

Introducing the Foreign Service Family Reserve Corps (FSFRC)

Summary

Background

Foreign Service family members represent a rich and talented pool of professionals from a variety of backgrounds that the Department would like to utilize to fill skill gaps at posts abroad. However, the length of time it can take to bring family members on board, particularly when positions require access to sensitive information, has sometimes proven frustrating to both hiring managers and potential employees. Among the goals in the Department's Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) are increasing the Department's ability to quickly fill positions and identifying new opportunities to accelerate the hiring process for eligible family members. To address these issues, the Under Secretary for Management is pleased to announce the creation of the Foreign Service Family Reserve Corps (FSFRC).

At full implementation, the FSFRC will improve efficiency in the hiring process for Appointment Eligible Family Members (AEFMs). The establishment of the FSFRC will require changes to some basic definitions to include AEFMs, U.S. Citizen Eligible Family Members (USEFMs), and others. These will be reflected in subsequent FAM changes

Structure of the FSFRC

When family members are accepted into the FSFRC, they will be in nonpaid status until placed in a local assignment. Family members who join the FSFRC will be permitted to remain in the FSFRC as long as they continue to meet eligibility requirements. FSFRC members will compete for available local assignments at their sponsoring employee's post of assignment abroad, just as they do now (e.g., GSO Assistant, HR Assistant, CLO), and will receive salary and benefits (if applicable) once they begin working. FSFRC members in Categories One or Two will retain their eligibility for access to classified information on the basis of their FSFRC position as they move from post to post. (See definition of categories below.)

The FSFRC will not create additional positions at posts nor guarantee FSFRC members a local assignment. FSFRC members will not obtain a security clearance simply by joining the FSFRC. FSFRC members without a clearance will start the security clearance process once selected for a local assignment at post that requires access to classified information, just as they do now. When not working in a local assignment at post, members will remain in the FSFRC.

Eligibility to Apply for Membership in the FSFRC

An individual who meets all the following criteria is eligible to apply for membership in the FSFRC.

1. Is a U.S. citizen
2. Is the spouse or domestic partner (as defined in 3 FAM 1610) of a sponsoring employee (i.e., a direct-hire Foreign Service, Civil Service, or uniformed service member)

3. Is either:
 - a. Listed on the travel orders of a sponsoring employee for a post abroad at a U.S. mission under Chief of Mission authority, or at an office of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), or
 - b. Listed on an approved Form OF-126, Foreign Service Residence and Dependency Report (or agency equivalent), of a sponsoring employee and resides at the sponsoring employee's post of assignment abroad, or, as appropriate, an office of the AIT
4. Does not receive a U.S. Government retirement annuity or pension from a career in the U.S. Foreign Service or Civil Service
5. Is not a Foreign Service Officer in Leave Without Pay (LWOP) status

Family members who meet the requirements stated above will be able to join the FSFRC. Family members who join the FSFRC will be assigned by DS and HR Shared Services (HRSS) to one of three categories based on their current or most recent security clearance: Category One for those with a current Top Secret clearance or those eligible to revalidate a recent Top Secret clearance; Category Two for those with a current Secret clearance or those eligible to revalidate a recent Secret clearance; or Category Three for those who do not have a security clearance or are not eligible to revalidate a previous clearance, including those who are not currently employed by the Department or who are working in non-sensitive positions. Regardless of category, FSFRC members will be eligible to apply for local assignments overseas where the sponsoring employee is assigned. If selected for a local assignment that requires access to classified information, FSFRC members who do not already hold the required level of clearance will begin the security clearance process.

Implementation of the FSFRC

Due to the large applicant pool, the Department will be phasing in the implementation of the FSFRC over the next two years. Family members who are currently employed in our missions overseas in an FMA or TEMP appointment and those currently in INWS who have a security clearance that can be revalidated will have the first opportunity to apply for the FSFRC.

The Department will open enrollment first to those family members in an FMA or TEMP appointment transferring during 2016, then to those transferring in 2017, and then to those transferring in 2018. The Department will then extend enrollment to all other family members overseas and to those who are on travel orders in advance of an overseas assignment. Information on the timing for application to the FSFRC will be provided prior to the start of each of these enrollment phases.

Application Process

Family members currently employed in an FMA or TEMP appointment and those in INWS status who meet the date-specific criteria will be invited to apply or decline by submitting a short application or declination form, which will be available through eForms. Enrollment announcements will include specific instructions on submitting the appropriate forms.

More Information

HRSS in Charleston will manage the operation of the FSFRC, the Office of Overseas Employment (HR/OE) will provide policy guidance, and the Family Liaison Office (HR/FLO) will communicate details of the program to family members. Please see Frequently Asked Questions and additional information on the FLO's internet page www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c71288.htm

Detailed Description

Introducing the FSFRC

The FSFRC will create a workforce capable of rapid assignment to positions overseas, including sensitive positions. Once fully implemented, the FSFRC will improve efficiency in the hiring and Entry on Duty (EOD) process for Appointment Eligible Family Members (AEFMs), centralize the administration of family member hiring, and allow for certain efficiencies in security clearance processing.

