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U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

Information Technology (IT) Professional Skills Pilot Program

Standard Operating Procedures Manual

March 8, 2002

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM

Purpose

In FY 1999, the Department of State (DoS) approved a leading initiative of the Federal government to offer recruitment and retention incentives for its Information Technology (IT) workers. With proof of specific certifications, and evidence of other computer training in high demand for the foreign affairs mission, DoS computer specialists and its new recruits are eligible for retention or recruitment bonuses, as circumstances apply. The DoS program has been highly successful in meeting its mission objectives that call for the support of a technical professional work force, with more than half of its IT personnel now participating.

In August 2000, USAID's Acting Assistant Administrator for Management (A-AA/M) approved a recommendation from USAID's Office of Information Resources Management (M/IRM) to investigate ways to establish a similar program of retention allowances for qualifying USAID personnel. In coordination with a wider work force planning initiative of USAID's Office of Human Resources (M/HR), M/IRM pursued the potential of a cooperative endeavor with DoS. In the intervening months, an agreement in principle was reached in discussions with DoS to have M/IRM become a sub-unit of the DoS IT Personnel Recruitment and Retention Program. As designed in this jointly operated initiative, each respective organization would contribute staff and support to administer the program, but pay all costs for its own employees.

A number of factors are identified below, in support of this joint program between DoS and USAID, which positively reflect on its purpose.

Future Market Pressure. The Washington Post, in August 2001, identified about 30,000 Federal technology workers, or more than half of the government's current high-tech workforce, who will retire within the next ten years. Federal requirements for additional IT workers, during this 10 year period, are expected to increase to 16,000 personnel, resulting in a net demand for more than 45,000 workers. Related to USAID, special concern is focused on IT recruitment, where the greatest challenges have been presented for workforce planning.

USAID's Aging IT Workforce. Demographics of the USAID workforce match this Federal trend, where workers in critical positions for both hardware and software are eligible to retire now or soon will be eligible. In late 2001, more than one-third (26 of 67) employees among M/IRM's on-board staff were eligible to consider early out or normal retirement alternatives. This fact was a matter of concern, since the demand for IT skilled personnel is expected to increase as the Agency substitutes systems for manual processes in the coming years.

Success of the DoS IT Retention and Recruitment Program. The DoS program of retention and recruitment incentives has been highly successful, in terms of keeping current IT workers, encouraging further skill building among existing staff, and offering a competitive advantage in recruitment of new personnel. M/IRM seeks and needs these same benefits to support Agency goals, with special emphasis on the benefits of recruiting new workers, in the face of attrition levels experienced since 1997. The ability to offer a recruitment incentive program at USAID creates the advantage in advertisements for personnel, compared to other state and Federal organizations, and offers greater equivalency with private sector compensation levels.

Hard to Fill IT Positions in USAID. USAID has a number of very high-risk positions in the telecommunications field, where existing Agency employees could leave the Agency and earn substantially more money for similar work elsewhere. These high-risk positions have a significant potential impact on the ability of USAID's development workforce in general to function effectively overseas, and are essential to deploy cost-effective web based technology that is dependent on reliably managed networks with adequate capacity.

Competition in Hiring Telecommunications Specialists. Organizations, such as the Peace Corps, have given up trying to recruit telecommunications managers at the senior level (equivalent to a GS-15), because of repeated unsuccessful recruitment efforts, as reported by its Chief Information Officer (CIO) to USAID senior management in March 2001. The potential for USAID to offer its telecommunications project managers competitive compensation, facing this market pressure in recruitment, would help support Agency objectives. USAID telecommunications managers are generally graded at the GS-14 level. This tells M/IRM senior management that doing everything possible to retain the effective technical project managers in place is a sound business decision. Similar risks are emerging for obtaining and retaining personnel skilled in web software technology critical to the Agency's future objectives.

M/IRM Historical Recruiting Problems. Despite significant management attention, M/IRM has operated continuously with a vacancy rate in excess of 10 positions (approximately 10 percent of its workforce) for more than four years. The recruitment incentives of the proposed Program are being evaluated to improve the measured results of filling vacancies in future years.

Institutional Memory Risks to USAID. At present, the IT workforce at USAID is under 17 percent direct-hire, with the balance of personnel drawn from private industry. Much of the contractor workforce has a high turnover rate. The direct-hires have a unique role providing the institutional memory for the IT delivery organization. In fact, calling this "institutional memory" is perhaps too weak a term. USAID operates in an overseas technical environment that most new hires do not understand--whether they are drawn from the contractor or direct-hire workforce. Not only does the nature of this environment influence technology choices, but it also influences organizational choices, such as how much to centralize administration of the missions' IT resources. USAID has an especially participatory decision making style. This "memory" is in critically short

supply now, and any turnover of direct-hire staff has significant negative impact. The cost consequences of this institutional memory involve primarily the following services:

- Maintaining older legacy software applications;
- Maintaining integration of the Outlook e-mail system with Banyan;
- Integrating the various parts of its telecommunications networks;
- Providing standards for missions overseas;
- Architectural design of technical solutions that will work overseas;
- Decisions that require an understanding of USAID's mission and organizational structure; and
- Business analysis that requires an understanding of USAID's major operational areas.

