![USAID - FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE]

THE HOW-TO MANUAL
FOR AAR AND PIF WRITING

March 2019

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

AAR	Annual Accomplishment Record
A&A	Acquisition and Assistance
ADS	Automated Directives System
AEF	Annual Evaluation Form
AOR/COR	Assistance Officer Representative/Contracting Officer Representative
EP&D	Employee Performance and Development
EXO	Executive Office
FFP	Food for Peace
FMFIA	Federal Managers Financial Integrity Act
FS	Foreign Service
FS/SFS	Foreign Service/Senior Foreign Service
FSN	Foreign Service National
FSO	Foreign Service Officer
HCTM	Office of Human Capital and Talent Management
IP	Implementing Partner
OU	Operating Unit
MO	Management Office
PIF	Promotion Input Form
SAR	Situation-Action-Result

WRITING YOUR AAR AND PIF ENTRIES

This manual begins by covering some key ideas related to understanding the Employee Performance and Development (EP&D) and Promotion processes and then moves into the specifics of writing Annual Accomplishment Record (AAR) and Promotion Input Form (PIF) entries.

Learning Objectives:

- Consider the benefits of actively tracking and skillfully writing about your performance
- Identify key elements of the Foreign Service EP&D process
- Differentiate between the AAR and the PIF, as well as understand how these differ from the Annual Evaluation Form (AEF)
- Learn and use tips for writing effective AAR and PIF entries

Two Important Notes:

1. This workbook can serve as a guide as you engage in the EP&D process; it is not official policy. In the event of any questions and/or discrepancies, follow the guidance in ADS 461, ADS 463, and the instructions on the official AAR and PIF forms.
2. This workbook is drawn, in part, from a more extensive reference guidebook that can be downloaded from the Office of Human Capital and Talent Management's (HCTM's) MyUSAID page: https://pages.usaid.gov/HCTM/briefings-reports-and-updates. The guidebook includes an appendix section with AAR and PIF examples, Plain Language writing resources, and more.

This manual includes the following elements:

- A description of the benefits of actively tracking and skillfully writing about your performance
- Important elements of the new Foreign Service Management Process
- FAQs and important tips on writing both AAR and PIF entries
- Step-by-step completion tips for the AAR
- Step-by-step completion tips for the PIF
- Multiple examples of "before" and "after" AARs and PIFs with editorial comments on how the entries were improved
- Appendices with additional resources

BEING PROACTIVE

No one knows what you do better than you. This is a major reason the new EP&D and promotion processes shift the responsibility for describing accomplishments, contributions, and skills to employees. You are in the best position to do this.

Taking a proactive role in this process will allow you to go beyond the requisite tasks and reap the benefits that come from collaborating and planning for your development with your supervisor and skillfully tracking and writing about your performance.

The following are just a few of the many benefits:

BENEFITS

Personal Development
Developing your competency in the 4 core skill areas

Self-Reflection
Tracking where you spend your time and identifying what work feels most interesting or fulfilling

Expanded Focus
Gaining a broader understanding of overarching and immediate goals and shifting priorities

Engagement
Increased engagement in the mission and your work because of a better understanding and linkage to it

Transportability
Building skills that can be transferred into writing more impactful accomplishment records, giving better interviews, submitting more competitive applications, and developing a clearer self-brand

GETTING STARTED

No one wants to be staring at a blank piece of paper with no idea where to start or what's required 2 weeks before their AARs and PIFs are due. With a little relatively painless planning and forethought, you won't have to. If you don't already have a binder or electronic folder with background documents and performance notes, start one now.

Things to consider including in your performance folder include:

Documents about you:

- Your current work and skill development objectives

- Notes from position descriptions and/or conversations with your supervisor about your position duties and responsibilities

- Notes from your Quarterly Conversation Records, especially those related to discussions about contributions and accomplishments that you might turn into AAR entries

- Your notes on key accomplishments or contributions, and situations where you had an opportunity to demonstrate core skills and subskills

- Notes from 360-degree feedback provided by your supervisor and others

- Letters, emails, or commendations on your performance

- Copies of your awards, training certificates, or records of other actions you took to further your professional development

- Questions and prompts for the Core Skills and Subskills (see Appendix C on page 20)

- The Operating Unit Context Statement from your current post (and if you have a partial year AAR from a different assignment, look for the OU Context Statement for that Mission, Bureau, or Office once they are all posted)

- Performance documentation from the past several years (including past AEFs, and as you complete them, AARs, PIFs, and MSR reports)

Reference documents:

- Blank copies of the AAR and PIF files with instructions (download from the USAID Forms Directory or the links to mandatory references for ADS 461 and ADS 463)

- Copy of ADS 461 (Employee Performance and Development) and ADS 463 (Promotions) and 463mai (Promotion Board precepts and decision factors)

- The Foreign Service/Senior Foreign Service (FS/SFS) Skills Framework and Subskill Proficiency Indicators (see https://pages.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/fs-sfs_skills_framework_-_final_march2018.pdf)

Make a regular, standing appointment with yourself to ensure you are paying attention to the important work you are doing. Use this time to reflect on potential AAR and PIF entries and prepare drafts or questions to discuss with your supervisor during your next Quarterly Conversation. Depending upon the work you do, these appointments could be as often as weekly or monthly, but try to avoid letting more than a few months pass without opening your folder and taking a few notes that capture your most important work.

UNDERSTANDING IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF EP&D

GOALS ARE CASCADING AND COORDINATED

At the start of the EP&D cycle or when an employee moves to a new assignment, the supervisor and employee meet to discuss goals, priorities, context and constraints, project-specific requirements, and other expectations of the Mission, Office, or Bureau. They also address the employee's specific role, along with the employee's strengths, development areas, and one or more skills the employee wants to develop.

MANAGERS AND STAFF HAVE QUARTERLY CONVERSATIONS

Each quarter, employees will have confidential discussions with their supervisors to track progress on developmental goals and discuss priorities, expectations, challenges, resources needed, and so on.

## EMPLOYEES WRITE THEIR OWN ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND PROMOTION INPUTS

While the PIF still requires written input from the supervisor or Rating Official[1], the entries around the four core skills and the employee's contribution to advancing the mission are written by the employee, which means you decide what to include. (Of course, you and your supervisor will be talking at least once each quarter, which will allow you to get your supervisor's thoughts about the examples are you considering.)

FAQS AND IMPORTANT TIPS FOR COMPLETING AAR & PIF ENTRIES

What are promotion boards looking for when reviewing files?

As outlined in ADS 463mai, Promotion Boards are to base their recommendations for promotion on six promotion decision factors:

---

[1] We use the terms "supervisor" and Rating Official interchangeably in the guidebook, even though the forms in ePerformance use the term Rating Official to designate the person who is responsible for signing forms. This will nearly always be the person functioning as your supervisor, except in unusual circumstances as described in the instructions on the PIF.
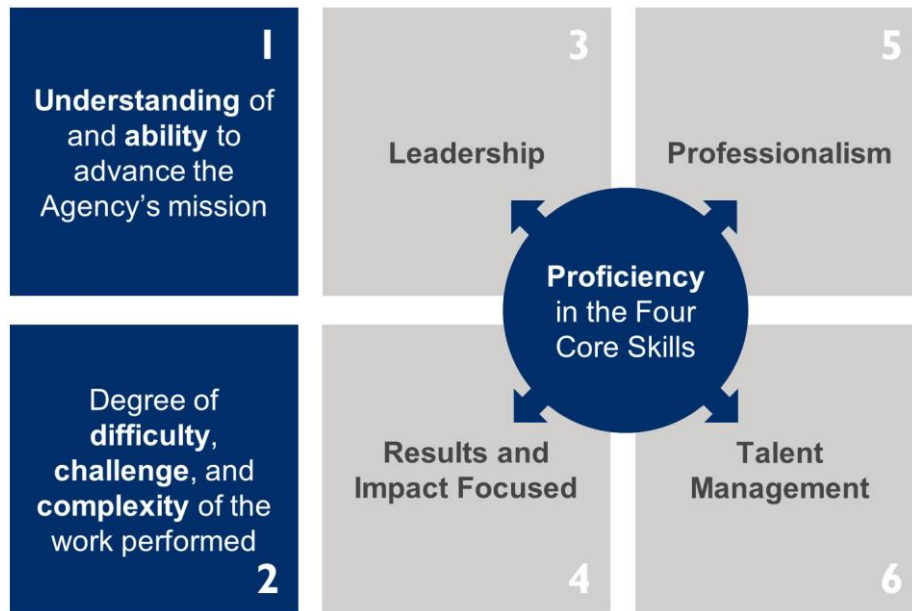
1. Understanding of and ability to advance the Agency's mission
2. Degree of difficulty, challenge, and complexity of the work performed
3. Proficiency in the four core skills:
   a. Leadership
   b. Results and Impact Focused
   c. Professionalism, and
   d. Talent Management

The Boards will rate each promotion candidate on all six factors based on the information included in the performance files. In 2019, this information will include the AAR(s) for the 2018–2019 performance cycle, the results of the 2019 Multisource Ratings, the biographical data sheet, and the PIF (which may describe situations going back to the individual's last promotion), as well as AEFs for the previous 4 years (or as many as are available).

