Senior Executive Service

Executive Core Qualifications

Preparing for the SES
Topics

- The Senior Executive Service (SES)
- The Qualifications Review Board (QRB) and its functions
- Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) and leadership competencies
- CCAR – Challenge, Context, Action, Result
- Do’s and Don’ts
The SES was established by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (CSRA).

Top management positions were placed into a distinct personnel system, which provided agency authority and flexibility.

Members of the SES are selected for their leadership qualifications and serve in the key positions just below the top Presidential appointees.

SES members are the major link between Presidential appointees and the rest of the Federal work force.
SES Responsibilities and Expectations

- SES jobs classifiable above GS15, with greater scope and complexity
- SES members frequently report to or interact with non-career leadership
- SES members supervise GS or other SES; SES positions usually consist of at least 25% supervisory responsibility
- SES members expected to possess executive skills not typically required of GS employees, e.g. vision, strategic thinking, external awareness, entrepreneurship
## Compensation

### Certified SES Performance System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Base Pay</th>
<th>Aggregate Limit on Bonuses and Other Compensation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to Executive Schedule II</td>
<td>$119,545</td>
<td>$179,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to Vice President’s Pay</td>
<td></td>
<td>$230,700</td>
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</table>

### Non-Certified SES Performance System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Base Pay</th>
<th>Aggregate Limit on Bonuses and Other Compensation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to Executive Schedule III</td>
<td>$119,554</td>
<td>$165,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Up to Executive Schedule I</td>
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</table>
Benefits

- Separate personnel system
- 8 hours annual leave per pay period (720 hour max limit)
- Sabbaticals (must meet requirements)
- Performance Awards
- Presidential Rank Awards
- Recruitment, Relocation and Retention bonuses of up to 25% of basic pay
- Student Loan Repayment (varies by agency)
- Home Leave
- Last move home
Other Provisions

- Not eligible for premium pay (e.g. overtime pay, Sunday premium pay, holiday premium pay, night pay, standby duty pay, and hazardous duty pay)
- Not eligible for compensatory time off
- Not eligible for credit hours
Hiring Timeline

- Agency posts vacancy announcement for minimum 14 days.
- Agency given 90 working days from date of vacancy announcement closing to conduct ERB evaluation and selection.
- Agency submits ECQ package to OPM for presentation to a QRB.
- OPM conducts QRB review within 2 weeks of receipt.
QRB Case Disposition

• An OPM staff member serves as a QRB Administrator for each Board.
• The Board members independently review one QRB case at a time.
• The final decision to approve or disapprove is by majority vote.
• QRB decisions are recorded along with any recommendations, and the selecting agency is notified usually the same day. The agency may then appoint the individual to the SES.
• QRB certification does not expire.
Qualifications Review Board

- Certifies the executive qualifications of all new career SES appointees and Candidate Development Program graduates.
- Is composed of three SES, each from a different agency, with at least two Board members being career appointees.
- Convenes weekly and virtually.
- Names of members and their organizations not subject to release.
Role of the QRB

- Assess the overall scope, quality, and depth of a candidate's executive qualifications within the context of the five Executive Core Qualifications.
- Determines whether the candidate has demonstrated executive level expertise and possesses the executive qualifications needed for entry and success in the SES.
- Makes the final determination about the candidate's executive core qualifications.
- Ensures that all new SES or SESCDP graduates have a broad perspective of government. The focus is on executive skills and not technical expertise.
- Does not rate, rank, or compare one candidate's qualifications against those of other candidates.
Submission Criterion

Agencies forward the candidate's application package to OPM for presentation to a QRB on the basis of one of the following criteria:

Criterion (A) - demonstrated executive experience

Criterion (B) - successful completion of a formal, OPM-approved SES candidate development program (CDP). Candidates that are certified by a QRB may be appointed to the SES without further competition (must still meet any position specific mandatory technical qualifications).

Criterion (C) - possession of special or unique qualifications that indicate a likelihood of executive success
Specific reasons and areas of weakness for disapprovals are provided to the agency. Agencies may:

**First time disapproval:**

- Make revisions to this case
- Use an alternative action (e.g. resubmitting as a Criterion C)
- Resubmit the case to another QRB, as is

**Second time disapproval:**

- A new case on the same individual for the same position may not be submitted until the candidate has acquired additional qualifying experience in those areas where deficiencies were noted by the QRB.
  - A new merit staffing competition to credit the additional experience is required and the closing date of the new announcement must be at least 12 months later than the closing date of the original announcement.
Executive Core Qualifications

