



# EQUITY ACTION PLAN

U.S. DEPARTMENT *of* STATE



## Executive Summary

Addressing systemic racism and strengthening democracy worldwide is a core tenet of President Biden’s foreign policy. The U.S. Department of State (“State Department”) is the lead foreign affairs agency within the Executive Branch for conducting diplomacy. On January 20, 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 13985, mandating all federal agencies ensure their missions advance racial equity and support for underserved communities. The State Department established an Agency Equity Team in response to this executive action. The Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, Brian P. McKeon, leads the Agency Equity Team to assess how the State Department advances racial equity and support for underserved communities.

The Agency Equity Team outlined five key priorities for integrating E.O. 13985 into the State Department’s foreign affairs work: (1) foreign assistance, (2) foreign policy development and implementation, (3) public diplomacy, (4) consular services, and (5) procurement, contracts, and grants. Using these priorities, the Agency Equity Team established working groups with representatives from across the State Department’s workforce, including the civil service, foreign service, contracted employees, and political appointees. In the 200-day equity assessment submitted in August 2021, the State Department evaluated its current efforts, identified gaps, and determined targets of opportunity. This assessment informed the State Department’s Agency Equity Action Plan, as called for in E.O. 13985, which prescribes “a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all.”

This Agency Equity Action Plan outlines specific actions, metrics, and accountability efforts to improve the State Department’s efficiency and effectiveness for successfully integrating E.O. 13985 into all aspects of its foreign affairs mission.

The State Department will engage high-level diplomatic partners and individuals worldwide from underserved racial and ethnic groups and other underserved communities to better assess and embed equity into U.S. foreign policies. Using a three-part strategic framework, the State Department will track progress and work with local stakeholders to reduce barriers hindering racial equity and support for underserved communities. In foreign assistance, the State Department will establish key reporting requirements and equity analysis tools to align priorities and operations around advancing racial equity and supporting underserved communities through international aid. Using these tools, the State Department will work with agency stakeholders to inform data-driven operations and



programming that integrate racial equity and support for underserved communities into U.S. foreign assistance.

The State Department will embed intersectional equity principles into diversifying public diplomacy and communications strategies and expand recruitment for programming and exchange opportunities to focus on underserved communities. The State Department will also increase inclusive, equitable messaging to combat disinformation, which can sow discord among communities and undermine democratic norms. Using equity assessment tools to track progress, the State Department will build global support for the advancement of racial equity and support for underserved communities through partnerships and public diplomacy.

In consular services, the State Department will offer U.S. citizenship products with inclusive gender markers as well as reform and reorganize resources to provide more equitable, accessible consular services to U.S. citizens. Using ongoing strategic plans and product management tools, the State Department will monitor the status of updates to citizenship products and dedicate personnel and resources to operationalizing equity and support for underserved communities in consular services.

In procurement, contracting, and grants processes, the State Department will require new reviews under current federal contracting processes to provide greater, more equitable access to underserved and small business partners. The State Department will grow the industrial supply base by incorporating racial equity and support for underserved communities into agency contracting partnerships and the federal marketplace. The State Department will achieve this goal by using a data-informed methodology in concert with market research, internal business scorecards, and consultations with stakeholders.

The State Department is also coordinating integration of E.O. 13985 with other lines of effort on equity, inclusion, and accessibility, including the implementation of E.O. 14020 Gender Equity and Equality, Presidential Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons around the World, E.O. 13988 on Preventing and Combatting Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation, E.O. 14035 on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce, the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, and the Americans with Disability Act (ADA).



## Summary of Early Accomplishments

**The State Department continues to make progress on integrating equity into its foreign affairs work.**

**Key U.S. High-level Diplomatic Engagements:** The Roadmap for a Renewed U.S.-Canada Partnership, released February 23, 2021, lays out an active bilateral agenda that includes support for underserved communities and advancing diversity and inclusion. During an October 2021 High-Level Dialogue, the United States and Colombia agreed to resume their dialogue on the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan for Racial and Ethnic Equality (CAPREE), in conjunction with our civil societies. The United States and Colombia also committed to scheduling a steering committee meeting for 2022 to examine efforts by both governments towards the inclusion of Afro-Colombian, indigenous, and other underserved communities.

