

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Table of Contents

1. [Logo Moratorium](#)
2. [Flag Marking Requirements](#)
3. [Co-Marking](#)
4. [Exceptions](#)
5. [Monitoring and Compliance](#)
6. [Points of Contact](#)

LOGO MORATORIUM

Why has the Department of State instituted a moratorium on new logos?

Numerous and diverse logos and “branding” treatments have emerged over time and are in use across the Department and at our embassies and consulates. These myriad logos only serve to dilute our messaging and diminish clarity among foreign audiences as to who is funding or sponsoring these projects and activities. The continuing creation of additional logos will only contribute to messaging confusion and undermine efforts to identify Department programs and assistance with the U.S. Government.

When does the logo moratorium go into effect?

The Department’s moratorium on the introduction of new logos, seals, and markings designed for use with foreign publics is already in effect. No new logos should be developed for Department of State programs or activities undertaken by U.S. Embassies, Consulates, or other Department of State entities, including programs undertaken with implementing partners.

Does this moratorium apply to programs or activities funded by other U.S. Government agencies?

No, this guidance does not apply to other U.S. Government agencies implementing Department of State-funded programs or their own programs, such as USAID, although these agencies are strongly encouraged to follow the Department of State’s guidance, and they must adhere to the terms and conditions for branding stated in the interagency agreement.

Does this moratorium apply to social media sites?

No, the logo moratorium does not apply to Department and overseas mission social media sites and digital media engagement, such as those hosted on Facebook and other non-U.S. Government platforms. However, the Department strongly encourages implementing partners to highlight U.S. Government sponsorship in the information partners post to their social media and other websites.

May a Department of State assistance recipient or partner organization develop a new logo for one of its programs or initiatives?

Recipients of federal assistance from the Department of State may develop logos for their own organizations or programs, but not new logos for programs, assistance, or activities funded by the Department of State. The moratorium on new logos applies only to Department of State-funded or sponsored programs, assistance, and activities, to include those being implemented by federal assistance recipients, program partners, etc.

U.S. FLAG MARKING REQUIREMENTS

What is the marking requirement for Department of State programs, events, assistance, and other activities?

The Department requires that all programs, projects, assistance, activities, and public communications to foreign audiences, partially or fully-funded by the Department, be marked appropriately overseas with the standard U.S. flag in a size and prominence equal to (or greater than) any other logo or identity. The requirement does not apply to a partner's own corporate communications or in the United States, nor does it apply to the Department's online social media sites or digital media engagement.

All publicity and promotional materials should underscore the sponsorship by or partnership with the U.S. Government or the U.S. Embassy. Existing logos or program materials may continue to be used; however, a standard rectangular U.S. flag must be used in conjunction with such logos.

The U.S. flag may replace or be used in conjunction with the Department of State seal, the U.S. Embassy seal, or other Department of State program logos. A standard rectangular U.S. flag must be incorporated into new:

- Signage and banners at press conferences, cultural and other program events, conferences, receptions, public events, U.S. speaker programs, etc. sponsored by an entity of the Department of State;
- Department and post-produced print publications (e.g., English language teaching materials, exchange information, etc.);
- Signage and labeling on Department-sponsored foreign assistance activities;
- Publicly distributed materials, including fact sheets; and
- Other Department of State supported programs and activities, the focus of which is to engage foreign publics.

Why is the Department requiring this change?

To ensure the American people and the U.S. Government are visibly recognized for the foreign programs, activities, and assistance they finance through the Department of State and to increase the transparency of Department activities abroad. Appropriate marking and public communications can have a positive impact on perceptions of the United States – an important foreign policy goal.

When is the requirement effective?

These marking requirements are already in effect.

Are there times when the marking requirements do NOT apply?

Yes. This marking policy, consistent with existing marking policies and practices, ensures the means for the Department to provide exceptions, including means by which a recipient organization may request exceptions. While the goal is to implement this policy in a comprehensive fashion, there are situations which warrant that exceptions be made. Please consult the exceptions section of the FAQ.

Should the U.S. flag be used on employee communications?

No. Only materials produced to communicate with foreign audiences a program, event, project, or some other activity, including invitations to events, press materials, event backdrops, podium signs, etc. must include the U.S. flag.

May black-and-white images of the flag be used?

Yes, when it is cost prohibitive to produce materials with color images of the flag, or if there is no access to color reproduction capability, black-and-white or grayscale images of the flag may be used.

Does this policy apply to USAID programs or activities, or those funded by other U.S. Government agencies?

