



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ADS Chapter 503

Correspondence Management

Partial Revision Date: 07/22/2020
Responsible Office: AID/ES
File Name: 503_072220

Functional Series 500 – Management Services
 ADS 503 – Correspondence Management
 POC for ADS 503: Erica Carr, (202) 712-1225, ecarr@usaid.gov

Table of Contents

<u>503.1</u>	<u>OVERVIEW</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>503.2</u>	<u>PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>503.3</u>	<u>POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>503.3.1</u>	<u>Managing Agency Correspondence.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>503.3.2</u>	<u>Correspondence Style.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>503.3.3</u>	<u>Types of Correspondence.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>503.3.4</u>	<u>Reply to Correspondence</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>503.3.5</u>	<u>Clearing Correspondence</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>503.3.6</u>	<u>Drafting and Clearing Documents for Other USG Agencies</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>503.3.7</u>	<u>Review and Clearance of Multilateral Policy Documents.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>503.3.8</u>	<u>Statements, Press Guidance and Press Contacts</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>503.3.9</u>	<u>Classification, SBU, and Privacy Act Designations.....</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>503.3.10</u>	<u>USAID/W Stationery Standards</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>503.3.10.1</u>	<u>USAID Missions Stationery Standards.....</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>503.3.11</u>	<u>Correspondence Control.....</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>503.4</u>	<u>MANDATORY REFERENCES</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>503.5</u>	<u>ADDITIONAL HELP</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>503.6</u>	<u>DEFINITIONS</u>	<u>19</u>

ADS 503 – Correspondence Management

503.1 OVERVIEW

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

This chapter prescribes the policies, processes, and procedures in place for the handling and creation of Agency correspondence. To enable Agency Principals to work efficiently and make fully informed decisions, and to manage information for official record keeping purposes, all employees must ensure that the Agency creates timely, responsive correspondence that is properly cleared and coordinated across all Bureaus and Independent Offices (B/IO), and is consistent in tone, style, and presentation.

503.2 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

- a. The **Executive Secretariat (ES)** is responsible for developing Agency standards and instructions governing the preparation, handling, and control of all correspondence. ES functions as the Administrator's coordination and communications mechanism. It is the official channel for communications within the Agency and between USAID and the interagency community, including information and recommendations from the Agency to the White House, the National Security Council (NSC), the Department of State (DOS), and other federal departments and agencies. The Executive Secretary, and/or his/her designee, serves as the coordinator for USAID's Correspondence Management Program.
- b. **USAID staff** including Correspondence Control Contacts (CCCs), clearing officials, executive assistants, drafting officials, and anyone else involved in the drafting, clearing, and movement of correspondence, are responsible for preparing correspondence that meets the Agency standards defined in this ADS chapter. Employees are also responsible for ensuring that all correspondence meets classification marking standards as prescribed in this ADS chapter and other sources listed in the mandatory references section.
- c. **Heads of Bureaus/Independent Offices and Overseas Missions** are responsible for establishing an internal clearance process for Agency correspondence, and for establishing internal controls and procedures to ensure prompt attention and action for all correspondence.

503.3 POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES

503.3.1 Managing Agency Correspondence

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

USAID must establish and maintain an active, continuing program for managing Agency correspondence, commensurate with the Agency's organization, mission, and record retention requirements.

503.3.2 Correspondence Style

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

Every member of the USAID workforce must strive to improve the quality, tone, clarity, and responsiveness of correspondence, and provide for its creation in a timely and efficient manner.

Staff must plan and carefully prepare all correspondence so that it can be read and understood with ease. Written responses must be substantive, clear, concise, fully responsive to the incoming correspondence, and be courteous and respectful.

Staff must avoid sex-biased language in all methods of communications. Staff must also adhere to the [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#), which requires that federal agencies use clear government communication that the public can understand and use.

