

09 Feb 2016

From: Foreign Area Officer Community Manager (BUPERS 314)

To: Foreign Area Officer Lateral Transfer Applicants

SUBJ: GENERAL INFORMATION FOR CONSIDERATION TO APPLY FOR  
LATERAL TRANSFER AND REDESIGNATION INTO THE U.S. NAVY FOREIGN  
AREA OFFICER (FAO) COMMUNITY

Refs: (a) DODD 1315.17  
(b) DODINST 1315.20  
(c) SECNAVINST 1301.7  
(d) OPNAVINST 1301.10 (series)

1. Thank you for your interest in becoming one of the U.S. Navy's International Engagement Professionals. Please use the information provided in this letter as you consider applying for lateral transfer to the FAO community. The majority of FAO assignments are accompanied overseas tours; therefore I highly encourage you to involve your family in this important career and life-changing decision.

2. Background: Per references (a) and (b) the Navy FAO Community was established in 2006. With the January 2014 approval of the FAO Full Operational Capability (FOC) Plan, the Navy's FAO inventory has grown to over 300 and will reach its FOC end-strength of approximately 400 officers by Fiscal Year 2019. From Lieutenant to Rear Admiral, FAOs provide a unique combination of operational experience, cultural knowledge, and language expertise to Fleet and Joint commands. Directly supporting the national and maritime strategies through our three lines of work (Attaché, Security Assistance, and Pol-Mil experts on Major Staffs) FAOs are force multipliers, forging critical global relationships through persistent and credible presence in over 70 countries. FAOs support the warfighter. The 405 billets that have been designated to become FAO billets were previously existing USN billets, but have been designated to be manned in the future by FAOs.

3. Regions: FAOs are organized into five geographic regions that correspond to the current Geographic Combatant Command (CENTCOM, PACOM, SOUTHCOM, EUCOM, and AFRICOM) Areas of Responsibility (AOR). FAOs are assigned to an AOR after their lateral transfer application has been selected. Although personal abilities and desires are taken into consideration (in the application for redesignation it is essential for every applicant to express their preference of AOR in order 1-5), **the needs of the Navy and the FAO Community drive AOR assignments**. The week after the board results are posted, the FAO Management Team slates the laterally transitioning FAOs to an AOR based on the FAO regional manning and regional requirements which are managed by year group. The regional assignments are then approved by the FAO Community Sponsor. Newly assessed FAOs will then be notified of their regional assignment by the OCM via email.

4. Assignment: As members of a small community, FAOs can expect assignment choices to be limited compared to those offered during their time in their source communities. It is common to be offered only one or two choices that meet an officer's career path timing. FAOs must be prepared to go to hard jobs, many times back-to-back assignments in region, where the community and the Navy requirements are. Approximately 70% of time as a FAO will be served in-country/in-region. The typical "in-country/in-region" jobs are in Security Assistance (e.g. Offices of Defense Cooperation, International Armaments Cooperation, etc.) and in the Defense Attaché Service (DAS) when an officer is more senior (O5-O6). It is important to note that not all attachés are FAOs and not all FAOs are attachés. Regardless of what designator an attaché billet is coded to Officers who are released by their detailers may compete for that attaché billet. Although a FAO may be stated to compete for an attaché billet, it is not a guarantee that that FAO will be selected to fill the billet. The attaché selection process is in-depth, long and comprehensive to ensure the best candidate is selected to fill the job. Although attaché is one on the three main lines of FAO work, a FAO is not required to apply for an attaché position. When not in-country, FAOs serve on staff assignments with Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs), Navy Component Commands (NCCs), OPNAV, Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Joint Staff (JS), and Department of State (DoS) as well as in other interagency appointments.

5. Overseas Service: A FAO's service overseas is best characterized as "remote, challenging, and rewarding". Professionally, a FAO must be able to combine his or her significant warfare and operational expertise with independent judgment in order to be effective as regional experts within the three lines of FAO-work. Some of the locations where FAOs find themselves may lack the vast support infrastructure of U.S. overseas bases, and often FAOs find themselves the most senior U.S. Navy representative in a country.