There are blocks in the PIF that specifically address the four core skills plus your understanding of and ability to advance the Agency's mission, and Boards will also draw inferences about these factors from your accomplishments and contributions. However, the second factor—degree of difficulty, challenge, and complexity of the work performed—is not addressed through a specific entry on any of your forms. Instead, Promotion Boards will be looking for evidence of your ability to perform difficult and challenging work throughout your promotion package.

What exactly are the AAR and the PIF?

The AAR is meant to demonstrate how you contributed to important team, Mission, or Agency objectives; in other words, what you accomplished. The AAR form allows up to five accomplishments, with a maximum word count of 75 words per entry. If you are in one assignment, with one supervisor for the 12-month performance appraisal cycle, you will only have one AAR. If you change supervisors during that time period, you will have more than one.

The PIF is completed by all employees eligible for promotion, including employees who may be in long-term training. In it, you will describe how you have demonstrated each of the four core skills in the context of a contribution or an accomplishment. There is also a block where you are asked to demonstrate your understanding of or ability to advance the Agency's mission. You are allowed 250 words for each of the five entries.

What is the operating unit context statement?

The Operating Unit (OU) Context Statement is a document that will provide context for your contributions and accomplishments. It will be completed by staff at each Mission, Bureau, or Independent Office and signed by the Principal Officer of the Operating Unit by the end of the appraisal period each year. The Statement will describe the Country Context, USAID Program Priorities, and Resources and Functions (similar to the Role in the Organization Section in the old AEF). You will want to refer to this before you finalize your AAR to ensure that you do not waste words repeating information in the OU Context Statement.

How are the AAR and PIF different from the AEF?

The AEF was written annually by the supervisor, often in very glowing terms, which made differentiating employees very difficult. Additionally, true differences across employees could be masked by differences in their Rating Official's ability to write an elegant and compelling story and the limitations of a single individual's perspective.

The AAR and PIF are designed to address the limitations of the AEF. The AAR provides a more objective record of one's contributions, while the PIF allows for a much fuller description of one's skills. Since both the AAR and the skills sections of the PIF are written by the employee in the first person, the information Boards are looking for is less likely to be buried in effusive praise, making it easier for them to rate candidates on the six promotion decision factors.

Is there a specific format I should use for the AAR or PIF?

Yes, the Situation-Action-Results (SAR) model works well for helping you describe the context and challenge, problem, or opportunity that existed (Situation), how you responded (Action), and the outcome or outcomes from your effort (Result). We will discuss this further when we get into the nuts and bolts of writing AAR and PIF entries.

Is the PIF just a longer version of the AAR?

No, the PIF is not just a longer version of the AAR. The AAR is meant to capture your contributions and accomplishments over the course of the year. The purpose of the PIF is to capture how you demonstrated the four core skills and your ability to advance the Agency's mission. Outcomes are mentioned in PIF entries, but most of what you write will focus on **how** you attained those outcomes—i.e., what you did that reflects what the Agency has defined as Leadership, Results and Impact Focused, Professionalism, and Talent Management. In other words, while an accomplishment or contribution may be referenced and provide context for your PIF entry, the goal of the PIF is to demonstrate the skills possessed and used.

Are all PIF entries written directly from AAR entries?

Since the AAR and AEF entries capture your best work, many, if not all, of your PIF entries may reference situations and accomplishments described in AARs or prior year AEFs. However, this is not required, and you may write about how you demonstrated the core skills in situations not included in AARs or AEFs.

Should I reference the core skills in my AAR entries?

No, this is not expected nor needed. Remember two important things: first, the emphasis for the AAR is on accomplishments or contributions and not on **how** you have demonstrated the core skills—that is the role of the PIF. Second, you have just 75 words, so you want to make certain each word counts.

Should I include quotes in my AAR and PIF entries?

While not prohibited, including direct quotes is discouraged since they seldom provide Boards with verifiable and specific information that can help them assess the six promotion decision factors.

Where do I start? I get writer's block when I look at those blank forms.

A few helpful tips for getting started:

- Have a friend or colleague interview you (asking: "What work did you do this year that was especially important?") and either record the conversation or take notes
- Interview yourself and record what you say
- Just begin writing about something you did without any initial concern for length or order; then as you review your scenario, highlight the sentences that look like AAR and PIF elements
- Capture performance often and early and by taking notes to use when you begin writing
- Read the instructions on the AAR and PIF forms; they are specific and will help you focus what you write about on each form

Most of my work is fairly routine—just doing my day-to-day job. How can I describe my contributions or skills so that I stand out?

Some work that seems routine to you may in fact be critical to the ability of others to do their jobs. In other words, sometimes doing your job well is how you contribute to your team's, your Mission's, or the Agency's ability to achieve important objectives. You may just need to articulate that link for the reader in order to create a good AAR entry.

In addition, people often take for granted a skill they bring to the job that they may not see, but others do. You might try asking yourself, your peers, and your supervisor questions such as "If I were sitting

next to several other people doing identical work to mine, would someone needing help seek me out first? If so, why?" If the answer is "yes" and the "why" describes a skill, talent, or level of technical expertise you bring to the job, you may have the beginning of a good PIF entry.

Finally, make sure you use specific and compelling language. For example, instead of "I completed the report," maybe what you actually did was "resolved the long-standing disagreement regarding the interpretation of the data so that we could finalize the conclusion and publish our findings." This would then usually be followed by a sentence that indicates why getting this done was important.

How should I handle references to other people or sensitive personal information in my entries?

Be judicious in your references to other people in both the AAR and the PIF. If a situation was difficult, describe the situation but be careful not to make negative references to specific people. Additionally, refrain from including references to personal information (e.g., race, religion, grievances, retirement plans, medical information) that is not relevant to the task of the Boards. Refer to 463mai "Precepts for Foreign Service Promotion Boards" for further guidance on inadmissible comments, and reach out to HCTM/CPE or your Resident Legal Officer or General Counsel for guidance if you are not sure if something is appropriate to mention.

TIPS FOR WRITING COMPELLING AAR AND PIF ENTRIES

The biggest challenges in writing AARs and PIFs tend to be:

- Underselling or not fully excavating the impact of an accomplishment (aka "leaving stuff on the table")
- Overselling the performance and not realistically tying the performance to broader goals
- Using generic, vague language
- Forgetting details about the performance

To address these issues, you will want to ensure you:

- Capture the breadth and depth of how you demonstrated the core skills by asking for peer review
- Don't oversell the performance, but connect the dots
- Use specific, compelling language
- Track and take notes on your performance

In addition to these general tips, you will want to ensure that your grammar, structure, and style reflect the principles of good writing, for example:

- Avoid using absolutes and superlatives

- Use active voice and prefer verbs to adjectives and nouns
- Maintain parallel structure
- Write shorter sentences (15–25 words)
- Use linking words and phrases

These tips are elaborated upon in the Guide to Writing Your Annual Accomplishment Record and Promotion Input Form. Please refer to this Guide for more information and examples.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE ANNUAL ACCOMPLISHMENT RECORD (AAR)

You can find extensive guidance on completing the full AAR form in the AAR and PIF writing Guidebook, on the AAR form itself, and in the comprehensive instructions appended to the PDF version of the form. The following is focused primarily on writing the AAR entries, but starts with a brief overview of the AAR requirements and elements.

When is an AAR required?

Each rating cycle, you will complete one or more AARs. You will always complete one at the end of the rating period, as long as you have been in that assignment or under your current supervisor for at least 60 days. If your supervisor changes during the rating period, either because you leave or he or she does, if you spent 60 days or more working for that individual you will still have to complete an AAR for that time period and have your supervisor review and sign it.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE AAR

THE AAR

- Has five blocks that allow up to 75 words for each accomplishment or contribution entry
- Has two blocks that allow up to 100 words each for "Exceptional or unusual challenges that specifically impacted the employee this year" and "Position Duties and Responsibilities"
- Should reflect your most difficult, challenging, and complex work, or the work that was most significant in terms of allowing your team or Mission to achieve objectives
- Is written in the first person ("I" statements)
- Is written in complete thoughts
- Includes minimal or no acronyms

BLOCKS TO COMPLETE ON THE FORM

1. The first block on the form is titled "**Exceptional or unusual challenges that specifically impacted the employee this year**" and has a 100-word limit. This block does not need to address political, budget, program, etc., challenges that affected the whole mission. These will be

covered in the Operating Unit Context Statement for the mission (see Guidebook Appendix for an example).

You are to use this block on the AAR to describe any exceptional challenges or obstacles that may have specifically impacted you or your role during the appraisal period. For example, a key position vacancy that required you take on extra responsibilities or significant budget increases or cuts in programs you managed, and so on. If you did not have any unusual challenges during the AAR period (which may happen frequently in AARs covering just a few months), there is no need to complete this section.

Here are two examples:

Example 1: *Typhoon Florence caused severe flooding and landslides in the four districts where the Integrated Water Resources Management project is located. I managed this project and flooding destroyed project-funded infrastructure, displaced project participants, and made access to project sites difficult for several months.*

Example 2: *One of the Mission's Health Office grantees received negative press coverage over its improper disposal of medical wastes, indicating that it was out of compliance with the environmental mitigation plan developed under its agreement with USAID. As the Mission's Environmental Compliance officer, I had to work closely with the Health Office to resolve this issue.*

2. The next block asks for your **Position Duties and Responsibilities**, also with a 100-word limit. Briefly summarize your major duties and responsibilities, such as programs managed and number/dollar value of the contract. The intent is to allow you to demonstrate the work you were actually responsible for; generic position descriptions will typically not capture this and just copying and pasting a position description or job announcement isn't recommended.