**Gender Equity and Equality:** The first-ever National Gender Strategy, released October 22, 2021, advances the empowerment of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons, in all their diversity, in the United States and globally. The State Department is developing an Action Plan to guide the implementation of the Strategy into U.S. foreign affairs and apply an intersectional approach that addresses the discrimination, systemic barriers, and human rights abuses and violations that impede equity.

**Human Rights and Racial Equity:** The Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) has dedicated funding to establish programming specifically for individuals from marginalized racial and ethnic groups. For the first time, DRL integrated racial equity and justice in a “notice of funding opportunity” template and proposal submission instructions for all foreign assistance solicitations in FY 2021 – 2022. Since FY 2021, DRL has requested racial equity disaggregation, analysis, and consideration in programming.

**Addressing Vulnerability to Human Trafficking:** The State Department has expanded data collection on racial equity and underserved communities for the 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report. The State Department also funded a Human Trafficking Expert Consultant Network project to examine how institutional racism relates to trafficking and is working with other cabinet agencies to integrate an equity-based approach into U.S. anti-trafficking work.



**U.S. Support for New UN Body:** On August 2, 2021, the United Nations General Assembly, with the full support of the United States, approved a historic resolution establishing the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent (PFPAD). The PFPAD provides expertise on addressing the challenges of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and intolerance facing people of African descent. The State Department nominated Howard University School of Law Professor Justin Hansford as an independent expert to the body; he was elected on December 16, 2021. His nomination and election further demonstrate U.S. commitment to addressing issues of racial justice on a global scale.

**Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) and U.S. Citizenship:** On May 18, 2021, the State Department updated its interpretation of Section 301 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1952, the law which governs acquisition of U.S. citizenship. Children born abroad to married parents, including those conceived using ART, who have a genetic or gestational tie to at least one of the married parents, and meet the INA's other requirements, can make a claim to U.S. citizenship at birth through the U.S. citizen parent.

**Communication on Consular Affairs Website:** The State Department continues to review and update its flagship website: [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov). Revising the website, including the Spanish language pages, with more precise and inclusive language will increase equity and access to information.

**Representing American Diversity on U.S. Travel Documents:** The State Department continues its efforts to incorporate themes and artwork to reflect the diversity of the United States with new designs for the U.S. passport book, the U.S. passport card, the Consular Report of Birth Abroad, and other consular products.

**Increasing Intersectionality and Equity in Foreign Affairs through Special Envoys:** The State Department has welcomed a U.S. Special Envoy to Advance the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons and a Special Advisor on International Disability Rights. Both actively encourage intersectionality across their global workstreams by engaging in lines of effort to promote racial equity, accessibility, value, and inclusion of individuals from underserved communities.

**Strategic Messaging on Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities:** The State Department provided overseas U.S. missions with messaging guidance, original video content, and official statements from State Department's leadership on the one-year commemoration of George Floyd's murder, the Tulsa Race Massacre, and Juneteenth.





The State Department also coordinated a global campaign for the 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act to celebrate how the world is powered by diversity, accessibility, equity, and inclusion by highlighting the contributions of persons with disabilities across the globe.

**Academic Exchange Programs:** The Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students (IDEAS) Programs provide grants, training, and resources to help U.S. higher education institutions increase and diversify student participation and destination where they study. For example, Dillard University is using an IDEAS Grant to establish its first-ever study abroad office, and Alaska Pacific University is using an IDEAS Grant to develop a study abroad program designed to connect Alaska Native students with indigenous peoples in Sweden and Finland.