Employees must reference and use the [ES Style Guide](#) for all correspondence. Additional information and templates for the most commonly used correspondence are available on the ES Web site at: <https://pages.usaid.gov/A/ES/what-we-provide>.

503.3.3 Types of Correspondence

Effective Date: 06/04/2019

When writing official Agency communications, USAID staff must comply with Agency standards regarding the types of correspondence used, kinds of copies required, and their distribution and purpose.

The Agency corresponds by memoranda, letters, telegrams (cables), and other written and electronic communications. The Agency also contributes input to multilateral policy documents circulated for clearance through U.S. Government departments and agencies. These may include, but are not limited to, talking points, policy language, resolutions, reports, letters, briefers, speeches, background papers, Diplomatic Notes, and cables.

- The memorandum is used for correspondence within the Agency. It may also be used between the Agency and other U.S. Government agencies.
- Letters are used for correspondence with members of Congress, heads of other U.S. Government agencies, business firms, universities, private and international organizations, officials of foreign government, and the public.
- Cables, sometimes called telegrams, are official records of the Department of State (DOS) and USAID policies, program activities, post operations, and personnel management. USAID sends out cables via DOS as an important means of capturing and making official policy decisions and program activities that are pertinent to both development and diplomatic interests. Cables fall into one of two categories: routine or substantive. For telegram preparation procedures see [549.5.2](#) and for electronic mail procedures see [549.5.4](#).

- Routing and Transmittal Slips are used for routing material or transmitting short informal messages within or between Agency offices.

The drafting office must use [Agency stationery](#) for letters and for memoranda that go outside the Agency. The first page of the original document must be prepared on Agency letterhead stationery. Succeeding pages and all other copies will be prepared on plain white bond.

ES maintains an electronic document management and workflow application, named the Agency Correspondence Tracking System (ACTS), which facilitates the efficient processing of correspondence and actions via electronic folders. ES also uses this system to manage and respond to executive correspondence and memos, and this system is the system-of-record for all executive correspondence.

503.3.4 Reply to Correspondence

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

The Agency must commit to maximizing the time available to B/IOs to draft and clear documents, while also requiring that B/IOs leave enough time for review and comment on documents by Agency Principals, their staffs, and ES (if necessary). As an example, the chart below (Table 1.0) summarizes common documents and their deadlines to ES. These should be used as a guide for B/IOs to incorporate for their respective correspondence deadlines. Staff is always encouraged to submit documents earlier than the deadline to allow for the necessary time to review and process all correspondence effectively. Deadlines provide the minimum time necessary for review. All due dates refer to working days. Weekends and holidays are not counted as working days for document review, so B/IOs will need to schedule their timing accordingly. For example, if the Administrator has a meeting on Monday, the briefer must be submitted to ES by 3:00 p.m. on the previous Thursday.

When correspondence requires immediate attention and is due within 24 hours, the email subject line must be marked "URGENT." Drafting officials should notify all B/IOs with equities of the incoming correspondence as early as possible, and clearly state the reason for the urgency, e.g., an imminent deadline. When necessary, ES can arrange expedited handling of urgent packages generated by a B/IO for an Agency Principal. B/IOs should establish similar protocols to ensure the fast and efficient movement of urgent correspondence.

All memos to Agency Principals that are prepared or co-signed by USAID staff must be transmitted through ES. This includes Action, Info, and Scheduling Request Memos. When sending a memo to a USG principal, B/IOs must submit the following:

- Action Memo requesting that the Administrator approve the memo for the stated Principal, including any relevant background information;
- The memo to the other USG principal attached as Tab 1; and

- Clearance page showing any required USAID clearances and required clearances from the other agency.

Agency Principals are the only people of sufficient rank to send memos to USG principals at other agencies. USAID B/IOs that wish to submit a memo to a USG principal must do so via the ES process. B/IOs should contact ES (aid.ESTaskerMailListUSAID@usaid.gov) in advance to ensure that they have the correct clearances needed to avoid delays in processing, either within USAID or within the other agency.