Here is an example:

As the Mission Environmental Officer at USAID/Rocklandia within the Office of Economic Growth and Environment, one of my primary responsibilities included serving as Project Manager and AOR/COR for the $38 million Integrated Water Resources Management Project. This project required significant redesign in collaboration with government and project implementers following Typhoon Florence. I was also charged with supporting all Mission Offices and implementing partners in ensuring compliance with U.S. law related to environmental planning and management (Regulation 216); and providing technical input on new project designs for potable water delivery and coastal restoration as part of a typhoon recovery package.

After setting the context for the assignment in these first two blocks of the AAR, you will then describe up to five of your most significant contributions and accomplishments.

WRITING YOUR AAR ENTRIES

THE STEPS IN BRIEF

AAR

1 Refer to the notes in your performance management folder, or if you haven't started one yet, write down your major activities and areas where your work has had an impact.

2 Select your most important accomplishments or contributions to the Mission/Office priorities.

3 Draft your accomplishments using the Situation-Action-Results (SAR) model.

4 Ensure you fully illuminate the impact and link your accomplishments to organizational goals.

5 Edit, revise, and let rest; seek peer review.

6 Think about how your AAR entries may be useful for your PIF; prepare them accordingly.

THE SAR MODEL

Before you start, talk to your supervisor and peers and ask yourself some questions to help you focus on the accomplishments most deserving of an entry. The questions below can help.

- What were the most important, challenging, difficult, and/or complex things you did this year and why were they important?
- What else did you accomplish that was not captured in your objectives?
- How did you contribute to the success of others?

You will want to identify accomplishments that have compelling qualitative and quantitative, measurable outcomes, and when possible, highlight a technical contribution in at least one of your AAR entries. Once you have a contribution or accomplishment in mind, start drafting your entry by writing a couple of sentences for each element of the SAR model.

Situation: Write one or two sentences describing the challenge or opportunity that you faced.

Example: Country X was facing a serious extended drought. Current crops were not surviving and there was growing food insecurity across the entire region.

Action: Write down what did you do to address the challenge or opportunity? Use "I" statements when describing what you did, and use a variety of active verbs.

Example: I worked with an FSN economist, the Ag Team's agronomist, and Ministry of Agriculture counterparts to figure out ways to identify and increase production of crops that could survive in drought conditions. As part of this effort I conducted a cost-benefit analysis of alternative approaches for increasing crop production focusing on drought-resistant cereals. I incorporated my analysis into recommendations which were accepted by the design team, and I wrote the project approval package.

Result/Outcome: Explain why what you did was important. What was the impact of your actions? Who benefitted and how? Realistically link your work to important objectives and mention expected outcomes. Realistic means not over- or underselling the work.

Example: As a result of our work thousands of farmers received seeds that are much more likely to be sustainable under current conditions.

With a little additional wordsmithing and the addition of a few more details, here is how the three parts might read as a final 75-word AAR entry:

Once experts confirmed the extended duration of Country X's drought, I quickly tackled the urgent need to expand sustainable crops. Working closely with an FSN economist, Agriculture Team agronomist, and Ministry of Agriculture counterparts, I completed cost-benefit analyses of alternatives for scaling-up production of drought-resistant cereals; collected and analyzed crop viability data; and developed recommendations. Our recommendations led to programs that provided 10,000 farmers with seeds and training to produce new sustainable crop varieties.

REVIEWING AND EDITING TIPS

Once you have draft versions of your accomplishments, you can begin the process of editing, rewriting, and finalizing your entries.

A common mistake people make when writing their accomplishments is to maintain too narrow a focus and to leave untold additional results, also called "leaving stuff on the table."

To tap into the full impact:

- If your action was required because there was a problem that had to be addressed or an opportunity you were able to leverage, make sure that is clear in your Situation statement

- Ask peers and your supervisor what they thought was important, or what might have happened had you done nothing

- Ask yourself if you have answered "why," "what," "who," "how," and "so what" in your entry

If the outcome isn't fully realized when you're writing and submitting your AAR, you may describe the potential outcome within realistic bounds using language such as "is poised to deliver."

Finally, review the writing tips at the end of this manual and the much more detailed tips and examples in the Guidebook. Ask yourself if you can shorten sentences, eliminate unnecessary details, or find more specific or compelling verbs. Give yourself plenty of time for this process and time to let it rest for a bit. In other words, write your entire draft and then forget it for as long as your schedule permits before you go back for your final editing and polishing.

If during your review you find that you have been tempted to highlight or describe skills, cut them from the AAR but keep for possible PIF entries!

HOW TO WRITE YOUR PROMOTION INPUT FORM (PIF) ENTRIES

You can find extensive guidance on completing the PIF in the Guidebook, on the form itself, and in the comprehensive instructions appended to the PDF version of the PIF form. The following is a condensed guide to get you started.

When is a PIF required?

All employees who are eligible for promotion, including employees who may be in long-term training at the end of the performance appraisal cycle, need to complete the Promotion Input Form or PIF. Note that even in years when you don't need to worry about doing a PIF, it is still smart to track your performance and begin developing content for future PIF entries—some of your best examples may come from the years you are not eligible for promotion.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PIF

- Five entries of 250 words maximum per block. Employees may choose to write two examples per core skill or use all 250 words for one example. Either way, the employee must denote the location, position, supervisor, and approximate time frame for each example.

- Section 2 is for input on the four core skills (Leadership, Results and Impact Focused, Professionalism, and Talent Management)

- Section 3 is for input on Understanding of and Ability to Advance the Agency's Mission

- Entries are written in the first person and with complete thoughts

- Entries should have minimal or no acronyms unless they are included in the list of acceptable acronyms or are spelled out the first time they appear in the block

UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU NEED TO WRITE

Before you even begin to write, it is important that you have a clear understanding of what Promotion Boards are looking for and what you are expected to write. To get a better sense of the totality of the things the Boards will be looking for, review the promotion decision factors in the ADS 463mai. Boards will be very familiar with both the promotion decision factors and the FS/SFS Skills Framework, and you need to be too. The core skills are listed below, but don't rely on names alone—the subskill definitions and proficiency indicators provide the operational definitions of the core skills.

FS/SFS SKILLS FRAMEWORK

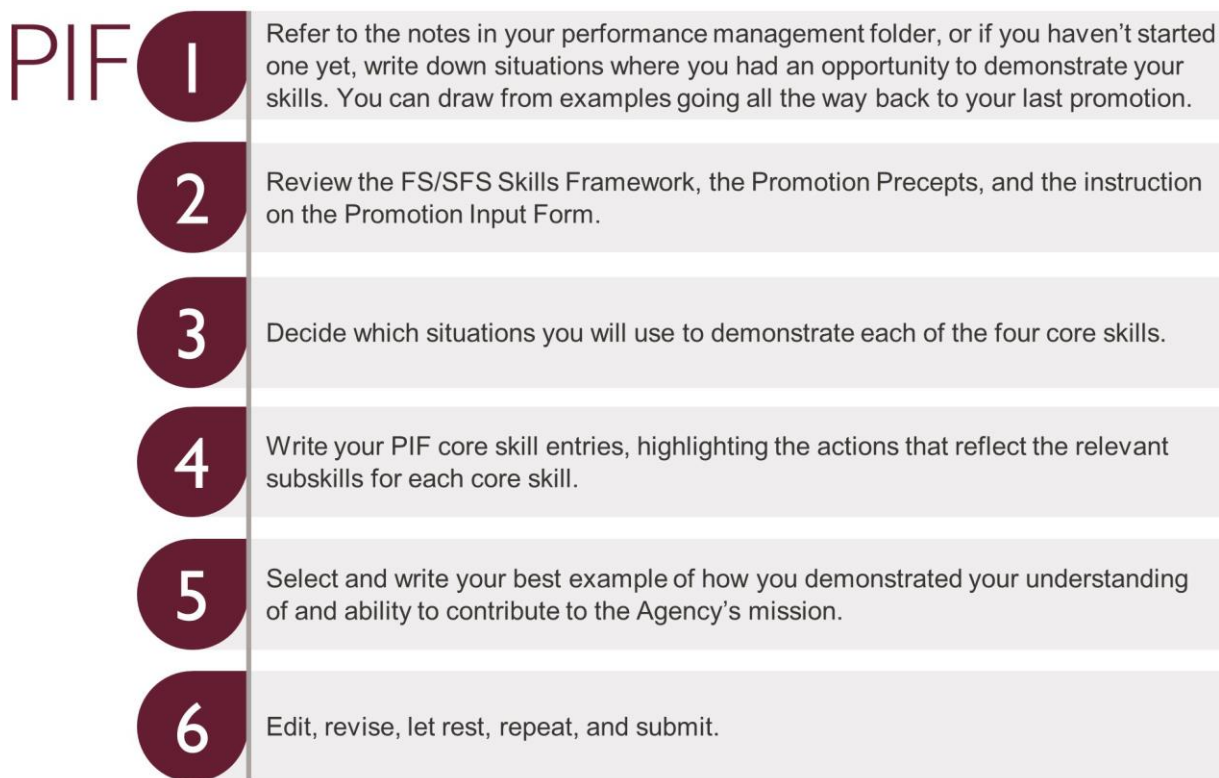| Leadership 1	Results and Impact Focused 2	Professionalism 3	Talent Management 4
• Building Consensus and Partnerships • Contextual Awareness and Political Astuteness • Motivation and Empowerment • Vision	• Accountability for Results • Problem Solving • Taking and Managing Risks • Technical and Substantive Expertise	• Adaptability and Flexibility • Communication • Cross-Cultural Competence • Interpersonal Skills • Teamwork	• Supports EEO, Diversity, and Inclusion • Professional Development • Supervision and Human Resources Management

Core Skills — Subskills

When you review the Framework, it is also important to understand that the behavioral examples used as proficiency indicators are just that—examples. There are many other things a Foreign Service Officer (FSO) might do that could be classified as examples of Leadership, Results and Impact Focused, Professionalism, or Talent Management, so don't limit yourself based on the examples.