In some cases the need for this "memory" may be transitory, but in many cases, it is long term. New issues will mostly replace the transitory areas, as they become less relevant. Most of these decisions involve inherently direct-hire activities, such as the prioritization of budget alternatives, valuation for cost benefit analysis, and selecting technical solutions that work in USAID's unique environment. All require the integration of technical and business knowledge. It typically takes a new employee several years to come up to speed in this area.

Long Term Issues. There have been historical challenges replacing direct-hires staff with new recruits of comparable quality. The ability to find replacements for direct-hire staff, with personnel of equal skill levels, has become increasingly important as the challenges of the Agency have increased with world conditions that call for USAID's assistance. As the economy improves, new government hires may see opportunities in the private sector that attracts them away from government service. If they do, they will take with them whatever USAID has invested in them in training and institutional memory, and create new short-term problems managing contractor performance. Thus, retention allowances are a valuable method to keep these new employees on board longer, not just to hold current employees.

1.2 HOW THE PILOT WILL PROCEED

The Agency is "buying" into a Department of State two-year Pilot Program, to be reviewed at least annually. It is expected that by 2002, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will have completed its IT Occupational Study, and the National Association for Public Administration (NAPA) will have completed its study and offered recommendations to the CIO Council and OPM on compensation for Federal IT workers. The results of these studies may supersede this Pilot Program.

To be eligible for a retention allowance under the Program, a Civil Service employee must be Career or Career-Conditional and serving in the following job series: (1) GS-332, (2) 334, (3) 335, (4) 391, (5) 392, (6) 854, (7) 855, (8) 1550, and (9) the new 2200, which replaces the 334 series. His or her most recent performance rating of record must be at least "Fully Successful." In addition, eligible GS employees must possess

professional certifications (see Appendix A) that are directly related to the duties of their assigned position, as certified by their supervisor.

At the present time, the IT Professional Skills Pilot Program is limited to eligible Civil Service employees in M/IRM, who staff the IT function in the occupational series mentioned above. Should the Agency decide at a later date to staff the IT function with Foreign Service employees, those employees would also be eligible to receive the incentive payment, provided they meet certain requirements. (See section 2.1.1) Employees must have a FS Career or Career Candidate Appointment and serve in an M/IRM position with a Data Management skills code, under backstop 03 to be eligible for the IT Professional Skills Pilot Program. In addition, eligible employees must have received a report card rating from their last performance review board of at least "Category B."

These professional qualification incentives would be paid under Section 704(b)(3) of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended. The Act permits the payment of special monetary or other incentives to encourage members of the Service to acquire or retain proficiency in foreign languages or special abilities needed in the Service. Professional qualifications incentives would be paid in the same way (e.g., on a biweekly basis) that retention allowances are paid to Civil Service employees under 5 CFR Part 575 Subpart C.

Retention allowances may be paid to eligible Civil Service employees. However, unlike the Foreign Service, these allowances must be paid in accordance with the conditions and criteria at 5 CFR Part 575, Subpart C. In addition, USAID's ADS Chapter 467, Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990 (FEPCA) Authorities, and the requirements set forth under the IT Professional Skills Program must be met. Since it has been determined that Civil Service employees in the categories described in this Plan are fulfilling a special need of the Agency that makes it essential to retain the employees' services, Civil Service employees are eligible to receive retention allowances for professional certifications directly related to the duties of their assigned position as follows:

- Under the IT group retention allowance authority (5 CFR 575.305(d)), it has been determined that there is a high risk that a significant number of employees in the categories identified under the Program would be likely to leave the Federal service, in the absence of a retention allowance because of extreme labor market conditions. Thus, when approved by the IT Professional Skills Panel, up to a 10 percent retention allowance may be paid under the Program to eligible Civil Service employees in the defined job series meeting all requirements.
- Under the Professional Skills Program, a 5 percent retention allowance may be paid, on a group basis, to employees serving in a GS-332 and GS-335 job series. Supervisors may recommend a higher allowance on an individual case-by-case basis, in accordance with procedures set forth in ADS 467 and 5 CFR 575.305(c).

- Allowances in excess of 10 percent may be paid only on an individual, case-by-case basis to Civil Service employees in the defined job series under this Program. Upon determining that certain requirements have been met, the IT Professional Skills Panel may recommend payment of the retention allowance to the Advisory Committee Chair. In accordance with 5 CFR 575.305(c), the Chair will determine whether the employee, in a defined category, is likely to leave the Federal service, if the allowance is not paid after consulting with the employee's supervisor. All requirements must be met.

A group retention allowance may not be paid to employees in Senior Executive Service (SES) positions (5 CFR 575.302). Therefore, SES employees can only be paid a retention allowance under the IT Professional Skill Program on an individual, case-by-case basis, when all requirements are met. These requirements are described in detail in section 3.4 of this Manual.

1.3 GENERAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1.3.1 USAID ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Agency's IT Professional Skills Advisory Committee provides oversight responsibility for the IT Professional Skills Pilot Program. It is composed of the M/IRM Director, the (CIO) (Chair), and the M/HR Director, or designees. In carrying out this responsibility, the Committee:

- Determines whether to approve changes recommended by the IT Professional Skills Panel, concerning the program and the skills on which the allowances and professional qualification incentives are based;
- Determines whether the Pilot Program should continue, based on the Panel's recommendations and proposes an appropriate course of action to the M/IRM Director; and
- Reviews any requests an applicant may make when appealing a decision made by the IT Professional Skills Panel.

