



## UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Washington, DC 20415

The Director

Monday, January 12, 2009

### **MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief Human Capital Officers**

**FROM:** Michael W. Hager, Acting Director

**Subject:** Results of SES Selection Pilot

Recently the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) completed a pilot project testing new methods for selecting members of the Senior Executive Service (SES). This memorandum provides a brief capsule of what we learned, and outlines our plans for next steps.

The pilot ran at eight Federal agencies from June 1, 2008, through November 14, 2008, with a total of 61 vacancies announced under one of the two pilot methods. The two methods tested are known as Accomplishment Record and Resume-based. The Accomplishment Record method differs from the approach used currently by most agencies in that the application does not focus on the five broad Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) but rather on a select few of the 28 executive competencies underlying them. This permits candidates to submit a more streamlined application targeting the selected competencies instead of the lengthy ECQ narratives that have become standard.

As the name indicates, the Resume-based option is even simpler. Applicants need only submit a standard resume. This option was designed especially for seasoned executives, whose general qualifications could be discerned from just a resume identifying positions they had held. Overall, 34 vacancies were advertised under the Accomplishment Record option, while the Resume-based method was used for 27.

The candidate assessment methods used under both pilot options drew heavily on structured interviews of well-qualified candidates. These interviews to a large degree took the place of the lengthy ECQ narrative statements typically required of candidates under the traditional SES selection process. In this way, the pilot attempted to make the hiring process more inviting to applicants by shifting some of the burden from them to agency staff.

Results from the pilot evaluation indicate it was successful in shifting that burden, and applicants noticed the difference. The pilot methods, especially the Resume-based option, won high marks generally from the applicants. Resume-based applicants generally found the process of applying for an SES vacancy easier than under the traditional process; some applicants even found it easier than applying for non-Federal executive positions. The relatively easy application process also produced a larger number of applicants on average for vacancies advertised under either of the pilot methods, compared to the traditional method. The Resume-based option also attracted a much higher proportion of applicants from outside of the Government than the traditional method.

Agency staff, however, found the process somewhat cumbersome, although there is some evidence that the initial objections diminished as they become more practiced in the processes. But agency human resource staff and executives were generally positive about the “virtual” Qualifications Review Board (QRB) process also tested under the pilot. Using an automated system, agency QRB members were able to receive and review QRB cases without actually convening at OPM. This method seems to hold considerable promise as a way to streamline this critical OPM function without diminishing the quality of the decisions rendered.

Based on these findings, OPM will be developing an improved version of the pilot methods and will provide training within the next few months to agencies wishing to use them. This modified version will attempt to make it easier for agency staff to use the more rigorous candidate assessment practices under the pilot such as structured interviews, while preserving what have been shown to be its applicant-friendly features. Information about these new methods and the training will be announced to the CHCOs and to the Human Resources Director community as soon as it becomes available. After completing the training, agencies will have the opportunity to choose a pilot selection method instead of the traditional method as they fill specific SES vacancies.

Deputy Director Howard Weizmann and I had the privilege of personally recognizing the participating agencies in a recognition ceremony at OPM on December 8. Please allow me, in closing, to acknowledge these agencies to the wider community: Department of Defense (Air Force, Army, Office of the Secretary), Department of Energy, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Housing & Urban Development, Department of Justice, Department of the Treasury, Department of Veterans Affairs, and our own internal human resources management staff at OPM. Without the willingness of these agencies to step forward and pioneer new methods and processes over a period of several months, the knowledge gained and potential future benefits of this effort would not have been possible.

cc: Human Resources Directors