



USDA DESK GUIDE

FOR

EXECUTIVE RESOURCES



*Office of Human Capital Management
Executive Resources Staff*

**Summary of Changes to
USDA's Senior Executive Service (SES) Merit Staffing Regulations (DPM 920)**

1. Regulations converted into USDA Executive Resources Handbook. Subsequent chapters to the Handbook on executive resources pay, classification, reduction-in-force, and performance will follow.
2. Coverage expanded to include policy and procedures for staffing SL/ST/SSRS positions, as well as SES positions.
3. Includes regulatory references (i.e., CFR/U.S.C.) and websites to validate requirements or for additional information.
4. Implements the Office of Personnel Management's 30-day model for filling SES positions.
5. Requires more involvement of the ERB Chair in the merit staffing process.
6. Streamlines the number of required documents for prior approval packages.
7. Allows for the recruitment of key positions, identified by each agency, prior to the Secretary's approval.
8. Adds a section on qualifying applicants for SES positions.
9. Adds section on the use of prescreening panels.
10. Delegates signature authority for ERB transmittal letters of ERB packages to the mission area/agency human resources officer.
11. Revises ERB transmittal letter and ERB Instructions sheet to require panel members to complete their evaluations and scoring matrix the day before the panel meets and fax to the Executive Secretary.
12. Expands section on limited appointments to include requirements for establishing such positions.
13. Revises/streamlines the SES vacancy announcement format.
14. Revises the rating plan for SES positions/establishes rating plan for SL positions.
15. Changes the official position description cover sheet for executive/senior level positions to OF-8, instead of the AD-332. Adds several new exhibits for convenience and consistency. The OF-8 can be downloaded at www.opm.gov.

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**USDA POLICY AND PROCEDURES ON
MERIT STAFFING FOR SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE (SES)
AND CAREER SENIOR EMPLOYEES (SL, ST & SSRS)**

AUTHORITY:

5 U.S.C. 3391-3395
5 CFR part 317
Departmental Regulation 4090-920

COVERAGE:

This chapter provides Departmental policy, procedures, and guidelines for staffing Senior Executive Service (SES), Senior Level (SL), Professional and Scientific (ST), and Senior Scientific Research Service (SSRS) positions. Actions taken under this chapter are subject to the prior approval of the Department and availability of SES, SL, and ST slot allocations approved by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and SSRS slot allocations approved by the Secretary. The Office of Human Capital Management (OHCM), Executive Resources Staff (ERS) coordinates all of these executive resources actions.

The SES offers Agency and Staff Office heads considerable flexibility in filling executive vacancies. Methods of filling positions include competitive selection, appointment of a graduate of an OPM approved SES Candidate Development Program (SESCDP), reinstatement of a former SES career appointee, reassignment, or transfer of a current SES appointee. In deciding what method to use, an agency should consider which is most likely to help meet the Agency's mission objectives, contribute new ideas and viewpoints, and meet the Agency's responsibilities in workforce diversity.

SL positions at USDA are in the competitive service and may be filled using the same flexibilities available for filling positions in the competitive service (i.e., promotions, reassignments, transfers, and reinstatements). These actions are made in accordance with applicable statutory and regulatory provisions. SL positions may also be in the excepted service. Any SL position established in the excepted service will be filled in accordance with the procedures and regulations that govern the service.

ST positions are also in the competitive service. Because ST positions normally result from the impact of the scientist on the position, peer panels review these positions and promotions to the ST level are based on peer review panel recommendations.

SSRS positions are a new cadre of research scientist positions, separate from the competitive Federal Service. The SSRS is designed to attract a needed complement of outstanding scientists with doctoral-level degrees in agriculture and forestry at the senior level. Additional information on the SSRS is found in Departmental Regulation 4090-920 dated March 7, 2003, and at: www.afm.ars.USDA.gov/ppweb/index.htm.

POLICY:

It is the policy of USDA to manage the Senior Executive Service within the spirit and letter of Title IV of the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA).

The Secretary has overall authority for managing the Department's SES and other senior level position planning, staffing, and utilization of these positions. The Secretary considers the recommendations from the Secretary's Executive Resources Board (ERB) relating to SES policy issues. The Mission Area ERB's provide recommendations regarding the staffing of specific SES and SL positions by determining the best-qualified candidates for vacancies. Although the Secretary's management of executive resources also includes classification, executive development, performance appraisals and awards, and pay administration, these topics will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Unallocated SES, SL, ST, and SSRS slots are retained in the Office of the Secretary until a determination has been made on their assignment. No commitment may be made to fill a vacant or new SES, SL, ST, or SSRS position until the Secretary or his or her designee has granted approval.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

The Director, Office of Human Capital Management is responsible for:

- a. Assuring that OPM and Departmental SES/SL/ST/SSRS policies and procedures are uniformly applied throughout the Department; and
- b. Making classification determinations for senior executive and senior career level positions.

The Director, Executive Resources Staff is responsible for:

- a. Developing prior approval procedures for staffing SES/SL/ST/SSRS positions, competitively and noncompetitively;
- b. Recommending policy on SES/SL/ST/SSRS issues (i.e., staffing, pay, performance, furlough, reduction-in-force, etc.) to the Secretary's ERB for approval and assisting the Assistant Secretary for Administration in assuring their uniform application throughout USDA;

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- c. Recommending classification of executive and senior career employee positions to the Director, Office of Human Capital Management;
 - d. Identifying position management issues related to establishing/reestablishing SES or SL positions;
 - e. Liaison, coordination, and securing of systems and case approvals from OPM;
 - f. Liaison with other Federal departments and agencies' executive resources staff;
 - g. Providing Departmental and technical guidance to agencies and staff offices regarding SES/SL/ST/SSRS staffing, classification, pay and other SES/SL/ST/SSRS issues;
 - h. Providing a staff member to serve as Executive Secretary on ERB's to provide technical support and consistency to the process;
 - i. Developing and maintaining executive resources records and reports, as required by the CSRA and/or Departmental Regulations; and
 - j. Keeping human resources and other appropriate officials advised of and assisting them in correctly interpreting and applying Departmental executive resource policy.

The *Mission Area/Agency Human Resources (HR) Directors* are responsible for:

- a. The uniform application of OPM, Departmental, and/or other applicable regulations governing the SES/SL/ST/SSRS;
- b. Assisting supervisors and management officials in applying such policy;
- c. Ensuring that SES/SL/SSRS merit staffing policies and procedures are followed;
- d. Ensuring that sound position management principles are followed when requesting the establishment of a new SES/SL/ST/SSRS position, the reestablishment of a position, or the filling of a vacant position;
- e. Promptly reporting SES/SL/ST/SSRS vacancies to ERS;
- f. Maintenance of Official Personnel Folder's;
- g. Conducting and finalizing a job analysis to identify any mandatory technical qualifications; and

h. Maintenance of documentation necessary to reconstruct the SES/SL/SSRS selection process.

COMPETITIVE RECRUITMENT FOR SES AND SL POSITIONS:

5 U.S.C. 3393(a)
5 CFR 317.501(b)

Mission Area/Agency/Staff Office Responsibility

Mission Area/Agency HR Offices (HRO's), in coordination with agency and staff office heads, must perform a job analysis and develop a qualification standard when they establish a new position, or when changing an existing position that lacks a qualification standard. Standards may be developed for individual positions or for a group of positions that require essentially the same kind of qualifications.

Job analysis documentation must be kept on file and be available for review by ERS, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), or OPM upon request. The absence of such documentation is sufficient evidence that selection procedures work to the disadvantage of members of a particular race, sex, or ethnic group.