1.3.2 IT PROFESSIONAL SKILLS PANEL

The Panel is composed of five State Department Foreign Service and Civil Service officials--one each from IRM, HR, FMP, FSI, and a Foreign Service Information Management Specialist at-large. In addition, when reviewing applicants from USAID, the Panel will be augmented by the Deputy Director of USAID's Office of Information Resources Management (M/IRM). The Panel reports to the IT Professional Skills Advisory Committee. The Associate Dean of FSI's School of Applied Technology (FSI/SAIT) will chair the Panel in recognition of FSI's role as the primary source for skill evaluation and training delivery in the Department of State.

The Panel issues guidance to employees and certifies that all requirements have been met, for Foreign Service employees applying for a professional qualification incentive, and Civil Service employees applying for a retention allowance up to 10

percent. Additionally, the Panel reviews the application of each Civil Service employee, applying for a retention allowance in excess of 10 percent, and when all requirements are met, recommends the payment of the allowance to the Committee Chair. The Panel is also responsible for evaluating quarterly the effectiveness of the IT Professional Skills Program and recommending Program modifications and changes to the list of qualifying skills, series, and skill codes.

The Panel will review, at least annually, the determination to pay professional qualification incentives to members of the Foreign Service and will make a recommendation to the DoS and USAID Advisory Committees as to whether the payment is still warranted. The criteria for termination are included in section 2.8.

For retention allowances recommended for Civil Service employees, who are in excess of 10 percent, the Committee Chair will determine whether an employee in a defined category is likely to leave on an individual, case-by-case basis, in accordance with 5 CFR 575.305(c). The Committee Chair will certify this determination in writing, after consulting with the employee's supervisor.

In accordance with 5 CFR 575.306(c), the Panel will review, at least annually, the determination to pay retention allowances for (1) the group of Civil Service employees receiving retention allowances of up to 10 percent, and (2) for each individual Civil Service employee receiving a retention allowance in excess of 10 percent, to determine whether the payment is still warranted. The Panel will make a recommendation to the DoS and USAID Advisory Committees as to whether the payment is still warranted.

For all retention allowances recommended by the Panel for a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES), the Committee Chair approves the allowance, once he/she determines on an individual, case-by-case basis that the SES member is likely to leave the Federal Service. The recommendation must be documented in writing and is certified by the Committee Chair.

Based upon the above review, the Panel will recommend an appropriate course of action to the DoS and USAID Advisory Committees regarding whether the IT Professional Skills Program should continue.

1.3.3 STAFF SUPPORT

The M/IRM Deputy Director's staff, in coordination with M/HR, will provide administrative services to support the Panel's work pertaining to USAID applicants. This work will include receipt of applications, verification of employment status, verification of successful service, as well as a review of qualification documents. The staff will prepare materials for the Panel to review, track the status of each application, maintain files, communicate with the applicants, and prepare any reports required. Finally, the staff will notify the applicants of the Panel's decision, and request personnel actions documenting the incentive and allowance.

1.4 SUMMARY OF THE PROCESS

Applicants may submit an application form (see Appendix C, Request for Consideration for a Professional Qualification Incentive, or a Retention Allowance), requesting an incentive/retention allowance, to the IT Professional Skills Panel Agency representative, who is the Deputy Director of M/IRM, at any time. The request must include all of the information on the form, as well as copies of certificates, transcripts, and other supporting documentation. Additionally, Civil Service employees, applying for a retention allowance in excess of 10 percent, must provide all of the information requested in Part II of the request form in Appendix C, as well as copies of certificates, transcripts, and other supporting documentation.

The package is sent to the IT Professional Skills Panel. Once the Panel staff verifies certain information, such as length of service and level of performance from personnel records, the complete package is sent to the IT Professional Skills Panel, where it is reviewed and voted on. The Panel can approve the application, reject it, or request additional information. The package returns to the Panel staff, and the staff notifies the applicant of the Panel's decision. If more information is required, the Panel Staff gathers it, going back to the applicant and/or supervisor or other knowledgeable official, if necessary.

For each Civil Service retention allowance submission, for an allowance in excess of 10 percent, the Panel determines whether requirements have been met, and if so, recommends approval of the allowance to the Advisory Committee Chair. Upon receipt of the package from the Panel, the Committee Chair will determine whether the employee, on a case-by-case basis, in the defined category, is likely to leave Federal service, based on such factors as those identified in Appendix E.

For members of the SES, the same process described above is followed regardless of the percentage of the allowance, and both parts of the form must be completed when requesting an allowance.

If an application is approved, the Panel staff requests the completion of a Request for Personnel Action (SF52) to adjust the base pay. If an application is rejected, the applicant is notified and he/she can request reconsideration by providing more detailed documentation to the IT Professional Skills Panel. The applicant may appeal the Panel's decision to the IT Professional Skills Advisory Committee.

2 EMPLOYEE PROCEDURES

2.1 HOW TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION

2.1.1 WHO CAN APPLY

The IT Professional Skills Pilot Program applies only to permanent direct-hire employees in the Civil Service at all grades including the Senior Executive Service. Employees must also serve in an IT position in one of the approved occupational series (see Appendix B). While the program is primarily directed at employees in M/IRM, other offices that have IT staff, in one of the covered occupational series who would otherwise be eligible, may participate in the IT Professional Skills Pilot Program. Participation by IT employees in other bureaus and offices is subject to funding considerations and requires written approval by the head of the independent office or bureau where the position(s) is located. This written approval must also include a justification that provides specific reasons for why a retention allowance is needed to recruit or retain IT employees in that particular office or bureau.

