
CHAPTER 4. COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN FIELD AND HEADQUARTERS

- 4-1. POLICY. It is the policy of the Department to encourage free and open communication between operating levels in the Field and at Headquarters. In particular, the Department encourages direct communication of technical and program interpretation and guidance between operating Field staff and Headquarters staff. The objective of this policy is to improve program delivery by providing rapid, consistent, responsible answers to Field questions and to remove confusion arising from the unnecessary transmission of questions and answers through multiple supervisory levels.
- 4-2. LIMITATIONS ON DIRECT COMMUNICATIONS.
- a. Guidance Only in Response to Field Request. Direct Headquarters communication of technical or program guidance is to be given in response to a Field official's request. The channels of direct Field/Headquarters communication described in Paragraphs 4-3 through 4-8 shall not be used to provide a direct channel of communication for directives initiated by Headquarters officials. These communications procedures shall not be used so as to interfere with or circumvent in any way the prescribed organizational, supervisory, and delegated authorities and responsibilities at any level of the organization.
 - b. Not a Policy-Making Channel. The provisions in Paragraphs 4-3 through 4-8 for direct channels of communication between Field and Headquarters officials shall not be used to substitute for or circumvent requirements for clearance, approval and issuance of new or revised policies, procedures, regulations, or technical requirements in Departmental issuances. New or revised policies, procedures, regulations and requirements shall continue to be issued with the written approval of the appropriate Assistant Secretary (or, as required, the Secretary) in accordance with requirements for clearance, approval and publication governed by Handbook 000.2 , Unified Issuances System.
 - c. General. Additional, specific limitations on direct communications are set forth in Paragraphs 4-3 through 4-8 and should be carefully observed. These include requirements for referring certain categories of questions through Regional Administrators or their designees, and requirements relating to the organizational levels at which certain categories of guidance may be requested and given.

4-3. TECHNICAL OR PROGRAM INTERPRETATION AND GUIDANCE ON SPECIFIC PROJECT CASES.

- a. Area Offices, HUD Service Offices, and Valuation and Endorsement Stations may communicate directly with Headquarters to secure answers to questions of technical or program interpretation and guidance on specific project cases. This category of question is limited to interpretation and guidance with respect to existing policies, regulations, or requirements.
- b. Requests to Headquarters for technical or program interpretation and guidance on specific project cases may be made in the Area Office by Division Directors or other officials reporting to the Area Manager. In addition, Branch Chiefs within the Housing and Community Planning and Development Divisions, Branch Chiefs within HUD Service Offices, and Supervisors of Valuation and Endorsement Stations may request such interpretation and guidance directly.
- c. Requests of Field officials should be made to the Directors of Headquarters Offices or Divisions or technical staff having responsibility for formulating the technical or program requirement in question, or to similar officials in Headquarters organization units having other titles.
- d. Requests for technical interpretation and guidance on specific project cases may be made orally or in writing. A Headquarters official may request that an oral request be submitted in writing, with appropriate information from project files and Field officials shall comply with such requests.
- e. Responses of authorized Headquarters officials may be made orally in order to expedite the receipt of the answer. However, whenever the question is complex, or will affect the outcome of a project approval, the oral response shall be promptly confirmed in writing to the requesting Field officials by the authorized Headquarters official who gave the response. Copies of written responses will be sent to the Regional Administrator, and Area Manager. The written response or confirmation of response shall be placed in the project file.

4-4. BROAD QUESTIONS OF TECHNICAL INTERPRETATION AND GUIDANCE. Field officials may also seek direct Headquarters technical interpretation and guidance in cases where the question is not limited to a specific project. For this purpose, the term

"technical" means a specialized area within a program or activity for which specialists, technicians, or Field counsel provide reviews and advice.

- b. Field staff members initiating such requests shall prepare them in writing for the signature of the Area Office Division Director responsible for the program or function. A copy shall be provided for the Area Manager and Regional Administrator.
 - c. These kinds of requests for technical interpretation and guidance may be initiated also by Regional Office officials in regard to Regional Office functions. They may be addressed to the Headquarters Division or Office Director responsible for the function, over the signature of the Regional Office Division Director or Office Head with a copy to the Regional Administrator.
 - d. For example, the Director of the Regional Office Accounting Division may communicate with a Headquarters Division or Branch Chief in the Office of Finance and Accounting; and Regional Office Division Directors in the Office of Regional Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity may communicate directly with their Headquarters counterparts.
 - e. The same Headquarters officials authorized to respond to requests for technical guidance on specific projects may respond to requests for technical guidance involving broader application of existing policies or procedures. Complex responses shall be confirmed in writing with a copy to the Regional Administrator and Area Manager.
 - f. Where the request is for guidance with respect to a technical question not covered in existing policies, regulations, or requirements, guidance shall be provided to all Field officials by issuance within the established directive system, with clearance and approval of the issuance in accordance with established procedures. However, after the directive has been approved for issuance, the Field official requesting the guidance may be given advance advice of the determinations.
- 4-5. INTERPRETATION AND GUIDANCE ON BROAD NON-TECHNICAL QUESTIONS RELATING TO PROGRAM OR OTHER AREAS OF HUD ACTIVITY. Requests for program interpretation or guidance which are not technical in nature and are not related to a specific project case will usually involve matters of program or procedure having program-wide or
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geographical implications. Questions regarding these matters should be directed to Headquarters through supervisory channels in writing, for the signature of the Regional Administrator or the Regional Administrator's designee. Requests which are clearly within the responsibility of one Assistant Secretary should be sent directly to that Assistant Secretary. A copy should be provided for the Deputy Under Secretary for Field Coordination.

- 4-6. REQUESTS TO ESTABLISH PROCESSING PRIORITIES. Headquarters officials may initiate requests to the Field to establish priorities in the processing of particular projects or categories of projects.
- a. Headquarters requests for priority in the processing of a particular project must be made in writing through the chain of command.
 - b. Program Assistant Secretaries will designate a limited number of Headquarters officials who may request processing priorities. The Deputy Under Secretary for Field Coordination will coordinate the preparation of a consolidated list of these designations.
- 4-7. REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION AND SINGLE TIME AND RECURRING REPORTS. Headquarters and Field officials at any level of organization may request information from each other. Requests for information shall not be made if the data sought is available in existing reports. Requests for preparation and transmission of both single time and recurring report requirements are governed by Handbook 2160.5, HUD Reports Management System.
- 4-8. EXPEDITING HEADQUARTERS RESPONSES TO FIELD REQUESTS. Each Assistant Secretary will establish processes for assuring that Field requests for guidance receive prompt attention and response. Since the intent of these procedures is to encourage direct and rapid communication, these processes should avoid interfering with the direct channels of communication provided above.
- a. If Field officials are unable to secure timely attention to request for Headquarters interpretation or guidance, they may ask the Deputy Under Secretary for Field Coordination to follow-up on specific cases or to look into particular Headquarters program areas which are consistently late in responding.
 - b. The Deputy Under Secretary for Field Coordination will monitor the timeliness and responsiveness of Headquarters units in answering Field requests for advice or assistance.

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