

Frequently Asked Questions for Departments and Agencies on Implementing the Executive Order to Strengthen the Senior Executive Service

Q: Who is covered under the Executive Order (E.O.) 13714 Strengthening the Senior Executive Service?

A: Please see the chart below which shows which provisions of the E.O. apply to career and non-career Senior Executive Service (SES), Senior Level (SL) and Senior Scientific or Professional (ST), and SES-equivalent positions in the U.S. Federal Government. Unless otherwise noted, all executives are covered under the E.O., including SES at the Offices of the Inspector General.

Type of Executive	Career*		Non-Career
	SES	SL/ST	
ACTIONS:			
<i>Immediate Government-Wide Implementation:</i>			
Performance Awards	Yes	Yes	
Review/Revise Pay Policy	Yes	Yes	
Evaluate Qualifications Review Board Process	Yes		
Streamline Hiring	Yes		
Rotations	Yes		
<i>Phased Implementation:</i>			
Talent Succession & Management	Yes		
Executive Tracker	Yes		
Executive Development	Yes		
Leadership Assessments	Yes		Yes
Onboarding	Yes	Yes	Yes

* As stated in the E.O., agency heads shall consider how to address SES equivalents consistent with existing agency authorities but agencies are encouraged to include SES equivalents where appropriate.

Oversight and President's Management Council (PMC) Sub-Committee:

Q1: Who will serve on the PMC Subcommittee and what role will career leaders play in driving implementation and ensuring continuity between administrations?

A1: The E.O. creates a subcommittee of the PMC, comprised of deputy heads of agencies, to advise the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), members of the PMC, and the President on implementation of the E.O. and additional ways to strengthen and improve the SES workforce. Senior leadership commitment from the PMC members is critical to the success of these reforms. The Subcommittee is comprised of members of the PMC, who are political appointees and have selected two members of the career SES to advise them. The career SES members will play a critical role in ensuring continuity in implementing these reforms between administrations. The current PMC Subcommittee consists of the following political appointees: Andrew Mayock, Senior Advisor to OMB Director on Performance and Personnel Management; Beth Cobert, Acting Director of OPM; Nani Coloretti, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development; Denise Roth, Administrator of General Services Administration; and Stan Meiburg, Deputy Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. The two career members are Robert Lightfoot, Associate Administrator of National Aeronautics and Space Administration and Veronica Hinton, Associate Chief Human Capital Officer of Department of Treasury.

The E.O. also directs the PMC Subcommittee to work closely with the Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) Council, many of whom are career members of the SES, to implement these reforms.

In addition, the White House Advisory Group on SES, comprised of 24 career leaders (SES, SL/ST, and one GS-15) from across Government, will remain engaged and will provide support and advice. These SES employees were charged by the President with making many of the recommendations and will play a critical role in implementing the reforms within their respective agencies and departments.

Finally, each agency in the first implementation stage (Phase 1) will be required to select a Senior Accountable Official (SAO) to drive the implementation of these reforms, with the encouragement that this SAO should report directly to the deputy agency head on the SES/SL/ST reform initiatives. If a non-career SAO is selected, a career deputy should also be named. Involvement from the career SES/SL/ST/SES equivalents will ensure continuity between administrations. Phase 2 and 3 agencies were also asked to identify an SAO for OPM and OMB communications on government-wide implementation activities.

Awards:

Q2: How will the E.O. change the current guidance on performance awards for SES/ST/SL?

A2:

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and OPM will revise current guidance on implementing an increased Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 spending limit (7.5%) on aggregate spending on agency performance awards for the SES/ST/SL employees. OPM/OMB will issue additional

guidance to strongly encourage agencies to allocate additional amounts available for awards in a manner that provides meaningfully greater rewards to top performers. Agencies should apply the new awards guidance starting in FY 2017 for awards that reflect performance in FY 2016. For any questions on awards, please send an email to OPM at sespolicy@opm.gov.

Pay:

Q3: How might my agency go about implementing the pay provision in the E.O.?

A3: Government-wide regulation gives agencies broad discretion on setting pay upon initial career SES appointment (5 CFR 534.404(a)). An authorized agency official may set the rate of basic pay at any rate within the SES rate range, subject to the limitations on maximum rates in 5 CFR 534.403(a). In setting the initial pay for a career SES appointee, such authorized agency official should include the rates of pay, including locality pay, of the applicable subordinate General Schedule (GS) employees in the considerations used to set initial SES pay.

