

Singles in the Foreign Affairs Community - Final Report of the TalentCare Council's Singles Working Group

Excerpts from 21 STATE 113784, released on November 10, 2021

Key Points

- This past spring, the TalentCare Council convened an ad hoc single working group with representatives from multiple offices and bureaus to respond to recommendations put forth in the “Living Single in the Foreign Affairs Community” webinar series.
- There is now a “Singles at State” Employee Affinity Group open to all employees of the Department of State and interagency community who have an interest in advocating for singles at the Department.

Background

In February 2021, the Foreign Service Institute’s (FSI) Center for Excellence in Foreign Affairs Resilience (CEFAR) organized a “Living Single in the Foreign Affairs Community” webinar series, which gathered 1,140 attendees from 167 locations to listen and learn from singles in the foreign affairs community and discuss resilience. Three key points emerged: 1) singles represent a wide range of diverse perspectives, 2) assumptions can lead to workplace inequities, and 3) organizational structures need to be singles-informed.

The Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) asked the TalentCare Council to convene a working group with representatives from multiple offices and bureaus to respond to recommendations put forth in the webinar series. The ad hoc group, with representatives from GTM, FSI, the Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR), the Bureau of Medical Services (MED), and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS), met regularly over six months to address key requests. This cable reviews the achievements of the working group, which concluded its term in October, as well as the ongoing efforts it initiated. This initiative would not have been possible without spirited feedback from the singles community. Thank you to all who participated for your constructive ideas and your patience as work continues across the Department to implement them.

Completed Working Group Actions

Within weeks of the initial listening sessions, the Department took numerous actions to address the issues raised by Civil and Foreign Service singles. Subsequently, the working group helped to add singles-specific questions to Post Info to Go and issued a cable on “Best Practices for the Inclusion of Singles in the Foreign Affairs Community.” Since then, the working group has contributed to the following accomplishments:

Forming a “Singles at State” Employee Affinity Group

In response to a formal petition by Department of State employees, the Department recently approved “Singles at State” as an official Employee Affinity Group (EAG). This group is open to all employees of the Department of State and interagency community, regardless of marital status, and is focused on ensuring Department policies and cultural norms are inclusive of single employees in all their

diversity. The Singles at State EAG aims to increase awareness across the Department about how Department norms and policies affect single employees (i.e., unmarried, divorced, and widowed employees, including single parents, across race, gender, disability status, sexual orientation, etc.) and advocate for Department support.

Integrating the "Building a Singles-Inclusive Workplace" page into S/ODI's SharePoint

Drawing from best practices generated from the CEFAR webinar series, S/ODI developed a SharePoint site with best practices for managers in building a singles-inclusive workplace. The page gives managers concrete tips on how to build an inclusive workplace that addresses singles-specific inequities and highlights resilience resources for singles in the foreign affairs community.

Updating Guidance for Regional Security Officers (RSOs) Overseas

DS is encouraging RSOs to implement the following best practices:

- Address singles-specific security/safety during security in-briefs to include a possible buddy system or neighbor phone list (and promote neighborhood warden systems for accountability purposes).
- Utilize the Missing Persons Identification Card (MPIC) system to record and find emergency contacts for singles and maintain regular communication with the singles community at post.
- Work with DCMs (who normally mentor first and second tour FS professionals) to focus on any singles-specific security concerns.
- Ensure employees use the online contact reporting system to promote personal privacy while facilitating compliance with reporting requirements.

Updating Global Community Liaison Office (GTM/GCLO) Resources and Messaging

GTM/GCLO implemented the following changes:

- Created a new [Singles in the Foreign Service webpage](#) with resources aimed at singles that are useful for all employees. To address bureaucratic obstacles for Foreign Service employees who marry foreign-born spouses, GTM/GCLO included links on [Adding a Foreign Born Spouse to Orders](#) and [Expeditious Naturalization](#) as well as to the [United States Customs and Immigration Service \(USCIS\)](#) page;
- Created an information sheet to clarify regulations regarding bringing Members of Household (MOHs) versus bringing Eligible Family Members (EFMs) to post. This new tool can be found on GTM/GCLO's SharePoint site;
- Designed messaging, webinars, and training sessions to raise awareness regarding CLO best practices for supporting diverse members of the foreign affairs community, including singles. Created a "Fostering Strong Communities Toolkit" for CLOs to use to support diverse communities (including singles) at post;
- Set up an "Unpacking Buddy" program toolkit to encourage greater support for singles during the packing/unpacking process;
- Met with the leaders of the Singles at State EAG (and will continue to do so on a quarterly basis) to ensure that concerns are raised and issues addressed in a timely fashion.

Integrating Singles Perspectives into FSI Transition Center Trainings

FSI's Career Transition Center (CTC), in collaboration with CEFAR, led singles resilience support sessions for participants in the August and October 2021 Job Search Programs (JSP) to acknowledge unique issues and concerns people who are single may face in post-federal career phases of life. CTC will continue to integrate learning from those sessions into support provided to JSP singles as well as in other Transition Center training programs.

CEFAR continues to stress the role of diversity, inclusion, and equity in building more resilient teams and organizations, including the need to support the unique challenges of singles serving in the foreign affairs community. CEFAR highlights resilience strategies for singles in all resilience trainings for managers and team members at overseas missions and in domestic offices. CEFAR also facilitates singles-focused personal and team resilience sessions where participants share their experiences and do a deeper dive on practical resilience-building strategies to build trust and a more inclusive community.

Allowances

The working group initiated discussions with relevant policy offices in response to requests to review the impact on singles of current allowance policy related to home service transfer, unaccompanied air baggage, and pet travel. The relevant policy offices were continuing these reviews at the conclusion of the working group's mandate.

Key Resources

- Posts may request CEFAR singles-focused resilience training at FSITCResilience@state.gov.
- Singles may reach out to the FSI/Transition Center's Overseas Briefing Center for transition resources and to arrange a consultation by emailing FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov.
- Posts and employees can take advantage of the resources available through TalentCare on well-being, community, safety, and workplace flexibilities.