U.S. and Foreign Service Personal Services Contractors (PSCs) are excluded. Foreign Service National (FSN) direct-hire employees are also excluded. Employees on temporary or intermittent appointments (when actually employed) are not eligible.

To be eligible, a Civil Service employee must be currently serving in a Career Conditional or Career appointment, in one of the occupational series listed in Appendix B. The employee's most recent performance rating must be at least "Effective" (or "Fully Successful"). All participants must have at least one year of continuous service with USAID. If an employee transfers from another Federal agency to USAID, the employee must have at least six months of continuous service with USAID in order to be considered for the Program.

2.1.2 WHAT MUST BE PROVIDED

An employee's request for consideration for an incentive or retention allowance consists of the Request for Consideration for a Professional Qualification Incentive, or a Retention Allowance (see Appendix C), with all supporting documentation including transcripts, evaluations, etc. The package is then sent to the IT Professional Skills Panel. The package must include all of the relevant information requested, otherwise it will be considered incomplete. The Panel will not consider applications from employees in job series or skill codes not listed in Appendix B.

Civil Service employees applying for a retention allowance in excess of 10 percent must submit all of the relevant information requested in Parts I and II of Appendix C.

All employees must submit copies of the credentials listed in Appendix A, and those subsequently approved by the Advisory Committee must be submitted by the

employee to the IT Professional Skills Panel for consideration. Only those vendor certifications listed in Appendix A are acceptable.

The following employees must submit a performance assessment from his/her supervisor (rating official) certifying that his/her performance in the current position is at least, Fully Successful/Satisfactory:

- All employees who are new to the Agency, and have completed the required length of service requirement, but have not received a formal performance rating under the Agency's Civil or Foreign Service performance evaluation systems; and
- Employees who move from a job series or skill code not covered under the IT Skills Program to a job series or skill code that is covered.

NOTE: All employees must be under their new performance standards/work requirements for a minimum of 120 days before their performance can be assessed by their rating official.

2.1.3 WHERE TO SUBMIT

Requests may be submitted, by regular mail/pouch, to the M/IRM Deputy Director, who is located at 2.12-12, RRB, Washington DC 20523.

2.2 REQUESTS FOR ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

The IT Professional Skills Panel may request additional documents. These requests will usually be made by electronic mail (e-mail). No applicant's case will be decided until the additional documents are received. If an allowance is approved, it will not be retroactive to the date of the Agency's request for additional documents, or to the date of the applicant's submission.

2.3 NOTIFICATION AND COMMENCEMENT OF ALLOWANCE

The IT Professional Skills Panel will meet at least monthly to review submissions. The Panel will notify employees of the outcome by e-mail. Approvals will be forwarded through normal channels for payroll action. The incentive/retention allowance will become effective at the beginning of the first full pay period following approval by the Panel or the Advisory Committee Chair.

An employee's total aggregate salary cannot exceed that of Level 1 of the Executive Schedule. The incentive and retention allowance will not be considered part of an employee's rate of basic pay for any purpose. It is only calculated as a percentage of the employee's rate of basic pay (excluding locality pay). The incentive/allowance will not be calculated, for example, in the "high three" salary computation for retirement.

2.4 RETURN OF DOCUMENTATION

All correspondence and documentation, including credentials, certificates, and diplomas submitted to the Panel, will be retained on file in the Dean's office for the life of the Pilot Program. At the termination of the Pilot Program, all documentation and correspondence on file will be disposed of in accordance with the Agency's Records Management provisions in 5 FAM 400.

2.5 EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees are responsible for submitting all of the information and documentation requested to be considered for an incentive/retention allowance. After being approved for incentive/retention allowance, the employee has certain responsibilities. Failure to meet the responsibilities that follow may result in an overpayment for which the employee may be required to reimburse the Agency for part or all of the overpayment.

2.5.1 NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE OF POSITION

The employee is required to notify the IT Professional Skills Program when he or she moves into a position not covered by the Pilot Program. Notification should be sent by e-mail over the OpenNet (certifying receipt) or by memorandum, if OpenNet e-mail is unavailable.

2.5.2 CONTINUED TRAINING AND MAINTAINING CERTIFICATION

Employees, who receive an incentive/retention allowance, are responsible for maintaining certifications to the requirements dictated by the certifying organization. The cost of certification, re-certification, and continuing education requirements, including tuition for third party courses, training materials from third party sources, examination fees, testing fees, and certification fees, are the responsibility of the employee.

2.6 DURATION OF INCENTIVE/RETENTION ALLOWANCES

All other certifications will be approved for incentive/retention allowance for the life of the Pilot (i.e., through September 30, 2002), subject to contingencies like those mentioned above. All related academic degrees would be approved for the duration of the Pilot Program.

If the Program is extended beyond the Pilot, renewal of the incentive/retention allowances for existing academic degrees may be contingent upon the employee's completion of additional academic credit hours. Renewal of the incentive/retention allowances, for certifications with annual renewal or maintenance provisions, will be contingent upon the employee's completion of those additional requirements or other

contingent requirements as defined at the time of the renewal or extension of the Pilot Program.

2.7 APPEALS ON NON-APPROVAL

Applicants may appeal non-approval under the following conditions:

- If his or her application is denied, an applicant may submit additional documentation to the IT Professional Skills Panel requesting a re-evaluation of his or her original application; and
- An applicant may appeal the Panel's decision to the IT Professional Skills Advisory Committee.