Pay adjustments under 5 CFR 534.404(b) for career SES members must generally be performance (i.e., ratings) based; however, in accordance with 5 CFR 534.404(c)(4)(ii) – reassignment – or 534.404(h) – transfer – it may be appropriate for the agency to take into consideration subordinate GS pay (e.g., in determining complexity and scope of responsibilities) to determine if a pay adjustment is warranted. OPM would not expect to see a pay increase for any career SES member reassigned or transferred due to poor performance under 5 CFR 430.309(c)(1).

As stated in the E.O., agencies shall implement policies, as permitted by and consistent with applicable law and regulation. If you have questions about whether your agency’s policy or an action taken to set or adjust a career SES member’s pay is consistent with law and regulation, you may contact Senior Executive Services and Performance Management, in OPM’s Employee Services, at (202) 606-8046 or sespolicy@opm.gov.

Q4: How will actions affecting initial pay setting and pay adjustments affect OPM certification of my agency’s performance appraisal system?

A4: The requirements for certification have not changed. To be certified, an agency’s performance appraisal system still must make meaningful distinctions based upon relative performance in pay adjustments and awards, and such adjustments and awards must be made in accordance with the agency’s performance appraisal system, 5 CFR 430.404(a)(9) and 5 CFR 534.404 and 5 CFR 534.505-507. Any additional pay increases made to meet the actions outlined in the E.O. must be made under appropriate authorities and explained in the comments section of the annual data call for the applicable time/appraisal period when seeking certification.

Q5: Does the pay comparison of the SES get made with the base and locality of the GS subordinates?

A5: Yes, consistent with U.S.C. 5304(g)(1) and 5 CFR 531.606(a), the comparison should be made with the GS base and locality pay rates. In doing so, agencies should take into account the

full range of subordinate base and locality payments when determining the appropriate rate of pay for the supervising executive.

Q6: Should agencies implementing the provision to provide pay to SES/ST/SL at a level exceeding the pay of their subordinates take into consideration the pay of subordinates that are SES/ST/SL or another non-GS classification?

A6: No, only the pay of GS subordinates should be considered in implementing this SES/ST/SL pay provision.

The E.O. states the heads of agencies with SES positions that supervise GS employees shall implement policies, as permitted by and consistent with applicable law and regulation, for initial pay setting and pay adjustments, as appropriate, for career SES appointees that will over time result in compensation exceeding the rates of pay, including locality pay, of their subordinate GS employees. Similar policies shall be implemented by heads of agencies for Senior Professional (i.e., SL or ST) employees that supervise GS employees.

Therefore, the provision applies only to the granting of pay to SES/SL/ST at a level above their GS direct reports in setting rates of initial pay and in some limited instances (e.g., reassignment or transfer) when adjusting pay, in accordance with law and regulation. Agencies should keep in mind that SES/SL/ST are covered under pay-for-performance systems where annual pay increases are generally based on the performance of the individual, including contributions to organizational performance.

Q7: Does this new pay setting provision relate to a comparison of the salaries of only the GS direct reports of SES/ST/SL employees, or to a comparison with any GS employees under the supervisory command of the SES/ST/SL (e.g., second-level and third-level reports)?

A7: At this time, this provision only applies to a comparison of pay between the SES/ST/SL employee and his/her direct GS reports (e.g., those subordinates for whom the SES/ST/SL serves as the Performance Rating Official, Time and Attendance authorizer, accountable official for discipline matters, probationary matters, assignments, travel approval, etc.).

Q8: Do recruitment and/or retention bonuses given to SES/ST/SL get added into the consideration/calculation when making comparisons to GS subordinates?

A8: No, this pay setting provision applies only to the SES/ST/SL salary level. A recruitment and/or retention bonus paid to an SES/ST/SL employee is not considered for the purposes of this provision.

Q9: Does this new pay rule in essence mandate that agencies start their SES/ST/SL salaries at the Level IV rather than at the Level V? This would appear to correct any future occurrence of this situation.

A9: No, subordinate pay rates will be one additional factor to consider when setting the rate of pay for an incoming supervisory SES/SL/ST or effecting a reassignment or transfer. After considering the current pay rate and qualifications of the incoming supervisor, and other criteria as specified in 5 CFR 534.404(a) and 534.506, agencies should consider the full range of

salaries, including both base and locality rates, earned by their direct report subordinate GS employees to determine if any additional adjustment would be needed to the salary offered to the individual.