**Professional Exchange Programs:** In September 2021, the Office of International Visitors initiated a virtual International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) project entitled “The Problem We All Live With: Dismantling Racial and Social Injustice,” to encourage participants to work together to dismantle systemic racism and advance civil rights in their own countries. The Office of the U.S. Speaker Program recruited 82 U.S. experts on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility to engage professional foreign audiences on business and economic development; communication and dialogue; education and awareness; and identity, activism, and leadership. The Office of Citizen Exchanges (CE) prioritizes diversity and inclusion, including racial and ethnic diversity, in recruiting a diverse pool of participants in its cultural, sports, youth and professional fellows exchange programs.

**Engagement with Foreign Press Centers:** The Foreign Press Centers’ Advancing Racial Equity Series connects foreign journalists with experts on the history, contemporary struggles, and opportunities present in U.S. race relations to advance the President Biden’s comprehensive equity agenda. The Foreign Press Centers held eight briefings to-date, highlighting issues such as the history and meaning of Juneteenth, climate equity, social justice movements, the role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in higher education, and resiliency in Black business communities.



## Equity Action Plan

### **Embedding Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities in U.S. Foreign Policy Development and Implementation**

#### *Barriers to Equitable Outcomes*

Individuals of underserved communities commonly face obstacles to achieving equity, including barriers and discrimination based on race, sex, ethnicity, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, disability, religion, and national origin. Systematic exclusion of underserved communities from full participation in economic, social, and civic life impedes equality and equity globally. Other challenges in a country can exacerbate inequity, such as violence and insecurity, including gender-based violence; a lack of access to justice and legal equality under the law; persistent impunity; lack of data, knowledge, and awareness; unwillingness to cede power by dominant groups; substandard access to information, services, markets, education, and other public goods; a lack of political will; physical and technical barriers to access; or prevalent structural and unconscious biases, among others.

Barriers also exist in the State Department's engagement with underserved communities. For example, varied interpretations of which groups comprise underserved communities across different countries; eroded trust of the United States in countries where diplomacy has historically engaged primarily with the dominant population; limited training for U.S. diplomats in non-majority languages; and U.S. diplomatic presence concentrated in capital cities. Other barriers within the State Department include lack of tools, data, and training to measure and assess equity, as well as limited time, staffing, and resources dedicated to consulting with underserved communities and conducting equity analyses.

#### *Actions and Intended Impact on Barriers*

The State Department and its U.S. missions overseas will increase engagement with individuals from marginalized racial and ethnic groups and other underserved communities globally. Bureaus, offices, and missions will apply new equity analyses consisting of quantitative measures and qualitative questions regarding race, ethnicity, and other intersections of marginalization. This analytical framework will underscore embedding equity into the State Department's foreign affairs work as a strategic National Security imperative, yielding more sustainable and effective U.S. foreign policies and diplomatic engagements. It will also raise the visibility of racial and other inequities globally and



generate better-informed foreign policies to decrease barriers to equity and equality worldwide. The State Department can also improve its accuracy in assessing the trajectories of key U.S. foreign policy priorities through sustained engagement with underserved communities.

### *Tracking Progress*

The State Department will develop a three-part equity strategic impact framework to evaluate global progress toward reducing barriers to equity.

1. **Inclusion in Decision-Making and Economic Growth:** Freedom from discrimination as well as equitable and inclusive access to cultural, political, educational, health, social, economic, and financial systems.
2. **Access to Justice and Human Rights:** Consistent and equitable application of laws, policies, and practices to advance access to justice and protect the human rights of individuals of underserved communities.
3. **Power to Advocate:** Open and inclusive civil society spaces to foster strong partnerships among individuals of underserved communities and their allies in their advocacy for social and policy change.