Job analysis is required only for the mandatory technical qualifications.

Qualification Standards for SES Positions

5 U.S.C. 3392(a)
5 CFR part 317, subpart D

Qualification standards must include:

Executive Core Qualifications. The managerial qualifications are based on the five Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) established by OPM and are used for all SES positions. The ECQs were designed to assess executive experience and potential, not technical expertise. The five ECQs are: (1) Leading Change, (2) Leading People, (3) Results Driven, (4) Business Acumen, and (5) Building Coalitions/Communication. These ECQs may be supplemented to make them more agency specific.

Qualification standards may also include:

Technical Qualifications. The technical qualifications are the job related knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required to perform the technical or non-managerial duties of the position as identified through a job analysis. However, some SES positions may not have technical qualifications (e.g., some administrative jobs). If the job analysis identifies technical qualifications that are

required to successfully perform the job, (not KSAs that can be learned within a short period of time), there should normally be no more than two technical qualifications. With the flexibility to supplement the ECQs with agency specific requirements, the need for technical qualifications should be lessened. Each technical qualification must be job related. However, no mandatory qualifications may emphasize agency-specific experience to the extent that it eliminates well qualified applicants from outside the agency.

Qualification Standards for SL Positions

Qualification standards for SL positions would include only technical qualifications and not include executive core qualifications.

Rating Plan (See EXHIBITS 1 and 2)

5 U.S.C. 3393(b)
5 CFR 317.501(c)

An SES/SL rating plan provides the basis for evaluating applicants to determine whether they meet minimum qualification requirements, determining the various degrees to which applicants possess KSA's for the position, and assigning values to each of the applicants' KSA's as a mean of identifying those who are superior.

A rating plan must be developed before a vacancy is announced.

Area of Consideration

For SES Positions:

"All Qualified Persons" is the area used to consider applicants from all sources.

"Qualified Federal Employees Only" is the minimum area from which agencies may recruit to fill SES positions. This area includes the legislative, judicial, and executive branches; it also includes employees in both competitive and excepted service including non-contract experts and consultants. For purposes of this section, Members of Congress, elected officials, and active or retired military or other uniformed services personnel such as those in the Public Service Commissioned Corps are not "Qualified Federal Employees."

For SL/ST/SSRS Positions:

"All qualified Persons" and "Qualified Federal Employees Only" as described for SES positions above.

In addition, SL/ST/SSRS positions may be advertised Department-wide.

Recruitment Plans

Recruitment plans must outline sources that will be contacted, how they will be contacted, and why they are appropriate. Plans must also specify how qualified women, minorities, and persons with disabilities will be recruited and sources where they may be found.

Recruitment Follow-up

When recruitment efforts fail to produce candidates of sufficient quality or quantity, or fail to produce women, minorities or applicants with disabilities, agencies should use follow-up telephone calls or letters to recruitment sources to verify receipt and distribution of vacancy announcements.

If contacts with recruitment sources show insufficiencies in the recruitment effort, such as failure to receive the vacancy announcement, too little time to post or distribute, or other shortcomings, agencies should consider the following:

1. Readvertising;
2. Expanding the area of consideration;
3. Using other recruitment sources;
4. Networking; and/or
5. Restructuring the qualification requirements.

Prior Approval Procedures for Recruitment

The Secretary must approve an agency's request to fill a vacant executive or senior career employee position, prior to announcement of the position. The documents required for these requests are listed in EXHIBIT 3. See also EXHIBIT 3.1 for the USDA SES/Career Senior Employee Merit Staffing Checklist.

In limited circumstances, if the position has been vacant for less than 9 months and is among the agency or staff office's top key positions (e.g., Deputy Administrator, Associate Administrator, etc.), the agency or staff office may announce the position without first obtaining the Secretary's approval to recruit for the position. The top key positions for each agency and staff office must be identified, along with a written justification for the identification, by each agency and staff office and submitted to ERS.

Only upon the Secretary's approval of the list of key positions and the receipt by ERS of the draft vacancy announcement may an agency or staff office proceed to announce the position. The number of key positions will vary depending on the size and organizational structure of the agency or staff office; however, in all cases, the number

of approved key positions will be limited.

The selections for the key positions will require the Secretary's approval.

Vacancy Announcements

5 CFR 317.501(b)(2)

Preparation. Agencies should use their own letterhead to announce SES vacancies and use the revised format outlined in EXHIBIT 4. Vacancy announcements must contain enough detailed information to enable applicants to judge their qualifications against the requirements of the position being filled and to respond to these requirements with ratable and relevant information. Where appropriate, state the positive education requirement for a particular series.

Announcement Period. SES vacancy announcements must be opened and posted for a minimum of 21 calendar days from the date of issuance. Normally, USDA vacancies are posted for 30 days. When recruiting for hard-to-fill positions and from among all qualified persons, agencies should use 30 to 45 calendar day announcement periods.

Distribution. Vacancy announcements are released when the Office of the Secretary has approved form AD-769, Request for SES Personnel Action. The HRO is responsible for electronically posting the vacancy announcement to OPM's web site at www.opm.usajobs.gov.

HRO's must send copies of their SES vacancy announcements directly to the following:

1. All recruitment sources included in the recruitment plan; and
2. Other sources that agencies deem necessary.

COMPETITIVE SELECTION PROCESS

OPM has developed a 30-day model for filling SES positions (Exhibit 5). This model describes a plan for filling SES positions within 30 workdays after the vacancy announcement closes. Agencies are to use this model in USDA's effort to streamline the SES merit staffing process.

Qualifying Applicants

The HRO's will screen the applications to determine whether they are within the area of consideration and meet the minimum qualifications for the position.

To qualify for any SES position, the applicants must meet the five ECQ's. Individuals applying for initial career appointment in the SES need to demonstrate, with specific examples, the scope and quality of their work experience.

In addition to meeting the ECQ requirements, applicants must meet any technical requirements identified. These may be professional/technical knowledge, skills and abilities or other qualifications (e.g., certification or licensure), that are essential for successful performance.

Applicants must meet both the ECQ's and mandatory technical qualifications to meet the minimum qualifications. Although there are no time-in-grade requirements to qualify for SES positions, the HR specialist must consider the level, scope and quality of experience of the applicants in determining qualifications.

Prescreening Panel

If the recruitment effort has produced a large number (i.e., 20 or more) of qualified candidates, the HRO should convene a prescreening panel of human resources professionals and program officials/subject matter experts to determine which candidates are only minimally qualified for the position and need not be evaluated by the ERB (EXHIBIT 6-Prescreening Panel Instructions). Although the prescreening panel membership may include a GS-14/15 employee, the panel must include at least one SES member if reviewing for a SES position; at least one SL or ST employee if reviewing for a position in his/her respective pay system. The Agency or Staff Office EEO Coordinator should be a member of the panel, also. HRO's will document this screening process (EXHIBIT 6.1) in the merit staffing file and need only forward copies of the applications of the highly qualified applicants to the ERB.

Preparing for the Executive Resources Board (ERB)

5 CFR 317.501(c) (7)

The Chair of the mission area ERB should be contacted once an agency has approval to recruit for a position. The Chair should be involved in each step of the merit staffing process, beginning with the review of the job announcement and the technical qualifications. This involvement enables the Chair to certify that appropriate merit staffing procedures were followed in filling the SES position. (EXHIBIT 7).

