



# Report in Brief

January 28, 2021

## Background

The U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Administration's (ITA's) mission is to create prosperity by strengthening the international competitiveness of U.S. industry, promoting trade and investment, and ensuring fair trade and compliance with trade laws and agreements. In 2018, in addition to creating and safeguarding jobs, ITA assisted more than 33,000 exporters and increased revenue of clients by an average of \$2 million. Global Markets—a business unit of ITA—assists and advocates for U.S. businesses in the international markets to foster U.S. economic prosperity.

The United States & Foreign Commercial Service (US&FCS) is a primary component of Global Markets. US&FCS's 229 foreign service officers are typically assigned to international posts to promote the export of U.S. goods and services, increase high-impact foreign direct investment into the U.S., and strengthen fair competition in international trade for U.S. firms and workers—all while facing demanding careers which require one to carry “the privileges and responsibilities associated with that representation at all times,” frequent relocation, and cultural sensitivity, among other challenges.

## Why We Did This Review

The objective of our evaluation was to determine whether US&FCS adhered to applicable laws, regulations, and policies when conducting the 2018 officer promotion process.

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE ADMINISTRATION

### The U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service 2018 Officer Promotion Process Did Not Comply With Applicable Criteria

OIG-21-021-I

#### WHAT WE FOUND

We found ITA's 2018 US&FCS officer promotion process did not adhere to certain applicable laws, regulations, and policies. Specifically, we found the following:

1. ITA did not determine the number of available promotion opportunities before selection boards convened.
2. Board rankings and other sensitive information were improperly stored on an unsecured shared network drive.
3. US&FCS incorrectly determined promotion eligibility.
4. Discrepancies were identified in the rankings of one selection board.

Consequently, important aspects of ITA's 2018 US&FCS officer promotion process were significantly flawed and may have resulted in inappropriate recommendations to promote certain foreign service officers, while failing to recommend other deserving officers for promotion.

#### WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend that the Under Secretary for International Trade do the following:

1. Review the 2018 US&FCS officer promotion process and determine whether any selection boards should reconvene, in order to ensure the process was conducted fairly, with integrity and transparency.
2. Ensure US&FCS establishes the number of promotion opportunities by officer class and provide those numbers via sealed communication to the American Foreign Service Association before selection boards convene.
3. Require US&FCS to prepare and maintain complete documentation to support the number of promotion opportunities for each foreign service officer class before selection boards convene.
4. Establish controls to comply with federal requirements for properly protecting sensitive promotion information and other sensitive federal records stored on shared network drives.

We recommend that the Assistant Secretary for Global Markets and Director General of US&FCS do the following:

5. Define the appropriate bureau personnel records that should be used to determine and verify promotion eligibility based on the *Foreign Service Personnel Management Manual's* requisites and require applicable Office of Foreign Service and Human Capital officials to preserve adequate and proper records to support both the subject officer's and future determinations of their respective promotion eligibility.
6. Ensure that the Office of Foreign Service and Human Capital requires future selection boards to adequately and properly document selection board rankings.