Qualifications Review Board (QRB) and Agency Hiring Practices:

Q10: What changes will OPM make to the QRB process? What changes are agencies required to make to their hiring processes?

A10: While the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs), upon which individuals are evaluated for selection to a senior executive position, will remain in place, OPM will assess the current QRB process to see if any improvements might be made. OPM intends to identify new or alternative types of materials agencies could submit to the QRB to demonstrate ECQ's. ECQ narratives will continue to be an option for QRB submission; however, other options, such as the QRB Template or Accomplishment of Record, will also be made available to agencies. Based on this guidance, agencies may consider all available submission options and select the option(s) best suited for their organizations as well as the specific requirements of positions for which they are hiring. OPM provided guidance to agencies on March 11, 2016 outlining a set of options for submission materials that will allow applicants to meet QRB requirements (see <https://www.chcoc.gov/content/executive-order-%E2%80%93strengthening-senior-executive-service-guidance-qualifications-review>).

As a result of the guidance and new QRB submission options, agencies will have 120 days (July 9, 2016) to evaluate their current hiring process to determine if it can be made more efficient and effective. Agencies should review and simplify the application requirements, as appropriate, and determine whether they are requesting only critically necessary technical qualifications, with the goal of minimizing required application materials that may deter qualified applicants from applying. Agencies should also identify ways to assess applicant qualifications while reducing the burden on both applicants and human resources staff, if possible. Changes to the hiring process should be made with the goal of reaching a diverse pool of talent from which to select the best-qualified candidate for the position. OPM requests that agencies share their draft streamlining plans by July 1 so that best practices may be identified and shared with other agencies at the July 15 President's Management Council. For any further questions, please contact OPM at sespolicy@opm.gov.

Q11: Will this Executive Order change the current OPM guidance on “time-to-hire” for submission of QRB cases for career senior executives?

A11: No, OPM continues to require agencies to complete their hiring process and submit QRB cases within 90 business days of the closing date of the announcement, as indicated in an OPM Memorandum to Chief Human Capital Officers in April 26, 2006 (see <https://www.chcoc.gov/content/qualifications-review-board-submission-timelines>).

Annual Talent Management and Succession Planning Process:

Q12: My agency already has an annual senior executives succession planning process in place. Will we need to change our practices?

A12: The Executive Order is meant to elevate best practices and encourage an enterprise view towards senior executive talent management. OPM recognizes that some agencies already have a mature senior executive succession planning process in place to evaluate organizational and individual developmental needs of SES/SL/ST/SES equivalents and encourages those agencies to continue those practices and mentor other agencies. OPM hosted a forum in February 2016 where agencies with promising practices shared their programs. OPM will provide some guidance in Summer 2016 on developing a talent management and succession planning process. OPM encourages agencies to share their succession planning templates in order to identify and share best practices. For any questions, please send an email to OPM at sespolicy@opm.gov.

Development:

Q13: The Executive Order requires executives to participate in at least one developmental activity each year. How should agencies define “developmental activity?”

A13: A developmental activity is any work assignment(s) that provides exposure to different leadership experiences and perspectives to promote personal and professional growth and development. As outlined in OPM’s Executive Development Best Practices Guide (<https://www.chcoc.gov/content/release-opm%E2%80%99s-executive-development-best-practices-guide>), there are many ways that individuals can grow and develop. Development might include learning that takes place on the job and is experiential in nature; it could take place in the form of meaningful relationships, coaching and feedback, or formal training. The Best Practices guide outlines a broad set of developmental activities that agencies and SES/SL/ST/SES equivalents can consider.

OPM also encourages agencies to take advantage of the SES Situational Mentoring Program and the Federal Coaching Network, which are available to agencies at no cost. The SES Situational Mentoring Program is a Government-wide program that provides Federal executives, particularly those who are new to the SES or transitioning to different roles, with timely advice and support from experienced executive mentors (contact sesdevelopment@opm.gov for more information and for your agency’s Point of Contact). The Federal Coaching Network includes a database of Federal internal coaches that are available Government-wide to help individuals reach peak performance (contact sesdevelopment@opm.gov for more information and for your agency’s Point of Contact). Coaching is one of the most effective executive development activities, and is particularly useful during transitional periods.