Table 1.0 - ES Correspondence Deadlines

Document Type	Deadline
Internal Documents	
Briefer	3:00 p.m. three days prior to meeting/event
Briefer with Building Blocks	Deadlines determined by Speechwriters in consultation with ES
Information Memo	3:00 p.m. for inclusion in the briefing book the same business day
Action Memo	3:00 p.m. at least three days prior to requested action
Action Memo for Agency Notice	Seven days prior to send date for Administrator Notices and for Executive Messages
Trip Papers	Deadlines determined by Trips Coordinator in consultation with ES
Scheduling Request	14 days prior to meeting/event
External Documents	
Public Letters	Within 14 days of receipt of original correspondence
Congressional Correspondence	Deadlines determined by LPA, generally within 3 – 5 days of tasking
Reports to Congress	Deadlines determined by LPA and report

Document Type	Deadline
	due date/legislatively set deadline
Thank You Letters	Within 48-hours of event or trip
Condolences Letters	Within 48-hours
Remarks, Speeches, and Testimony	Deadlines determined by Speechwriters
Interagency Documents	
Principal's Committee, Deputy Principal's Committee, and National Security Council Briefers	Three days prior to meeting for standard meetings; within 24 hours of meeting for priority topics
NSC-tasked Policy Papers	Three days prior to NSC due date
Interagency Letters/Board Decisions/etc.	Three days prior to interagency due date
Telegrams (Cables)	
FLASH, NIACT IMMEDIATE, and IMMEDIATE Telegrams	Within 24 hours
PRIORITY Telegrams	Within two working days
CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRY Telegrams	Within three working days
Routine Telegrams	Within five working days

503.3.5 Clearing Correspondence
 Effective Date: 07/22/2020

Please refer to the following guidelines when obtaining clearances:

- Include all relevant entities. All B/IOs and, as appropriate, other USG agencies, that have equities in a subject matter must clear. To expedite the process, the drafter should distribute electronic copies to all clearing offices simultaneously. Drafters should consult other offices at an early stage in the drafting process.
- Set reasonable clearance deadlines. All clearance requests should specify a deadline that provides adequate time for review, while still allowing for document completion in a reasonable timeframe. The standard deadline should allow clearers 48 hours. A slow response from a B/IO is not a sufficient reason to omit a clearance. B/IOs who do not respond within established deadlines will be listed as Info.

- At a minimum, one clearance per B/IO. One authoritative clearance per B/IO is sufficient; authoritative is defined as at the Assistant Administrator (AA) or Deputy Assistant Administrator (DAA) level for all documents to be submitted to the USAID Front Office or as directed by the B/IO Front Office for all other documents. Multiple clearances within the same B/IO should not be shown unless a particular subject matter expert's or other individual or office-level clearance is deemed necessary. Each B/IO front office is encouraged to establish its own internal document review and clearance process (see Table 2.0 USAID Clearance Matrix). The staff member clearing for a B/IO assumes responsibility for clearing internally with other relevant stakeholders within the unit.
- Communicate clearly about clearances. Comments on an original draft do not automatically constitute clearance unless specifically noted. It is the drafter's responsibility to incorporate comments. If substantive changes are made after a staff member clears, you must re-clear the package.
- Agree where possible, agree to disagree elsewhere. Every attempt must be made to reconcile differing opinions prior to consulting the Administrator and/or B/IO front office. Where there are differences, the different opinions or options must be noted. In those instances where clearing offices are unable to incorporate differing views in one memo, the drafting office must indicate that a Dissenting Memo is being forwarded on the same subject by another B/IO. Both memos must be forwarded simultaneously.
- Use the clearance page to save time. Clearance pages must accurately reflect the document drafter and those that have cleared. ES and B/IO front offices will often call the drafter and/or clearers of documents to provide feedback or ask a follow-up question directly. ES and B/IO front offices may return documents without completed clearance pages. If using an e-clearance rather than a hard signature, then ensure a record of the clearance/approval is clearly recorded on the clearance page and also in a location/file that can be retrieved later, as needed."
- "Best Practices" when using Google Docs.
- When drafting materials for an AA or DAA of a Bureau, the respective Bureau should lead and seek input from other Bureaus rather than asking another Bureau to draft materials for their principals.