After the qualifying and/or prescreening process is completed, the HRO must submit to ERS one (1) complete package of the following:

1. A description of the recruitment efforts (recruitment plan);
2. A list of all applicants' names with a brief explanation for those applicants screened out.
3. Names, titles, agencies/staff offices, and telephone numbers of nominees to serve as members of the ERB. HRO's should brief first-time ERB members on their role in the ERB process;

4. List of noncompetitive candidates and SESCDP graduates who have been certified by OPM *and* whom the Agency has determined meet the technical qualifications.

- Noncompetitive candidates are: current SES members, or candidates who were previously in the SES and who left the SES voluntarily, not those removed for performance, discipline, or security reasons. HRO's *must* certify that candidates meet the technical requirements for the position.
- SESCDP graduates are: candidates who have satisfactorily completed an OPM-approved SES Candidate Development Program and whose executive core qualifications have been certified by OPM.

5. The ERB package prepared for ERB members along with the transmittal/instruction memorandum (EXHIBIT 8) signed by the HR Officer.

A HR specialist from ERS will serve as Executive Secretary and must receive an ERB package as well. In addition to the documents in the panel members' ERB package, the Executive Secretary's package must also include the complete list of all applicants (competitive and noncompetitive) with an explanation for those applicants that were eliminated.

The HRO will complete ERB packages for panel members as described in EXHIBIT 9. See also EXHIBIT 10-SES scoring matrix, and, EXHIBIT 10.1-SL scoring matrix.

At least one week prior to the ERB meeting, the HRO must send one (1) complete ERB package to each of the panel members, including the Civil Rights representative.

ERB Membership for SES Staffing Actions

5 U.S.C. 3393(b)

5 CFR 317.501(a)

5 CFR 412.107(a)

www.opm.gov/ses/selection

The ERB Chairperson is determined by the agency head or staff office director where the vacancy is located. Members of the ERB should not be individuals who would later participate in the interview and/or other aspects of the selection process.

ERB members must be USDA employees. ERB members should include, to the extent practicable, a mix of Presidential and SES appointees, career and noncareer appointees, headquarters and field representatives, and representation of women and minorities. Panel members may also include SL, ST, and Senior Foreign Service (SFS) members if they provide subject matter expertise. As a panel member, any of these executive/senior level employees may vote. However, the panel must include a majority of career SES members and a minimum of 3 voting/rating members.

Also, present at the panel meeting will be a civil rights representative and an Executive Secretary (servicing ERS HR specialist), who are non-voting members and are not included in the minimum numbers for panel membership discussed above. However, if the civil rights representative is an SES member, he/she is a voting member and may be included among the required 3 rating members.

ERB's for SL Positions

ERB's for SL positions may differ from ERB's for SES position in the following ways:

- ERB membership must include at least 3 raters, but does not have to be a majority of career SES members; and
- ERB's must include a HR Specialist who has completed OPM's Delegated Examining Unit (DEU) certification training to incorporate Veteran's Preference in the scoring process. The HR Specialist's DEU certification must be current.

ERB Evaluation

The ERB will evaluate the applicants against the five (5) executive core qualifications and any technical qualifications, and determine the best qualified. Through ERS, the ERB will forward a certificate of best qualified candidates, along with a composite of the ERB rating sheets on those candidates to the HR Officer. The HR Officer is responsible for submitting the best qualified roster and all appropriate documentation to the recommending official.

Noncompetitive candidates who meet the technical qualifications are not reviewed by the ERB. The HR Officer will also refer a noncompetitive roster to the recommending official. The noncompetitive roster may be referred to the recommending official with the best qualified roster of competitive candidates or it may be submitted earlier.

Interview Panels

After an ERB has certified and forwarded the "best qualified" candidates to the recommending official, the recommending official may wish to have an interview panel conduct interviews and further assess the candidates. The interview panel, however, would not rate and rank the candidates; the ERB completed that process. The interview panel would provide an assessment on how the individuals answered questions and conducted themselves during the interview. The panel may provide a recommendation based on the interviews and their overall impressions. The recommending official would use both the ERB rating and ranking information and the interview assessments to make his/her selection decision. The recommending official may re-interview the panel recommendations or all the certified candidates.

Interview panels must include a majority of career SES members. SES members from

other departments, individuals from outside the Federal government, and GS-15 employees may serve on the interview panel as subject matter experts and/or stakeholders. Management should also make every effort to have a diverse panel (i.e., include women and minorities). To ensure that interview panels for SES positions meet departmental policy, management should consult with their HRO's executive resources staff before scheduling interview panels.

Competitive Recruitment and Selection for SSRS Positions

Agencies will follow the procedures outlined in Departmental Regulation 4090-920 dated May 7, 2003.

Documenting Tentative Selections

After the recommending official has made a tentative selection for an SES or senior level career position, a prior approval package must be prepared by the HRO and sent to ERS for transmittal to the Office of the Secretary and, if necessary, to OPM. Required documents for these prior approval packages are outlined in EXHIBIT 11. Also, see EXHIBIT 12-Roster of Best Qualified Candidates and EXHIBIT 12.1-Roster of Noncompetitive Eligibles.

Office of Personnel Management Approval

5 U.S.C. 3393(c)
5 CFR 317.502

A tentative selection for an SES appointment will not be made final until an OPM Qualifications Review Board approves the selectee's executive core qualifications (except when the selectee is a graduate of an OPM-approved SESCDP). OPM approval is not required for SL, ST, or SSRS appointments.

Applicant Inquiries and Appeals

5 CFR 317.501(e)

Actions taken by the ERB in their consideration of applicants for SES positions or participation in a SESCDP are not grievable. However, applicants for SES positions with concerns or questions about the staffing process may request information regarding the nature of the procedures used in recruiting and selecting candidates; whether they were found eligible for the position; and, whether they were referred to the selecting official for consideration. The inquiry should be directed to the ERS Specialist handling the staffing action. Any other requests for information beyond whether the candidate was found eligible for the position, or whether the candidate was referred to the selecting official, should be referred to the Director, ERS, for a response. Other avenues afforded by law or regulation (e.g., the Office of Special Counsel or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) may, in some cases, be appropriate (e.g., where

prohibited personnel practices or disparate treatment is alleged).

Documenting SES/SL/SSRS Merit Staffing Files

5 CFR 317.501(d)

HRO's must retain merit staffing case files for 2 years from the effective date of the appointment. If no appointment was made from the vacancy announcement, the file must be retained for a period of 2 years from the closing date of the vacancy announcement. If an EEO complaint is filed, the case file should be marked for retention and retained until the EEO case is closed. The required documentation for these case files is outlined in EXHIBIT 13.

NONCOMPETITIVE ACTIONS

Noncompetitive SES actions include limited emergency and limited term appointments, details, reassignments, reinstatements, transfers of current or previous SES members, or appointments of SESCDP certified graduates to SES positions.

Details

5 U.S.C. 3341

5 CFR 317.903

www.opm.gov/ses/sesguide-staffing.html#details

Agency and staff office heads may approve details of non-SES employees to SES positions in increments of up to 120 days (may be extended for an additional 120 days, if needed). The total detail must not exceed 240 days. Details of non-SES employees to SES positions do not result in a temporary change to a higher rate of pay. Agencies and staff offices must document all details of more than 30 days in the Official Personnel Folder and must certify that the employee meets the qualifications for the position. *Noncareer and Schedule C employees cannot be detailed to SES career reserved positions.* Details of non-SES employees to SES positions for more than 240 days must be competitive.

An agency or staff office may detail a current SES member, or an SESCDP graduate certified by OPM, to another SES position for longer periods of time (more than 240 days) without competition. Agencies and staff offices must also document these details in the Official Personnel Folder.