Be aware also that simply saying you have done something that sounds exactly like one of the proficiency indicators does not mean that you have just demonstrated your proficiency at that level. Each of the behaviors listed as a proficiency indicator may be done more or less frequently, more or less effectively, and in situations that vary from relatively simple to extremely complex.

Real world actions also tend to reflect a mix of proficiency levels, so not everything you do in a situation will fit neatly into an Apprentice, Journey, Master, or Teacher level. Certainly, you will want to focus your write up on those actions that reflect the higher skill levels. However, Boards will be looking for, and welcome, honest, realistic accounts of what you did; descriptions taken verbatim from the Skills Framework will not be impressive.

THE STEPS IN BRIEF

PIF

1 Refer to the notes in your performance management folder, or if you haven't started one yet, write down situations where you had an opportunity to demonstrate your skills. You can draw from examples going all the way back to your last promotion.

2 Review the FS/SFS Skills Framework, the Promotion Precepts, and the instruction on the Promotion Input Form.

3 Decide which situations you will use to demonstrate each of the four core skills.

4 Write your PIF core skill entries, highlighting the actions that reflect the relevant subskills for each core skill.

5 Select and write your best example of how you demonstrated your understanding of and ability to contribute to the Agency's mission.

6 Edit, revise, let rest, repeat, and submit.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Use feedback from your supervisor and peers throughout this process.

SELECTING YOUR CORE SKILL PIF EXAMPLES

Once you are familiar with the FS/SFS Skills Framework, review your current AARs and past AEFs and try to identify any that gave you a chance to really shine in one of the core skill areas. Think also about any feedback you've received from your supervisor or others related to the core skills, and don't hesitate to ask trusted colleagues if they can think of or suggest good PIF examples. Once you have identified some contenders for your PIF entries, just start writing. Focus on what you actually did, with lots of detail. You can tighten it up later once you have the story down on paper.

You might find that once you start writing what you did, you are including actions that reflect subskills from another core skill. When this happens, you need to refocus on the relevant subskills, or rethink your initial assessment of the best fit for your scenario. Often, complex and challenging situations call for skills from multiple domains. You may discover as you write that something you initially thought would be a good Leadership example actually works better as a Results and Impact or Professionalism example.

Whatever block you put an example in though, be sure to focus on actions and insights relevant to that core skill—you don't have enough space to discuss actions that reflect subskills for other core skills.

WRITE YOUR PIF CORE SKILL ENTRIES

The most important thing to keep in mind when you are writing PIF entries is that you need to emphasize "how" you accomplished the result by describing actions that reflect the skill you are writing about. Simply saying something like "I used my excellent interpersonal skills to get everyone on board" will not do it. You need to describe what you did or said so that someone else will say "Wow, what a great demonstration of interpersonal skills!". You will describe actions that reflect your skills at their best or highest level, but your descriptions need to be and sound authentic. Remember that others will be weighing in on your skills as well through the Multisource Ratings, and your supervisor will be asked if the way you are presenting yourself is consistent with what he or she has observed or learned about you.

There is no formula for the perfect PIF entry, but the guidance suggests that the SAR format is often an effective way to structure your narrative. Whether you choose to write one long entry or provide two separate examples, your word limit for each core skill is 250 words. As a rough guide, you might consider using just 20–30 percent of the total number of words to describe the situation and the results, leaving 70–80 percent to describe the specific actions you took that reflect the target skill. However, each situation is unique, and there is no hard and fast rule of thumb.

A good PIF entry, just like a good AAR entry, needs specific examples, compelling language, active voice, and "I" statements. Likewise, be sure you are getting at the full impact of each entry and not "leaving stuff on the table." When you are setting up the situation or problem, or when you are describing challenges you worked through, include details that might convey the difficulty and complexity of the situation, or insights you brought to the task that might illustrate your understanding of, or ability to advance the Agency's mission. Remember that Boards will be looking for information to support ratings on these two additional promotion decision factors in the PIF as well as your AARs and past AEFs.

FULLY CAPTURE HOW YOU DEMONSTRATED YOUR SKILLS

With AARs, the questions that yield the most impact are WHAT, WHO, and SO WHAT. What happened or was the result? Who benefitted? With PIFs, the most helpful question is HOW. How did you do this?

Be sure to highlight the many important actions you took to attain the goals you are referencing. In the PIF example below, notice that the first sentence gives a very brief description of the situation. The last sentence is a brief summary of the results achieved. The sentences in the middle describe actions and thought processes that broadly reflect Leadership skills, with an emphasis on those related to building consensus and partnerships, contextual awareness, and political astuteness. Elements of the vision subskill also come through. Note that with a slightly different emphasis (e.g., highlighting adaptability, interpersonal skills, and teamwork) this could also have served as a Professionalism example.

LEADERSHIP PIF EXAMPLE:

When I arrived in CountryXYZ, I noted an evolving policy environment and trends that necessitated adapting USAID's health strategy; a formidable challenge. To deepen my understanding, I launched a listening and communication campaign including consultations with diverse stakeholders and roundtables with staff. Being new to CountryXYZ, I relied heavily on my team's knowledge and insights to navigate the nuances of the culture, grasp what the beneficiaries valued, and understand the political climate in the country. These insights allowed me to open a dialogue with an important stakeholder resistant to changing course. In a series of one-on-one meetings I solicited the stakeholder's viewpoints and priorities on our child & maternal health goals and those of the host government. I integrated these perspectives into a vision statement and developed an alternative course of action designed to yield greater impact in a shorter amount of time and reflect priorities that would resonate with my host country counterparts. I structured my presentation of the plan to address the concerns of both USAID leadership and the interagency stakeholders, invited all stakeholders to debate alternatives, and set ground rules to create a safe space for dialogue. The buy-in I gained from mission leadership, my government counterparts, and our implementing partners allowed me to make tough decisions to end some projects early and modify the scope others. The result was that I was able to build trust with a new team and influence our programming to have greater impact within the health sector for CountryXYZ. (248 words)

If you are struggling to develop a PIF entry or trying to help a colleague flesh out the big middle HOW section, you can start by asking questions about either the situation or the result. If we pose the question "What did you do?" in response to the situation or problem, the writer can begin filling in the steps. If they respond with something general, like "I got a lot of input from people" or "I got all the stakeholders to buy into a new approach" ask follow up questions like "How did you do that?" or "What made them want to buy in?". If it is easier to start from the result, "how" questions also work. For example, "How did you build trust? How did you influence programming decisions?"

DEVELOPING A PIF EXAMPLE FROM AN AAR

Asking "how" questions is a relatively easy way to develop a PIF entry from an AAR entry since AAR entries describe actions, but only briefly, and not with the level of detail needed to illustrate skills.

Read the AAR entry below and notice the underlined action sentences. They clearly and succinctly state what the writer did to get the procurements moving. They show his or her contribution to the positive result, but they don't allow you to visualize what was involved or see the individual's skills in action.

Example AAR: *I learned upon arriving at post that several critical procurements were significantly delayed. I researched the delays, seeking insights from A&A Specialists and CORs, and discovered one regulation was interpreted too narrowly. I gained buy-in for an expedited approach and ensured that staff understood why the procurements were permissible. Progress was immediate, and procurements stalled for 6-10 months were awarded in record time for the mission, allowing us advance key objectives of our HIV programs. (75 words)*

Although it's not clear from the AAR what core skills were most relevant in this situation, it is easy to imagine a scenario involving skills from the Results and Impact Focused domain. The example below shows what a Results and Impact Focused PIF entry might actually look like. Notice that the individual's technical expertise shines through, in addition to her ability to problem solve, reinforce accountability, and assess and manage risks—all of which are relevant to this core skill. However, an account focused entirely on just one or two of the subskills could have been equally effective.

RESULTS AND IMPACT FOCUSED PIF EXAMPLE:

Upon my arrival at post, the Mission Director expressed concern about several procurements that were significantly delayed. <u>Before attempting to address potential accountability issues with the staff, I tried to understand the root cause of the problem by encouraging our A&A Specialists and CORs to share their perspective on delay-related issues. I also collected data on bottlenecks and reviewed the award process to see if any steps could be streamlined and ensure our compliance with ADS requirements and other regulations. Armed with this information, I proposed several adjustments to the A&A Specialists and CORs and solicited their feedback. These consultations resulted in agreed-upon process adjustments with clear performance metrics that we swiftly enacted. Additionally, my inquiries led to the discovery that one regulation had been interpreted too narrowly. I commended the staff for conscientiously seeking to be compliant and then led them through an analysis of how pertinent section of the ADS applied to these procurement scenarios. I explained the general principles guiding procurement processes and the role of the ADS within it. I also explained the checks and balances built into USAID's procurement process to manage the inherent risks of award approvals and emphasized the importance holding ourselves and our partners accountable for complying with these control systems. I monitored the status of these important procurements to ensure they were being expedited.</u> Ultimately, improved processes and accountability systems led to all procurements being awarded, allowing the Mission to ramp up support for HIV-impacted populations and for small farmers. (249 words)

THE FINAL EMPLOYEE BLOCK: UNDERSTANDING OF AND ABILITY TO ADVANCE THE AGENCY'S MISSION

The instructions to employees for completing this final PIF entry are as follows:

In the block below, provide an example of how you positively advanced the Agency's Mission and U.S. foreign assistance objectives acting individually, as a member of a team (e.g., interagency, within or across B/IOs), or in partnership with local actors or other key external stakeholders. Describe the situation, your actions, the impact of your actions, and if applicable, what you learned from the experience. (250 word limit)

As a reminder, this is the current posted USAID Mission Statement.