Fiscal constraints limit the Department's ability to create new positions overseas, and a government-wide Executive Order limits the issuance of a security clearance to those assigned to a position requiring access to classified information. Therefore, the FSFRC, in and of itself, will not create additional employment opportunities, nor will it provide an independent pathway to gain a security clearance. However, over time, the Department will benefit from the efficiencies the FSFRC provides in filling positions overseas, particularly those requiring access to classified information.

Eligibility to Apply for Membership in the FSFRC

An individual who meets all the following criteria is eligible to apply for membership in the FSFRC.

1. Is a U.S. citizen
2. Is the spouse or domestic partner (as defined in 3 FAM 1610) of a sponsoring employee (i.e., a direct-hire Foreign Service, Civil Service, or uniformed service member)
3. Is either:
 - a. Listed on the travel orders of a sponsoring employee for a post abroad at a U.S. mission under Chief of Mission authority, or at an office of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), or
 - b. Listed on an approved Form OF-126, Foreign Service Residence and Dependency Report (or agency equivalent), of a sponsoring employee and resides at the sponsoring employee's post of assignment abroad, or, as appropriate, an office of the AIT
4. Does not receive a U.S. Government retirement annuity or pension from a career in the U.S. Foreign Service or Civil Service
5. Is not a Foreign Service Officer in Leave Without Pay (LWOP) status

U.S. citizen spouses/domestic partners who are on approved Voluntary Separate Maintenance Allowance (VSMA) or Involuntary Separate Maintenance Allowance (ISMA) and are temporarily residing apart from the sponsoring employee are also eligible to join the FSFRC in non-paid status. However, they may begin working in a local assignment only when they resume residing with the sponsoring employee.

FSFRC Structure

Successful applicants would enter into the FSFRC in one of the following three categories, as determined by DS and HRSS:

Category One: Family members who meet the eligibility requirements listed above and currently hold an active Top Secret (TS) clearance would enter the FSFRC in Category One. Those who have been employed by the Department of State within two years of their FSFRC application date in either a Civil Service position or in a position abroad under COM authority that required a TS clearance, or are currently in Intermittent No Work Scheduled (INWS) status after serving in a position that required a TS clearance and who have had their background investigation favorably adjudicated within five years of their FSFRC application date (“revalidation eligible applicants”) also may enter the FSFRC in Category One upon revalidation of their previous TS clearance.

Category Two: Family members who meet the eligibility requirements listed above and currently hold an active Secret clearance would enter the FSFRC in Category Two. Those who have been employed by the Department of State within two years of their FSFRC application date in either in a Civil Service position or in a position abroad under COM authority that required a Secret clearance, or are in INWS status after serving in a position that required a Secret clearance and who have had their background investigation favorably adjudicated within five years of their FSFRC application date (“revalidation eligible applicants”) may also enter the FSFRC in Category Two upon revalidation of their previous Secret clearance.

Category Three: Family members who meet the eligibility requirements listed above who are currently employed by the Department of State under a Family Member Appointment (FMA) or a Temporary Appointment (TEMP) in a nonsensitive position or a “public trust” position for which they received appropriate investigation and suitability determination, or are in INWS after serving in a non-sensitive position. Category Three is also open to those who are not currently employees of the Department, if they are deemed suitable for a non-sensitive position (see New Hiring Preferences sections listed below).

Regardless of the category at which they enter, FSFRC members may later qualify for a different category by completing the following steps:

- 1) Applying for and being selected for a local assignment at post that requires a higher level clearance than the FSFRC member currently holds.
- 2) Completing the required security documents.
- 3) Undergoing a security investigation.
- 4) Receiving a favorable adjudication by DS for the higher level clearance.

FSFRC members would remain employed in the new category until their appointment in the FSFRC terminates or until they are granted a new clearance based on the need for a higher level of access to

classified information. Accepting a local assignment which does not require access to classified information will not affect the FSFRC member's current category.

Recertification to remain a member of the FSFRC will be conducted annually for all Category One and Category Two members not currently in a local assignment. The FSFRC appointment will terminate if the member no longer qualifies for FSFRC recertification or does not respond to the HR Shared Services' (HRSS) annual recertification query within the required timeline. FSFRC members must notify HRSS of any event (such as divorce, etc.) which may result in a loss of eligibility for the program.

FSFRC members will compete for local assignments at post. Only FSFRC members with an assignment will receive compensation and benefits (where applicable). FSFRC members who are not in a local assignment will remain in a nonpaid status.