By September 30, 2026, the State Department will achieve the following milestones to advance progress toward embedding racial equity and support for underserved communities in foreign policy:

- **Strategic Planning & Public Reporting:** Include analysis and goals to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities in the State Department's strategic planning documents beginning with the 2022-2026 planning cycle. Add E.O. 13985 reporting requirements as an element of all the State Department's public reports by 2024.
- **Tools & Guidance:** Develop analytic tools for integrating equity into the development and implementation of foreign policy by 2024. Implement guidance and requirements for applying such analyses to U.S. foreign policy, programs, and processes by 2026.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Conduct targeted consultations with a variety of stakeholders, including racial and ethnic marginalized and other underserved communities, to improve their access to the development and implementation of U.S. foreign policy.





Integrating a new equity structure across the State Department requires a robust resource commitment to advance equity globally. Appropriate staffing and funding resource allocations are paramount to operationalizing E.O. 13985 over the long term.

### *Accountability*

The State Department established its first Agency Priority Goal (APG) to advance equity in U.S. foreign policies, programs, and processes. Creating an APG ensures racial equity and support for underserved communities permeate all strategic planning, program and project design, consular activities, and procurement practices to steer U.S. foreign policy development and execution. APGs align with Administration and Department leadership priorities and serve as an effective accountability tool by mandating quarterly reporting on progress over 24 months. The Department's equity APG is intended to drive significant organizational change by identifying outcomes and measuring results.

Furthermore, the State Department will mandate each bureau or office identify at least one Deputy Assistant Secretary responsible for coordinating E.O. 13985 implementation. Each senior leader will ensure their bureau or office consistently applies an equity analysis when developing and implementing U.S. foreign policies. Additionally, the State Department may add dedicated positions or units to track progress and implementation, with similar resources provided for U.S. missions overseas.

### **Embedding Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities in Foreign Assistance Using Key Issue Data and Developing a Social Inclusion Analysis Tool**

#### *Barriers to Equitable Outcomes*

It is challenging to establish baselines and measure progress and success for the State Department's work in the equity space. Without a common language, the State Department cannot disaggregate activities by bureau, country, region, or globally. The State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Standardized Program Structure and Definitions (SPSD) provides a consistent way to categorize and aggregate foreign assistance funds across six primary sectors: peace and security; democracy, human rights, and governance; health; economic growth; education; and humanitarian assistance. As a complement, Key Issues are reporting tools created for cross-cutting topics such as gender and disability.



In the absence of a Key Issue, the foreign assistance community lacks the tools to describe and quantify cross-cutting foreign assistance work at any aggregate level above individual programs or projects. This limits the U.S. government’s ability to identify best practices and remedy deficiencies. However, equity, including racial equity and support for underserved communities in programming and policy, is an emerging body of work across the State Department and USAID foreign assistance landscape.

*Actions and Intended Impact on Barriers*

**Key Issue Update:** The State Department’s Office of Foreign Assistance (F) will undertake a comprehensive review and analysis of the new Key Issue launched in FY 2021, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities. This review will reveal a formal baseline of data to determine where there are equity programming gaps, challenges, and opportunities.

Elements of implementation will determine the:

1. Amount of planned funding to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities in FY 2021;
2. Geographic configuration of racial equity programs across the globe;
3. Types of racial equity programming implemented through foreign assistance; and
4. Breadth of performance indicators used to monitor and evaluate racial equity programs.

This analysis will enable the State Department to view equity through its own “sector” lens and should reveal promising best practices to replicate and address programmatic gaps. In addition, this review will identify ongoing equity work not formally reported through the Key Issue data. Armed with this knowledge, the State Department will ensure its bureaus and posts have a comprehensive understanding of the Key Issue data results.

F will utilize the upcoming Key Issue Review season, in Spring 2022, to engage Key Issue owners to submit updates or revisions to the definition, leading to more accurate equity reporting in FY 2022. F will also engage the State Department’s Equity Council to review agency-wide equity definitions. This consultation will further align definitions across the State Department to ensure cohesion and improve reporting across all lines of work.