Our Mission: On behalf of the American people, we promote and demonstrate democratic values abroad, and advance a free, peaceful, and prosperous world. In support of America's foreign policy, the U.S. Agency for International Development leads the U.S. Government's international development and disaster assistance through partnerships and investments that save lives, reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance, and help people emerge from humanitarian crises and progress beyond assistance.

When reviewing your overall performance and the specific accomplishments and contributions, consider work and outcomes that are most linked to the mission and overarching organizational goals and that you played a role in. At the same time, consider situations that allowed you to see things differently and possibly gain a deeper or more nuanced understanding of the Agency's mission and strategies for advancing it. This block gives you more freedom than the others to share something you learned through your interactions with partners or stakeholders, and unique opportunities you leveraged to advance foreign assistance objectives, sometimes in creative or innovative ways.

ⓘ FINAL EDITING TIPS

- Avoid using all but the most common acronyms. Use shortened versions of longer names to save on word count, for example after naming a program, refer to it as "the program." Do not put the abbreviated form in parentheses unless you plan to use the term again.

- Avoid using the absolutes "always" and "never" unless that is the actual performance because they tend to make the descriptions sound overblown.

- Prefer verbs, the more specific the better, to adjectives and avoid using superlatives (the greatest, most amazing, best ever).

- Break up long sentences. Aim for sentences that are 15–25 words long.

- Write in active voice; use "I" to identify clearly that the action taken was yours. Avoid passive voice (the program was implemented versus I implemented the program) unless you do not know or cannot say who did something or you want to emphasize what was done and not who did it.

- Avoid "tion" and other noun-inducing endings such as "ance, ence, ment" and so on. For example, rather than "This necessitated adaption of our strategy," use "This necessitated adapting our strategy." Or say it more plainly: "We needed to adapt our strategy to meet the changing needs."

- Use linking words and phrases to create logical flow and to guide the reader through the SAR elements. Example: I was faced with… Therefore, I…, Consequently, I was able to…and the outcome was….

- Ensure your entries do not include any Inadmissible Comments.

The best approach is to draft your entries, seek initial input from colleagues and your supervisor, edit a bit based on their feedback, and then let it rest a bit. Ideally, you will want to let enough time pass to allow you and others to read your final draft with "fresh eyes," allowing you to find typographical errors and make tweaks that will ratchet up the quality of the entries. Time and access permitting, seek feedback from your supervisor and your peers again and make changes as needed. Once you have completed your final documents, do a final check just for grammar, punctuation, and style. If these aren't your strengths, ask someone else to help with this final review.

Once you submit your final AAR and PIF, rest and take a breather. Then start preparing for next year!

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: AAR EXERCISES

AAR Exercise #1

Evaluating the Full Impact of an AAR

Read the AAR entry below and then answer the questions that follow.

(Backstop 60, Grade FS 03)

I managed the restructuring of the workforce development activities to include higher education institutions and then developed a relationship with a key counterpart in the Ministry of Higher Education to secure their support. I analyzed each activity's target population, proposed implementation strategy, geographic presence, and intended result. I devised a plan that encouraged implementing partners (IPs) to work with government-supported entities, such as technical vocational educational training centers, skills development providers, and curriculum development teams. (75 words)

1. Has the writer fully illuminated the impact of the accomplishment?

2. What questions might the writer ask to get at the true depth of the impact?

3. If the employee was to expand this accomplishment into a PIF entry or two, what might be the potential core skills these actions might fall under?

AAR Exercise #2

Critiquing First Draft (Poor) AAR examples

Read all three of the AAR examples below and discuss with your colleagues. Share what you see as the weaknesses in each and any ideas you have for how they might be strengthened.

In your critique consider the following:

1. Does the example include the 3 elements of the SAR framework?

    Situation—the challenge, need, or opportunity that needed to be addressed

    Action—what the individual did in response to the situation

    Result—what was accomplished and why it was important, or how the actions contributed to a positive outcome

2. Is language vague? Verbs too general? Adjectives overused?
3. Could you summarize in one short sentence the key thing the person did?
4. After reading the entry are you thinking "good thing that person was on top of that!"

(Backstop 50, Grade FS 03)

Example #1: As the Senior Country Associate for the USAID/{country} program, I served as an agency advocate for the Country Operational Plan review and for data management processes, and contributed technically to the overall management of the HIV/AIDS response in {country}. I was also responsible for ensuring that channels of communication with State Department colleagues remained open and were used effectively and strategically. (60 words)

(Backstop 25, Grade FS 04)

Example #2: Our mission had planned an important construction project and I was assigned to ensure that we could execute the procurement without undue delays or complications. One of the most important things I accomplished in carrying out this assignment was to convince both the International Finance Corporation and the {country} Port Authority to delay their tender for a port operator so as to more fortuitously align with USAID's construction procurement. (69 words)

(Backstop 93, Grade FS -3)

Example #3: I empowered US and FSN staff to take leadership roles and enhance direct engagement with {country} counterparts and Implementing Partners (IPs). This is leading to public fora that better meet the needs of the development community in {country}. I also effectively supported staff efforts to create a Community of Practice among IPs, and skillfully created an enabling and empowering and motivating environment for the greater {country} community. (67 words)

AAR Exercise #3

Analyzing SAR Elements in AAR examples

Below are ten examples of accomplishments or contributions from different Backstops. AAR entries should convey the situation/issue being addressed (S), what specifically you did (A), and the result of your efforts or why this was important (A). Read the examples and in the space below each note what you think about the SAR elements—*Ok? Poor? Great?*—and how weaker elements might be improved. Be mindful of word limits!

Also, note that often, important context information will be included in the OU Context Statement or the top two blocks of the AAR. When context and role information is adequately covered in the OU Context Statement or AAR sections on Challenges or Primary Responsibilities, there is no need to repeat the information in the narrative on accomplishments/contributions. So, you can assume that in some cases there would be more information on context than what you read here.

Remember also that not every contribution has a huge impact or immediate results. Often, FSOs contribute to the ability of their team or Mission to achieve objectives by excelling in the performance of their basic position duties and responsibilities.

1. *(Backstop 02, Grade FS 03)* I supported reduction of coca cultivation in {country} - a top USG priority - by leading efforts to target a region which had experienced a 300% increase in 2016. I coordinated Mission staff and implementing partners, drafted a tailored USAID strategy for the region, and liaised with government counterparts. This resulted in three new activities with existing partners moving into the region, increased coordination among all ongoing activities, and greater alignment with {country} priorities. (74 words)

   (S)

   (A)

   (R)

2. *(Backstop 03, Grade FS 02)* I consolidated the USAID/{country} office space by working closely with a space planner, USAID office heads, and five tenant agencies in the building. I analyzed office needs for all current and projected new employees based on grade and space allowances, and designed an improved floorplan for shared spaces. By decreasing the USAID footprint, the project saved over $100,000/year, provided an office configuration conducive to collaboration, and met needs across the Interagency. (71 words)

   (S)

   (A)

(R)

3. *(Backstop 04, Grade FS 02)* Recent changes in Inspector General (IG) requirements have placed more responsibility for audit oversight on Mission Financial Management offices. Accordingly, I established an Audit Management working group and solicited representatives from all functions among the 20 staff I manage to re-evaluate OFM's oversight responsibilities for the entire Mission's portfolio. This led to new policies and guidance so that the Mission is now in compliance with the IG's standards. (68 words)

(S)

(A)

(R)

4. *(Backstop 10, Grade FS 04)* To respond to El Nino's devastating impact on agricultural production in {country}, I led teams in modifying two existing activity awards to incorporate riverbank reinforcement and development of water catchments, which saved an estimated 9,100 hectares of cropland and provided water for 60,000 livestock for three months, respectively. Additionally, I helped reprogram $2 million of program funds to assist farmers with recovery in the drought stricken north by carefully analyzing project pipelines and mortgages. (74 words)

(S)

(A)

(R)

5. *(Backstop 60, Grade FS 03)* With the impending close out of USAID's basic education program in September 2017, I lobbied a local foundation's chief executive and convinced him to support key interventions. I initiated and oversaw meetings for foundation staff to work with the implementing partner during the last month of the project to ensure a smooth transition of responsibility. With the foundation's commitment, we can sustain advances for 12.5 million primary school students and training for over 230,000 teachers. (75 words)

(S)

(A)

(R)

6. *(Backstop 85, Grade FS 02)* I established a framework with {country} government to begin {country} funded government-to-government agreements and embed USAID health technical advisors in government-run provincial medical offices. This framework will enable the Health Team to effectively manage rural health activities and allow the {country} government to directly implement selected USAID activities, a long-awaited priority. (51 words)