An HR Officer must submit a copy of the SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, documenting the detail, to ERS within seven days of the beginning of a detail that is scheduled to last more than 120 days.

Reassignments

5 U.S.C. 3395
5 CFR 317.901

Career SES members may be reassigned within the commuting area to any SES position in the Department for which they qualify after prior clearance by the Office of the Secretary and 15-day advance written notice. For SES members outside the commuting area, a 60-day notice of a proposed reassignment must be given and must include the reasons for the reassignment. The head of the agency or staff office must consult with the employee on the reasons and discuss with the employee available options. The SES member may waive the 15 or 60-day waiting period voluntarily; however, the waiver must be in writing. With such a waiver, the reassignment may be effective at any time following the approval by the Office of the Secretary. Career SES members may not be reassigned involuntarily within 120 days after the appointment of a new Secretary of Agriculture or a new first level supervisor who is noncareer.

Noncareer and limited (term and emergency) appointees may not be reassigned to SES positions as SES career appointees.

Departmental approval is required for SES/SL/ST/SSRS reassignment actions. Documentation for these prior approval cases is outlined in EXHIBIT 14. Sample reassignment letters are described in EXHIBITS 15 through 15.4; sample declination letter is EXHIBIT 16.

Failure to accept a directed reassignment makes a senior executive subject to removal from Federal service under adverse action procedures. If separation is for failure to accept reassignment to a different commuting area, the executive is entitled to discontinued service retirement (if eligible) or severance pay (if eligible). However, the executive is not entitled to discontinued service retirement, if, at the time of appointment, a memorandum of understanding or other written agreement provided for geographic mobility.

SES Reemployed Annuitants

5 U.S.C. 3323(b)(1)
5 CFR 359.202
5 CFR 359, subpart I

SES reemployed annuitants may be reemployed in positions for which they are qualified. They serve at the pleasure of the agency or staff office head. The documentation required for approval of reemployed annuitants is the same as that required for reassignments above, except for the reassignment letter.

Transfers

5 U.S.C. 3395 (a)(1)
5 CFR 317.902

SES members may not be transferred to another Department or independent government agency involuntarily. The Office of the Secretary must approve transfers to USDA from other Departments/agencies. The documentation required for approval of transfers to USDA is the same as that required for reassignments above, except for the reassignment letter.

Transfer of Function

5 U.S.C. 3595(e)
5 CFR 351, subchapter C
5 CFR 752, subpart F

Career SES members affected by a transfer of function between USDA agencies or staff offices have rights comparable to competitive service employees. Career SES members may accompany their function, if they would otherwise be removed from the SES. Career SES members who fail to accompany a transfer of function may be removed from the SES and the Federal service.

In a transfer of function between USDA agencies or staff offices, noncareer and limited appointees may be offered transfers at the discretion of the agency or staff office.

Reinstatements

5 U.S.C. 3593(a)
5 CFR 317, subpart G

SES members who left the SES voluntarily, i.e., were not removed for performance, discipline, or security reasons, may have SES reinstatement eligibility. The prerequisites for reinstatement are:

- a. Individuals must have held a career SES appointment;
- b. Must have satisfactorily completed a one-year probationary period (unless the appointee converted to the SES as a career appointee when the SES was established in 1979);
- c. Must meet the qualifications of the position to which reinstated; and
- d. Must be approved by the Office of the Secretary.

The documentation required for approval to make reinstatements is the same as that for

reassignments above, except for the reassignment letter.

Appointments of SESCDP Graduates

5 U.S.C. 3396(a)
5 CFR 412

Graduates of an OPM-approved SES Candidate Development Program **and** whose executive core qualifications have been certified by OPM, may be appointed without further competition to any SES position for which they are qualified. Agencies must

seek Departmental approval to appoint graduates by submitting the documentation requirements listed for reassignments above, except for the reassignment letter. A copy of the SES certification certificate, issued by OPM, is also required.

Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) Assignments

5 U.S.C. 3371-3376
5 CFR 334

www.opm.gov/programs/ipa/index.asp

An OF-69, "Assignment Agreement - Title IV, Intergovernmental Personnel Act," is needed to document assignments to or from state and local governments, institutions of higher education, Indian Tribal governments and other eligible organizations. These assignments are intended to facilitate cooperation between the Federal government and the non-Federal entity through the temporary assignment of skilled personnel.

Civilian employees of Federal agencies who serve on IPA assignments serve without loss of employee rights and benefits.

Approval from the respective Under/Assistant Secretary is required for SES IPA assignments. HRO's should submit a completed/signed copy of Form OF-69 to ERS no later than 14 days after the effective date.

Limited Appointments

5 U.S.C. 3394
5 CFR 317, subpart F

Limited emergency and limited term appointments may not exceed 18 months and 36 months, respectively. Limited emergency appointments are designed for use in situations in which an agency must make appointments more rapidly than would be possible under competitive procedures to meet a bona fide emergency such as to implement the mandate of an Executive Order. Limited term appointments are used when the position is not a continuing one, e.g., for a special project or a study of limited duration.

Prior approval requests for limited term or limited emergency appointments should include 2 copies of the following:

1. Form AD-67;
2. Written rationale that explains the circumstance which supports the need for a limited appointment authority;

Limited Term: rationale must identify objective factors explaining why the duties of the position will expire at the end of the term. Merely stating that the job will terminate in 3 years is not sufficient.

Limited Emergency: rationale must identify the bona fide, unanticipated emergency that the appointment addresses.

3. The position description with the OF-8 and classification evaluation statement. The PD should reflect the rationale for the appointment by incorporating elements that distinguish the position from a continuing SES position or describe the emergency situation;
4. Qualifications standards for the position; and
5. Qualification analysis that describes how the employee meets the qualification standards identified for the position.

Changes to Position Descriptions

Position descriptions may require changes/revisions for various reasons - reorganizations, title changes, redescriptions, etc. When such changes are necessary, contact ERS for guidance. Required documentation may vary according to the circumstances supporting the need for the changes and the degree of changes.

Sabbaticals

5 U.S.C. 3396(c)

Agency or staff office heads may grant sabbaticals not to exceed 11 months to SES career appointees for study or uncompensated work experience that will contribute to their development and effectiveness. A sabbatical can broaden professional skills and provide an opportunity for personal growth.

To be eligible for a sabbatical, career appointees must satisfy the following requirements:

- Completed 7 years of service in SES positions or equivalent civil service

positions (i.e., grade level above the GS-15 or equivalent), and at least 2 of the 7 years must have been in the SES.

- Cannot be eligible for voluntary (optional) retirement as of the time the sabbatical begins.
- Have not been granted more than one sabbatical in a 10-year period.
- Must sign a service agreement to continue in the civil service for a period of 2 years following the sabbatical. The agency or staff office head may waive this requirement for “good and sufficient reasons,” which would include disability retirement, reduction-in-force, or other involuntary separation.

While on sabbatical, the executive:

- continues to occupy his/her position of record and to receive SES pay
- continues to earn leave and is charged for any leave taken
- may receive travel expenses (including per diem) as the head of the agency determines to be essential for the sabbatical study or experience
- remains subject to the SES performance appraisal system

The HRO must submit a copy of the SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, documenting the sabbatical, along with a statement explaining the purpose of the sabbatical and the benefits the agency expects to gain. In addition, the agency must submit a statement explaining how the duties of the executive on sabbatical will continue to be performed.