**Analysis Tool to Promote Equity and Social Inclusion:** The State Department will also develop an analysis tool to promote equity and social inclusion in foreign assistance



program design, public diplomacy, and foreign policy implementation. Drawing from the successes of the gender sector, this tool can be a driver of real change. The equity and social inclusion analysis tool will prompt State Department personnel and implementing partners to fully consider intersectional issues impacting individuals of racial and ethnic groups and other underserved communities prior to program design.

General elements of implementation will be:

1. A review of related analysis tools and a determination of areas of leverage;
2. External consultation with non-USG equity experts;
3. Consultations with State and USAID equity stakeholders;
4. Drafting and beta-testing elements of the tool;
5. External and internal consultation on the beta-tested tool; and
6. Finalizing and standardizing use of the tool.

### *Tracking Progress*

Key Issue reporting occurs on an annual cycle. Progress will be incremental and largely measured over years. Any adjustments in foreign assistance from this analysis will also be subject to the annual programming cycles at State and the U.S. Agency for International Development. In the immediate term, the State Department will continue to refine the Key Issue definition for the foreign assistance space, and track reporting of the Key Issue across domestic bureaus and U.S. missions overseas. Long-term success factors include an equity budget timeline and performance trend data, an equity-based analysis tool to design foreign assistance programs, learning and evaluations for programming course correction, and establishing a well-defined cadre of equity experts across State and USAID to be a powerful voice for action.

Although the equity and social inclusion analysis tool is a new instrument, the State Department is eager to leverage ongoing operations and expand upon USAID's Inclusive Development Analysis Tool and the Gender Analysis Tool from the State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues to develop a mechanism specific to the State Department's needs and mandate. Standardization of the tool will establish accountability by formalizing and embedding it in routine programming processes. The Office of Foreign Assistance will work collaboratively across the State Department to ensure all bureaus and posts use the tool. Over time, the State Department will create an Equity Community of



Practice where users of the tool can share their learning, resulting actions, and final outcomes.

### *Accountability*

The Key Issue is “co-owned” by the Office of Foreign Assistance (F), the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and USAID. The State Department’s Office of Foreign Assistance drives the Key Issue analysis due to its cross-cutting nature. This office works collaboratively on equity efforts with other technical specialists at the State Department on the Joint Strategic Plan, bureau strategies, Integrated Country Strategies, the State Department’s Learning Agenda, and external stakeholder engagement. Many aspects of foreign assistance programming are embedding equity themes and mandatory reporting.

### **Embedding Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities in Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs to Advance U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities**

The State Department will measurably increase the scope and scale of Public Diplomacy (PD) and Public Affairs engagement, programming, and partnerships among individuals of racial and ethnic groups and underserved communities. These lines of effort will increase awareness of and access to resources and opportunities for individuals of underserved communities domestically and abroad.

The State Department’s desired outcomes for public diplomacy are:

- Diverse participation by American and foreign participants in PD programs; and
- Inclusive public messages modeling the importance and benefits of equity and inclusion.

### *Barriers to Equitable Outcomes*

Several barriers exist for embedding equity into the State Department’s PD work, including the following:

- The State Department has not provided guidance to posts and bureaus to establish goals for participation from diverse or underserved communities in PD programs, including provision of funding for necessary accommodations. Accommodations can include the use of personal assistants or sign language interpreters, as well as physical or electronic devices or services that enable access and communication for persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.



- The State Department lacks consistent data on diversity among participants in public diplomacy programs.
- Individuals of underserved communities around the world may not meet the criteria for participation in PD programs, such as English language ability.
- Societal norms may prevent individuals of underserved communities in foreign countries from participating in programs or from self-identification.
- Foreign audiences perceive gaps between rhetoric and reality with regards to U.S. values of racial equity.

