

**Procedures for Requesting that new LQA and Post Allowances  
Surveys be conducted at your Post**

In light of the dramatic negative changes in the exchange rate for the U.S. Dollar against foreign currencies, as well as other economic factors that may have impacted members of our bargaining unit, the FEA has investigated the process and procedures for how to request that the State Department Office of Allowances revise the Living Quarters Allowance (LQA) and Post Allowance (PA) to reflect these changes.

As a reminder, by law, the Post Allowance is determined by the difference in cost of living in Washington D.C. and the Post in question. While the cost of your Post has dramatically escalated recently, the cost of living in Washington D.C has also increased tremendously, especially with the huge increase in energy costs (gas, heating oil, etc.) Accordingly, while the cost of living at your post may dramatically change, the Post Allowance might not change noticeably due to similar cost increases in Washington D.C.

It is important to note that under the Department of State Standardized Regulations (DSSR), the Office of Allowances cannot change rates or allowances without hard data to justify the changes. Thus, it is important to determine whether the head agency at the Post in charge of collecting and reporting data has provided the latest up-to-date information.

Please note that the following is guidance on whom to contact and what to ask them to do; please do not attempt to submit these forms or collect this data on your own, as the DSSR has specific procedures and guidelines on how this must be done.

Please use these guidelines to make a calm, reasoned presentation as to why you believe it is necessary to take these steps, instead of making threats or demands, if they have not already begun the process themselves. What we are asking these officials, who are likely military members not connected to DoDEA, to do is to ensure that the Post is providing the State Department Office of Allowances the latest data and information on changes at the Post in order to have as much information as possible to justify a change in these allowances.

We must also caution that even if the Post submits all of this data, it does not guarantee that the Office of Allowances will automatically increase the allowances, as they are determined by a formula in which this data is a part, but not the sole factor in the equation. In fact, it is possible that following this guidance could result in a decrease in your LQA or Post Allowance. Nonetheless, by providing the Office of Allowances the latest data and information on changes, it gives your Post a better chance of getting a positive change than simply relying on dated information.

If you believe that your Post Allowance and LQA rates do not match the conditions at the Post, the following would be the Association's recommended steps to follow to attempt to convince the State Department to increase the rates.

## LQA

### Step One

- Contact your local DSO and determine which agency (Army, Air Force, etc.) is responsible for the submission of information and reports on LQA to the State Department
- Ask for the name, title and contact information for the official in the applicable agency at the post who is responsible for filing these LQA reports.

### Step Two

Contact that official and ask when was the last time the [DS-7604](#) form (Living Quarters Summary Expenditure Report) was submitted for that post. That form can be found here: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/80145.pdf>

- Under DSSR 077.2, the [DS-7604](#) report must be filed annually, and the date for submitting the report is listed in DSSR section 920
- However, DSSR 077.21 provides the post the ability to submit an “interim report” when the LQA rates do not appear to match costs
- It may be useful to have some information and facts on hand to offer to this official to demonstrate that there has been a change in the local economy, housing or living conditions at the post, so that the officer has some “new information” to offer to the State Department

### Step Three (assuming that you convince the official to do an interim report)

- Make sure that the post community is widely aware that this survey is being conducted and that the results of the survey may well impact the LQA rates at your post, and encourage maximum participation by the community in a cooperative fashion in the collection of data by the official
- Follow up with the official that the official has completed and submitted the interim report to the State Department in a timely fashion and follows the guidance listed in DSSR 077.21 on what must accompany the report
- The Association would recommend that once the interim survey results have been collected, that you suggest that the responsible official compare the results of the new survey to the old survey. In other words, the official should check to see if the data appears to support an increase in LQA or not. If it does not appear to support an increase, or the State Department indicates it would not result in an increase, it might be best not to submit the interim survey rather than potentially incur a reduction in your LQA

## Post Allowance

### Step One

- Contact your local DSO and determine which agency (Army, Air Force, etc.) is responsible for the submission of information and reports on Post Allowance to the State Department
- Ask for the name, title and contact information for the official in the applicable agency at the post who is responsible for filing these Post Allowance reports.

### Step Two

- If there is a clearly identifiable factor that has changed the economic conditions at the post (such as a dramatic change in the exchange rate, changes in local taxes, etc), then confirm with this official that this information has been transmitted to the State Department in accordance with DSSR 074.31
- Please note that under DSSR 074.31, the State Department will consider the changes reported by the post, and then decide if a new Price Retail Survey must be conducted at the post (more on this survey below)

### Step Three

- When you contact the official responsible for these reports, ask when the last [DS-1996](#) form (Living Pattern Questionnaire for Civilian Post Allowances and Military COLA) was submitted to the State Department by the post. That form can be found here: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/80004.pdf>
- If there have been changes in the way people shop or live at the post (e.g. less shopping on the economy, more purchase on post, etc.) since the last submission of the [DS-1996](#) form for your post, then ask this official whether it is necessary to resubmit the [DS-1996](#) form, in light of the changes (please have examples of the changes ready for the official, so they have information in front of them).
  - Under DSSR 074.43, if there are changes, then the [DS- 1996](#) form must be completed before the Retail Price Survey can be conducted
  - The reason listed in the DSSR as to why an updated questionnaire should be completed if there have been changes in shopping/living patterns at the post is that the results will direct the survey takers to the right outlets and stores for the survey.

- In the event that the officer determines it is necessary to complete this form, encourage people at the post to cooperate and complete the questionnaire so that the most accurate information possible is available.

#### Step Four

- Assuming that the [DS-1996](#) questionnaire has been completed/is current, and the post concludes that would like to conduct a new voluntary Retail Price Survey, under DSSR 074.45, the post must first notify the State Department Office of Allowances of their intent, so that the Office of Allowances can provide guidance, advice and ensure the correct forms are used
- Under DSSR 074.3, voluntary Retail Price Surveys may be conducted at any time, but they must meet the requirements listed in DSSR 074.2
  - If the Post decides to conduct a voluntary Retail Price Survey, please stay in contact with the officials responsible for conducting these surveys to confirm that you have properly completed these surveys and entered the information correctly.
  - For example, one member has noted that when the survey asks for the percentage of meals you eat off-base versus on-base, it is asking about the number of times per week you eat outside of your home. So, if you go out to eat 2 times a week at off-post establishments, and never eat at on-post establishments, when the survey asks what percentage of the time you eat off post vs. the percentage on post, the correct answer is 100% off post. Some people would mistakenly answer 10%, thinking the survey was asking you how many times (2) you eat outside of your home as a percentage of your total weekly meals (21, or 3 per day).
  - In other words, the Association strongly recommends if you are unsure that you understand a question on the survey correctly, contact the official responsible for the survey to confirm that you understand the question and the instructions to answer it.

#### Step Five

- The Association would recommend that once the voluntary survey results have been collected, that you suggest that the responsible official compare the results of the new survey to the old survey. In other words, the official should check to see if the data appears to support an increase in Post Allowance or not. If it does not appear to support an increase, or the State Department indicates it would not result in an increase, it might be best not to submit the voluntary survey rather than potentially incur a reduction in your Post Allowance.