OPM’s Federal Executive Institute, as well as other executive development institutions, is available to educate, train, and facilitate development for the SES. More information about these training programs can be found here: <https://leadership.opm.gov/index.aspx>.

Mobility and Rotations:

Q14: How are rotations being defined? Do reassignments count? What about details?

A14: In the Executive Order, rotations must be a minimum of 120 days, including to different departments, agencies, subcomponents, functional areas, sectors, or non-Federal partners. Agencies are encouraged to take advantage of existing authorities, such as the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) and Sabbatical authorities, to facilitate mobility. OPM released guidance on

January 29, 2016 that defines rotations and clarifies the various ways agencies can meet the E.O. requirement for executive rotations (see <https://www.chcoc.gov/content/executive-order-guidance-%E2%80%93-strengthening-senior-executive-service-implementing-executive>).

Q15: How often are SES required to rotate? Must all SES in an agency rotate? Must every agency rotate at least 15 percent of its executives?

A15: The E.O. sets a goal to have 15 percent of executives Government-wide rotate each year. The frequency of SES rotations in your agency will depend on agency and individual needs. Not every executive in an agency is required to rotate. The goal of the requirement is “to improve talent development, mission delivery and collaboration of executives within and across agencies.” When selecting SES for a rotation, the agency should consider agency priorities, needs identified in existing agency succession and hiring plans, recommendations from the annual talent review process required in the E.O., the development opportunities in Executive Development Plans (EDP), the Government’s interest in cultivating generalist executives with broad and diverse experiences who can lead in a variety of organizations, and individual SES needs.

Some agencies will rotate more than 15 percent annually (many already do), and others will rotate less than 15 percent. An average of 15 percent will achieve the Government-wide goal, and still be based on the organizational and individual needs. Since the average tenure of an executive is about six years, this assumes that most executives will rotate on average once during their tenure.

Agencies were required to develop a plan for increasing rotations by May 31, 2016, and are required to begin implementing the plan by October 1, 2016.

OPM may grant temporary allocations to support agencies sending executives on a rotation, during which time the individuals will occupy an agency space even though he or she is not available for agency work. The temporary space compensates an agency for the fact that the executive continues to encumber an agency space while on rotation. Requests for temporary allocations should be submitted in writing to OPM’s Senior Executive Services and Performance Management Office. For more information on how to request a temporary allocation, please contact the OPM SERS team at (202) 606-2246.

Q16: Does the requirement to rotate executives pertain to ST/SL/SES equivalents?

A16: No, although agencies are encouraged to implement rotational programs for their SL, ST, and SES equivalent employees as appropriate.

Q17: Will GS-14s and GS-15s be required to rotate to demonstrate readiness for SES? What is the Administration doing to address the pipeline?

A17: No, this E.O. does not apply to GS employees although agencies are encouraged to find ways for their senior GS employees to get breadth of experience both within and across agencies. OPM currently leads the Government-wide President’s Management Council Interagency Rotations Program for GS 13-15s. Many other leadership development programs also require developmental assignments and rotations (e.g., SES Candidate Development Programs).

Additionally, in December 2014, the President announced the creation of the *White House Leadership Development Program (WHLDP)*, to harness GS-15 top talent from across Government to drive progress on the implementation of Cross-Agency Priority Goals. The program aims to retain and grow top talent within the Federal Government; develop potential new career senior executives through a rotation focused on complex, cross-agency challenges which increasingly confront the Federal Government; and provide a development component to build and strengthen enterprise leadership skills. The first cohort of 16 WHLDP Fellows began in November 2015. A second cohort will launch in 2016.

Q18: How will agencies track the rotation requirement?

A18: Formal tracking and reporting of rotations is described in the OPM guidance issued on January 29, 2016 and found at: <https://www.chcoc.gov/content/executive-order-guidance-%E2%80%93-strengthening-senior-executive-service-implementing-executive>.

Onboarding:

Q19: Does this apply to both career and non-career executives?

A19: Yes.

Q20: What is the timeline for agencies to implement onboarding procedures?

