



The Senior Executive Service: A Management Primer

This “primer” was created by the Senior Executives Association (SEA) as an adjunct to “The Political Appointee’s Challenge: Minimize the time it takes for the career-political team to function well, enabling the Administration’s agenda to be met.” That document, also created by SEA, can be found on the website of the Council for Excellence in Government (www.excellenceintransition.org).

Both are intended as resources for new political appointees who will be working with career Senior Executives. SEA will be pleased to assist appointees with any questions they may have regarding the SES, and staff are available to provide briefings on these materials.

“What’s So Different About the SES Anyway?,” a PowerPoint which provides a much fuller explanation of the Senior Executive Service, is presented twice annually as a benefit of SEA membership. It is also available to Federal agencies as a presentation to SES Candidate Development Programs and SES orientation programs.



Designed in 1988, the SES flag was approved as the official SES flag in 1989 by OPM and registered as a trademark by SEA.

A Career Senior Executive

- Was appointed to his/her position following competition
- His/her executive qualifications have been certified by a Qualifications Review Board convened by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
- His/her personnel system is completely different from the General Schedule under which most Federal employees work

SES Staffing

- Agency head determines which positions are SES positions (within a number allocated by OPM)
- Staffing process is overseen by the agency or department’s Executive Resources Board; members are appointed by the agency head

- Two types of SES positions:
 - General (may be filled by a career, non-career, or limited term appointee) or
 - Career Reserved (must be filled by a career appointee)

The designation (from either one to the other) may not be changed without written approval from OPM.

SES Pay and Performance

The maximum rate of pay for a Senior Executive (if any agency's SES performance management system has been [certified by OPM and OMB](#)) is Executive Schedule II (\$ 177,000 for 2009).

The average salary of a Senior Executive in FY 2007 was \$158,865. The average salary adjustment in that year for executives rated "outstanding" was 3.9%.

- Adjustments are based solely on performance ratings
- May be reduced up to 10% for poor performance or misconduct
- Mandatory removal from SES if
 - a. 2 minimally successful ratings within 5 years, or
 - b. one unsatisfactory and 2 minimally satisfactory ratings within 3 years

If one unsatisfactory rating, must be moved to another SES position or removed from SES.

- Fallback rights to GS-15 (with saved SES pay) if removed for performance
- Appeal of removal or reduction in pay essentially limited to prohibited personnel practices

Cash Awards

Performance Awards

- Agency Pool: Up to 10% of aggregate career SES basic pay
- Amount: Minimum award (if given) is 5 percent of basic pay
Maximum is 20 percent of basic pay

Presidential Rank Awards



Each year, SEA honors Presidential Distinguished Rank Executives at a black-tie banquet at the Department of State Diplomatic Reception Rooms.

- Distinguished:
 - Limited to 1 percent of career SES corps annually
 - Award is 35 percent of salary
- Meritorious:
 - Limited to 5 percent of career SES corps annually
 - Award is 20 percent of salary

Recruitment, Retention, and Relocation Allowances (all Federal employees are eligible)

Unlike Other Federal Employees...

- Members of the Senior Executive Service hours of work are unlimited and they are not eligible for compensatory time
- Career Senior Executives may not participate in partisan elections by:
 - Making campaign speeches
 - Circulating nominating petitions
 - Running for office
 - Holding office in political organizations

(Hatch Act)



- Virtually all Senior Executives are prohibited from contacting their former agencies, with intent to influence, for one year after leaving government
(Post-employment ethics restrictions)

Your Duties as a Supervisor of SES:

Clarify criteria for success: Performance Plan

- Must be developed in consultation with a career executive and communicated to the executive on or before the beginning of an appraisal period

Individual Development Plan
Leadership Competencies Development Program (Based on OPM's Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs))

Participant Name: _____ Mentor Name: _____ Supervisor Name: _____

Executive Core Qualification 1: Leading Change
 This core qualification encompasses the ability to develop and implement an organizational vision which integrates key national and program goals, priorities, values, and other factors. Inherent to it is the ability to balance change and continuity—to continually strive to improve customer service and program performance within the basic Government framework, to create a work environment that encourages creative thinking and to maintain focus, intensity and persistence even under adversity.

Competencies: Continual Learning, Creativity and Innovation, External Awareness, Flexibility, Resilience, Service motivation, Strategic Thinking, Vision

Developmental Objectives (List specific competencies to develop)	Developmental Activities	Dates		Cost
		Beginning	Ending	

- Must describe:
 - The critical elements of his/her work and any other relevant performance elements. Elements must reflect individual and organizational performance with a focus on results
 - The requirements for fully successful performance
 - Elements must relate to agency's strategic mission if the agency's SES performance management plan is to be certified by OPM and OMB

Your Duties as a Supervisor of SES:

Provide Feedback: Progress Reviews:



- You must conduct at least one with the Senior Executive during the appraisal period (typically October 1 – September 30)

- You must provide feedback to him/her on progress in meeting the performance plan and provide advice (re: improving performance)
- The review may be informal
- The review may be used to modify performance elements or requirements to reflect changes since the plan was initially developed

Your Duties as a Supervisor of SES:

Appraise Performance: Annual Performance Review

- The performance rating will be used to determine both salary adjustment and also a performance award, a.k.a. bonus, if any
- A minimum of 90 days is required to evaluate a Senior Executive's performance
- You must review the evaluation with him/her
- The performance rating bonus recommendation will be reviewed by a Performance Review Board appointed by the agency head. More than one half of the members must be career executives

Your Duties as a Supervisor of SES:

Senior Executives can be reassigned to any SES position in the same agency for which he/she is qualified.

- 15 days written notice must be given for a non-geographic reassignment
- 60 days written notice if the reassignment involves relocation (outside the executive's commuting area)
- Before notice for geographic reassignment is given, you must consult with the executive



- If they refuse reassignment, they may retire (if eligible) or are subject to removal from the Federal service

However...

No involuntary reassignment or removal of a career Senior Executive is permitted within 120 days after the head of a department (not a component agency, except DoD) or a new immediate appraising supervisor (if political) takes office.

This statutory requirement for a “get acquainted period” provides an opportunity for the career executive and political appointee to get to know each other.

As is True with Regard to all Federal Employees:

Assignments cannot be made for a reason which constitutes:

- Illegal discrimination on the basis of age, race, sex, religion or other reason prohibited by EEO laws
- Retaliation against an employee for utilizing an appeals procedure, for cooperating in the conduct of an EEO or criminal investigation, or for whistle-blowing activities where the whistle-blowing is done in good faith and the allegations concern violations covered by whistle-blowing
- Coercing partisan political activities

Non-Career Senior Executives: The Differences



As of June 2008, there were 6,696 career executives and 670 non-career executives.

By law

- No more than 10 percent of the total number of SES allocated positions government-wide can be filled by non-career appointees
- No more than 25 percent of any agency’s SES allocated positions can be filled by non-career appointees

Non-Career Senior Executives:

- Are appointed without regard to competitive requirements
- White House Office of Presidential Personnel must approve his/her appointment
- Serve at the pleasure of the agency head
- Do not undergo scrutiny by a Qualifications Review Board
- Have no appeal rights
- 120 day “get acquainted” period does not apply
- Are not eligible for SES performance awards (though they may be for other agency awards)

The Senior Executives Association wishes you a successful term in partnership with the Career Senior Executive Service. The association will be pleased to respond to any requests for information or assistance.



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