Timing

The FSFRC will be phased in starting in 2016. We expect that it will take approximately 24 months to fully implement the required changes. The first phase will be an informational phase. During Phase Two and in subsequent phases, a call to applicants will be issued. To join the FSFRC, individuals will need to apply for the program during the appropriate phase. Each phase will be announced in advance and the announcement will include instructions on how to apply. HR/OE and FLO will post updates and status changes on their respective websites.

1. In Phase Two/ Wave A, the following family members may apply membership in the FSFRC:
 - a. Those currently employed at post under an FMA or TEMP appointment whose sponsoring employee has a Transfer Eligibility Date (TED) in Calendar Year (CY) 2016;
 - b. Those currently working in an FMA or TEMP Appointment or INWS status with a Not To Exceed (NTE) date in CY2016
 - c. Those currently working in a Department of State Civil Service position domestically who are on their sponsoring employee's 2016 travel orders to a post abroad (or other agency equivalent).
2. In Phase Two/Wave B, the following family members may apply for membership in the FSFRC:
 - a. Those currently employed at post under an FMA or TEMP appointment whose sponsoring employee has a TED in CY2017
 - b. Those currently working in an FMA or TEMP appointment or in INWS status with a NTE date in CY2017
 - c. Those currently working in a Department of State Civil Service position domestically who are on their sponsoring employee's 2017 travel orders to a post abroad (or other agency equivalent).
3. In Phase Two/Wave C the following family members may apply for membership in the FSFRC:
 - a. Those currently employed at post under an FMA or TEMP appointment whose sponsoring employee has a TED in CY2018 and beyond;
 - b. Those currently working in an FMA or TEMP appointment or in INWS status with a NTE date in CY2018 and beyond;

- c. Those currently working in a Department of State Civil Service position domestically who are on their sponsoring employee's 2018 travel orders to a post abroad (or other agency equivalent).

There is no closing date for each phase and applicants in each group may apply for FSFRC membership at any time during or after the wave that applies to them.

After applications received during the initial phases of implementation have been processed, all family members who meet the eligibility requirements listed above who have not yet joined will be eligible to apply for membership in the FSFRC. This call for applications will also be announced in advance and the announcement will include instructions on how to apply. Spouses of newly hired sponsoring employees in entering Foreign Service generalist and specialist classes will be eligible to apply for membership in the FSFRC once they are listed on their sponsoring employee's travel orders to a post abroad during the phase applying to that calendar year. Note: Suitability determinations for all new FSFRC applicants will be made per 3 FAM 2150 (Personnel Review Panel (PRP)).

New Hiring Preference

Several months after open enrollment commences FSFRC members will begin to receive a hiring preference for all vacancies advertised in the mission. At the same time, FSFRC membership will be required for Expanded Professional Associates Program (EPAP) program vacancies. If no eligible or qualified FSFRC members are available at post, a non-FSFRC member could be considered for employment. If the non-FSFRC member is ultimately chosen to fill the vacancy, he/she would be hired on a Personal Services Agreement (PSA).

When the new hiring preference goes into effect, (in approximately 20- 24 months), the hiring preference for all vacancies advertised in overseas missions would be as follows:

1. Members of the FSFRC who are also preference-eligible U.S. Veterans
2. Members of the FSFRC who are not preference-eligible U.S. Veterans
3. USEFMs* who are also preference-eligible U.S. veterans but who are not members of the FSFRC
4. USEFMs* who are not preference-eligible U.S. veterans and are not members of the FSFRC

*includes FS on LWOP who meet the definition of USEFM

Highest Previous Rate

Unless the Under Secretary for Management determines that Department funding levels are insufficient due to critical operational shortfalls, FSFRC members, when actively working in a local assignment, will receive a salary equivalent to their Highest Previous Rate (HPR) earned on a prior Federal Government personnel appointment of at least 90 calendar days without a break in service. However, if the HPR exceeds the highest step of the class/grade of the local assignment, the salary rate will be set at the highest step of the local assignment class/grade, even if that would result in a salary lower than an individual's HPR.

Declining FSFRC Membership

Currently employed family members who choose not to apply for FSFRC membership will be asked to decline to apply in writing. Application and declination forms will become part of the employee's official personnel file. If a family member does not apply for membership in the FSFRC, he/she must resign from his/her current FMA or TEMP appointment on or before their departure from post, and the family member will be unable to enter INWS status.

FSFRC Program Administration

HR Shared Services (HRSS) will manage and administer the FSFRC program for enrollment into the FSFRC. Over the course of the program phase in, HRSS will coordinate the transition of management of the FSFRC Employment Program from bureau executive offices to HRSS, one region at a time.

Sources of Additional Information

Additional information on the FSFRC is available on the Family Liaison Office internet page.

As AFSA will be the exclusive representative of all those appointed under the FSFRC, they have been kept fully apprised of proceedings leading to this policy and have reviewed and commented on the contents of this ALDAC.