Noncareer Appointments

5 U.S.C. 3394

5 CFR 317, subpart F

www.opm.gov/ses/sesguide-staffing.html#noncareer

Noncareer appointments may be made to general positions only. Competition is not required to make the appointment. Although OPM's Qualifications Review Board approval is not required, the agency or staff office must ensure that the appointee meets the qualification requirements for the position. The appointee does not acquire tenure and serves at the pleasure of the appointing authority. Documentation for Departmental approval is outlined in EXHIBIT 17. Appointments for SES noncareer appointments cannot become effective before OPM approval. ERS will notify the agency or staff office when OPM approves the noncareer authority.

SAMPLE SES RATING PLAN**POSITION: (Title & Series)****LOCATION: (Agency & Duty Station)****EXECUTIVE CORE QUALIFICATIONS (ECQ's) EVALUATION:**

Each eligible panel member shall rate each candidate based on evidence of possession of the key characteristics and leadership competencies of each ECQ. The candidates entire application package should be used in determining the level these criteria are met.

Rating Key:

- ❖ Five (5) points - the candidate demonstrates all or nearly all of the key characteristics and leadership competencies for the ECQ; **outstanding qualifications** for this factor.
- ❖ Four (4) points - the candidate demonstrates a majority of the key characteristics and leadership competencies for the ECQ; **superior qualifications** for this factor.
- ❖ Three (3) points -- Demonstrates approximately half of the key characteristics and leadership competencies; **fully acceptable qualifications** for this factor.
- ❖ Two (2) points - the candidate demonstrates few (less than a majority) of the key characteristics and leadership competencies for the ECQ; **minimally acceptable qualifications** for this factor.
- ❖ One (1) point – the candidate demonstrates less than an acceptable level of key characteristics and leadership competencies for the ECQ, and may demonstrate potential for acquiring more key characteristics and leadership competencies with additional experience and/or training opportunities.
- ❖ Zero (0) point - the candidate demonstrates no possession of the key characteristics and leadership competencies for the ECQ.

Executive Core Qualifications

1. **LEADING CHANGE** encompasses the ability to develop and implement an organizational vision that integrates key national and program goals, priorities, values, and other factors. Inherent to it is the ability to balance change and continuity—to continually strive to improve customer service and program performance within the

basic government framework, to create a work environment that encourages creative thinking, and to maintain focus, intensity and persistence, even under adversity.

Leadership competencies: continual learning, creativity & innovation, external awareness, flexibility, resilience, service motivation, strategic thinking and vision.

2. **LEADING PEOPLE** involves the ability to design and implement strategies which maximize employee potential and foster high ethical standards in meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals. It involves responsibility for assuring that women and minorities are provided the opportunity to receive grants and/or contracts, employment and advancement opportunities, training, award recognition, and program benefits.

Leadership competencies: conflict management, leveraging diversity, integrity/honesty and team building

3. **RESULTS DRIVEN** stresses accountability and continuous improvement. It includes the ability to make timely and effective decisions and produce results through strategic planning and the implementation and evaluation of programs and policies.

Leadership competencies: accountability, customer service, decisiveness, entrepreneurship, problem solving, and technical credibility

4. **BUSINESS ACUMEN** involves the ability to acquire and administer human, financial, material, and information resources in a manner that instills public trust and accomplishes the organization's mission, and to use new technology to enhance decision making.

Leadership competencies: financial management, human resources management, and technology management

5. **BUILDING COALITIONS/COMMUNICATION** involves the ability to explain, advocate and express facts and ideas in a convincing manner, and negotiate with individuals and groups internally and externally. It also involves the ability to develop and expansive professional network with other organizations, and to identify the internal and external politics that affect the work of the organization.

Leadership competencies: influencing/negotiating, interpersonal skills, oral communication, partnering, political savvy, and written communication

TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS EVALUATION:

Each panel member should rate each technical qualification based on the rating key below. The candidate's entire application package should be used in determining the rating for the evaluation factors.

Rating Key:

- ❖ Five (5) points - the candidate demonstrates a broad, in depth knowledge, skill, and/or ability in the evaluation factor and a thorough knowledge of a wide range of techniques, programs, operations and/or functions related to the program area, technical/ professional or scientific field and/or work environment of the position. **Outstanding qualifications** in the evaluation factor.
- ❖ Four (4) points - the candidate demonstrates the knowledge, skill, and/or ability that falls between outstanding experience, as described at the 5-point level and fully acceptable experience, as described at the 3-point level. **Superior qualifications** in the evaluation factor.
- ❖ Three (3) points - the candidate demonstrates the knowledge, skill and/or ability in the evaluation factor through work experience that involved planning, developing and implementing programs and/or functions in the program area or in a closely related area with experience that is easily transferable. **Fully acceptable qualifications** in the evaluation factor.
- ❖ Two (2) points - the candidate demonstrates the knowledge, skill, and/or ability that falls between fully acceptable experience, as described at the 3-point level and experience as described at the 1-point level. **Minimally acceptable qualifications** in the evaluation factor.
- ❖ One (1) point - the candidate demonstrates less than acceptable knowledge, skill and/or ability in the program and/or functional area or closely related area. Experience may have been at the staff or program management level and may demonstrate potential for achieving knowledge, skill and/or ability needed to meet the minimum qualifications for the factor. Need additional experience and/or training opportunities.
- ❖ Zero (0) point - the candidate does not demonstrate the experience and/or training that meets the basic requirement for the evaluation factor.

Any candidate who does not meet the basic requirement for an ECQ, or technical qualification will be considered “not qualified” for the SES position. Therefore, if a candidate receives a rating of zero (0) on any of the ECQs or technical qualifications, the candidate will be eliminated from further consideration for the SES position.

The evaluation scores assigned to the candidates by the ERB members will be totaled. Based on the total score received by each candidate, the ERB will determine the “Best Qualified” candidates and certify these individuals to the recommending official.

SAMPLE SL RATING PLAN**POSITION: (Title & Series)****LOCATION: (Agency & Duty Station)****TECHNICAL MANDATORY QUALIFICATIONS:**

Each eligible panel member shall rate each candidate based on evidence of possession of the key technical qualifications identified for the position. These are qualifications that the candidate must possess upon entry into the position for successful performance. The candidate's entire application package should be used in determining the level the qualifications criteria are met. Each panel member should numerically rate each technical qualification based on the rating key below.

Rating Key:

- ❖ Five (5) points - the candidate demonstrates a broad, in-depth knowledge, skill and/or ability in the evaluation factor and a thorough knowledge of the program area, technical/professional or scientific field. **Outstanding qualifications** in the evaluation factor.
- ❖ Four (4) points - the candidate demonstrates the knowledge, skill, and/or ability that falls between outstanding experience, as described at the 5-point level and fully acceptable experience, as described at the 3-point level. **Superior qualifications** in the evaluation factor.
- ❖ Three (3) points - the candidate demonstrates the knowledge, skill and/or ability in the evaluation factor through work involved in the program, technical/professional or scientific field or with comparable experience that is easily transferable to the subject position. **Fully acceptable qualifications** in the evaluation factor.
- ❖ Two (2) points - the candidate demonstrates the knowledge, skill, and/or ability that falls between fully acceptable experience, as described at the 3-point level and experience as described at the 1-point level. **Minimally acceptable qualifications** in the evaluation factor.
- ❖ One (1) point - the candidate demonstrates less than acceptable knowledge, skill and/or ability specified in the evaluation factor. Shows potential with additional experience and/or training.
- ❖ Zero (0) point - the candidate does not demonstrate the experience and/or training that meets the basic requirement for the evaluation factor.