No, this policy does not apply to USAID programs, which have their own marking regulations, whether USAID implements these programs with its own funding or with Department of State funding. Nor does this policy apply to other U.S. Government agencies implementing Department of State-funded programs,

although they are strongly encouraged to follow the Department of State's guidance, and they must adhere to the terms and conditions for branding stated in the interagency agreement.

Do these marking requirements apply to social media sites?

No, this marking policy does not apply to Department and overseas mission social media sites and digital media engagement, such as those hosted on Facebook and other non-U.S. Government platforms. However, the Department strongly encourages implementing partners to highlight U.S. Government sponsorship in the information partners post to their social media and other websites

May publications, signage, and other program materials produced prior to this policy announcement and still in stock continue to be used, or should this material be discarded?

Previously-produced materials may continue to be used. The marking requirements apply to any materials in development or to any materials awaiting another round of reproduction.

CO-MARKING

What is co-marking?

Co-marking is placing the U.S. flag next to other U.S. Government, foreign government, or partner logos, ensuring equal size and prominence on programs, projects, events, activities, public communications, etc. partially or fully funded by the Department.

What about the host-country government?

The Department often funds programs and activities in cooperation with foreign governments. Many ministries have a flag, seal, or another logo that is included on program materials. At times, a foreign government may require the government or ministry flag, seal, or logo to be more prominent, or may restrict use of the U.S. flag. Such cases would qualify as exceptions to these guidelines.

May the Department Seal continue to be used?

Yes, the Department and embassy seals may continue to be used, in conjunction with the flag. The flag does not replace the seals, but serves as a strong symbol, further identifying Department programs and activities with the U.S. Government.

EXCEPTIONS

Does every single item need to be marked?

No, judgment is required to determine what is reasonable. For example, if the Department is funding construction of a school, providing a temporary sign during construction, and then a permanent plaque in the lobby and stickers on computers may satisfy the requirement, versus marking every desk, chair, and blackboard. The goal is to strike a balance between over marking and too little recognition. At a conference, the flag may be placed onstage, behind the podium and speaker(s), or in some other prominent location, rather than marking every conference banner.

Is anything exempt from marking?

Yes, there are several categories of exceptions for which marking will not be required.

What are the exceptions?

Legitimate reasons that the Department may decide not to mark our programs may include, but are not limited to:

- Reasons of safety and security for Department employees, implementing partners, and/or program participants and beneficiaries;
- Programs or projects in which the U.S. Government is one of any number of co-sponsors, donors, or participants, or where highlighting the United States would be disproportionate to the U.S. contribution; and
- Where identifying U.S. Government support, or where use of the U.S. flag, would raise suspicion of U.S. motives, alienate partners, participants, or beneficiaries, or otherwise undermine the goals of the program.

Marking is not required if it would:

- Compromise the independence or neutrality of a program or materials, such as election monitoring or ballots or political party work;

- Diminish the credibility of reports, analyses, etc. whose data or findings must be seen as independent;
- Undercut cooperating country government “ownership” of laws, policies, studies, or other communications;
- Impair the functionality of an item, such as sterilized equipment or spare parts;
- Incur substantial costs or be impractical, such as items too small or otherwise unsuited for individual marking;
- Offend local cultural or social norms, or be considered inappropriate on certain items; or
- Conflict with international law.

Who decides what qualifies as an exception?

The Department of State will determine what qualifies as an exception to these guidelines. Partner organizations and/or assistance recipients that wish to request an exception from the marking requirements should discuss their concerns with the grants officer for their federal assistance agreement or contract.

The exceptions are based on experience to date and common sense. For example, the Department would not require marking of election materials because to do so would counter neutrality in the election process. Certain federal assistance agreements already include a waiver of acknowledgement of U.S. involvement. Such waivers remain in force.

What if marking is a security risk?

The guidelines provide for an exception to marking requirements for safety and security reasons, including the safety and security of recipients and program beneficiaries, or adverse reaction in the country.

How are exception requests made?

Partner organizations and/or assistance recipients that wish to request an exception from the marking requirements should discuss their concerns with the grants officer for their federal assistance agreement or contract.

MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE

How will compliance be monitored?

Federal assistance recipients must meet the terms and conditions of their awards, to include the marking guidelines. Grants officers will continue to monitor grants for compliance through a variety of means such as site visits, program reports, etc.

POINTS OF CONTACT

Recipients and applicant organizations should contact their sponsoring Department of State bureau, office, or overseas mission for specific information related to federal assistance or contracts. For general questions about the Department marking policy and overall branding strategy, please contact VisiblyAmerican@state.gov.

