

## U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

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SES

# About the Senior Executive Service

The Senior Executive Service (SES) is comprised of the men and women charged with leading the continuing transformation of government. These leaders possess well-honed executive skills and share a broad perspective of government and a public service commitment which is grounded in the Constitution. The keystone of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, the SES was designed to be a corps of executives selected for their leadership qualifications.

Members of the SES serve in the key positions just below the top Presidential appointees. SES members are the major link between these appointees and the rest of the Federal work force. They operate and oversee nearly every government activity in approximately 75 Federal agencies.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) manages the overall Federal executive personnel program. OPM staff provides the day-to-day oversight of and assistance to agencies as they develop, select, and manage their Federal executives.

To learn more, click on the below links.

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This page can be found on the web at the following url: [http://www.opm.gov/ses/about\\_ses/index.asp](http://www.opm.gov/ses/about_ses/index.asp)

**U.S. Office of Personnel Management**

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## Overview

The SES includes most managerial, supervisory, and policy positions classified above General Schedule (GS) grade 15 or equivalent positions in the Executive Branch of the Federal Government.

### These positions are excluded:

1. positions requiring appointment by the President with Senate confirmation;
2. legislative and judicial branch positions;
3. positions in law enforcement and intelligence gathering agencies, in the Foreign Service, and in other agencies excluded by statute or by the President.

Administrative law judges, members of boards of contract appeal, and positions in independent Government corporations (e.g., Tennessee Valley Authority) and in certain financial regulatory agencies also are excluded.

There are two types of positions and four types of appointments in the SES:

**Career Reserved positions** are those which, as defined in law, are "to ensure impartiality, or public's confidence of impartiality of government." These positions can only be filled by career appointees.

**General positions** may be filled by any type of SES appointee -- career, noncareer, limited term or limited emergency.

**Career appointments** may be to a General or Career Reserved position; rights of the individual are the same in either case. Incumbents are selected by agency merit staffing process and must have their executive qualifications approved by a Qualifications Review Board (QRB) convened by OPM.

**Noncareer appointments** are approved by OPM on a case-by-case basis and the appointment authority reverts to OPM when the noncareer appointee leaves the position. Appointments may be made only to General positions and cannot exceed 25% of the agency's SES position allocation. Governmentwide, only 10% of SES positions may be filled by noncareer appointees.

A **Limited Term appointment** may be made for up to 3 years, is nonrenewable and must be to an SES General position which will expire because of the nature of the work (e.g., a special project).

A **Limited Emergency appointment** is also a nonrenewable appointment, may be for up to 18

months, and must be to an SES General position established to meet a bona-fide, unanticipated, urgent need.

The total number of limited appointments may not exceed 5% of SES positions allocated Governmentwide. Each agency has a pool equal to 3% of its allocation for making limited appointments of career or career-type employees from outside the SES. OPM must approve use of this type of appointment authority in other cases.

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### History

The Senior Executive Service (SES) was established by Title IV of the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) of 1978 (P.L. 95-454, October 13, 1978) and became effective on July 13, 1979. The CSRA envisioned a Senior Executive Service whose members have shared values, a broad perspective of government, and solid executive skills. Its stated purpose was to "ensure that the executive management of the Government of the United States is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the nation and otherwise is of the highest quality." The Government's senior executives would be held accountable for individual and organizational performance. To achieve this purpose, the CSRA gave greater authority to agencies to manage their executive resources and assigned OPM the responsibility for governmentwide leadership, direction, and oversight.

Under the CSRA, the SES was set up as a "third" service, completely separate from the competitive and excepted services. It replaced over 60 separate executive personnel authorities covering from one to several thousand positions. Top management positions that had been subject to disparate rules and practices, with requirements for prior approval of almost every personnel action, were joined into a unified and distinct personnel system that provided for considerable agency authority and flexibility.