• Describe the leadership skills needed to succeed in the SES (5 U.S.C. 3393)

• Reinforce the concept of an “SES corporate culture”

• Assess executive experience and potential (not technical expertise)

• Measure whether an individual has the broad executive skills needed to succeed in a variety of SES positions

• Are interdependent (successful performance in the SES requires competence in each ECQ)

• Must be certified by a QRB convened by OPM for all initial career appointments to the SES
Executive Core Qualification & Competencies

5 Meta-Leadership SES core qualifications:

- Leading Change
- Leading People
- Results driven
- Business Acumen
- Building Coalitions

28 competencies – personal and professional attributes that are critical to successful performance in the SES:

- 22 competencies specific to ECQs
- 6 Fundamental competencies serve as the foundation for success in each of the ECQs
Leading Change

Involves the ability to bring about strategic change, both within and outside the organization, to meet organizational goals.

- Inherent is the ability to establish an organizational vision and to implement it in a continuously changing environment.
Leading Change Competencies

• Creativity and Innovation – New insights, encourages new ideas and innovations

• External Awareness – Up to date on local, national and international policies and trends

• Flexibility – Open to change and adapts to changing conditions or unexpected obstacles

• Resilience – Deals effectively with pressure

• Strategic Thinking – Formulates objectives and priorities and implements plans

• Vision – Acts as catalyst for organizational change and translates vision into action
Leading Change
What should the focus be?

In describing your experience, here are some questions to ask:

• What was my organizational vision?

• How did I transcend my vision into action? What initiative did I take?

• Did I strategically initiate and implement transformational change?

• How did I deal with unexpected organizational changes/obstacles (to internal/external pressures)

• Did my vision achieve measurable results that impacted the organization?
Leading People

Involves the ability to lead people toward meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals.

• Inherent is the ability to provide an inclusive workplace that fosters the development of others, facilitates cooperation and teamwork, and supports constructive resolution of conflicts.
Leading People Competencies

• **Conflict Management** – Anticipates and takes steps to prevent counter-productive confrontations

• **Leveraging Diversity** – Fosters an inclusive workplace where diversity and differences are valued

• **Developing Others** – Develops the ability of others to perform and contribute to the organization

• **Team Building** – Inspires and fosters team commitment. Facilitates cooperation and motivates to accomplish goals
Leading People
What should the focus be?

In describing your experience, here are some questions to ask:

• What is the largest staff size I have led? What challenges did leading a large staff present?

• Was I leading versus managing?

• How did I lead my team through a challenge? How did I motivate them to achieve set goals?

• How did I contribute to the professional development of my employees (individually or as a team)

• How did I deal with conflicts that arose within my team?

• How did I leverage diversity amongst my team? (age, cultural, race, skill levels)
Results Driven

Involves the ability to meet organizational goals and customer expectations.

• Inherent is the ability to make decisions that produce high-quality results by applying technical knowledge, analyzing problems, and calculating risks.
Results Driven Competencies

• **Accountability** – Holds self and others accountable for measurable high-quality, timely and cost-effective results

• **Customer Service** – Anticipates and meets the needs of both internal and external customers

• **Decisiveness** – Makes well-informed, effective, timely decisions with limited data

• **Entrepreneurship** – Positions the organization for success by identifying new opportunities

• **Problem Solving** – Identifies and analyzes problems

• **Technical Credibility** – Appropriately applies principles, procedures, regulations related to specialized expertise
Results Driven
What should the focus be?

In describing your experience, here are some questions to ask:

• How did the priorities and objectives I set lead to high quality/quantity results?

• How did I address the needs of customers and stakeholders (internal and external)?

• How did my decisions and actions impact results?

• Did I identify problems and implement solutions that resulted in improving services?
Business Acumen

Involves the ability to manage human, financial, and information resources strategically.
Business Acumen (Competencies)

- **Financial Management** – Prepares, justifies, and administers program budget. Oversees procurement and contracting.

- **Human Capital Management** – Recruits, builds, and manages multi-sector workforce and manages a variety of work situations.

- **Technology Management** – Makes effective use of technology to achieve results.
Business Acumen
What should the focus be?

In describing your experience, here are some questions to ask:

• What is my experience in creating and administering budgets and resources?

• How did I procure and utilize resources? What obstacles did I face in doing this?

• What was the size of budget and resources I managed? How much money saved?

• What is my experience with a multi-sector workforce? Percentage of backlog eliminated/reduced? Length of processing time reduced?