2.8 TERMINATION OF RETENTION/INCENTIVE ALLOWANCES

Incentive/Retention Allowances will be discontinued:

- When an employee moves into a position that is not in an approved skill code (FS) or job series (GS) approved for a incentive/retention allowance;
- When the Agency no longer needs a particular skill set/level;
- When the granting organization discontinues a certification or the certification expires, or is declared obsolete;
- When it is determined that the need for the initial incentive or retention allowance is no longer justified;
- When the employee's performance falls below the Fully Successful/Satisfactory level; or
- For budgetary reasons.

The above list is not meant to be all-inclusive.

2.9 WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Employees can request additional guidance from the USAID Representative to the IT Professional Skills Panel (the M/IRM Deputy Director).

3 STAFF PROCEDURES

3.1 RECEIPT OF APPLICATIONS

The Panel staff will carry out the following activities:

- Review the contents and determine if they are legible;
- For e-mailed applications, the M/IRM Deputy Director's staff will also ensure that files and attachments can be opened, read, and printed;
- Start a new folder for this application;
- Notify the applicant that the package has been received; and
- Annotate the received log.

3.2 PREPARATION OF FILES FOR PANEL

The Panel staff will prepare each application for the Panel as follows. If necessary, the Staff will contact the applicant for additional information. The folder will be annotated as each validation is completed. Each contact to the applicant, for additional information, will be documented as to date and reason.

3.3 VALIDATION OF POSITION, DATES, AND SERIES

The Panel Staff will use the USAID application package to document:

- The job series or skill code of the position that the applicant currently occupies;
- The applicant's skill code or job series;
- The date when the applicant entered on duty (EOD) with the Agency;
- Whether the applicant has been employed with the Agency for the required period of time;
- Whether the applicant received a recruitment bonus within the last year;
- Whether the applicant is already receiving an incentive/retention allowance;
- Whether the applicant has been assigned to his/her current job series/skill code for a minimum of 120 days;
- Whether the documentation submitted shows a minimum of five weeks of vendor training for products the Agency currently uses or will begin to use within the next 12 months;
- Whether the documentation submitted shows a single five-week vendor course or group of shorter vendor courses totaling five weeks that demonstrates an increasing level of skill in maintaining a single vendor's product currently in use by the Agency;
- Whether the documentation submitted shows a single vendor course or group of shorter vendor courses that demonstrates an increasing level of skill in maintaining a single vendor's product line currently in use by the Agency;

- Whether the documentation submitted shows a group of shorter vendor courses that demonstrates competence in maintaining related products from two or more vendors (such as radios from multiple vendors) currently in use by the Agency;
- Whether the employee has a performance rating of record, an interim rating, or memorandum assessing performance in the job series or skill code for which he or she is applying for a retention allowance.

The Panel will document its findings in the applicant's folder.

3.4 VALIDATION OF CREDENTIALS

Academic degrees provide the employee with a high level of knowledge and theory in the field of computer science and information systems. As such, the knowledge or theory does not become obsolete as technology is developed to improve upon the application of computer science and information theory. It is this foundation of knowledge and theory that allows the individual(s) to design and develop new technology to improve the collection, processing, storage, and dissemination of information to support decision making in an organization.

Vendor certifications, vendor technical school diplomas, and professional association certificates are credentials affirming that the individual(s) has demonstrated a level of knowledge or proficiency that is narrowly focused on a single product(s), technology, or application. As such, the currency and relativeness of the certification, diploma, or certificate are limited to the life cycle of the product(s), technology, or application.

The Panel staff will review the documentation submitted to determine:

- That the applicant has the proper skill code or job series (verified through the copy of their SF50);
- That he or she is serving at least at the Fully Successful/Satisfactorily level, based upon his or her last WGI, MSI, or promotion. If an applicant's last WGI, MSI, or promotion is over a year old, the Panel will request a copy of the most recent rating of record performance evaluation, or a memorandum from the supervisor (rating official) assessing the employee's performance;
- If the certification documents and credentials are among the approved ones and have not expired (see Appendix A for the approved list) and;
- If additional documentation is needed.

3.5 PREPARING FOR THE IT PROFESSIONAL SKILLS PANEL MEETINGS

The Panel staff will prepare the information form(s)/checklist(s) for the Panel. (See Appendix F for a sample form). The Panel staff will also prepare the meeting agenda.

3.6 REQUESTS FOR ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

If there is any inconsistency in the documentation submitted, or if added documentation is required, the Panel staff will contact the applicant to obtain it. The request for additional materials can be generated by the Panel staff's review or by the Panel itself, as a result of its review of the application.

3.7 RECORD-KEEPING

The Panel staff will maintain a system of records to track the information associated with this Program. These records will be protected in a manner appropriate for personnel records that are protected under the Privacy Act. These records will consist of the following items:

3.7.1 Applicant folders

There will be a folder for each applicant, with all the submitted documentation, communications, and all generated documents and checklists.

3.7.2 Meeting Agendas/Minutes/Reports

Files will also be made to document meetings of the Panel and Advisory Committee. These files will contain minutes, reports, and any other documents not a part of an applicant's file.