Guidance for seeking clearances: Action Offices should determine any additional clearances required based on the subject matter. Always use the official CCC list when seeking clearance from another Bureau. The following top-line guidance will help determine the necessary clearances:

- Pillar and regional Bureaus clear on all documents pertinent to their programmatic or geographic portfolios (i.e., the Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment (E3) for papers dealing with economic growth; and the Bureau for Africa (AFR) for papers dealing with programs or Missions in Africa).
- The Office of Budget and Resource Management (BRM) clears on all documents that include program budget or resource requirements. The Bureau for Management, Office of Management Policy, Budget and Performance (M/MPBP) clears on all documents that include Operating Expense (OE) budget or resource requirements.
- The Bureau for Management (M) clears on documents dealing with any of the issues housed under Management (M/CIO, M/CFO, M/MPBP, M/MS, M/OAA). This includes papers that deal with operational, financial, or administrative policy-related issues.
- The Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) clears on all documents which may have Congressional or public interest, including external and media engagement ramifications. Schedule requests (except for internal USG meetings) must be cleared by LPA, even if no media coverage is proposed. Any memos or proposals that are related to a public rollout or launch must be cleared by LPA and the USAID Press Office. Memos and briefing papers that relate to sensitive issues that could become public or could require a press response must be cleared by LPA and the USAID Press Office.
- The Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) clears on all documents that have strategic policy implications and coordinates Agency review and input on interagency multilateral policy documents per section **503.3.7**.
- The Office of Human Capital and Talent Management (HCTM) and M clear on issues with personnel implications, including reorganizations, changes to office structures or staffing, or Mission openings or closings.
- The Office of the General Counsel (GC) clears on all documents with potential legal, legislative, or ethical implications.

Guidance for granting clearances: Clearance by a B/IO indicates concurrence on the action and content of a memo or letter. Just as a common sense standard should be applied in seeking clearances, a common sense standard also applies in granting clearances. Clearers are not expected to make stylistic, format, or grammatical changes to a document as these edits are the responsibility of the drafting official.

Input from a clearing B/IO adds the most value when a B/IO reviews a document from its particular area of expertise to ensure consistency with Agency policy and practice,

uncovers blind spots or omissions, and identifies critical issues. Helpful clearance comments address the following questions:

- Does the document reflect Agency-wide equities, particularly from your unit's perspective?
- If not, what needs to change for your B/IO to agree?
- What concerns do you have with the content and how can those concerns be addressed?
- Do you clear contingent upon suggested changes, or clear with comments upon which your clearance is not contingent?

The goal of the clearance process is collaboration and coordination to provide Agency Principals with the full information needed to make informed decisions. The goal is not consensus, as consensus may not always be possible, particularly on complex issues. B/IOs may disagree from time to time because they represent different perspectives. In these instances, the drafting B/IO must present all sides of the disagreement in a fair and transparent manner.

A memo must not be held up due to a lack of consensus. Instead, the Action Office and clearing offices should utilize one of the following options:

- Use the "Background" section of the memo to detail alternate courses of action/differing viewpoints and the implications of each; or
- Prepare a "Split Memo" that provides the Agency Principal with more than one recommendation to choose from; or
- Prepare dissenting memos to be submitted simultaneously when a solution is not negotiable.

These options allow opportunities to negotiate differences when they arise. Do not avoid difficult clearances—utilize the options memo and/or contact ES and/or the B/IO front office when assistance is needed.