Any candidate who does not meet the basic requirement for a technical mandatory qualification will be considered “not qualified” for the SL position. Therefore, if a candidate receives a rating of zero (0) on any of the technical qualifications, the candidate will be eliminated from further consideration for the SL position.

The evaluation scores assigned to the candidates by the ERB members will be totaled. Because veterans’ preference is applicable for SL positions in the competitive service, an HR specialist will extrapolate the scores, using an OPM prescribed formula, to incorporate veterans’ preference. The final scores, incorporating veterans’ preference, will determine the top three candidates to be forwarded to the recommending official.

If there are no veterans among the candidates, the extrapolation of scores will not be done. Based on the original total score received by each candidate, the ERB will determine the “Best Qualified” candidates and certify these individuals to the recommending official.

EXHIBIT 3**DOCUMENTATION FOR PRIOR APPROVAL REQUESTS TO RECRUIT**

To fill existing executive and senior career employee positions (with no changes in duties or title), two copies are required of the following:

1. Form AD-769, Request for Recruitment Action, reflecting the signatures of the Agency Administrator and appropriate Under/Assistant Secretary;
2. Proposed vacancy announcement, which includes executive core and/or technical qualification standards;
3. Position description, including Form OF-8, Position Description Cover Sheet. If there is no change in immediate supervisor, the current OF-8 is appropriate. However, if there is a change in supervisor, the current supervisor must initial and date the OF-8 to certify the accuracy of the position description; and
4. USDA Executive and Senior Career Employee Merit Staffing Checklist with all applicable blocks completed; signed by the mission area/agency Human Resources Officer.

To fill **new** executive and senior career employee positions, the documentation required for approval is the same as that required to fill existing positions above, plus:

5. An evaluation statement reflecting an analysis of the position using appropriate classification standards to show how the duties and responsibilities exceed GS-15. The evaluation must also include a position management statement, justifying the need for a new position.

EXHIBIT 3.1

USDA SES/SENIOR CAREER EMPLOYEE MERIT STAFFING CHECKLIST

Position: _____

Agency/Division: _____

REQUEST TO RECRUIT CASES (PART I)

MERIT STAFFING QUESTION	YES	NO	EXPLANATION
1. Does filling this position increase the agency's current SES/SL allocation?			
2. Is this a new position?			If new, and not vice the abolishment of an established SES position, attach justification that supports the need for an additional SES slot
3. Has management redistributed SES/SL allocations within the mission area?			Identify agencies and positions involved:
4. Are the major duties of this position currently performed by a GS/GM-15 or is the position currently classified at the GS/GM-15 grade level?			Position: Organization:
5. Is this a previously established position? When was it vacated/by whom?			When vacated: Vice: Reason:
6. If this position has been vacated for more than 1 year, why the request to fill now?			
7. If this position has been vacated for more than 1 year, who performed the duties in the interim?			Who: Grade level:

Mission Area/Agency Human Resources Officer

Date

Position: _____

Agency/Division: _____

Tentative Selectee: _____

REQUEST TO APPROVE TENTATIVE SELECTEE (PART II)

MERIT STAFFING QUESTION	YES	NO	EXPLANATION
1. Is this a reassignment action? If so, what is management's plan for the position vacated by the tentative selectee?			
2. If the tentative selectee is an SESCO graduate, has the servicing HRO certified the graduate's technical qualifications?			
3. Were the merit staffing process and procedures for filling this position in compliance with Departmental and OPM policies and procedures?			
4. Were interviews conducted?			# of competitive candidates referred by ERB: _____ # of noncompetitive candidates referred: _____ # of competitive candidates interviewed: _____ # of noncompetitive candidates interviewed: _____
5. From where was the tentative selection made (i.e., same agency, another USDA agency, another Federal agency or outside Federal government)?			

Mission Area/Agency Human Resources Officer

Date

If more room is necessary for your explanations, please attach additional page(s).

EXHIBIT 4

**United States Department of Agriculture
(Agency)
Washington, D.C. 20250**

SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE RECRUITMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

Vacancy Announcement Number:

Position (Title/Series):

Organization, Location/Duty Station:

Opening Date: XX-XX-200X

Closing Date: XX-XX-200X

**For more information:
(Contact Person) name & telephone #**

**Area of Consideration:
All Qualified Persons**

SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE

This position is in the Senior Executive Service (SES)-**General or Career Reserved**. Positions in the SES are not graded. Only one position to be filled under this announcement. The salary range is (enter salary range) per annum. SES employees are also eligible for bonuses and awards based on performance. Veteran's preference is not applicable to the SES. The selectee is subject to a one-year probationary period unless currently serving under an SES appointment. Visit www.opm.gov/ses for additional information and benefits for SES employees.

WHY WORK FOR USDA (tailor to agency):

(Example) If you would like to work for a premier agency that is focused on enhancing the quality of life for the American people by supporting production of agriculture: ensuring a safe, affordable, nutritious, and accessible food supply; caring for agricultural, forest, and range lands; supporting sound development of rural communities; providing economic opportunities for farm and rural residents; expanding global markets for agricultural and forest products and services; and working to reduce hunger in America and throughout the world, USDA is the place for you. To learn more about our agency, our exciting mission, vision, and guiding principles, please visit (www.usda.gov). **Duties include:** _____

A. EXECUTIVE CORE QUALIFICATIONS: Please address these Executive Core Qualifications (ECQ's). Detailed information on the ECQ's and Key Characteristics may be found at: www.opm.gov/ses/handbook.html.

ECQ 1 LEADING CHANGE: Encompasses the ability to develop and implement an organizational vision which integrates key national and program goals, priorities, values and other factors. Inherent to it is the ability to balance change and continuity, to continually strive to improve customer service and program performance within the basic Government framework, to create a work environment that encourages creative thinking, and to maintain focus, intensity and persistence, even under adversity.

ECQ2 LEADING PEOPLE: Involves the ability to design and implement strategies that maximize employee potential and foster high ethical standards in meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals. Must describe your accomplishments in EEO and/or CIVIL RIGHTS. This includes opportunities provided to minorities and women to receive grants and/or contracts, employment and advancement, training, award recognition, and program benefits.

ECQ3 RESULTS DRIVEN: Stresses accountability and continuous improvement. It includes the ability to make timely and effective decisions and produce results through strategic planning and implementation and evaluation of programs and policies.

ECQ4 BUSINESS ACUMEN: Involves the ability to acquire and administer human, financial, material, and information resources in a manner that instills public trust and accomplishes the organization's mission and to use new technology to enhance decision making.

ECQ 5 BUILDING COALITIONS/COMMUNICATION: Involves the ability to explain, advocate, and express facts and ideas in a convincing manner and negotiate with individuals and groups internally and externally. It also involves the ability to develop an expansive professional network with other organizations and to identify the internal and external politics that impact the work of the organization.

B. Mandatory Technical Qualifications (if applicable): all applicants must address.

C. Education: (Identify any required educational requirements, if applicable).

HOW TO APPLY -- All applicants must submit the following:

1. OF-612, Application for Federal Employment, or resume that includes all specific information that your application must contain (see "Applying for a Federal Job" and forms at www.opm.gov/forms/html/of.asp)

2. Complete responses to executive and technical qualifications. (Managerial statements, i.e., ECQ's, **must not** exceed 10 pages). Visit www.opm.gov/ses/writingstate for additional guidance on writing your Qualifications Statements.
3. Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program graduates must provide proof of current OPM certification and address the Mandatory Technical Qualifications.
4. Current or former SES members must submit documentation of SES status and a narrative statement addressing only the mandatory technical qualifications.

