35

b. Federal Information Records Management Regulations (FIRMR) 201-4, 201-6, and 201-9

c. Executive Order 12356, National Security Information, April 2, 1982

d. Executive Order 12958, National Security Information, April 17, 1995

e. Executive Order 12968, National Security Information, July 28, 1995

f. 12 FAM 500, Foreign Affairs Manual

503.4.2 Internal Mandatory References

There are no internal mandatory references documents for this chapter.

503.5 ADDITIONAL HELP

a. U.S. Government Correspondence Manual 1992, U.S. General Services Administration

503.6 DEFINITIONS

administratively controlled correspondence
Correspondence which does not require the same protection as National Security Information but should be protected from unauthorized disclosure for administrative reasons, i.e., Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU). **(Chapter 503)**

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Agency acronym
The Agency's acronym, USAID, refers to both the Washington office and field missions. The field missions use USAID/(name of Mission) and Washington uses USAID/W. **(Chapter 503)**

correspondence
Correspondence includes letters, form letters, telegrams (cables), memoranda, endorsements, summary sheets, postal cards, memo routing slips, and other written or electronic communications. **(Chapter 503)**

correspondence: classified
Correspondence containing information which requires protection in the interest of national security, i.e., Top Secret, Secret, or Confidential. **(Chapter 503)**

correspondence management
Correspondence management is the program that establishes standards for managing correspondence within the Agency. **(Chapter 503)**

endorsement
The act of giving one's approval to something. (**Chapter 503**)

official file copy
The official file copy of an outgoing letter or memorandum is the Agency record copy that bears the name and signature or initials of the drafting, clearing, and signing officers. (**Chapter 503**)

telegram (CABLE)
An official message originating in the Agency relating pertinent information dealing with policy, program activities and personnel for the operation of the U.S. Government. (**Chapter 503**)

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