(S)

(A)

(R)

7. *(Backstop 04, Grade FS 03)* In a context of increasing management risks due to staff vacancies and insecurity in {country}, I coordinated preparation of the Mission's annual required Federal Managers Financial Integrity Act (FMFIA) report. I provided detailed guidance to all offices, assisted new directors in completing required checklists, facilitated Mission leadership review of the findings, and took the lead in drafting both the final report submitted to Washington and comprehensive plan to address or mitigate identified weaknesses.   (73 words)

(S)

(A)

(R)

8. *(Backstop 50, Grade FS 04)* To support the Health Team's priority of completing procurements to replace core programs that will end next fiscal year, I served on the Technical Selection Committee (TEC) for a $60 million Primary Health Care project that will improve services in underserved regions. I assisted the Chair in developing materials, carefully reviewed all proposals, contributed actively to the discussion, consolidated member scores and comments, and helped to draft the TEC Selection Memorandum to meet tight deadlines. (75 words)

(S)

(A)

(R)

9. *(Backstop 76, Grade FS 02)* When the Government of {country} called snap parliamentary elections with little advance notice, I led USAID efforts to support civil society to monitor the fairness of the process and the vote count. I represented USAID in interagency planning meetings, identified program funds to reallocate to local partners, assisted with award modifications, and mobilized USAID staff to serve as election monitors. These efforts will help in determining whether the upcoming elections are free and fair. (74 words)

(S)

(A)

(R)

10. *(Backstop 10, Grade FS 04)* While assigned to post X, I realized that there wasn't an efficient mechanism for sharing information about the Food for Peace (FFP) program in the Sub-Sahara Africa region. I designed the first regional website to serve as a knowledge management platform and served as the website administrator, uploading helpful documents, tools, resource links, and programming information. As a result, I was able to benefit the information sharing for over 50 FFP staff in the region. (75 words)

(S)

(A)

(R)

For additional practice, revisit one or two examples that seem like they might have the potential to be expanded into a PIF entry. Once you find a couple of promising examples, ask yourself:

1. Which core skill feels most appropriate?
2. What subskills might be highlighted?

AAR Exercise #4

Writing your own AAR example

AAR Exercise: Part 1

Consider your performance during the current rating cycle. What is one accomplishment you would like to highlight? If you can't think of one right away, pair up with someone and ask each other questions from Step 2 of the Writing your AAR Entries process in the Guide to Writing. Questions could include:

- What was the most important thing you did this year and why was it important?
- What did I accomplish against work or performance objectives this year?
- What else did you accomplish that was not captured in your objectives?
- How did you contribute to the success of others?
- Why were these contributions important?
- What was your most challenging, difficult, or complex work this rating cycle?
- If you had to leave your position suddenly, what would your supervisor and/or colleagues peers miss most about you and the work you do?
- What differentiates you and your work from other people who do the same work?

AAR Exercise: Part 2

Use the prompts below to begin drafting an accomplishment. Do not worry about word count for now. Instead, carefully think through each of the elements so you have content to draw from as you pare the accomplishment down to the requisite 75 words.

Some people find it helpful to start with the result and then work backward to flesh out the situation and action before then revisiting the result to ensure the breadth and depth has been captured.

Situation: What was the challenge or opportunity that you faced?

Action: What did you do to manage or capitalize on the situation?

Result: What was the impact of your actions? What were important outcomes? Who benefited and in what ways?

Once you are done, take turns sharing and receiving feedback on what you have written.

AAR Exercise: Part 3

Return to the SAR you developed and determine if you have fully excavated the impact of the accomplishment(s). Minimally, ask yourself (or have a partner ask) the following: "Did this result or outcome benefit anyone else? If so, how?" and "Is this outcome directly linked to overarching organizational goals?" Amend the result as relevant.

AAR Exercise: Part 4

Review what you have written and look for opportunities to strengthen language, cut words, and make the entry as compelling as possible. When you are done, trade with a partner and give one another feedback.

AAR Exercise #1 – Discussion Guide

Evaluating the Impact of an AAR

Instructions: Read the AAR entry below and then answer the questions that follow.

(Backstop 60, Grade FS 03)

I managed the restructuring of the workforce development activities to include higher education institutions and then developed a relationship with a key counterpart in the Ministry of Higher Education to secure their support. I analyzed each activity's target population, proposed implementation strategy, geographic presence, and intended result. I devised a plan that encouraged implementing partners (IPs) to work with government-supported entities, such as technical vocational educational training centers, skills development providers, and curriculum development teams. (75 words)

1. Has the writer fully illuminated the impact of the accomplishment?

   No. This is essentially a **list of activities**, but it is not clear what issue/problem was being addressed, what the outcome was, or why it was important. In other words, this entry lacks the SAR structure. Lots of "what" (Action) here but no answer to the "Why did you do this?" and the "So What?" questions.

   The emphasis on actions taken "managed the restructuring," "developed a relationship," "analyzed each activity's…," and "devised a plan" suggests that the author may be trying to highlight skills, but that is better left to the PIF. In the PIF the author would be able to present a more detailed description of what he or she did and tailor the narrative to highlight only those actions that are relevant to the core he or she has chosen to illustrate. The AAR, on the other hand, should shine a light on accomplishments, which can only be defined as "accomplishments" or "contributions" if they led to some positive outcome or result.

2. What questions might the writer ask to get at the true depth of the impact?

   What prompted the restructuring?

   How were the institutions of higher education included? What were the benefits of the relationship with the Ministry of Higher Education?

   Who might benefit? Is there any evidence so far that any IPs have adopted recommendations?

3. If the employee was to expand this accomplishment into a PIF entry or two, what might be the potential core skills these actions might fall under?

   It is difficult to tell exactly because the verbs used here could suggest that Leadership, or Results and Impact Focused, or Professionalism subskills could have been paramount. What would the author highlight to demonstrate leadership vs Results and Impact Focused? (refer to subskill definitions)

AAR Exercise #2 – Discussion Guide

Critiquing First Draft (Poor) AAR examples

Instructions: Read all three of the AAR examples below and discuss with your colleagues. Share what you see as the weaknesses in each and any ideas you have for how they might be strengthened.

1. Does the example include the 3 elements of the SAR framework?

   Situation—the challenge, need or opportunity that needed to be addressed

   Action—what the individual did in response to the situation, and

   Result—what was accomplished and why it was important, or how the actions contributed to a positive outcome

2. Is language vague? Verbs too general? Adjectives overused?
3. Could you summarize in one short sentence the key thing the person did?
4. After reading the entry are you thinking "good thing that person was on top of that!"

Note that often, important context information will be included in the OU Context Statement or the top two blocks of the AAR. When context and role information is adequately covered in the OU Context Statement or AAR sections on Challenges or Primary Responsibilities, there is no need to repeat the information in the narrative on accomplishments/contributions.

(Backstop 50, Grade FS 03)

Example #1: As the Senior Country Associate for the USAID/{country} program, I served as an agency advocate for the Country Operational Plan review and for data management processes, and contributed technically to the overall management of the HIV/AIDS response in {country}. I was also responsible for ensuring that channels of communication with State Department colleagues remained open and were used effectively and strategically. (60 words)

Problem: This AAR entry reads more like a **position description** than a good AAR entry. It describes responsibilities but not what the individual accomplished in those roles. A better approach would be to pick one of those responsibilities and highlight a specific action that contributed to an important outcome.

(Backstop 25, Grade FS 04)

Example #2: Our mission had planned an important construction project and I was assigned to ensure that we could execute the procurement without undue delays or complications. One of the most important things I accomplished in carrying out this assignment was to convince both the International Finance Corporation and the {country} Port Authority to delay their tender for a port operator so as to more fortuitously align with USAID's construction procurement. (69 words)

Problem: The only activity you can take away from this example is that the person convinced other parties to delay a tender. But there is **too little context** to allow the reader to understand what this convincing involved – a simple telephone request? A series of tense, politically charged negotiation meetings? Presentation of a detailed cost/benefit analysis? Additionally, there is **nothing to support the significance** of the work. The author says that the construction project was important and the

accomplishment was important, but the bottom line – the more "fortuitous alignment" is too vague to convey why.

(Backstop 93, Grade FS -3)

Example #3: I empowered US and FSN staff to take leadership roles and enhance direct engagement with {country} counterparts and Implementing Partners (IPs). This is leading to public fora that better meet the needs of the development community in {country}. I also effectively supported staff efforts to create a Community of Practice among IPs, and skillfully created an enabling and empowering and motivating environment for the greater {country} community. (67 words)

Problem: This entry is filled with **lofty sounding verbs and adjectives** suggesting there was a lot of enabling, empowering, and motivating going on, but it is **not at all clear what the individual actually did**, or why it was important. If in fact these efforts contributed to achieving important team or mission objectives, this should be highlighted in the Situation (was there a problem or an opportunity?) and the Result (what did all this empowering lead to?) elements of the entry. Similarly, if the author truly did do an exceptional job creating an empowered and motivated workforce, a detailed description of how he or she did that could make an effective Leadership entry on the PIF.

APPENDIX B: PIF EXERCISES

PIF Exercise #1

Is there a potential PIF example in this AAR?

Read this AAR entry and answer the questions that follow.