The clearance page: Clearances are submitted on a separate page at the end of a document that includes the following:

- Drafter (full name, B/IO, phone extension, after-hours phone number);
- Approver (Bureau AA/IO Director full name, approval, date); and
- Clearer (B/IO, full name, clearance, date for each person clearing).

Each clearance must be listed on a separate line with the response (i.e., clear, clear with edits, do not clear) or list as Info, per the following template:

EXAMPLE EXAMPLE EXAMPLE

CLEARANCE PAGE FOR [copy title from first page of memo]

Draft

Drafter: [Bureau/IO]: [Name]: [Phone extension]; [After hours phone number.]

Approved: [Bureau/IO]: [AA/Office Director Name] Approved Date: [MM/DD/YYYY]

Clearances	Clearance Status (Not Cleared, Info, Clear, Clear w/ comments)	Date
[Bureau/IO]: [Name]	XX [Clear, Info, etc.]	MM/DD/YYYY
[Bureau/IO]: [Name]	XX [Clear, Info, etc.]	MM/DD/YYYY

EXAMPLE EXAMPLE EXAMPLE

Table 2.0 - USAID Clearance Matrix

Subject	Clearances
2030 Agenda, including Sustainable Development Goals and Addis Ababa Action Agenda (FfD)	PPL
Administrative Policies/Issues	M, GC (if authorities)
Afghanistan/Pakistan	OAPA
Agency-level Policies and Strategies (Development Policy)	PPL, LPA, BRM, M
Agriculture	RFS
Aid Effectiveness	PPL
Bilateral Donor Engagement (sovereign only)	PPL
Clear Choice	PPL
Climate Change	E3
Civilian-military Affairs	CPS , BHA

Subject	Clearances
Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA)	PPL
Congress	LPA, GC
Conflict and Reconciliation	CPS
Contract and Grant Policies/Actions	M, OSDBU
Counterinsurgency, Counterterrorism	CPS, SEC
Country Programs, Visits, Pilots	Regional/Pillar Bureau depending on country or issue
Delegations of Authority	GC, M
Democracy, Human Rights and Governance	DCHA
Development Credit	E3
Disability Policy	PPL, BHA
Economic Growth	E3
Education and Higher Education	E3
Employee Benefits and/or Pay	HCTM, GC
Energy	E3, AFR (for Power Africa)
Entrepreneurship	E3
Environment, Natural Resource Management	E3
Evaluation	PPL
External Outreach	LPA, other offices depending on subject
Financial Documents (reports, audits, etc.)	M
Food Aid	BHA, LPA (Food Aid Reform)
Food Security, including Feed the Future	RFS, BHA (for Title II- or emergency-related)
Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA)	PPL

Subject	Clearances
Fragility	CPS, PPL
Funding and Budget Requests	BRM (if program expense), M (if OE), LPA (Congressional Notifications), F (funding requests) , LPA
Gender Issues	E3, PPL, BHA, CPS
Global Engagement	PPL, Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives (CFOI)
Global Health, including GHI	GH, Ebola Task Force Secretariat (as appropriate)
Guest Lists	LPA, GC
Humanitarian Assistance	BHA
Infrastructure and Engineering	E3
Innovation	Global Development Lab
Interagency Coordination and Communication	PPL, GC, BRM (if OMB)
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Refugees	BHA
IT Systems, Policies, Actions	M
Journey to Self-Reliance/Self-Reliance Metrics/Strategic Transitions	PPL
Legal Authority	GC
Legislative and/or Regulatory Proposals	GC, M, LPA (if legislative)
Litigation	GC
Multilateral Institutions (includes UN and MDBs; cross-cutting only – sector/region/topic-specific are led by the respective B/IO)	PPL
New Media	LPA, M/CIO, LAB
Non-Governmental Organizations	Bureau/IO depending on the subject/region

