

ASSOCIATION OF BLACK AMERICAN AMBASSADORS
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Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Foreign Service: Recommendations for Action

In the wake of last year's events that put a spotlight on problems of diversity and inclusion at the State Department, the Association of Black American Ambassadors (ABAA) on October 29, 2020, convened a virtual Diversity Conference. The group discussed ABAA proposed recommendations for action and a unified initiative to press for diversity and anti-racism in the U.S. Foreign Service and, more broadly, all foreign affairs agencies.

On behalf of the ABAA, Ambassador (ret.) Charles Ray chaired the event that included ABAA President Ambassador (ret.) Edward J. Perkins, Ambassador (ret.) Ruth A. Davis, Ambassador (ret.) Harry Thomas, as well as others from the ABAA and representatives from the American Academy of Diplomacy, State Department affinity groups (including the Pickering & Rangel Fellows Association, the Thursday Luncheon Group, Disabilities at State, the Hispanic Employee Council of Foreign Affairs Agencies, and the Asian American Foreign Affairs Association), the American Foreign Service Association, the International Association of Black Professionals in International Affairs, National Public Radio, and other interested parties.

In the 45-minute discussion, all participants voiced agreement with the draft statement's intent and the measures it included as a series of actionable bullet points. Ambassador Edward J. Perkins emphasized the imperative that the Foreign Service broadly represent elements of American society and encouraged senior and retired diplomats to work with current employees to ensure that the State Department accurately reflects the Constitution and our nation's values.

The recommendations are attached. Please direct any questions or inquiries concerning them to Ambassador Harry Thomas, Chair of the ABAA's Diversity Group, at harryktbomasjr2@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Ruth A. Davis

*Ambassador Ruth A. Davis
Vice President*

Recommendations from the Association of Black American Ambassadors Regarding Diversity and Inclusion in the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development

The foreign affairs agencies have a collective responsibility to stand up and take serious action to address structural barriers to diversity and inclusion in their respective agencies. All employees should be provided with the skills, resources and mentoring that contribute to professional advancement. These proposed changes should be codified in the Foreign Service Act of 1980 and implementing regulations.

Leadership. Unless there is clear and visible support from the highest levels, little action will be taken to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development. We believe that the only way to reverse the institutional failings in these areas is to put the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the Secretary of State and those in the senior ranks of the Foreign and Civil services.

We recommend that:

- (1) The Secretary commit to all employees and to the public that he or she will not permit discrimination of any type anywhere at any time and is committed to ending it at the State Department.
- (2) The Secretary include in his or her regularly scheduled staff meetings discussions with the assistant secretaries regarding their progress in addressing diversity and inclusion issues such as the racial and gender composition of their bureaus. Particular attention should be placed on the number of deputy assistant secretaries, desk officers and ambassadors.
- (3) The State Department and USAID establish clearly defined and measurable ways to financially reward senior personnel for their achievement in reaching the department's diversity goals.
- (4) The State Department and USAID appoint a Senate-confirmed Chief Diversity Officer who reports directly to the Deputy Secretary and the Deputy Administrator to be a resource for dealing with diversity issues and coordinating with the agencies' affinity groups.

Recruitment. The State Department and USAID should continue support of the Pickering, Payne and Rangel Programs, and make known the rigid selection process that these Fellows undergo, in order to dispel negative perceptions about their qualifications to be in the Service. They should support and expand Pathways Student Internships, including Presidential Management Fellowships, and assist in their noncompetitive conversion into an FTE (full-time equivalent) at the end of their program. Recruitment outreach should be strengthened.

We recommend that:

- (1) The State Department increase the number of Diplomats in Residence (at least 10) at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-serving institutions (HSI), and other institutions serving significant numbers of minority students, as well as at public land grant and private colleges. They should focus on recruiting African Americans, LatinX, Asian- and Pacific Islander-Americans,

Native Americans, Arab Americans, disabled Americans, LGBTQIA and any other historically underrepresented Americans.

(2) The State Department examine the process of security clearances for Fellows, taking into account that people with economic disadvantages might have encountered problems related to debt repayment.

(3) The State Department double its recruiting programs and set a goal to increase the annual intake to an established goal within three to five years.

(4) The State Department increase the number of paid internships for members of underrepresented communities, especially for those demonstrating financial need.

Assignments. Underrepresented Foreign Service officers and specialists can advance America's foreign interests at all posts, and their assignments should reflect this from their entry into the Foreign Service throughout their careers.

We recommend that:

(1) The State Department and USAID cease the practice of assigning African Americans predominantly to the Africa Bureau, especially in ambassadorial and other high-level positions.

(2) The State Department and USAID end similar de facto practices with LatinX and Asian Americans in the Western Hemisphere, East Asian and South and Central Asian Affairs Bureaus.

(3) The Director General of the Foreign Service recruit officers from underrepresented groups to bid on chief of mission (COM), deputy chief of mission (DCM), principal officer (PO), office director, deputy assistant secretary (DAS), and principal deputy assistant secretary (PDAS) positions.

(4) The Director General of the Foreign Service ensure DCM/PO committees and COM committees are diverse, and provide feedback to those not selected.

Training. We recommend that all senior personnel, Foreign Service and Civil Service, including noncareer officials, especially those serving as ambassadors, be required to take training on hiring and leadership principles, subject to executive order and State Department policy. Such training might be organized into one or more short mandatory courses to enable the maximum number of participants.

Missions should also develop training for all employees to ensure that locally employed staff hiring practices do not reinforce host country's values that contravene U.S. principles and values.

Mentoring. We recommend that the State Department and USAID institutionalize a robust mentoring program for individuals at all grade levels.

Promotions.

We recommend that the State Department:

(1) With the American Foreign Service Association and the American Federation of Government Employees, rework the 13 Dimensions' skill set (that reflect the skills, abilities, and personal qualities

deemed essential to success) to give more weight to equal employment opportunity (EEO) principles in the performance evaluation process.

(2) Require language in employee evaluation reports (EERs) to emphasize commitment to diversity, with concrete examples required.

(3) Direct raters and reviewers to use gender-neutral language in EERs.

(4) Hold ambassadors, deputy chiefs of mission and principal officers accountable in their EERs for supporting and implementing diversity and inclusion at post. Rating and reviewing officials of Civil Service employees should be held equally accountable.

(5) In the case of noncareer ambassadors who elect not to have an EER, letters to the White House Personnel Office be sent on those who fail in this regard.

(6) Ensure that members of underrepresented groups serve on every selection panel.

Retention. Consistent, high-level support for targeted mentorship of officers from underrepresented communities coupled with promotion-related incentives can help officers of color advance and feel their contributions are valued.

We recommend that the State Department:

(1) Pay more attention to retention. Increased payments that reduce or eliminate student loans might help retain more diverse candidates. To be eligible, the employee should commit to serve for at least five years.

(2) Support external training programs, such as the International Careers Advancement Program (ICAP) that helps prepare mid-level foreign affairs practitioners to advance to more senior levels.

(3) Make exit interviews mandatory—and retroactive to include those who did not have an exit survey on separation—and collect data to make changes in the system that would keep people in the Service. Data should include patterns of assignments; challenges for underrepresented members of the Foreign and Civil Service in finding mentors, employment opportunities and treatment of spouses; and the impact of and procedures for (cone) track designation.