



The Director

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

MEMORANDUM

TO: Heads and Acting Heads of Departments and Agencies

FROM: Charles Ezell, Acting Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management

DATE: May 29, 2025

RE: Hiring and Talent Development for the Senior Executive Service

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is providing policy, guidance, and timelines to agencies on Senior Executive Service (SES) hiring and development.

The SES was intended to serve as “a corps of top management leaders” that provides “strong executive leadership” and “takes into account the national interest, the achievement of presidential and congressional goals, and simultaneously maintains the soundest management techniques.” S. Rep. 95-969, 67, 1978 U.S.C.C.A.N. 2723, 2789.

The Constitution vests all executive power in the President. *See* U.S. Const., Art. II, § 1. The President, in turn, must rely on subordinate officials like those in the SES to govern. Therefore, SES officials must be recruited, selected, and trained so that they are equipped to respond to “the needs, policies, and goals of the Nation” and implement the agenda that the American people elected the President to deliver. 5 U.S.C. § 3131. Thus, it is crucial that SES officials, who “have enormous influence over the functioning of the Federal Government, and thus the well-being of hundreds of millions of Americans,”¹ are knowledgeable regarding Administration priorities and prepared to execute them efficiently and effectively.

Too often, the broken, insular SES hiring process resulted in the hiring of executives who “engage in unauthorized disclosure of Executive Branch deliberations, violate the constitutional rights of Americans, refuse to implement policy priorities, or perform their duties inefficiently or negligently.”² President Trump has directed a sweeping reform of these “broken, insular, and outdated” Federal hiring practices.³

In addition, on February 25, 2025, based on President Trump’s memorandum *SES*

¹ Presidential Trump, Memorandum for the Heads of Departments and Agencies, [Restoring Accountability for Career Senior Executives](#) (“SES Accountability”) (Jan. 20, 2025).

² *Id.*

³ Executive Order (EO) 14710, [Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service](#) (Jan. 20, 2025).

Accountability, OPM overhauled SES performance plans in order to prioritize: fidelity to the Constitution, ability to carry out Administration priorities, and ability to drive a high-performance, high-accountability culture that drives results across the government.⁴

To implement the President’s directives and ensure “that the Executive Branch will work together in service of the Nation,”⁵ OPM is introducing new, enhanced Executive Core Qualifications that will improve SES hiring and provide the basis for continued development of the SES. OPM is reforming the SES application process to streamline the previous paperwork-heavy, consultant-driven process. OPM is creating SES training programs to ensure that current and aspiring SES are equipped to deliver on key administration priorities.⁶ And OPM is strengthening agency Executive Resources Board oversight of the SES to ensure long-term planning and management of the SES by politically-accountable officials.

Together, these changes in hiring, training, development and oversight will drive a cultural shift in the SES—ensuring that it comprises only “the highest caliber of civil servants committed to achieving the freedom, prosperity, and democratic rule that our Constitution promotes.”⁷

I. New Executive Core Qualifications

Federal executives must be selected based on their merit, competence, and dedication to our Nation’s Founding ideals—without regard to race, sex, color, religion, or national origin.

By statute, OPM prescribes Executive Core Qualifications for the appointment of career SES members. 5 U.S.C. § 3393(c)(2). The previous qualifications included unlawful “diversity, equity and inclusion” (DEI) criteria for hiring Federal executives. Those qualifications were inconsistent with the President’s direction that “Federal employment practices . . . shall not under any circumstances consider DEI or DEIA factors, goals, policies, mandates, or requirements.”⁸

To eliminate DEI factors and to align SES hiring with the new SES Performance Plan, OPM is providing new Executive Core Qualifications as follows:

Commitment to the Rule of Law and the Principles of the American Founding:

⁴ OPM, [*New Senior Executive Service Performance Appraisal System and Performance Plan, and Guidance on Next Steps for Agencies to Implement Restoring Accountability for Career Senior Executives*](#) (Feb. 25, 2025).

⁵ *SES Accountability*.

⁶ This guidance applies to all executive [agencies](#), including so-called “independent regulatory agencies” and Inspectors General.

⁷ *Restoring Merit*, § 1.

⁸ Executive Order 14151, [*Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferring*](#) (Jan. 20, 2025).

Demonstrated knowledge of the American system of government, commitment to uphold the Constitution and the rule of law, and commitment to serve the American people.

Driving Efficiency: Demonstrated ability to strategically and efficiently manage resources, budget effectively, cut wasteful spending, and pursue efficiency through process and technological upgrades.

Merit and Competence: Demonstrated knowledge, ability, and technical competence to effectively and reliably produce work that is of exceptional quality.

Leading People: Demonstrated ability to lead and inspire a group toward meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals, and to drive a high-performance, high-accountability culture. This includes, when necessary, the ability to lead people through change and to hold individuals accountable.

Achieving Results: Demonstrated ability to achieve both individual and organizational results, and to align results to stated goals from superiors.⁹

II. Improved SES Application Method

At present, the SES hiring process requires lengthy, time-consuming essays. This cumbersome hiring process has hurt the government's ability to hire high-caliber SES officials who share American values and possess exceptional skills.