3.8 NOTIFICATION OF EMPLOYEE, DISPOSITION OF RECORDS AND DOCUMENTATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF EVALUATING THE PILOT PROGRAM

When the Panel has reached a decision, the USAID representative to the IT Panel will:

- Notify the applicant of the Panel's decision and retain a file copy of the e-mail or written notification;
- Retain copies of all submitted documentation and credentials in the Dean's office (FSI/SAIT) for record-keeping purposes; and
- If the application was approved, file any checklists and forms, generated by the staff and Panel, in the applicant's folder.

3.9 SUBMISSION OF PERSONNEL ACTION

The USAID representative will request that the Administrative Management Staff (M/AMS) complete a Request for Personnel Action (SF-52) to initiate the adjustment to the applicant's pay and forward it to M/HR to process a Notification of Personnel Action (SF-50).

3.10 REPORTING DUTIES

The USAID Representative will prepare a report to the Panel every month. In addition, the staff will prepare an annual report at the end of each fiscal year to go to the IT Professional Skills Advisory Committee from the Panel. Finally, the staff will prepare the report documenting the entire Pilot.

3.10.1 REPORTING TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Annually, the USAID Representative will prepare a report summarizing the following information:

- Total number of applicants that month;
- Number of applications approved totaled by type of certificate;
- Dollar amount of incentive pay approved;
- Number rejected totaled by reason for rejection;
- Number of appeals for reconsideration of rejection;
- Status of program funding and;
- Other issues worth noting.

3.10.2 ANNUAL REPORT

The annual report will be finalized at the end of each fiscal year and will summarize all the monthly reports. In addition, it will document any known occurrences of employees losing their incentive pay because they moved to a job in a series or skill code not approved for IT incentive pay. The report will also document changes in the approved lists of certificates, skill codes, and job series. The annual report will identify any issues that need to be addressed by the Agency's Advisory Committee.

4 IT PROFESSIONAL SKILLS PANEL PROCEDURES

4.1 DUTIES OF PANEL

The Panel will review and vote on applications, decide to approve or disapprove the retention/incentive allowance, and review the folders prepared by the Panel Staff. Review and voting procedures are addressed in section 4.5.

4.2 PRIVACY PROTECTION OF INDIVIDUALS

The Panel will protect all information provided by any applicant, including any notes or additional documentation produced in the course of application consideration. The Panel will not discuss its proceedings with anyone who is not directly involved in the Program.

4.3 REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

The Panel may request additional information concerning an individual application. Requests can be made for information from M/HR, the applicant's supervisor, or the applicant. The Panel will document the applicant's folder and note the date and nature of the request. The Panel staff will follow through on the request and resubmit the applicant's folder to the Panel with the requested information added.

4.4 DECISIONS REGARDING PROGRAM ISSUES

The Panel may make decisions concerning the conduct of the Program. These decisions include such factors as meeting schedules, supporting documentation requirements, and a determination of what information should be retained for the purpose of managing and reporting on the Program itself.

4.5 PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The Panel will have five representatives from the Department of State including officials from IRM, HR, FMP, FSI, and a Foreign Service Information Management (IM) Specialist at-large nominated by his/her respective bureau. The Associate Dean of FSI's School of Applied Technology (FSI/SAIT) will chair the Panel. In addition, the USAID representative (the M/IRM Deputy Director or his/her designee) will have one vote, when assessing the qualifications of a USAID employee. This USAID representative will also act as a bridge, present Agency candidate cases to the Panel, and relay back findings to the Agency. This may change if the program is approved for permanent implementation.

4.6 MEETINGS SCHEDULE/ PROCESS

The Panel will meet at least once a month (or more frequently if needed). Upon completion of the Pilot Program, the Panel will hold at least one meeting to vote on its report and recommendations to the IT Professional Skills Advisory Committee.

4.7 APPLICATION REVIEW AND VOTING PROCEDURES

The members will review each folder and decide the following for all applicants:

- Is the applicant requesting IT incentive pay for one or more of the approved credentials?
- Do the documents submitted support the applicant's request?
- Is the applicant in a position with an approved skill code or job series code? (See Appendix B for approved Civil Service job series and Foreign Service skill codes.)
- Are the Civil Service applicant's certifications or degrees for a retention allowance greater than 10 percent directly related to the applicant's current position?
- Does the applicant have a minimum of one year combined continuous service with USAID, USIA or ACDA? If the applicant is a direct transferee from another United States Government (USG) agency, does the applicant have six months of continuous service with the Agency?
- Does the applicant have an "Effective" or "Fully Successful" rating of record or evaluation in the job series or skill code? If not, a performance assessment must be provided by the employee's supervisor (rating official.)
- Does the applicant already receive an incentive/retention allowance? If so, will approval of the new application give the applicant more money?
- If the application is approved, will the applicant's total aggregate salary remain below the Executive Level I salary level?

For Civil Service employees applying for a retention allowance in excess of 10 percent, the Panel will determine whether to submit a written recommendation to pay the retention allowance to Advisory Committee Chair for consideration.

For SES employees, regardless of the amount/percentage of the retention allowance, the Panel will determine if the credentials/certifications qualify, and make a recommendation to the Advisory Committee Chair for approval. The Committee Chair will approve or disapprove all submissions from SES and Senior Foreign Service employees.

For those requesting incentive pay for technician's certificates, the following factors will be decided:

- Do the credentials submitted show a minimum of five weeks of vendor training for products that the Agency currently uses or will begin to use within the next 12 months?
- Does the documentation submitted show a single five-week vendor course or group of shorter vendor courses totaling five weeks that demonstrate an increasing level of skill in maintaining a single vendor's product currently in use by the Agency?

