

Adapting Standard Embassy Design to Specific Sites

Contributed by the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. General Services Administration

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SUMMARY

The U.S. General Services Administration has developed a standard embassy design (SED) template that better predicts construction cost and construction time dependent on embassy size.

BUILDING SAFE, SECURE EMBASSIES

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) uses a SED for most embassy construction projects. Designed by URS Corp., the SED lays out the process for planning, designing, and building new U.S. embassies and consulates. It comprises a series of documents, including site and building plans, specifications, design criteria, an application manual describing methods of adaptation for a specific site and project, and contract requirements.

The SED documents identify prescriptive requirements and illustrate required architectural and engineering concepts to ensure that new facilities are safe, secure, and functional. The OBO revised its standard space parameters; updated its design criteria; incorporated industry standards; and evaluated previous projects to incorporate best practices and solutions to common problems.

The SED facilitates the design-build method of project delivery, and its use is expected to reduce overall construction time—from site selection to project completion and occupancy—by 34 percent. The cost savings will enable the State Department to build more new embassies faster. The savings of \$63 million achieved on projects begun in fiscal year 2002 alone, for example, will enable OBO to construct one additional embassy or consulate.

The State Department views the SED as an important element in its strategic plan to replace, at reasonable cost, those embassies and consulates not secure enough to house U.S. diplomatic personnel and functions. The buildings are blast-resistant, and the interior configuration ensures that maintenance workers (usually local foreign nationals posing a potential security risk) rarely need access to secure office areas.

STANDARD EMBASSY DESIGN: SMALL*



Estimated construction cost:	less than \$47 million†
Approximate size:	4,300 gross square meters (gsm)
Estimated planning time:	6 months
Estimated design-build acquisition time:	6 months
Estimated design-construction time:	15 months
Estimated commissioning time:	2 months
Estimated total project time:	29 months

STANDARD EMBASSY DESIGN: MEDIUM*

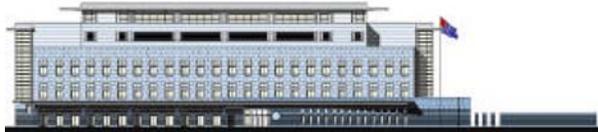


Estimated construction cost:	more than \$68 million†
Approximate size:	4,300–7,400 gsm
Estimated planning time:	6 months
Estimated design-build acquisition time:	6 months
Estimated design-construction time:	24 months
Estimated commissioning time:	2 months
Estimated total project time:	38 months

The SED consists of three prototype designs of varying size that serves as a starting point for the design of embassies and consulates in places such as Cape Town, South Africa, or Tashkent, Uzbekistan—places that do not typically receive the same level of design attention and funding as embassies in major world capitals such as Beijing, London, or Paris.

The designs may be customized for particular sites and climates. Different building materials may be selected based on the local availability of materials, the necessary skilled labor, and the appropriateness for the local climate and culture. On a case-by-case basis, the basic design elements might be organized into customized configurations.

STANDARD EMBASSY DESIGN: LARGE*



Estimated construction cost:	less than \$88 million†
Approximate size:	greater than 7,400 gsm
Estimated planning time:	6 months
Estimated design-build acquisition time:	6 months
Estimated design-construction time:	28 months
Estimated commissioning time:	2 months
Estimated total project time:	42 months

* Source: Joseph W. Toussaint, managing director, Project Execution, Office of Overseas Buildings Operations, U.S. Department of State

† Estimated cost in 2003 dollars, not including VAT and land costs.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 06.04.01 Getting Paid for International Work
- 06.04.02 Managing International Teams
- 06.04.13 Adjusting to Foreign Business Customs and Practices

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Practicing in a Global Market,” by Roger B. Williams, FAIA, and C. Richard Meyer, FAIA, *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 6, page 100. The *Handbook* can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending an e-mail to bookstore@aia.org.



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Key Terms

- Design
- Buildings
- Building by function
- Public facility



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