#### *Actions and Intended Impact on Barriers*

**Establish Guidance on Equity in Participation in PD Programs:** The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs' Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources (R/PPR) will establish guidance to ensure participation by individuals of diverse and underserved communities in PD programs. PD practitioners will plan and execute activities that incorporate intersectional equity principles, including respect for human rights, and in program design advancing U.S. foreign policy objectives and increasing the inclusion of marginalized populations.

**Provide Guidance and Tools to Consistently Track Equity in PD Program Participation:** R/PPR will provide guidance to establish consistent tracking of equity in PD program participation and ensure data collection tools will track such information, such as PD Tools and the Department's Contact Relationship Management tool (CRM). The State Department includes demographic data in surveys deployed overseas and uses data collection tools to provide a platform for Public Diplomacy Sections at U.S. embassies and domestic PD Offices to monitor, track, and report on PD initiatives and activities promoting racial equity and engagement with underserved communities.

**Recruit Diverse Participants for PD Programs:** Offices sponsoring international exchanges will continue to focus on the diversity of inbound and outbound participants as well as expanding the number of exchange participants from or hosted by U.S. Minority Serving Institutions. Offices will consider broadening criteria for program participation or developing new program options to target communities that may not meet the criteria for existing programs. Overseas PD sections and domestic offices will work to cultivate the demographic diversity of audiences reached by outreach efforts. PD practitioners will increase key stakeholder engagements among underserved communities to achieve policy





objectives, and amplify the impact and reach of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access principles, including racial equity.

**Promote Equity through Inclusive Messages:** The State Department will ensure messaging on key policy issues reaches underserved communities and emphasizes intersectional issues. The State Department will feature diverse Americans in public communications and commit to expand messages targeted to underserved communities in domestic and international fora on key policy priorities. This messaging will also underscore the United States' own efforts to improve equity for Americans. The State Department will counter disinformation threats through PD programs that develop critical thinking and media literacy skills to empower individuals and networks to combat disinformation, including those harmful to inclusivity and racial equity, along with mitigating racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism.

#### *Tracking Progress*

The State Department will develop equity analysis tools to establish baselines, identify and remove barriers, and set targets for future increases in engagement. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' (ECA) Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Innovation (MELI) Unit, the Bureau of Global Affairs' (GPA) Research & Analytics units, and the Office of the Under Secretary's Office of Policy, Planning, and Resource's (R/PPR) Research and Evaluation Unit, Organizational Learning Unit, Professional Development Unit, and Chief Technology Office contribute to the monitoring, tracking and evaluation of public diplomacy efforts to advance equity as a core element of U.S. foreign policy.

ECA's MELI Unit will implement the Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) Framework, which standardizes indicators and reporting protocols for the collection and use of performance data to improve programming, including for underserved communities. ECA will fully implement MODE by 2023. GPA's Strategic Planning and Organizational Excellence (SPOE) team will continue to collaborate with each office to establish indicators, milestones, and tracking mechanisms to advance equity across the Bureau. Representative milestones and indicators for 2022 include: develop a baseline in 2022 for outreach to media outlets targeting underserved groups and increase by 25 percent annually thereafter; provide services for the hearing impaired during the State Department Spokesperson's Daily Press Briefing by June 2022; and meet or exceed the target of 10 percent of content focused on engaging diverse and underserved communities each quarter.



### *Accountability*

Across the State Department, strategic planning includes objectives that incorporate racial and intersectional equity and support for individuals from marginalized racial and ethnic groups and other underserved communities. Public diplomacy practitioners will use PD Tools and the State Department's Contact Relationship Management tool to analyze and identify three to five target underserved communities and report to R/PPR and regional bureaus. PD teams will use the information to execute and report on expanded equity in programs and communication using the baseline data and sharing effective practices. For equity-related work outside the scope of PD Tools, GPA's SPOE team will continue to track progress toward Bureau goals and report to GPA's Assistant Secretary on a quarterly basis.