After discovering that our cybersecurity training was seriously outdated, I conducted extensive research on threats and best practices for addressing general threats and locally specific vulnerabilities. I revised our manual, coordinating revisions and approvals with security and training staff, delivered in-person training to 50+ staff and created a 6-week messaging campaign to reinforce key points. A subsequent evaluation confirmed that local staff better understood cybersecurity risks and requirements for protecting Agency systems and data.

1. Imagine what completing this accomplishment might have involved. What kinds of skills might have been required?

2. Review the core skill and subskill definitions and select a core skill you could make up a PIF entry for, building on this AAR.

3. In your table group, take a couple of minutes to discuss and write down some of the possible actions this employee might describe to demonstrate the nature, depth, and breadth of their skills in this area. Refer to the subskill definitions and proficiency indicators for suggestions.

PIF Exercise #2

Identifying Common Mistakes in PIF Entries

Common mistake #1. Describing results but just naming the skills

Read through the sample PIF entry below.

Example 1: PIF entry for Professionalism

> One of my goals as the EXO was to strengthen our emphasis on customer service. I was successful in doing this in just a few short months and our Mission's new customer service-orientation yielded tangible benefits, ranging from reinvigorating the practice of FSN mentorship for new FSOs to instilling a sense of cooperation and common purpose with the Embassy. In addition, I addressed the historically strained relationship with the Embassy's Management Office, and my efforts to create a more positive relationship paid great dividends. By establishing common goals, I was able to increase the Embassy's receptivity towards USAID requests. The results include a reframed discussion on USAID-owned residences, the formalization of the Mission Director's authority over Agency properties, and the inclusion of the EXO in housing assignments prior to Housing Board presentations. These COMMUNICATION efforts are increasing morale as USAID is better represented and our needs better met. Additionally, it will soon lower USAID's ICASS costs through increased cost savings. (160 words)

The sample might look like a pretty good write-up if you are used to writing AEFs. There are several problems with this narrative as a PIF entry, however.

1. **Focus on one subskill.** The writer adopted the AEF strategy of singling out just one subskill—something not necessary or recommended for PIF entries (more on that below).

2. **Claiming it by naming it.** The writer names the skill and suggests it was responsible for a variety of positive outcomes. This was all you had room for in an AEF, but with 250 words for a PIF entry you have space to describe what you did in more detail, i.e., the specific actions you took that would lead someone observing you to think "Wow, that is communication excellence in action!" Promotion Boards obviously aren't able to observe you in action, but a rich behavioral description will allow them to picture what you did and draw their own conclusions about your proficiency.

3. **Too focused on results.** Achieving results is very important, but in the new promotion package, the AAR is the place to describe accomplishments and contributions. PIF entries are appropriately embedded in a contribution or accomplishment, but most of the narrative should illustrate skills, not list outcomes or results.

Below are sentences taken directly from the PIF example. The words and phrases in red are all missed opportunities to provide details that could illustrate skill proficiency. Read each sentence and make up a new version that includes more specific descriptions to illustrate Professionalism subskills. Note that the blue italicized text in each paragraph describes outcomes; assume that your new version will replace most of that text.

One of my goals as the EXO was to strengthen our emphasis on customer service. I was successful in doing this (How?) … *in just a few short months and our Mission's new customer service-*

orientation yielded tangible benefits, ranging from reinvigorating the practice of FSN mentorship for new FSOs to instilling a sense of cooperation and common purpose with the Embassy. (Outcome #1).

New version, less on outcome, more on how:

In addition, I addressed (How?) the historically strained relationship with the Embassy's Management Office, and my efforts (What efforts?) *to create a more positive relationship paid great dividends. (Outcome #2)*

New version, less on outcome, more on how:

By establishing common goals (How?), *I was able to increase the Embassy's receptivity towards USAID requests. (Outcome #3) The results include a reframed discussion on USAID-owned residences, the formalization of the Mission Director's authority over Agency properties, and the inclusion of the EXO in housing assignments prior to Housing Board presentations. (Outcome #3 elaborated)*

New version, less on outcome, more on how:

These COMMUNICATION efforts (What efforts?) *are increasing morale as USAID is better represented and our needs better met. (Outcome #4)*

New version, less on outcome, more on how:

Achieving results usually requires some level of skill, however, if you don't describe in fairly specific terms what you actually did, the Board won't necessarily attribute those results to you—maybe your

predecessor set the stage for your success, or you had an exceptionally competent team or manager, or excellent cooperation from other organizations.

To show the Board that YOUR skills were instrumental, you need to get more specific about what you did. Usually, this means that you will pick one contribution or accomplishment to provide context (not several), and then describe what you did to help bring about the positive result, limiting yourself only to the actions that reflect that particular **core skill, as defined by its definitions and subskills.**

Typically, real-world actions encompass more than a single subskill, so you are missing out on a chance to present a fuller picture of the core skill (which is what you are rated on) if you adopt too narrow a focus. Just make sure your example(s) fit the core skill you are writing about.

Review the Professionalism subskills and then read the rewritten version below. Notice how the rewrite of the example above reflects the Professionalism skill more broadly and provides several examples of specific things the EXO did that reflect this skill.

Example 1 <u>Revised</u>: PIF entry for Professionalism (focused on skills)

> Our Mission's historically strained relationship with the Embassy's Management Office (MO) was impacting the morale of our office and our ability to provide important services to our FSOs. Interactions often centered on turf issues and blame instead of cooperation. To shift mindsets in both organizations, I started by asking MO staff to share their priorities and challenges and give us feedback on ways our office could be more supportive. We then identified three common goals and specific issues related to each that needed resolution. I developed open-ended questions to structure discussions of the more contentious issues and ensured that the perspectives of each organization were solicited and acknowledged. This led to the reframing of discussions about USAID owned residences and formalization of the Mission Director's authority over Agency properties. Additionally, I articulated the mutual benefits of working as a team on housing assignments, and negotiated a role for EXOs in housing assignment discussions prior to Housing Board presentations. The key to the success of these discussions has been our ability to question assumptions respectfully and adapt our own long-standing processes when they hinder cooperation. Our relationship is now grounded in a sense of cooperation and shared purpose, resulting in improved staff morale and increased satisfaction with how residence and housing issues are handled. (213 words)

Common mistake #2. Adjective/Adverb overload (me praising me doesn't work)

It's difficult to make the transition from the flowery language, effusive adjectives, and over-the-top praise that often characterized AEFs. But you must… While the PIF entry below might sound fine (albeit a little over the top) if it were written about you by someone else, using the same language to describe yourself is not going to impress anyone.

As you read this example, note (underline or highlight) the adjectives, adverbs, and phrases that sound like self-praise.

Example 2: PIF entry for Results and Impact Focused (high self-praise)

> I hold myself, as well as my team to very high standards. I am also extremely responsible and demonstrate accountability in many ways. For example, when there were several Mission critical large procurement actions that required the use of my unique knowledge and finely honed skills, I diligently ensured that they were completed prior to my departure from post. In addition, I am always looking for ways to maximize my team's performance. Utilizing my in-depth technical expertise and understanding of the programmatic and development context I successfully managed the work of my unit so that five awards valued at close to $200M were completed to support Food for Peace initiatives. Executing these awards also required me to utilize my exceptional problem solving skills, by thoroughly analyzing resource needs and effectively and efficiently synthesizing information from multiple sources. My extremely high level of commitment and dedication to achieving results for our Mission were demonstrated throughout my tenure at the Mission and resulted in accolades from the Ambassador as well as my team and my supervisor.

A better Results and Impact focused entry would most likely start with a sentence or two about a big challenge (Situation), conclude with a sentence or two highlighting the positive impact (Results) of the individual's actions, and the entire middle section would describe what the person did (Actions) that illustrates the skills they brought to bear on the situation.

If you find it difficult to get specific about what you actually did, have a friend ask you questions about your narrative. Reread the hypothetical PIF example above and try to come up with three or four questions that could have helped the writer develop a more compelling example.

Below are some sample questions that could help a colleague replace self-praise with language that might paint a more convincing picture of his/her skills.

- What's something you did in this situation that shows that you are extremely responsible?

- What unique knowledge was required to complete those procurement actions?

- Could anyone with that knowledge have gotten them out? If not, what was the skill you brought to the task? What did you do because you have that skill that someone else might not have known to do?

- What are three specific things you have done to maximize your team's performance?

- If someone tried to synthesize information but they were ineffective and inefficient, what would that look like? What did you do that an ineffective, inefficient person would probably not do?

- Is your level of commitment to getting results really exceptional? What makes it exceptional? (If you can't come up with a behavior that demonstrates exceptional commitment, leave it out.)

- Did your accolades mention any specific skill? Anything you did that many others wouldn't do? (If not, don't bring up praise from others.)

PIF Exercise #3

Expanding an AAR into a PIF Entry

PIF Exercise: Part 1

In this multi-part exercise, you will tackle writing a PIF entry on the core skill of your choice. You may use the AAR you already wrote in Exercise 3 (if you completed that exercise) as the starting point or write about a different accomplishment.

Start with a good sense of the core skill you want to address and a clearly defined Situation and Result, which will allow you to pull out your significant actions. Review the FS/SFS Skills Framework as you brainstorm, keeping in mind the subskills that are relevant for that core skill.

Do not seek perfection or worry about how many words you have used on this first draft. Instead, try to tell the story of your best work and the complex tasks you had to complete to attain an important outcome. You will revisit this content later.

PIF Exercise: Part 2

Quickly review what you have written so far, focusing on content and not on wordsmithing at this point. Do you need to add additional information?