Additional Information:

1. This position is covered under the post-employment restriction of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-521). This law also requires the selectee to file an Executive Personnel Financial Disclosure Report (Standard Form 278), within 30 days of appointment.
2. Applications sent in U.S. Government postage-paid envelope and submitted through Federal Agency courier services will not be considered, however use of government e-mail systems and government fax machines is permitted if the agency states those systems may be used to send applications.
3. Male applicants born after December 31, 1959, must be registered with the Selective Service System before they can be employed by an executive agency of the Federal government. This requirement does not apply to Agency employees appointed before November 8, 1985.
4. The 1993 Hatch Act Reform Amendments prohibit oral and written political recommendations for Federal jobs.
5. ALL APPLICATION FORMS ARE SUBJECT TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE PRIVACY ACT AND BECOME THE PROPERTY OF USDA.
6. Include other pertinent information such as agency drug and/or alcohol testing program, if applicable.

*****All forms/applications/questions should be sent and/or directed to: (Agency Address) Attn: (Contact Person Name and Telephone Number, and if applicable, Fax Machine Number and E-mail Address), (Reference Announcement Number).*****

Applications must be received by the closing date of the vacancy announcement.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication or program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

"The USDA provides reasonable accommodations to applicants with disabilities. If you need a reasonable accommodation for any part of the application and hiring process, please notify us. The decision on granting reasonable accommodation will be made on a case-by-case basis."

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Consideration for competitive selection for this position is open to all persons within the area of consideration who meet the basic qualifications. Race, color, age, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, political beliefs, religion, marital or family status, disability, and other nonmerit factors will not be considered.

EVALUATION METHOD

Applicants who meet the mandatory requirements in items A (Executive Core Qualification Factors), B (Technical Qualifications), and C (Education Requirements) above will be considered qualified for this position. Rating and ranking to determine "**best qualified**" will be conducted by a panel of experts and will be based upon consideration of the degree to which applicants meet the mandatory knowledge, skills and abilities described in items A and B.

EXHIBIT 5

Streamlining the SES Merit Staffing Process

Office of Personnel Management's
30-Day Model

ACTION	Time Frame in Work Days
Announcement closes; preliminary qualifications determinations made, Executive Resources Board (ERB) convened	3 days
ERB evaluates applicants; identifies those who are Best Qualified (BQ)	5 days
List/certificate of BQ prepared; BQ referred for consideration of Selecting Official	3 days
Selecting Official interviews and selects. Department secures approval of Appointing Authority (Secretary of Agriculture or designee)	7 days
Case prepared for OPM review and presentation to Qualifications Review Board (QRB)	7 days
Total USDA Time	25 days
OPM reviews case; QRB takes action	5 days
Total time from close of announcement to selection:	30 days

EXHIBIT 6

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRESCREENING PANEL MEMBERS**OBJECTIVE:**

To separate the applicants into two categories:

Minimally Qualified - those applicants that will be eliminated from further consideration. This does not mean that they are not qualified, only that there are other applicants that are more qualified for this position.

Qualified - those applicants that will be referred to the Executive Resources Board for further consideration. From this group of applicants, the ERB will determine the "Best Qualified" list for referral to the recommending official.

Prior to the prescreening panel meeting, please:

- Review each application and consider the information provided in the complete application (not only the narratives for the ECQs and technical qualifications) to evaluate qualifications.
- Complete the attached SES Prescreening Evaluation Sheet. You must document why you made the choices you made; why you determined some were in the qualified group and others were in the minimally qualified group. Documentation must be specific enough to clearly explain the reasons for elimination. To state that an applicant has "limited ECQ's" or "limited technical qualifications" is insufficient. For example, the documentation should identify which ECQ or technical qualification is lacking and/or identify the level and scope of responsibility demonstrated vs. the level and scope of responsibility required of the SES position.
- Consider only the information provided in the application and job related factors. You may not consider personal knowledge in your rating process.

The prescreening panel, as a group, will determine which applicants will be referred to the ERB.

If for some reason you feel that you cannot be objective in rating all applicants or feel your serving on this prescreening panel would be inappropriate, please contact the Executive Secretary immediately.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRESCREENING PANEL MEMBERS - *continued*

The discussions and recommendations of the prescreening panel are confidential. Please do not communicate recommendations to other management officials.

If you have questions on the prescreening panel process and/or your role, please contact: _____ at _____.

Attachment

EXHIBIT 6.1

United States Department of Agriculture/AGENCY

SES PRESCREENING EVALUATION SHEET

POSITION TITLE & SERIES:

LOCATION:

Name of Applicant Current Place of Employment	Minimally Qualified	Qualified	RATIONALE (You must address why you screen out an applicant)

United States Department of Agriculture/AGENCY
SES PRESCREENING EVALUATION SHEET - continued

POSITION TITLE & SERIES:
LOCATION:

Name of Applicant Current Place of Employment	Minimally Qualified	Qualified	RATIONALE (You must address why you screen out an applicant)

Panel Member: _____
Signature

Date: _____

EXHIBIT 7**SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE**
MERIT STAFFING CERTIFICATION CHECKLIST

The checklist below reflects the merit staffing procedures followed in the recruitment, development of qualifications standard, acceptance of applications, rating of applications, referrals and selections, and documentation retained for the position of (include position title, agency & USAJOBS' No. _____).

Vacancy Announcement/Recruitment

1. The vacancy announcement was entered into the automated OPM SES vacancy announcement system, and the published vacancy announcement conforms in all respects with the information entered into the OPM SES vacancy announcement system.
2. The vacancy announcement
 - was opened from _____ to _____.
 - contains all the required information for SES vacancy announcements
 - was opened to All Qualified Persons or Governmentwide
 - identifies the Executive Core Qualification requirements as mandatory

Qualifications Standards

1. The qualification requirements:
 - were established prior to publication of the vacancy announcement
 - are related to the duties and responsibilities of the position
 - are stated broadly enough that non-USDA applicants could meet them
 - are set at a high enough standard that those who meet them can successfully perform in the position
2. Only mandatory qualification requirements were used to disqualify or screen out applicants.
3. If a minimum education requirement is used, it is the same minimum education requirement authorized for similar positions in the general schedule.

Accepting Applications

1. Each application is clearly marked with date of receipt.
2. All applicants considered were received within the time specified in the job announcement.
3. Applications were reviewed for completeness.
4. Ineligible applicants were returned with a notice of explanation.

Rating Applications

1. An AD-735 (or similar listing) was completed to document the preliminary eligibility and qualification determinations.
2. The Executive Resources Board (ERB)
 - rated and ranked eligible applications to determine which applicants were Best Qualified.
 - used a rating plan to make consistent judgments in rating and ranking applicants
 - grouped the eligible candidates into broad categories, one of which was Best Qualified.
3. The rating and ranking factors were based upon the knowledge, skills, abilities and other job-related factors identified in the qualification standard for the position.
4. The rating of the ERB panel members (rating sheets) and the consolidated scoring matrix show the basis for the determination/ranking made on each applicant.

Referral and Selection

1. The ERB used the rating sheet to make recommendations to the selecting official on the qualifications of the eligible applicants, which included the Best Qualified list.
2. The selecting official selected from among the applicants identified on the:
 - Best Qualified Competitive Certificate
 - Noncompetitive Certificate
3. The agency head, Under or Assistant Secretary and the Secretary sign the AD-67 certifying that the selected applicant meets the qualification requirements of the position.

Documentation

Sufficient documentation exists to reconstruct this action.