## **Embedding Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities in Consular Services at the State Department**

### *Barriers to Equitable Outcomes*

The Bureau of Consular Affairs' limited resources also impact its ability to reorganize and reform its flagship website, [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov). The Bureau of Consular Affairs expects to offer an X gender marker option on routine applications for U.S. passport books, when all necessary technological updates are completed. It will take a bit longer to fully implement the technological modifications for this option to be available on applications for passport cards, for overseas and domestic emergency passports, and for online passport renewal.

### *Actions and Intended Impact on Barriers*

Applicants seeking the X gender marker option who need an emergency passport prior to full implementation will be able to exchange their emergency passport issued with a binary gender marker for one with the X gender marker for no additional cost, if they make this request within one year of the emergency passport's issuance. The Bureau of Consular Affairs is undertaking a review of [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov), to make the website more inclusive and useful for all audiences. The project includes focus groups with diverse audiences to gain their feedback on the website's utility and inclusivity. The Bureau of Consular Affairs plans to dedicate personnel to plan and implement a road map for reviewing and regularly updating [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov) and ensuring its use of inclusive language into the future.



### *Tracking Progress*

The addition of the X gender marker option in all citizenship products will be completed in phases. The State Department issued the first X gender marker passport in October 2021. Starting in early 2022, the Bureau of Consular Affairs will offer X as a gender marker option on routine applications for U.S passport books. Upon completing the necessary systems updates, the State Department will offer the X gender marker option for all other citizenship products, including passport cards, domestic and overseas emergency passports, online passport renewal, and Consular Reports of Birth Abroad. In 2021, the Bureau of Consular Affairs standardized the practice to solicit input from its own workforce when developing new designs for the U.S. passport book, the U.S. passport card, the Consular Report of Birth Abroad, and other consular products. In early 2022, design teams will map out multi-year plans for future product redesigns that incorporate early-stage information gathering strategies to inform product artwork and design themes.

### *Accountability*

The Bureau of Consular Affairs incorporated these action items into its strategic planning efforts and will monitor progress towards completion through internal reporting requirements for the Annual Performance Report. The [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov) reform project is also a Performance Goal under the FY 2022-2026 Department of State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan, as well as part of the State Department's Learning Agenda.

## **Embedding Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities in the State Department's Procurement, Contracts, and Grants**

### *Barriers to Outcomes*

A substantial challenge for the State Department remains in identifying, quantifying, and including the many underserved groups named in E.O. 13985 in its small business goals. Some individuals of underserved communities (for example, LGBTQI+, rural) do not fall within the current statutory socioeconomic categories, nor have an opportunity to self-identify as such in the federal contracting system of record (SAM.gov).

The most common impediments to entry for small businesses are shared among the underserved communities. Responses to the State Department's Town Hall meetings with underserved community representative groups demonstrated this mutual challenge. The most cited barriers for all small businesses and underserved communities were the State



Department's geographic dispersion and worldwide performance requirements; access to capital (to include financing, bonding); and facility security clearances.

Small and disadvantaged businesses most commonly enter the federal government market through small contracts that enable them to garner experience and past performance, understand the contracting process and customer missions, build relationships with federal agencies and industry partners, and obtain the necessary funding and resources to bid on more significant contract opportunities. The "Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT)" contracting process was created to incentivize small businesses to enter the market, and for federal agencies to more readily allow such market entry by requiring that awards under the SAT (currently \$250,000) be reserved for small businesses. However, the State Department does not currently have a rigorous process to verify that awards below the SAT are being set aside for small business concerns in compliance with statutory requirements.