- Does the documentation submitted show a single vendor course or group of shorter vendor courses that demonstrated an increasing level of skill in maintaining a single vendor's product line currently in use by the Agency?
- Does the documentation submitted show a group of shorter vendor courses that demonstrate competence in maintaining related products from two or more vendors (such as radios from multiple vendors) currently in use by the Agency?

NOTE: Department of State and DTS-PO courses are considered in-house training and do not count towards the five-week criteria.

If the answer is "YES" to all these questions, the Panel will have a sufficient basis for approving the new incentive pay. If the answer is "NO" to any of these questions, the Panel must consider whether to deny the application or request additional information.

The Panel will vote formally (by voice or show of hands) on each application. A majority three (3) vote of the Panel is required to approve the incentive pay. A majority three (3) vote is required to deny the incentive pay. Although the following list is not meant to be all-inclusive, the incentive/retention allowance can be denied for the following reasons:

- The skills certified are not the skills approved in the Cohen memo or on the approved list (see Appendix A);
- The skill level certified is below the level on the approved list;
- FSI courses cannot be used to support the Technician certification;
- Credentials that are "in process" cannot be used. The applicant must have completed the courses, testing, etc., and received the certificate(s);
- The applicant's position is not in an approved job series or skill code;
- The applicant has less than one year of combined continuous service in USAID, USIA or ACDA, or the employee transferred directly from another USG agency and has less than six months continuous service with the Agency;
- The applicant already receives an incentive/retention allowance and this application will not get him or her more money;
- The employee does not have a performance rating of record, an interim rating, or a memorandum assessing performance in the job series or skill code for which he/she is applying for a retention allowance; or
- The certifications, for which the Civil Service applicant is requesting an allowance, are not directly related to the responsibilities of the applicant's current position.

4.8 RECORDING THE DECISIONS AND ACTIVITIES

4.8.1 APPROVING THE APPLICATION

The Panel will note that the application is approved. Each voting member will then sign the submission form and note an "A" for approval or a "D" for disapproval.

4.8.2 DISAPPROVING APPLICATION

The Panel will note that the application was denied and the basis for the denial. Each voting member will then sign and date the form.

5. EVALUATION OF THE PILOT PROGRAM

USAID will rely upon the Department of State's evaluation of the Program and will assess the findings and recommendations. USAID will take appropriate action, as needed.

Appendix A LIST OF APPROVED CREDENTIALS

Five (5) percent

Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP) in Windows NT4.0 Server with A-Plus Certificate [CompTIA]
 Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP) in Exchange 5.5 with A-Plus Certificate [CompTIA]
 Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA)
 Cisco Certified Design Associate (CCDA)
 Certified Lotus Specialist (CLS)with A-Plus Certificate [CompTIA]
 Systems Security Certified Practitioner (SSCP) [Computer Security Institute (CSI), Information Systems Security Assoc. (ISSA)]

Ten (10) percent

Certified Lotus Professional (CLP) in Notes Systems Administrator R4.6
 GSA 1000by2000 certification
 An approved Bachelor's degree [e.g., computer science, etc. or those listed in the Cohen memo]. The minimum academic requirement is a Bachelor's degree listed in the Cohen memo, e.g. Computer Science or Information Systems (or equivalent title), etc. Where the Bachelor's degree is not listed in the Cohen memo or titled Computer Science or Information Systems (or equivalent title), etc. the major listed on the transcript must be Computer Science or Information Systems (or equivalent title). Where the major is not stated or is not listed as Computer Science or Information Systems (or equivalent title), there must be a preponderance of computer science or information science courses listed on the transcript and a minimum of 30 semester credit hours successfully completed. The course number must be from the computer or information science Agency
 A Technician certificate: IDNX or DGC Mux Certification; Telephone certificate from Mitel, Nortel, GTE or AT&T; Radio/Satellite Certificate from Motorola, GE, Harris, Collins, Magnavox, McKay or TWC. [A minimum of 5 weeks' worth of vendor technical training is required to qualify for allowance.]
 Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP), Systems Security Professional NTISSI No. 4001 Certificate (NDU)

Fifteen (15) percent

Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE, MCSE+I)
 Certified Computing Professional (CCP) [Institute for Certification of Computing Professionals]
 Cisco Certified Network Professional (CCNP)
 Oracle Certification Program (OCP) with subsets of Database Administrator (DBA) and Applications Developer (AD)
 CIO Certificate [IRM College, National Defense University]
 An approved Master's degree [e.g., computer science, etc. or those listed in the Cohen memo] The minimum academic requirement at the 15% level is a Master's degree as listed in the Cohen memo, e.g. Computer Science or Information Systems (or equivalent title), etc. Where the Master's degree is not listed in the Cohen memo or titled Computer Science or Information Systems (or equivalent title), etc. the major listed on the transcript must be Computer Science or Information Systems (or equivalent title). Where the major is not stated or is not listed as Computer Science or Information Systems (or equivalent title), there must be a preponderance of computer science or information science courses listed on the transcript and a minimum of 30 semester credit hours at the graduate level is successfully completed. The course number must be from the computer or information science, or Electrical/Electronic Engineering Agency.

NOTE: Job Series Codes 332 and 335 are limited in eligibility to those credentials listed in the 5% category only.