6. Qualifications: Per references (c) and (d), a fully qualified FAO must have the following:

(a) A regionally focused Master's degree (refer to appendix A for more information). This qualification may be waived by ASN (M&RA) for those with Master's degrees in other areas of study and/or and who have *significant* overseas experience working in-country with a host nation's government and military. To date, for this waiver to be endorsed, the FAO community standard has been multiple tours overseas with JPME I completion or underway, or a master's degree other than a regionally focused International Relations or Strategic Studies course of study.

(b) Foreign language qualification via the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) and Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) goal of 3/3/3. In order to be designated fully qualified, a FAO must attain a score of at least 2 in at least two of the three modalities (i.e. listening, reading, and speaking) in a foreign language of their assigned region. State Department and civilian exams do not suffice to meet this requirement. Even though foreign language proficiency is important, the most important language that a FAO will use in supporting the warfighter is English. FAOs should strive to master not only a foreign language but English as well.

(c) Ideally one year (but at least six months) experience in his or her assigned region.

7. Accession: Today, the FAO community is manned to 88% of its authorized manpower levels. Entry into the community is highly selective and competitive. **Many year groups are closed to new accessions due to the existing number of FAOs already in these year groups.** Candidates with the highest chance of selection generally possess the following qualities:

- First and foremost, sustained superior performance (e.g. break out FITREPs, milestone screened, etc) in their source community;
- Demonstrated aptitude in international settings via substantial experience in FAO-like overseas jobs;
- Language aptitude as measured by the Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB), and/or actual foreign language skills as documented by the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT). The lateral transfer board will only consider documented DLAB and DLPT scores achieved within three years of application;
- For LCDRs with greater than two years' time-in-grade, a regionally focused master's degree, language proficiency and prior regional experience are highly desirable.

FAOs are only accessed during the semi-annual Lateral Transfer Boards. There are no direct accessions to the FAO community because FAOs must rely on their operational experience to be most successful. Basic requirements for application to the board include:

- At least eight years of commissioned service (officers with 5-7 years commissioned service may be considered on a case-by-case basis based on their operational experience and attainment of warfare qualifications in their parent community);
- Worldwide assignable as defined by successful completion of overseas screening to CENTCOM AOR (Bahrain) standards; however, waivers will be considered for officers with Exceptional Family Members (EFM) in category 1, 2, and 6 status on a case-by-case basis;
- Eligible to obtain or already in possession of a TS/SCI clearance (verified by a current SSBI adjudication, JPAS report, or letter from SSO);
- FAO applicants should have a minimum DLAB test score of 115. The FAO OCM, in consultation with the FAO community sponsor, may grant waivers to otherwise highly qualified applicants with DLAB scores below 115 and applicants who can document inability to take a DLAB due to operational commitments.;
- Ideally, all applicants should be within one year of their PRD, but 18 months is acceptable. Applicants with more than 18 months from PRD should contact the FAO OCM before applying.

The following are highly desirable:

- Language qualifications in CAT III (Dari, Pashto, Persian Farsi, Russian, Uzbek, Hindi, Urdu, Hebrew, Thai, Serbian Croatian, Tagalog, Turkish, Sorani, and Kurmanji) or CAT IV (Arabic-MSA, Chinese Mandarin, Korean, Japanese) languages associated with maritime countries as documented with a DLPT score within three years of application;
- Regionally focused International Relations or Strategic Studies type Master's degree;

- PEP / Foreign War College graduates / Olmsted Scholars;
- Have not failed to select for promotion to the next paygrade. Applications of those officers who have 1xFOS for LCDR will not be to the lateral transfer board.

8. Timing: Transition timing to the FAO Community is important. There are two important considerations- Milestone and Promotion Boards.

8a.Milestone: An integral part of the FAO Career Path, Milestone selection is used as an additional quality cut for placement of officers into high-profile/critical fill Major Staff, Security Cooperation, and Attaché positions, as well as critical community billets. The Milestone process is essential in ensuring Service, Joint, and Interagency assignments are manned with qualified FAOs possessing the required level of maturity, experience, and knowledge.

The Milestone Process is similar to the URL's Command and Major Command Screen Boards. Similar to the URL, selection as a Milestone Screened Officer supports selective detailing to Milestone billets. Unlike Command Screening, where you are detailed to a specific command, FAOs are screened primarily on their ability to perform well in the three "functional" lines of FAO work: Political-Military Staff, Security Cooperation, and Attaché.

A LCDR will be eligible for their first Milestone Look 4 years following the FY of their date of rank. The second Milestone Look will occur 5 years following the FY of their date of rank. A CDR will be eligible for their first Major Milestone Look 3 years following the FY of their date of rank and their second Major Milestone Look 4 years following the FY of their date of rank. Past precepts for the Milestone boards have emphasized the importance of sustained superior performance and being a fully qualified FAO (see paragraph 6 above).

8b. Promotion: Historically, there has been more opportunity for promotion to the next rank than there has been to be selected for Milestone and Major Milestone. To date, all milestone selected officers have subsequently been selected for their subsequent promotion. After re-designating to the FAO Community, all subsequent FITREPs will be 1710 and the officer will go up for board as a 1710. There are cases where an Officer may be in-zone in the FAO Community when they would have been below zone in their parent community. Historically, the precepts for promotion boards have directed the board to select the best and most fully qualified. Due to timing, it may be difficult for a newly transitioned FAO to be fully qualified for the next promotion board or milestone board if they transition into the FAO community without a regionally focused Master's Degree, a regional language with a test score of 2/2 or higher and preferably 1 year (but can be waived down to 6 months) in region experience.

9. Family Considerations: For those FAOs with dependents, a career as a FAO presents unique family challenges, and in many overseas assignments, **the spouse of a FAO is an integral part of the team**. Many FAO assignments involve orders to locations with limited special education or medical support. Some locations are dependent-limited or restricted. Senior FAO assignments tend to be located overseas where the greatest depth and breadth of international engagement takes place and where FAO capability is highly

sought after by the ambassador. These can present competing priorities for FAO families. **Every applicant is highly encouraged to discuss the long-term implications of a career as a FAO with their family**, to include the potential of living in austere locations and/or the possibility of unaccompanied assignments. Due to Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs) world-wide, it is often very difficult or impossible for dependents of FAOs to work overseas in some locations. When FAOs are working for a U.S. Embassy (Security Assistance and Attaché work), their dependents may have opportunities to work at the U.S. Embassy or get a work permit to work locally, but these opportunities are sometimes limited. Applicants with families enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) should discuss with their local coordinators to ensure that their EFMP status is up to date, and understand the limitations regarding assignments overseas before applying. Officers who are applying to the FAO Community must receive overseas screenings to CENTCOM standards for them and all their dependents.

10. Contact: If you wish to discuss specific questions not addressed here, or if you want to meet with a FAO near you, please contact me.

Very Respectfully,

//S//

CDR Jennifer Jones  
FAO Community Manager  
BUPERS-314

## **Appendix 1**

USN FAOs have master's degrees that meet the FAO Community requirements from the following institutions. This is not an all-inclusive list, but was created to assist prospective applicants. The FAO OCM will consider any degree upon request in conjunction with the Naval Postgraduate School Assistant Dean of Students and the OPNAV N52 Policy Office.

- Naval Postgraduate School: Regional Studies Curriculum 681,682,683, 684
- Naval War College
- University of San Diego Master of Arts in International Relations
- Stanford African Studies, East Asian Studies, Iberian and Latin American Cultures, International Policy Studies, International relations, Latin American Studies, Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies,
- Tufts University Fletcher School
- University of Albany (SUNY) Masters in National Security Studies
- American University in Cairo MA Applied Linguistics
- MA International Journalism Baylor
- Catholic University of America Int'l Business
- Joint Forces Staff College
- Salve Regina Newport International Relations- MBA international business focus on Western Europe.
- American University
- MBA international management Thunderbird school of Intl Management  
MS Global Leadership
- American University- Masters of Arts and International Peace and Conflict Resolution.  
MA in International Affairs: Comparative and Regional Studies