Going forward, agencies shall immediately discontinue the use of 10-page narrative essays in the hiring process.¹⁰ Instead, they shall adopt a resume-only initial application method, with resumes capped at 2 pages. This will align Federal SES hiring with private industry and the Merit Hiring Plan. It will also help agencies achieve a robust applicant pool of top executive talent and reduce the burden and delay associated with applying to the SES. In addition, politically-accountable agency leadership, or designees, should be involved "throughout the full hiring process" for SES officials.¹¹ This should include, at a minimum, interviewing prospective SES to confirm organizational fit, commitment to American ideals, technical acumen, and alignment with the new Executive Core Qualifications.

By statute, OPM must establish Qualifications Review Boards to certify that SES hires are of the highest quality. 5 U.S.C. § 3393(c). Beginning in FY 2026, OPM will transition from the

⁹ The new Executive Core Qualifications are included in Appendix 1. They will become effective following OPM's validation of this revised model.

¹⁰ This guidance prohibits both Executive Core Qualifications and Technical Qualifications narratives. Agencies may assess whether candidates possess those required qualifications through assessments, interviews, and resume reviews.

¹¹ *Restoring Merit*, §2(b)(vii).

Appendix 1: Updated Executive Core Qualifications

Meta ECQ	Sub-Competencies
<p>Commitment to the Rule of Law and the Principles of the American Founding: This core qualification requires a demonstrated knowledge of the American system of government, commitment to uphold Constitution and the rule of law, and commitment to serve the American people.</p>	<p>Knowledge of the American System of Government: Demonstrates understanding and appreciation of the American system of government, including the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, separation of powers, federalism, and the historical development of the American Nation.</p>
	<p>Commitment to the Rule of Law: Upholds the principles of the American Founding, including equality under the law and democratic self-government. Ensures the law is applied fairly and consistently.</p>
	<p>Civic-Mindedness: Stays up-to-date on important developments in American government and aligns organizational objectives and practices with presidential and public interests. Demonstrates a commitment to serve the American people.</p>
<p>Driving Efficiency: This core qualification involves the demonstrated ability to strategically and efficiently manage resources, budget effectively, cut wasteful spending, and pursue efficiency through process and technological upgrades.</p>	<p>Fiscal Responsibility: Strategically manages, allocates and monitors financial resources. Aligns priorities and initiatives to justify budget proposals. Monitors expenditures, cuts unnecessary costs, and uses cost-benefit analysis to set priorities.</p>
	<p>Managing Resources: Manages resources efficiently and effectively based on current and projected organizational goals, skills, budget considerations, and staffing needs.</p>
	<p>Leveraging Technology: Explores emerging technology and potential applications. Incorporates technology to enhance efficiency and achieve results. Ensures access to and security of technology systems.</p>
<p>Merit and Competence: This core qualification involves the demonstrated knowledge, ability and technical competence to effectively and reliably produce work that is of exceptional quality.</p>	<p>Technical Skill: Possesses the requisite technical knowledge and subject matter expertise to consistently produce timely, high-quality work. Is considered a strong contributor in his or her domain.</p>
	<p>Problem Solving: Engages in critical and data-driven thinking when diagnosing root causes and evaluating options. Identifies and promptly addresses the most pressing, high-priority</p>

Meta ECQ	Sub-Competencies
	problems.
	Agility and Resilience: Anticipates and adapts to change, new ideas, new information, and new conditions. Is committed to continuous improvement. Deals effectively with pressure and remains optimistic and persistent, even under adversity.
Leading People: This core qualification involves the demonstrated ability to lead and inspire a group toward meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals, and to drive a high-performance, high-accountability culture. This includes, when necessary, the ability to lead people through change and to hold individuals accountable.	Accountability: Ensures that employees are appropriately recruited, selected, appraised, trained, and retained. Takes swift action to address performance- or conduct-based deficiencies in employees supervised. Holds self and others accountable for measurable high-quality, timely, and cost-effective results.
	Developing Others: Recognizes and rewards outstanding achievement in others. Develops the ability of others to perform and contribute to the organization by providing opportunities to learn through formal and informal methods. Cultivates a dynamic environment in which employees are not afraid to make mistakes.
	Executive Judgement: Makes well-reasoned, timely, and effective decisions and considers short- and long-term implications. Communicates effectively with stakeholders across all organizational levels, sharing and guarding information where appropriate.
Achieving Results: This core qualification involves the demonstrated ability to achieve both individual and organizational results, and to align results to stated goals from superiors.	Operational Mindset: Effectively translates strategies into actionable steps and processes. Partners effectively with stakeholders to drive adoption and addresses blockers to ensure successful implementation.
	Innovation: Applies creativity to improving products and processes, challenges convention, takes measured risks, and considers ways to simplify and remove unnecessary requirements.
	Strategic Thinking: Formulates objectives and priorities and implements plans consistent with the long-term interests of the organization by evaluating conditions, resources, capabilities, constraints, and organizational goals and values.