A20: Executive onboarding refers to the acquiring, accommodating, assimilating and accelerating of new leaders into the organizational culture and business. The E.O. states agencies will, “Establish a formal Executive Onboarding Program informed by OPM’s Enhanced Executive Onboarding Model and Government-Wide Executive Onboarding Framework.” OPM will work with agencies to strategically plan and implement their programs. A phased approach will be used to implement onboarding among the 24 Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act agencies, with seven agencies implementing in FY 2016, seven in FY 2017 and the remaining agencies in FY 2018. Below is a table that lists the agencies in each of the three phases.

Phase 1 (FY 2016)	Phase 2 (FY 2017)	Phase 3 (FY 2018)
HHS	EPA	Commerce
HUD	ED	State
Energy	USDA	DHS
VA	NASA	Treasury
GSA	DOT	DOI
OPM	Labor	DOJ

DOD	SBA	NSF
SSA*		USAID
		OMB

**SSA is not listed in the E.O. because they are an independent agency, but they have requested to implement in phase 1.*

Agencies can find additional useful resources on OPM’s Executive Onboarding Wiki page: <http://www.opm.gov/wiki/training/New-Employee-Orientation.ashx>.

Q21: Should a modified onboarding program be in place for rotations and reassignments?

A21: Yes, agencies should implement a process to help individuals acclimate during rotations and reassignments. OPM will provide tools to assist in onboarding for those on reassignment and rotations.

Q22: We already do an onboarding process in my agency. Do we have to change our onboarding process?

A22: OPM recognizes that some agencies have been leading on this issue and have developed robust onboarding programs, some in coordination with OPM using OPM’s Onboarding Framework. Agencies should continue to implement these onboarding programs and monitor, evaluate and make improvements as necessary. For those who are already running onboarding programs, OPM encourages agencies to share best practices and be sure that agency onboarding references the government-wide orientation programs such as OPM’s Federal Executive Institute’s that are available to executives.

Implementation of E.O.:

Q23: How will these actions be implemented?

A23: All agencies are required to implement four key recommendations – 1) streamline the hiring process; 2) develop a plan to increase rotations; 3) implement policy on pay setting and adjustments – beginning in FY 2016; and 4) increase the limit on aggregate spending on performance awards – beginning in FY 2017.

A phased approach will be used to implement four other recommendations in the E.O. – 1) establish talent management and succession planning processes; 2) require executive ownership of recruiting and hiring; 3) increase professional development requirements; and 4) create an onboarding program – among the 24 CFO Act agencies, with seven agencies plus SSA implementing in FY 2016, seven in FY 2017 and the rest in FY 2018.

Q24: Will there be additional funding allocated to help agencies implement actions related to learning and development?

A24: Currently, no additional funding is available to support implementation of these requirements, although OPM is seeking funding to support the development of IT systems that could support talent succession and management processes if approved. Agencies are encouraged to work together to share best practices and strategies for implementation. For example, to facilitate rotations, agencies could partner to exchange talent, which would minimize costs. OPM and OMB will help facilitate opportunities for agencies to learn from one another and work together and can share best practices identified across the Federal Government. Agencies are also encouraged to take advantage of existing resources, such as OPM's Situational Mentoring Program and Federal Coaching Network, which are available at no cost and can help agencies meet some of their professional development requirements. Contact sesdevelopment@opm.gov for more information about these two developmental resources.

Q25: Will agencies have flexibility to implement the reforms within the E.O.?

A25: The Administration recognizes that the reforms cannot be implemented uniformly across all agencies and departments given the different missions, authorities, and funding requirements. As stated in the E.O., it does not supersede any existing legislation or regulation. OPM guidance shall specify that agencies will have flexibility, where appropriate, in implementing the different reforms, consistent with existing regulations, mission requirements, funding availability, and other agency-specific requirements.

Q26: Who will be responsible for implementing these actions, monitoring progress, and ensuring reporting requirements are met?

A26: Phase 1 agencies will select an SAO to lead the implementation of the phased actions outlined in the E.O. OPM will provide guidance in 2016, which will include details about reporting requirements agencies will be required to submit. Agencies implementing in phases 2 or 3 are also required to designate an SAO to oversee implementation of the government-wide actions in the E.O. Agency SAO's or points of contact will monitor implementation and submit reports to OPM. Agency heads, their deputies, and their assistant secretaries of management or other similar positions, should play a role in supporting the SAO.

NOTE: If you have additional questions not covered in this document or would like to request assistance in your implementation efforts, please contact the OPM SES office at sespolicy@opm.gov.