Appendix B

Approved Civil Service Series and Foreign Service Skill Codes

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Approved Civil Service Series | 332, 334, 335, 391, 392, 854, 855, 1550, 2200 |
| | |

Appendix C

UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
**REQUEST FOR CONSIDERATION FOR A PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION INCENTIVE
 OR A RETENTION ALLOWANCE**
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) PROFESSIONAL SKILLS PROGRAM

PART I – All employees must provide the information requested in blocks 1 through 8 below.

1. Full Name of Employee: _____
2. Social Security Number: _____
3. Organizational Symbol/Duty Station/Post: _____
4. Position Title/Position Number: _____
5. Skill Code/Pay Plan/Series/Grade/Step: _____
6. Date Entered on Duty in the Agency: _____
7. Length of time in Current Job Series/Skill Code More than 120 or less than 120 days: ¹
8. List IT credentials and then attach copies of credentials you are submitting to support your consideration by the IT Skills Panel: _____

PART II: Civil Service employees requesting a retention allowance above 10%; and all Senior Executive Service (SES) employees must provide the information requested in items 9 through 11. (The response to items 10 and 11 must be brief and may not exceed, in total, one page.)

9. Retirement Eligibility Date (mm/yyyy): _____
10. **Briefly** state mission of Office.
11. To assist the Panel in determining how the certifications or degree for which a retention allowance is requested correlates to the responsibilities of your current position, **briefly** describe the critical activities or functions that you are performing **or** attach a copy of your current position description to this request.
12. Certification by employee's supervisor of applicability of professional certification to duties of assigned position.

Clearance _____
 Supervisor of Record

¹ Employees who move from a job series or skill code not covered under the IT Skills Program to a job series or skill code that is covered by the Program may not apply for an incentive/allowance until their performance has been assessed in the new job series or skill code. Employees must work under their new work requirements/performance plan for a minimum of 120 days before their supervisor (rating official) can assess level of performance. A copy of the assessment must be submitted along with the application for an incentive/retention allowance.

Appendix D

| |
|---|
| CERTIFICATION AND APPROVAL OF RETENTION ALLOWANCES |
|---|

When a Civil Service employee applies for a retention allowance that is in excess of 10% or as a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES), the following certification is used to certify whether the employee is likely to leave the Federal service if the retention allowance is not paid.

NAME OF EMPLOYEE _____

As the authorizing official,

I do not support the recommendation of the IT Professional Skills Panel to pay a retention allowance. *If retention allowance is denied, specify reason below:*

I do support the Panel's recommendation and certify the following:

1. The employee has unusually high or unique qualifications and skills and/or the Agency has a special need for the employee's services. The employee's experience, technical expertise and certifications and/or degree for which a retention allowance is requested make the employee uniquely qualified for his/her current position. Additionally, based upon the employee's skills and qualifications in comparison to other non-Federal employees in this area; the shortage of skilled individuals in the information technology labor market, who with minimal training, can do the work; the high number of information technology vacancies and the shortage of employees with the essential IT skills needed by the Agency; and the ongoing need for technical expertise that can support the Agency's IT Architecture infrastructure, it is essential for the Agency to retain this employee's skills; and
2. Based on both general factors (as described in the attached documentation) and individual information (including the employee's skills and performance level), and after consultation with the employee's supervisor, I certify that the employee is likely to leave the Federal service absent the payment of a retention allowance.

Signature of Chair, IT Professional Skills Advisory Committee

Date

Signature of USAID Representative

Date

Appendix E

FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN MAKING THE LIKELY TO LEAVE DETERMINATION

Factors such as those that follow may be considered in determining whether the employee is likely to leave the Federal Service if the retention allowance is not paid.

- ❑ Eligibility to retire
- ❑ Receipt of job offer
- ❑ Interviewing for private-sector positions
- ❑ Inadequate promotion career advancement opportunities
- ❑ Insufficient opportunity to take on more responsibility
- ❑ Isolated from team (does not feel that he/she is part of the team)
- ❑ Inadequate training opportunities
- ❑ Poor work environment
- ❑ Inflexible work hours or opportunity to telecommute
- ❑ Insufficient compensation and/or benefits
- ❑ Personal circumstances of employee:
 - Unable to balance work/family commitments
 - Too much overtime/shift work

**Appendix F
PANEL CHECK LIST FORM**

Name: _____ **SSN** _____

Date Received SAIT _____

| CATEGORY | Yes | No |
|---|-----|----|
| Individual possesses the identified skill code/job series code and is serving in a position with an identified skill code/job series (GEMS copy attached) | | |
| Individual has presented listed credentials | | |
| Individual has presented acceptable corroborating documentation, i.e. work requirements statement etc. | | |
| Individual has at least one year of Agency service (GEMS copy attached) EOD= | | |
| Individual is a direct transferee from another USG agency with six months continuous service with the Agency EOD= | | |
| Individual has at least Satisfactory/Fully Successful performance rating | | |
| Has served successfully for a minimum of 120 days in the qualified skill code or job series and supervisory assessment is attached | | |
| Individual is approved for incentive/allowance | | |
| Does individual have an existing incentive? | | |
| Total allowance/incentive approved: | | |

Date File Reviewed by Panel _____ Approved: ____ Disapproved: _____ Deferred: _____

Date Forwarded to Advisory Committee Chair for Certification: _____
(15% Civil Service Allowance Submissions only)

Panel Members:

SF-52 prepared _____