Since 1979, OPM's approach to executive resources management has gradually evolved from the traditional regulatory and procedure oriented approach to one that focuses on leadership, provides expert assistance and quality services to agencies and executives, and preserves merit principles and other governmentwide interests. Our goal today is to maintain a proper balance between the agencies' need for flexibility and OPM's responsibility to preserve the governmentwide interests of a corporate, merit-based executive service.

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## About the Senior Executive Service

### Contact Information

For questions regarding SES policies (i.e., law, regulations, and guidance) contact:

**Phone:** (202) 606-8046

**Fax:** (202) 606-1637

**Email:** [SESPolicy@opm.gov](mailto:SESPolicy@opm.gov)

For questions regarding SES operations (i.e, allocations and merit staffing) contact:

**Phone:** (202) 606-2246

**Fax:** (202) 606-2126

For questions regarding SES training contact:

**Phone:** (888) 676-9632

**Email:** [register@opm.gov](mailto:register@opm.gov)

Current federal employees should contact their servicing human resources office for questions regarding agency policies, operations and trainings related to the SES.

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# About the Senior Executive Service

## Frequently Asked Questions

### About SES

- What does the SES insignia symbolize?
- Are agencies permitted to use the SES insignia on letterhead, place cards, invitations, etc?
- What's the difference between SES, ST, and SL positions?

### Facts & Figures

- Where do I find information about the number of SES who receive Presidential Rank Awards and bonuses (performance awards)?

### Recruitment & Selection

- Where can I apply for SES positions?
- Do veterans receive hiring preference for SES positions?
- What kind of forms do I need to fill out when I apply for an SES position?
- The vacancy announcement says I must submit supplemental documents addressing how I meet the mandatory Executive Core Qualifications (ECOs). How do I address these?
- What are the 3 types of Qualifications Review Board (QRB) cases?
- I believe I am qualified for the Senior Executive Service because of the executive type positions I have held. How do I go about obtaining SES certification from OPM?
- If I send OPM my written responses to the Executive Core Qualifications (ECOs), will you give me your opinion and any suggestions for improvements?
- Do I need to address each Fundamental Competency within each Executive Core Qualification (ECO)?
- Will I be assessed on all of the competencies?

### Performance & Compensation

- What are the current pay rates for SES jobs?
- Is there a difference between acting in an SES position and being detailed to one? Am I entitled to SES pay while I am detailed to or acting in such a position?
- Am I eligible to earn credit hours if I participate in my agency's Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) Program?
- Can I earn compensatory time?

- What are the eligibility requirements for a "last move home" for a member of the SES?

## Executive Development

- Is there any program that will help me prepare to become an SES member?
- Where can I get information about SES Candidate Development Programs (SESCDPs)?

## Miscellaneous

- Are members of the SES subject to the Federal Hatch Act?
- Are members of the SES allowed to join Federal labor unions?
- What is the established protocol for SES members?
- Is there an association for the Senior Executive Service?



### Q. What does the SES insignia symbolize?

A. The SES insignia or emblem represents a keystone -- the center stone that holds all the stones of an arch in place. This represents the critical role of the SES as a central coordinating point between Government's political leadership which sets the political agenda and the line workers who implement it. Members of the SES translate that political agenda into reality. The upright lines in the center of the keystone represent a column in which individual SES members are united into a single leadership corps. There is no particular symbolism to the number of lines, which has varied over the years with different iterations of the logo. The SES insignia can not be modified.

### Q. Are agencies permitted to use the SES insignia on letterhead, place cards, invitations, etc?

A. Agencies are permitted to use the SES insignia for official Government business. The insignia can not be modified.

### Q. What's the difference between SES, ST, and SL positions?

A. **SES** positions are classified above GS-15 or equivalent. The position involves one or more of the criteria set forth in 5 USC 3132 (e.g., directing the work of an organization, monitoring progress toward organizational goals, etc.).

**ST (scientific and professional)** positions are classified above the GS-15 level and involve high-level research and development. ST positions are established under 5 USC 3104 and are always in the competitive service.