Subject	Clearances
Operational/Management Policy	M, LPA
Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management	PPL, M
Overseas Missions	M (if Admin), Regional Bureau depending on country
Personnel	HCTM, M, LPA (if announcement), OCRD
Press, Media	LPA and USAID Press Office
Private Sector Engagement	LAB, E3, GC (if external communications)
Procurement	M, OSDBU, GC (if reform)
Program Performance Management/ Performance Monitoring	PPL
Public Events	LPA, GC (if WAG needed)
Regional Programs	Appropriate Regional Bureau
Religion, Interfaith Collaboration	CFOI, LPA (if external group)
Reorganization(s)	BRM, HCTM, GC, OCRD, M
Resilience	RFS
Risk Management	ERM Secretariat
Science and Technology	LAB
Security Policies/Procedures	SEC
Space/Facilities	M
Speeches/Testimony	LPA, PPL (if policy-related), AID/A Speechwriters
Transformation	PPL
Volunteerism	E3
White House Correspondence/ Communications	White House Liaison, other Bureaus as appropriate per substance

503.3.6 Drafting and Clearing Documents for Other USG Agencies

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

USAID is sometimes asked to draft documents for use by other USG principals, most often from the Department of State (DOS). Usually these requests are to draft papers, briefers, or other documents in conjunction with an upcoming trip or meeting.

ES assigns DOS taskers through the same process as internal taskers. Assigned Action Offices responsible for drafting documents should contact the DOS Bureau coordinator with any questions regarding the tasker.

Once drafted, the Action Office must obtain all USAID clearances and submit the document to ES. ES will review the document, obtain any needed clearances from A/AID, and transmit the final document to State coordinators. Please note that deadlines to USAID ES may differ from those on the original State tasker to allow time for ES to review and obtain A/AID clearances.

USAID is often asked to clear on memos, briefers, or trip papers for other USG principals, most often from DOS. For such requests, USAID ES will alert the appropriate B/IO that it has DOS documents that need to be cleared. These often have very short turnaround deadlines.

For trip papers, USAID ES will alert the B/IO and request that they contact the DOS coordinator or appropriate State office (indicated on the tasker) to request a copy of the document for clearance. B/IOs must provide all clearances obtained to ES, who will submit to DOS.

503.3.7 Review and Clearance of Multilateral Policy Documents

Effective Date: 06/04/2019

All external requests for USAID clearance on multilateral policy documents (public-facing policy papers, statements, reports, speeches, talking points, resolutions, etc.) must pass through the multilateral-policy clearance process, managed by the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL). PPL coordinates the intra-Agency review of, and input to, multilateral documents circulated for clearance through the U.S. Government, including, but not limited to, talking points, policy language, resolutions, reports, letters, briefers, speeches, background papers, Diplomatic Notes, and cables. The clearance process is as follows:

- All multilateral policy documents received externally must be processed through **usaidclearance@usaid.gov**;
- Multilateral clearance staff in PPL task item(s) to relevant Bureaus/Independent Offices (B/IOs) through their Correspondence Control Contact (CCC) list(s) for review by subject-matter experts (SMEs) and B/IO leadership;
- CCCs return B/IO-level feedback on the item(s) to multilateral clearance staff in PPL;

- The Agency Front Office reviews the item(s), a process that can occur in parallel to review by B/IOs;
- Multilateral clearance staff in PPL incorporate final comments in the item(s) and return them to the originator through **usaidclearance@usaid.gov**; and
- Multilateral clearance staff in PPL provide the final version of the item(s) to the relevant B/IO(s).

In addition, for sector-specific multilateral policy documents drafted by USAID, the respective B/IO will manage the clearance process, which includes final review and clearance through **usaidclearance@usaid.gov**.

The process for approving employees' attendance at multilateral conferences and meetings is outlined in [ADS 580](#).