Share the draft with a colleague. Have your colleague identify the less descriptive and often over used verbs (e.g., managed, led, collaborated, participated, developed) and ask HOW questions to get more specific details. It is your specific actions and/or insights and thought processes that will provide the evidence that you have the skills Boards are looking for.

PIF Exercise: Part 3

Finally, it's time to make sure you haven't left a core subskill "on the table." Have a partner review the Prompts for the Core Skills and Subskills in Appendix C and ask questions about the subskills for core skill you are working on.

PIF Exercise: Part 4

1. Review your draft and look for opportunities to strengthen language and make the language more specific and compelling. Refer to the writing tips in the Guidebook.

2. Have a partner review your near final draft and provide any suggestions on grammar, structure, ways to simplify an clarify and avoid redundancy.

3. Let it rest until all AARs are finalized and all PIF entries are drafted. Then revisit when you submit for your supervisor's review and comments.

APPENDIX C: CORE SKILL AND SUBSKILL PROMPTS

PROMPTS FOR CORE SKILLS AND SUBSKILLS

When you are trying to think of a situation to use for a PIF entry, the questions below might help jog your memory or bring to light a situation you'd forgotten about. If you have a situation already in mind, you might describe it to a colleague and have them interview you about it, using some of the subskill related questions below as prompts. If you are talking about leadership, for example, they might ask if there was consensus building involved, or how you took local context into account. And remember, for any question, a good follow-up is "How exactly did you do that?"

LEADERSHIP

Building consensus and partnerships:

- Did you ever have to build a partnership among parties where the interests were not fully aligned? How did you do this?

- When have you had to build consensus toward a common goal among a diverse set of parties, such as local actors, inter- and intra-agency personnel, and other stakeholders? What steps did you take?

- Have you ever had to decide how best to use a USAID partner to address a development challenge? Describe your thought process.

Contextual awareness and political astuteness:

- Can you think of a time when you had to incorporate US foreign and national security policy into your programs or objectives? What was involved in doing this?

- When have you had to consider and address various stakeholder needs and priorities? How did you collect the data you needed? How did you reconcile different perspectives or priorities?

- In carrying out your work when has it been especially important to take into account the political climate and/or cultural differences? Why was it important? How did you go about doing this?

Motivation and empowerment:

- How do you maintain a positive attitude, especially during change or when your team is stressed?

- How do you "set the bar" for excellence and quality? Inspire people to set their sights higher?

- How do you develop "leaders at every level"?

- Give an example or examples of how you solicited others' ideas for improvement and implemented a promising new idea.

Vision:

- What steps do you take to make sure that everyone in the operating unit understands the link between their work and the Agency vision and objectives?

- Is there a time you had to deal with resistance to implementing a vision? How did you do this?

- How have you contributed to the work unit's strategic management plans?

RESULTS AND IMPACT FOCUSED

Accountability for Results:

- How have you held yourself (and/or others) accountable for achieving timely, measurable and high-quality results in line with work unit objectives and targets?

- What actions have you taken to monitor work unit progress, to take corrective action based on new information or changes in the operating environment, and to hold implementing partners accountable for meeting or exceeding goals?

- How have you ensured that you and others understand and comply with Agency business processes, control systems, and reporting requirements?

- How have you created an environment in which learning from what works and what doesn't work is fostered, staff are encouraged to express dissenting opinions, and people take responsibility for mistakes?

Problem Solving:

- What actions have you taken to identify problems, analyze their causes, and develop effective solutions?

- How have you used and synthesized data from internal and external sources to develop action plans for addressing complex development issues?

- How have you assisted others to resolve problems affecting the work unit or its partners?

Taking and Managing Risks:

- How have you capitalized on potential opportunities to achieve results in line with the operating unit's priorities while identifying and treating potential threats?

- How have you supported the work unit in embracing risk and considering new and innovative approaches based on analysis of benefits in relation to costs?

Technical and Substantive Expertise

- What actions have you taken to obtain and use knowledge of local culture, systems and context in pursuit of sustainable development results?

- How have you leveraged your technical specialty to solve problems or advance important objectives?

- How have you demonstrated knowledge of your backstop and related policies and procedures and applied them to your work assignments?

- What actions are you taking to keep your technical expertise up to date and to strengthen your understanding of development theory and practice?

PROFESSIONALISM

Adaptability and Flexibility:

- In what way(s) did you have to adapt or demonstrate flexibility—whether because it was a new situation/context, you were presented with unexpected information, or the arguments presented were contrary to your point of view?

Communication:

- In what ways did you reach out to the actors in a challenging situation, including those in positions senior and junior to you, your team, your peers, and other stakeholders?
- How did you manage a discussion that had escalated to a strong disagreement, whether between you and another person or within a group setting?
- What approach did you take to influence the course of action that you thought was best?

Cross-Cultural Competence:

- How did you overcome communication or interpersonal challenges due to cultural differences?
- How did you navigate a sensitive, consequential situation with a host country official or the like?
- How did you learn about the prevailing cultural norms in the country of assignment?
- How did you establish effective relationships with FSNs/CCNs, TCNs, host country government officials, implementing partners, beneficiaries, and others?

Interpersonal Skills

- How did you handle a personal conflict?
- How did you support someone who was struggling either personally or professionally?
- How do you go about building your network and alliances?
- What steps/actions do you take to increase your self-awareness and then grow from that knowledge?
- If you encountered an ethical dilemma, how did you manage it?

Teamwork:

- How did you build a common vision for your team?
- How did you earn your team's trust?
- How did you build commitment from your team members?
- How did you go about setting expectations?
- How did you keep your team members accountable?
- How did you motivate your team and keep them engaged?

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Supports EEO, Diversity and Inclusion:

- In what ways have you supported a respectful work environment free of discrimination?
- What step have you taken to ensure that contributions of all employees are valued and different points of view are heard and respected?

Professional Development:

- In what ways have you provided timely and actionable feedback to help staff improve their performance and develop their skills and knowledge?
- How have you managed employee engagement?
- What actions have you taken to support staff in their professional development, such as through developing individual learning plans, identifying and providing opportunities for on-the-job or formal classroom training, securing time and funding to take such training?
- How have you addressed your own competency gaps and continued to build your own technical and programmatic skills?
- How have you mentored staff in/outside your office to support their career goals?

Supervision and Human Resource Management:

- What actions have you taken to ensure that all staff members have clear performance expectations and targets in line with work unit priorities, goals and timelines?
- How have you allocated work among subordinates, monitored their progress, and made sure that all staff members have opportunities to take on key responsibilities?
- How have you provided recognition to staff for their accomplishments and contributions or dealt with issues of conduct or poor performance?
- What actions have you taken to ensure that the human resource needs of your work unit are adequately considered and resourced within budget constraints and that staff are hired/developed to complete the priority work of the unit?

APPENDIX D: EP&D ACRONYMS

Programmatic

ADS   Automated Directives System (USAID Policy Documents)

CBJ   Country Budget Justification

CDCS   Country Development Cooperation Strategy

CLA   Collaborative Learning and Adapting

CY   Calendar Year

FMFIA   Federal Managers Financial Integrity Act

FY   Fiscal Year

ICS   Integrated Country Strategy

M&E   Monitoring and Evaluation

MRR   Mission Resource Request

OE   Operating Expenses

OP   Operational Plan

OYB   Operational Year Budget

PEPFAR   President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

PPR   Performance Plan and Report

FtF   Feed the Future

MEO   Mission Environmental Officer

DOC   Development Outreach Communications Officer

Locations

DC   District of Columbia

Gov't. Of X   GOX (but it must be spelled out previously)

Personnel Titles

A/AID   USAID Administrator

AA	Assistant Administrator
AOR/COR	Assistance Officer Representative/Contracting Officer Representative
COP	Chief of Party
DAA	Deputy Assistant Administrator
DMD	Deputy Mission Director
MD	Mission Director
DCM	Deputy Chief of Mission
FSO	Foreign Service Officer
FSN	Foreign Service National
PSC	Personal Services Contractor
FSL	Foreign Service Limited
USDH	United States Direct Hire
TCN	Third Country National
USPSC	US Personal Services Contractor
RSO	Regional Security Officer/Office
GSO	General Services Officer/Office

Washington DC Bureaus and Offices

AFR	Africa Bureau
ASIA	Asia Bureau
BFS	Bureau for Food Security
BRM	Bureau for Resource Management
DCHA	Democracy Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance Bureau
E&E	Europe and Eurasia Bureau
E3	Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment
GC	Office of the General Counsel

LAC	Latin America and Caribbean Bureau
LPA	Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs
M	Management Bureau
ME	Middle East Bureau
HCTM	Office of Human Capital and Talent Management
OAA	Office of Acquisition and Assistance
OFDA	Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
PPL	Bureau for Program, Policy and Learning
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
SEC	Office of Security
FFP	Food for Peace
CDC	(US) Centers for Disease Control
MCC	(US) Millennium Challenge Corporation

Other

FO	Front Office
PRO	Program Office
EXO	Executive Office
OFM	Office of Financial Management
OAA	Office of Acquisition and Assistance
RLO	Resident Legal Officer
DoD	Department of Defense
ICASS	International Cooperative Administrative Support Services
USG	US Government

UN Agencies

FAO   Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN

UN   United Nations

UNDP   United Nations Development Program

UNFPA   United Nations Family Planning Association

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees