



International Cooperative Administrative Support Services

## **PLAYBOOK**

### **ICASS “Good Governance”**

#### **Introduction**

In the Spring of 2020, an Assessment of ICASS (AoI), conducted by an independent contractor, identified as one area for improvement the low or uneven quality of ICASS governance at many posts. To address this, State Department regional bureaus and customer agencies were asked to identify posts where ICASS governance works well and there is good collaboration between the ICASS council and the management section. During December 2021 and January 2022, the ICASS Service Center (ISC) deputy director and ICASS Working Group chair met with ICASS council chairs, management, and financial officers, and other ICASS post participants from the eleven selected posts\*, to glean best practices. The result of those meetings is this “good governance playbook,” reviewed and endorsed by the ICASS Executive Board on June 16, 2022, which can serve as a tool to enhance ICASS governance overseas.

Besides serving as a guide for all posts, this playbook can also mitigate the disadvantages of small and even medium-sized posts compared to larger posts, where the latter have a wider and deeper pool from which to draw participants with the experience and the time to devote to ICASS governance. For example, an AoI recommendation to mandate ICASS training before deployment is logical but unrealistic, given the lack of line authority to enforce such a mandate, as well as the myriad other tasks imposed on those preparing for an overseas assignment. However, a pro-active approach to training and orientation for ICASS customers soon after arrival at post can be effective. At-post training combines peer pressure and collegiality at post to incentivize training as well as engagement in ICASS governance. Following a structured playbook such as this one can also reduce the disruption that personalities can sometime cause in ICASS governance at smaller posts.

\*Abidjan, Abuja, Amman, Bangkok, Brussels, Kigali, London, Muscat, Panama City, Tbilisi and Tokyo,

# **ICASS GOVERNANCE PLAYBOOK**

## **1. Set the Tone for ICASS and the Management Platform**

- a) Integrate the ICASS governance process with overall post governance, including the country team. Posts with a range of governance or family/employee engagement activities, such as locally engaged staff committees, recreation associations, diversity and inclusion committees, and “Green Team” can interact synergistically with ICASS governance.
- b) Facilitate front office engagement: the COM and Deputy Chief of Mission do not often have the time to actively engage in ICASS, especially at large posts. Help make participation easy, e.g., provide the script/talking points for the DCM’s ICASS council participation.
- c) Set the tone for ICASS buy-in: remind agencies “this is your money,” the price for your overseas presence.
- d) Manage up: an engaged front office can motivate otherwise reluctant agency representatives.
- e) Incorporate ICASS management goals into the Integrated Country Strategy.
- f) In sum, set a tone and focus on relationship-building, which is the key to developing trust between service providers and customers.

## **2. Train and Orient New Members to ICASS**

- a) Provide training/orientation as soon as possible upon arrival at post; encourage new arrivals to use [www.icasstraining.com](http://www.icasstraining.com) links for both initial and follow-up training (i.e., upon arrival and again after some at-post ICASS experience).
- b) Make an extra effort to engage and train representatives from smaller agencies, who often do not have the same level of access to training, nor the time once at post to engage, especially given they may also have few local employees to rely on.
- c) Host in-person budget committee and ICASS council orientations, in addition to on-line training.
- d) Follow the Meeting Planning Schedule (MPS), available on the ISC website (<https://usdos.sharepoint.com/sites/CGFS-ICASS>)
- e) Use the ISC’s one-page training tools and the Training Continuum with links as an introduction for post ICASS training.
- f) The financial management officer should review the ICASS budget with each senior customer representative as soon as possible after this position turns over.
- g) Do not assume previous ICASS knowledge/experience—many have no knowledge at all.
- h) As part of the annual joint orientation meeting held every September/October, incorporate a general training session on the roles and responsibilities of the budget committee and ICASS council as well as any topics that ICASS representatives regularly struggle with.

## **3. Tailor ICASS Leadership Succession and Recruitment to Post Needs and Circumstances**

- a) When possible, send post governance material before new personnel arrive at post, once the ICASS council and budget committee chairs are identified following summer rotation.

- b) Possible Succession Option I: Filling the ICASS council chair position by rotating among the members, instead of by election or recruitment, which can reduce perception of “insider” or cliquish leadership.
- c) Possible Succession Option II: ICASS council chair selection can also be based on length of tour, i.e., instead of annual election/selection, the ICASS council chair serves for their length of tour. Besides providing continuity, this allows posts the option to take advantage of agency representatives who have more time and willingness to commit to ICASS than others.
- d) Possible Succession Option III: Fill ICASS council and budget committee chairs by election, but place strong emphasis on the candidate’s ICASS experience and participation level, since there would be a much higher chance of success as a chair if filled by someone with the experience and desire to serve rather than simply based on rotation.
- e) Possible Succession Option IV: Establish budget committee chair position as being “on-deck” for assuming ICASS council chair the following year, to provide continuity.

#### **4. Manage the Meetings**

- a) “No Surprises!” Contentious issues should be discussed with possible solutions or options identified as much as possible among the management officer, financial management officer, and ICASS council chairs before the formal meetings. Ensure they are familiar with the agenda and on the same page as management with the various agenda topics.
- b) Discussing potential problems ahead of time also prevents agencies feeling they are being rushed into decisions.
- c) Schedule meetings as far in advance as possible.
- d) Distribute meeting materials as soon as possible, at least one week ahead, to allow questions and anticipate potential issues.
- e) Schedule weekly or monthly standing meetings between management and/or financial management officer and ICASS council and budget committee chairs.
- f) Strive for early consensus on the simple/technical/immediate issues, to allow time for broader and/or informal discussions, e.g., priorities for the next fiscal year.
- g) When feasible/appropriate, invite the representatives of the budget committee to ICASS council meetings—this fosters inclusion and transparency.
- h) Execute the Meeting Planning Schedule and Seven Simple Questions as an easy way to impose structure and discipline on ICASS governance
- i) Always include “A Look Ahead...” as a final agenda item so budget committee and ICASS Council representatives have a good idea of what to what to expect regarding future meeting info, deadlines, etc.

#### **5. Communicate**

- a) Tell agencies not just how a proposal advances agency ICASS interests, but how the proposal might support the agencies’ broader mission goals.
- b) Send invoice adjustment notices to customers as soon as invoice changes are detected.
- c) Tell agencies you invite questions and scrutiny of invoices. Engaged governance acts as a check on the system and fosters trust and transparency.
- d) Find and address agency pain points, e.g., what is their primary concern? Is it locally engaged staff wage increases? Speedier service response times?
- e) If communicated early and clearly, most customers understand, even if they do not accept, when something can’t be done or is out of their control (e.g., host government household effects shipment clearance delays).

- f) Record ICASS meetings and post the recordings on a shared drive.\

## **6. Use Data to Build Trust**

- a) Establish a data analyst position or ensure that post's quality coordinator provides information that can enhance discussion and decision quality as well as trust and transparency.
- b) Provide agencies data from the Management Analytics Portal (MAP 3.0), especially the locally engaged staffing analysis tool, and the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) to measure and communicate service performance.
- c) Emphasize data-driven measures of performance to convey information as well as obtain feedback, e.g., is management proposing reducing the Furniture and Appliance Pool annual assessment, or using that money to accelerate the replacement schedule for older furniture?
- d) Use the APA process and MAP data on performance to slowly deemphasize an excessive focus on customer satisfaction in place of a more balanced approach.
- e) As part of every budget presentation, include an audit trail that shows the changes from the previous target to the current target for each budget component: Regional Bureau, Overseas Buildings Operations, and Diplomatic Security.

## **7. Manage Customer Expectations**

- a) Address issues raised in the Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS), even when comments reveal customer misunderstanding of ICASS.
- b) Incorporate, and report on, CSS or other surveys to gauge customer satisfaction, keeping in mind that low survey participation can be a sign of dissatisfaction, rather than contentment or apathy.
- c) Explain whenever there is an inability to meet expected service standards, e.g., post medical unit may not be able to manage a worldwide pandemic and still perform all its normal functions.
- d) Identify and explain the linkage between changes in performance and resources if more staff or increased training is required.

## **8. Anticipate Challenges in ICASS Governance**

- a) Big changes, such as moving into a new embassy or office compound, can generate disputes over how to distribute costs among agencies, some of whom do not move into the new compound.
- b) Unanticipated cost increases, e.g., a locally engaged staff wage increase can be serious problem for small agencies that have not budgeted for it.
- c) Complexity and communication issues can undermine agency faith in the ICASS promise of local empowerment.
- d) Developing a track record of transparency and building trust serves well when unforeseen challenges arise....as they almost always do.