• How did I utilize technology to create or improve programs?
Building Coalitions

Involves the ability to build coalitions internally and with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, nonprofit and private sector organizations, foreign governments, or international organizations to achieve common goals.
Building Coalitions (Competencies)

- **Partnering** – Develops networks and builds alliances
- **Political Savvy** – Perceives organizational and political realities and acts accordingly
- **Influencing/Negotiating** – Persuades others and builds consensus through give and take. Gains cooperation from others to accomplish goals
Building Coalitions
What should the focus be?

In describing your experience, here are some questions to ask:

• What groups/networks (internal and external) did I partner with to achieve a goal?

• How did I bring groups together? What challenges did I face doing that?

• What did I do to build coalitions?
Fundamental Competencies

Should be addressed over the complete ECQ narrative. The narrative, in its totality, shows mastery of these fundamental competencies overall.

Competencies:

• Interpersonal Skills
• Oral Communication
• Integrity/Honesty
• Written Communication
• Continual Learning
• Public Service Motivation
ECQ statement should include no more than 2 examples (per ECQ) of relevant experience that matches the ECQ criteria. Describe specific challenges, actions and results.

• **Challenge** – describe a specific problem or goal

• **Context** – individuals and groups you worked with and/or environment in which you worked to address a challenge

• **Action** – what you specifically did to address the challenge

• **Result** – measures/outcomes that had some impact on the organization. This demonstrates the quality and effectiveness of leadership skills
(CCAR) Model

Quick Example
Energy Information Administration (EIA) lacked a formal, corporate, and strategic approach to managing and operating its web assets. My vision was to completely revamp the way EIA approached its web management activities by developing an integrated, corporate approach. Program officials strongly resisted my initial efforts to consolidate web management as they feared that giving up the existing approach would cause them to lose control of their resources.
The agency had taken a completely decentralized approach to web operations, with each program office independently managing its own substantial web holdings. Therefore, the agency hosted a myriad of websites and applications that had disjointed navigation models and produced a high amount of redundancy and duplication.
Action

To overcome resistance, I met with them individually and in groups, and strongly championed the integrated approach. I demonstrated how the current approach was highly duplicative and inefficient, and was hampering progress in advancing its missions and meeting customer needs. To garner broader support, I created and led a study group in examining critical issues and also led them in a series of exercises to gain an understanding of the major shortcomings of the existing website.
As a result of my leadership, the corporate approach to web management became a prominently featured in EIA’s Strategic Plan, making it one of the agency’s top priorities over the next five years. Progress in implementing the new plan has already made the EIA web a much more dynamic and responsive tool that is now widely used by customers and stakeholders.
Sample Exercise

Pass

vs.

Fail
General Concepts

Make Sure:

• Write-up is focused on demonstrated executive leadership
• Examples are less than 10 years old
• Candidate followed CCAR model
• Examples were clear and easy to follow
• Not to leave open ended questions throughout write-up
• Examples are relevant to leadership
• Majority of competencies are addressed
• Examples organized well
Reviewing and Writing Tips

Make sure to:

• Strictly adhere to 1 inch margins, 12pt font and 10 page narrative limit. (Number pages)

• Limit introductory summaries to 2 paragraphs (it counts towards 10 page narrative limit)

• Follow the CCAR (Challenge-Context-Action-Result) model

• Quantify experience (numbers, percentages, and timelines)

• Use measurable results (whenever possible)

• Use action oriented verbs (Active Voice vs passive voice)
Reviewing and Writing Tips

Make sure to:

- Describe experience and accomplishments in a clear and organized manner. Tell the story and be succinct.
- Use personal "I" instead of the third person
- Write in Layman’s terms
- Proofread
- Spell out and limit the use of Acronyms
Avoid:

• Using the same example for more than one ECQ

• Vague statements

• Statements that describe personal beliefs, philosophies, or commitment to a social or political cause

• Grammatical errors and typos

• Using examples or experiences that are older than 10 years
Avoid:

• Referring readers to other parts of the ECQ narrative
• Overuse of bolding and underlining
• Making disparaging remarks about former managers
• Revealing information about political affiliation or activities
• Using bureaucratic words and expressions
• Including ECQ definitions
Resources

Guide to SES Qualifications

Welcome to the Senior Executive Service

"What is the SES?" The Senior Executive Service (SES) is comprised of the men and women charged with leading the continuing transformation of our government. This dedicated corps of executives shares a commitment to public service and a set of democratic values grounded in the fundamental ideals of the Constitution. As the leaders of our Federal civilian workforce, Senior Executives strive each day to create a more citizen centered, result oriented Federal Government.

More About SES
Questions?

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Executive Resources/Employee Development