503.3.8 Statements, Press Guidance and Press Contacts

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

The USAID Press Office—which is part of the Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs—coordinates and produces all external media and press communications for the Agency. Due to the unique time sensitivities in dealing with the press, press strategies and guidance do not need to be coordinated through ES, but must be cleared through the Press Office, which coordinates directly with the Office of the Administrator. The Press Office also develops press strategies and prepares press guidance. The Press Office has the lead on coordinating press guidance, and is the primary point of contact between USAID and the Interagency press operations, including NSC Press and State Department press offices.

Statements by the Administrator and Spokesperson are coordinated by the Press Office. Bureaus and Independent Offices wishing to propose a statement should reach out to the Press Office before discussing with ES or the Front Office, and the Press Office will provide guidance on clearance.

USAID staff must not have unauthorized contact with the press corps. If a member of the press contacts you directly, refer them to the Press Office for follow-up. The Press Office will then determine whether contact is appropriate and whether it should be on-the-record, on background, or off-the-record. You should expect that someone from the Press Office will be at the meeting or on the call when you are speaking to a reporter. Should you be approached by a reporter unexpectedly at an event, notify the Press Office of the conversation. This is for your protection. You do not have to speak to the reporter. If you have any doubts or questions, contact the Press Office at **usaidpressofficers@usaid.gov**. Please see [ADS 560, News Releases and Services](#), for additional information.

503.3.9 Classification, SBU, and Privacy Act Designations

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

[12 FAM 500](#) contains the policy and procedures for USAID and all foreign affairs agencies concerning the implementation of [EO 13526](#) and classified information.

Information is deemed classified when it is determined that the unauthorized disclosure of that information could cause some degree of damage to national security. Information may be classified at one of the following levels (see [EO 13526](#)):

- **CONFIDENTIAL:** Must be applied to information, of which the unauthorized disclosure reasonably could be expected to cause damage to the national security that the original classification authority is able to identify or describe.
- **SECRET:** Must be applied to information, of which the unauthorized disclosure reasonably could be expected to cause serious damage to the national security that the original classification authority is able to identify or describe.
- **TOP SECRET:** Must be applied to information, of which the unauthorized disclosure reasonably could be expected to cause exceptionally grave damage to the national security that the original classification authority is able to identify or describe.

Except as otherwise provided by statute, no other terms will be used to identify USG classified information.

If there is significant doubt about the appropriate level of classification, the authorized creator of the information must classify it at the lower-level.

Classified correspondence must be marked with one of the three designations above: "TOP SECRET," "SECRET," or "CONFIDENTIAL." Note: The marking "SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED (SBU)" must not be used to identify classified information. SBU denotes for official use only information and must be used accordingly. [ADS Chapter 568, National Security Information Program](#) contains additional information regarding classification markings.

USAID must protect personally identifiable information (PII) against anticipated threats or hazards that could result in substantial harm, embarrassment, inconvenience, or unfairness either to an individual or to USAID. [ADS 508, The USAID Privacy Policy](#) describes the organization, functions, policies, and procedures of the USAID privacy program, and is the authoritative guide for the handling and marking of correspondence with PII. All staff must adhere to [ADS 508](#) requirements when handling correspondence with PII.

503.3.10 USAID/W Stationery Standards

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

When writing Agency correspondence, USAID employees must use Agency stationery that has been approved by M/MS. The following types of letterhead are currently available:

- U.S. Agency for International Development (for General Use)
- The Administrator
- Office of the Administrator
- The Deputy Administrator
- Assistant Administrators
- Inspector General
- General Counsel
- Director, Office of Equal Opportunity Programs
- Director, Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization/Minority Resource Center

503.3.10.1 USAID Missions Stationery Standards

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

USAID Mission letterhead stationery 8 1/2" x 11" or metric size A4, with appropriate envelopes (both plain and window) is authorized for use in USAID Missions.

503.3.11 Correspondence Control

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

Every B/IO must establish and use internal controls and procedures to assure prompt attention and action for all correspondence.