This negatively impacts underserved U.S. small businesses by contributing to several identified barriers:

1. **Language and Complexity:** One of the intents of Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT) is to allow small businesses to access contracting requirements that are simplified in several aspects: the amount of compliance, the language and descriptions of the requirement itself, as well as the effort required to respond to such opportunities. The exemption of such simple contracting opportunities from the small and underserved business community effectively makes it more difficult to understand, compete for, win, and perform on federal contracts.
2. **Past performance:** The ineffectiveness of a process intended to provide greater access results in a decreased ability to obtain past performance, which is a requirement for consideration on larger, more complex acquisitions.
3. **Set asides:** Allowing unjustified exceptions to the SAT makes a significant number of contracts intended for small and disadvantaged businesses unattainable.

#### *Actions and Intended Impact on Barriers*

The State Department will require Competition Advocate reviews/approvals for acquisitions under the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT). This will have a positive impact on equity by placing greater scrutiny and accountability on procurement actions



and reporting to ensure U.S. small and underserved businesses, which are the intended recipients of SAT awards, have the maximum practical opportunity to receive them.

### *Tracking Progress*

The State Department will track progress using data, as reported in the System for Award Management, SAM.gov, of all its obligations utilizing Simplified Acquisition Threshold procedures.

For Fiscal Year 2021, according to SAM.gov, more than 70 percent of SAT actions were awarded to entities that were not U.S. small businesses:

<b>Contracting Officer's Size Determination</b>	<b>\$ Obligated</b>	<b># Transactions</b>
<b>Other than Small Business</b>	\$501,349,072	13,406
<b>Small Business</b>	\$204,917,481	2,851
<b>Total Awards</b>	\$706,266,553	16,257
<b>Small Business Percent of FY2021 SAT Obligations</b>	29%	18%

The Competition Advocate will assess on a quarterly basis the obligations made to entities that are not U.S. small businesses and will work with the Heads of Contracting Activities (HCA) and program offices to review the small business contracts awarding methodology. The Competition Advocate will collaborate with the Office of the Procurement Executive (OPE) and Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) to conduct market research to identify potential small business sources. The OSDBU "Progress Towards Goals" monthly scorecard that is distributed to OPE monthly, and published on SharePoint, will also provide regular, aggregate data to evaluate progress in obligations to small and underserved business.

Over the long term, these changes will improve the State Department's understanding of small business capability by requiring thorough market research and compliance with SAT goals. The greater access to Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT) opportunities by small and underserved businesses will grow the industrial supply base that can win first-time contracts and be better positioned to successfully compete for more complex contracting opportunities at the State Department. As a result, the State Department expects to see an increased number and amounts of contracts awarded to U.S. small businesses from marginalized and historically underserved communities.





Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT) awards are considered a gateway for new entrants to the federal market and a way for small and disadvantaged businesses to obtain small contracts that position them for larger contracting opportunities. For businesses experiencing barriers and disadvantages in accessing federal contracting opportunities, SAT contracts are significant as a pathway to develop a performance record, gain customer knowledge, receive obligations, and pivot to more complex opportunities that require more significant risk and investment. A broadened path to contracting, and an increased number of opportunities will also help rebuild the small business industrial base and reverse the most recent five-year trend of precipitous declines in the number of small business vendors in the federal marketplace.

### *Accountability*

Within the State Department, the Office of Small Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) and the Bureau of Administration's Office of the Procurement Executive (A/OPE) co-own these policy issues. These offices have a vested interest in increasing contracting opportunities for small business by monitoring and ensuring regulatory compliance with current policy. The State Department will establish a proactive governance approach to ensure accountability. By enforcing the current policy with written procedures and guidance, the State Department will ensure harmonious implementation. Outreach will accompany written guidance to the State Department's customer base across the enterprise to spur collaboration, cooperation, and accountability. OSDBU and A/OPE will monitor anticipated actions under the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (SAT) prior to award and conduct quarterly compliance reviews of awards made under the SAT through random sampling.

Improving small and underserved business participation in SAT awards is a named Agency Priority Goal (APG) and the State Department is committed to increasing the dollar value of SAT contracts awarded to U.S. small businesses by three percentage points in Fiscal Year 2022 (to 32 percent), and Fiscal Year 2023 (to 35 percent).