**SL (senior level)** positions are classified above GS-15. The work of the position does not meet the SES criteria nor does it involve the fundamental research and development responsibilities that are characteristic of ST positions. SL positions may be in either the competitive or excepted service.

**Q. Where do I find information about the number of SES who receive Presidential Rank Awards and bonuses (performance awards)?**

A. Historical information about both types of awards is published in OPM's "The Fact Book & Federal Civilian Workforce Statistics".

**Q. Where can I apply for SES positions?**

A. All SES vacancies are advertised on OPM's website: [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov). - From this site, you may download announcements for vacancies of interest to you.

**Q. Do veterans receive hiring preference for SES positions?**

A. No. The reason is that 5 USC 2108(3) which defines the term "preference eligible" provides that this term does not include applicants for, or members of, the Senior Executive Service.



**Q. What kind of forms do I need to complete when I apply for an SES position?**

A. You may submit a resume or an Optional Application for Federal Employment (OF-612 which you may download from OPM's website) in accordance to the vacancy announcement instructions. Check the vacancy announcement for additional forms or documents required by the agency/department to which you are applying. Take particular note of the information you must provide if you submit a resume instead of an OF-612.

**Q. The vacancy announcement says I must submit supplemental documents addressing how I meet the mandatory Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs). How do I address these?**

A. The "Guide to Senior Executive Service Qualifications" contains information about the ECQs and samples you may use to develop your own statements.

**Q. What are the 3 types of Qualifications Review Board (QRB) cases?**

A. **Criterion A** cases are based on demonstrated executive experience. Candidates must demonstrate that they have experience/competence in all 5 ECQs.

**Criterion B** cases are based on successful participation in an OPM approved SES Candidate Development Program (SESCDP). Candidates who compete governmentwide and successfully complete a CDP are eligible for non-competitive appointment to the SES. (However, successful completion does not guarantee placement in the SES.)

**Criterion C** cases are based on the candidate's having special or unique qualities that indicate a likelihood of success in the SES. Candidates must demonstrate that they have the qualifications for the position and the potential to quickly acquire full competence in the 5 ECQs. The package submitted for



QRB approval must contain the agency's assessment of why the selectee uniquely qualifies for the position, and an Individual Development Plan that focuses on the specific ECQs that need to be enhanced.

**Q. I believe I am qualified for the Senior Executive Service because of the executive type positions I have held. How do I go about obtaining SES certification from OPM?**

A. You must first identify a position to apply for. Agencies announce their SES vacancies on OPM's website [USAJOBS](http://USAJOBS). From there, you may download information on vacancies of interest to you, complete the application procedures, and submit your application to the agency that has the vacancy. The agency submits the executive core qualifications of the person selected to a Qualifications Review Board (QRB) convened by OPM. The QRB must certify all selectees before they can be appointed to the SES. Further information about the selection process is available elsewhere on this site.

**Q. If I send OPM my written responses to the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs), will you give me your opinion and any suggestions for improvements?**

A. No. OPM will not pre-review ECQ statements. To do so would be a conflict of interest since we administer the Qualification Review Boards, and would also provide the requestor with an unfair advantage over other applicants.



**Q. Do I need to address each Fundamental Competency within each Executive Core Qualification (ECQ)?**

A. No. Because the Fundamental Competencies are cross-cutting, they should be addressed over the course of the ECQ narrative. It is not necessary to address them directly as long as the narrative, in its totality, shows mastery of these competencies on the whole.

**Q. Will I be assessed on all of the competencies?**

A. No. You will be assessed on each ECQ, not on the individual competencies (although you are expected to demonstrate mastery of the Fundamental Competencies somewhere within your narrative statement).

**Q. What are the current pay rates for SES jobs?**

A. The current pay rates for SES jobs can be found at <http://www.opm.gov/oca/payrates/index.asp>.

**Q. Is there a difference between acting in an SES position and being detailed to one? Am I entitled to SES pay while I am detailed to or acting in such a position?**

A. There is some difference between acting in and being detailed to an SES position. OPM defines "acting" to mean a situation in which (for instance) a Deputy's position description includes authority and responsibility to perform the duties of an SES level Director's position in that Director's absence.

This "acting" authority is meant to cover a short term absence or vacancy. When an acting assignment extends to the lengths of time discussed in 5 CFR 317.903, the provisions of that section, including requirements for competition, apply. These restrictions are appropriate since the opportunity to serve under detail in an SES position may provide an advantage in competing for SES positions in the future. OPM regulations on details to SES positions are found at 5 CFR 317.903. Under that section, a detail includes "the temporary assignment of a non-SES member to an SES position, with the expectation that the employee will return to the official position of record upon expiration of the detail." The regulation provides that, "For purposes of pay and benefits, the employee continues to encumber the position from which detailed." That is, a GS-15 who is detailed to a SES position continues to be paid at the GS-15 rate of pay of his or her position of record.

Paragraph (b) of the regulation (5 CFR 317.903) describes procedures and time lengths for detailing a non-SES member to an SES position. It requires agencies to use competitive procedures for any detail exceeding 240 days. Agencies must receive OPM approval before detailing for longer than 240 days a non-SES member to an SES position that supervises other members of the SES.



**Q. Am I eligible to earn credit hours if I participate in my agency's Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) Program?**

A. No. Credit hours are a form of premium pay, SES members are not eligible. (5 CFR 610.408)

**Q. Can I earn compensatory time?**

A. No. Compensatory time is another form of premium pay, SES members are not eligible. (5 CFR 610.408)

**Q. What are the eligibility requirements for a "last move home" for a member of the SES?**

A. You must be a career member of the SES to be eligible for a "last move home." SES members on non-career and limited-term/emergency appointments are not eligible. Under 5 U.S.C. 5724(a)(3), retiring career appointees are entitled to travel, transportation, and household goods expenses to the place where they will live if:

- They retire after 9/22/88.
- They were moved geographically as a career appointee in the SES (either reassigned or transferred in the career SES or appointed into the career SES at the new duty station); and
- At the time of the geographic move, they were eligible for optional retirement, or were within 5 years of optional retirement, or were eligible for discontinued service retirement.

The General Services Administration regulates payment of travel and transportation expenses. Contact your agency's travel or human resources office for further information and guidance.

**Q. Is there any program that will help me prepare to become an SES member?**

A. Yes. SES Candidate Development Programs are competitive programs designed to develop the executive qualifications of employees with strong executive potential. Participation in an SESCDP is not a prerequisite for obtaining an SES appointment.

**Q. Where can I get information about SES Candidate Development Programs (SESCDPs)?**

A. Visit <http://www.opm.gov/ses/recruitment/fedcdp.asp> for information about SES Candidate Development Programs. You may also visit <http://www.opm.gov/ses/recruitment/fedcdp.asp> for information about OPM's Federal Candidate Development Program (FED CDP). Agencies and departments that recruit for SESCDP participants must advertise on OPM's website [USAJOBS](http://USAJOBS).



**Q. Are members of the SES subject to the Federal Hatch Act?**

A. Yes. The Hatch Act, administered by the Office of Special Counsel (OSC), restricts the political activity of executive branch employees of the Federal Government, District of Columbia government and some state and local employees who work in connection with federally funded programs. Go to [OSC's website](http://OSC's website) for additional information.

**Q. Are members of the SES allowed to join Federal labor unions?**

A. Union membership is not prohibited. However, a labor union cannot represent a member of the SES in a grievance, and its contract provisions do not apply to the SES.

**Q. What is the established protocol for SES members?**

A. For guidance on SES protocol, contact your agency's human resources office.

**Q. Is there an association for the Senior Executive Service?**

A. Yes. The Senior Executive Association (SEA) is a professional association representing the interests of the members of the career Senior Executive Service. SEA maintains a website where members may access valuable resources from legal help (ie: professional liability insurance) and member forums to information on how to obtain SES flags, lapel pins, and other SES items.



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