503.4 MANDATORY REFERENCES

503.4.1 External Mandatory References

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

- a. [12 FAM 500, Foreign Affairs Manual](#)
- b. [EO 13526](#)
- c. [Marking Classified National Security Information, ISOO Publication](#)
- d. [United States Code, Title 44, Chapters 31 and 33](#)

503.4.2 Internal Mandatory References

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

- a. [ADS 508, The USAID Privacy Policy](#)
- b. [ADS 560, News Releases and Services](#)
- c. [ADS 568, National Security Information Program](#)
- d. [Branding Resources](#)
- e. [Document Templates](#)
- f. [ES Resources](#)
- g. [ES Style Guide](#)
- h. [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#)

503.5 ADDITIONAL HELP

Effective Date: 10/03/2018

There are no additional help documents for this chapter.

503.6 DEFINITIONS

Effective Date: 06/04/2019

See the [ADS Glossary](#) for all ADS terms and definitions.

Action Office

Bureau/IO that has the lead role in preparing materials requested in a tasker. (**Chapter 503**)

Administrator Agency Notices

Electronic notices sent from the Administrator's Office to convey official information to the Agency. (**Chapter 503**)

administratively controlled correspondence

Correspondence which does not require the same protection as National Security Information but must be protected from unauthorized disclosure for official reasons, i.e., Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU). (**Chapter 503**)

Agency acronym

The Agency's acronym, USAID, refers to both the Washington, DC office and field Missions. The field Missions use USAID/(name of Mission) and Washington, DC uses USAID/W. (**Chapter 503**)

Agency Correspondence Tracking System (ACTS)

The electronic document management and workflow application that facilitates the efficient processing of correspondence and actions via electronic folders. It is used by ES to task, track, and manage executive correspondence and memos. (Chapter 503)

Agency Notice

The Agency’s official method of disseminating official, unclassified information of significant but temporary interest. Agency Notices are not for material that is to be retained for any length of time, with the exception of Policy Notices. (Chapter 503, 504)

Agency Principals

The Administrator, Deputy Administrator, and Counselor to the Agency. Associate Administrators are included when officially designated. (Chapter 503)

ClassNet

Computer system used to process information up to the Secret level. (Chapter 503)

correspondence

Correspondence includes letters, form letters, telegrams (cables), memoranda, endorsements, summary sheets, postal cards, memo routing slips, and other written or electronic forms of communication. (Chapter 503)

correspondence: classified

Correspondence containing information which requires protection in the interest of national security, i.e., TOP SECRET, SECRET, or CONFIDENTIAL. (Chapter 503)

Correspondence Control Contacts (CCCs)

Designated B/IO personnel that liaise with ES. (Chapter 503)

correspondence management

Correspondence management is the program that establishes standards for managing correspondence across the Agency. (Chapter 503)

drafter

B/IO subject matter expert that prepares memos or executive correspondence for submission to ES. (Chapter 503)

endorsement

The act of giving one’s approval to something. (Chapter 503)

Executive Message

A Notice that relays critical Agency information and/or is time-sensitive. Therefore, it cannot wait for the daily email distribution and posting to the Notice Web database on the USAID intranet. (Chapter 503, 504)

multilateral policy documents

Documents circulated for clearance through U.S. Government departments and agencies, which include, but are not limited to, talking points, policy language, resolutions, reports, letters, briefers, speeches, background papers, Diplomatic Notes, and cables. **(Chapter 503)**

official file copy

The official file copy of an outgoing letter or memorandum is the Agency record that bears the name and signature or initials of the drafting, clearing, and signing officials. **(Chapter 503)**

tasker

Official request for information from ES on behalf of an Agency Principal to be prepared by a B/IO. **(Chapter 503)**

telegram (CABLE)

An official message originating in the Agency relating pertinent information dealing with policies, program activities, and personnel for the operation of the USG. **(Chapter 503)**

Trip Papers

All trip materials, including briefers and background information, tasked for principal-level travel. **(Chapter 503)**

503_072220