CERTIFICATION

The merit staffing process used for this vacancy announcement is in full compliance with internal USDA SES merit staffing procedures/policy and with law, rule, regulation and OPM guidance.

Chair, ERB

Date

EXHIBIT 8**SAMPLE ERB TRANSMITTAL/INSTRUCTION MEMORANDUM****TO:****FROM:****SUBJECT:** Executive Resources Board - (mission area)

The Executive Resources Board (ERB) will meet:

Date:

Time:

Room:

Purpose: To review and evaluate applicants for the following SES position: (Position title & series; agency; location)

Attached are copies of the vacancy announcement, position description, executive core and technical qualification requirements, rating plan, scoring sheet, and job applications for those candidates who meet the basic qualification requirements of the position.

Please review all material and read the "Instructions for ERB Members" before evaluating the applicants. Your individual scoring matrix should be completed and faxed to the Executive Secretary at (202) 690-2435 the day before the ERB is scheduled to meet. As a group, you will determine which applicants are the best qualified and should be referred to the recommending official. **The information contained in the attached package is confidential and should only be discussed with ERB members serving on this board.**

(Identify Antoinette Brevard, Marilyn Caul, or Penni Scriven) will serve as the Executive Secretary for the ERB. If you have any questions regarding this meeting, please contact her at (202) 720-2101.

Attachments

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXECUTIVE RESOURCES BOARD (ERB) MEMBERS

Prior to the meeting please:

- Review each application and consider the information provided in the complete application (not only the narratives for the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) and technical qualifications) to rate qualifications.
- Using the rating plan provided in your ERB package, rate the applicants from 1 to 5 (5 being the highest rating) on each ECQ and technical qualification. You may assign a zero (0) for a qualification if you find no evidence of possession of that qualification. However, any applicant assigned a zero will be discussed by the panel to ensure that all information provided by the applicant was considered. If a zero stands as a rating for any qualification after the panel discussion, that applicant is immediately out of consideration and is no longer part of the process.
- Add the scores of each applicant, providing each applicant with a total score. Please ensure that your total scores are added correctly.
- Consider only the information provided in the application. You may not consider personal knowledge in your rating process.

The ERB, as a group, will determine which applicants will be referred to the recommending official as the Best Qualified (BQ) list. The panel must ensure that the applicants on the BQ list, as reflected by their scores, are comparable, and that there is a defensible break between the scores of the BQ list and the other applicants that are not referred.

If for some reason you feel that you cannot be objective in rating all applicants or feel your serving on this ERB would be inappropriate, please contact the Executive Secretary immediately.

The discussions and recommendations of the ERB are confidential. Please do not communicate recommendations to other management officials. The Executive Resources Staff will transmit the BQ list to the servicing HRO after the scores and totals have been validated.

If you are a first time ERB member and have additional questions on the ERB process and/or your role, please contact the Executive Secretary at (202) 720-2101.

Please fax a completed copy of your scoring matrix to the Executive Secretary at (202) 690-2435 the day before the ERB meets.

EXHIBIT 9**DOCUMENTATION FOR ERB PACKAGE**

1. Transmittal/Instruction memorandum;
2. Applications of all qualified candidates. Applications for lateral candidates and technically qualified SESCDP certified graduates should not be distributed to panel members;
3. Summary scoring matrix containing the names of all qualified candidates to be rated and ranked in alphabetical order;
4. Position description;
5. Rating plan (must include the extrapolation statement); and
6. Vacancy announcement with executive core and/or technical qualification requirements.

HRO's are responsible for ensuring the quality, accuracy, and completeness of each package.

EXHIBIT 10

SES SCORING MATRIX

POSITION TITLE: _____

AGENCY: _____

Names of competitive candidates:	EXECUTIVE CORE QUALS					TECHNICAL QUALS			TOTAL SCORE ¹
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	

Panel Member:

Signature

Date

¹ Total score is the sum total of points for each ECQ & technical qualification rating

EXHIBIT 10.1

SL SCORING MATRIX

POSITION: _____

AGENCY: _____

Name of Competitive Candidates	TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS				TOTAL SCORE
	1	2	3	4	

Panel Member:

Signature Date

EXHIBIT 11**DOCUMENTATION FOR TENTATIVE SELECTIONS**

1. Form AD-67, Request for Prior Clearance of Personnel Action; and
2. USDA Executive and Senior Career Employee Merit Staffing Checklist with all applicable blocks completed; signed by the mission area/agency Human Resources Officer;
3. Executive Personnel Transaction Form (all requested information provided);
4. Employee's job application or resume; **and, for SES selections, the selectee's written narrative that addresses the executive core qualifications; and**
5. Documentation certifying selection by the recommending official. (Roster of Best Qualified candidates, Exhibit 11, and/or Roster of Noncompetitive Eligibles, Exhibit 11.1).

If the selection requires approval from the Qualifications Review Board (QRB), 3 copies of the following should also be submitted in addition to the above and labeled for the QRB:

- a. Selectee's job application or resume;
- b. The vacancy announcement (minus the supplemental statements); and,
- c. Written narrative that addresses the ECQ's (no more than 10 pages total).

EXHIBIT 13**MERIT STAFFING CASE FILES**

If applicable, the merit staffing case file should include:

1. The vacancy announcement which shows its opening and closing dates and the OPM control number from USAJOBS;
2. Form AD-769, with the signatures of the Agency or Staff Office Heads, Agency EEO Manager, appropriate Under/Assistant Secretary, Assistant Secretary for Administration, and the Secretary/Deputy Secretary of Agriculture;
3. A description of the recruitment efforts (recruitment plan);
4. Qualifications standard, if required, position description, including AD-332, Position Description Cover Sheet, and evaluation statement;
5. Job analysis, if required, and rating plan;
6. Organization chart reflecting location of position;
7. Instruction memorandum for ERB members;
8. List of ERB members including job titles, agencies, current employment location and telephone numbers;
9. ERB certificate of "Best Qualified" Candidates and a composite of the ERB rating sheets on those candidates forwarded to the recommending official. Attach the agency's roster(s) of competitive eligibles, noncompetitive eligibles, and/or SESCO graduates to document selection by the recommending official;
10. USDA Executive and Senior Career Employee Merit Staffing Checklist;
11. Approved Form AD-67;
12. Completed SF-52, including selectee's name with appropriate signatures and dates. Attach the selectee's application/resume;
13. Originals of all applications/resumes received by the agency; and
14. Any inquiries obtained on the applicants.

EXHIBIT 14

DOCUMENTATION FOR SES/SL REASSIGNMENTS

Submit 1 set of the following to ERS:

1. Form AD-67;
2. Reassignment letter on Office of the Secretary letterhead;
3. USDA Executive and Senior Career Employee Merit Staffing Checklist (Part II);
4. Executive Personnel Transaction Form;

And, for new positions only:

5. Position Description with OF-8 and classification evaluation statement.

EXHIBIT 15

SAMPLE REASSIGNMENT LETTER
SES only
Reassignment within 120 days after appointment of Secretary
Within or Outside of Commuting Area
(Use Office of the Secretary letterhead)

Name & Address
of SES member

Dear Mr./Ms.

This is to request that you accept a voluntary reassignment from your current position of _____, ES-__ to the position of _____, ES-__, in city/state. This reassignment action will not affect your career appointment.

In accordance with 5 CFR 317.901(c), an agency may not involuntarily reassign a Senior Executive Service career appointee within 120 calendar days after the appointment of the head of an agency. In addition, 5 CFR 317.901(b)(1 or 2) provides for a written notice of at least 15/60 calendar days before the effective date of the reassignment.

Please indicate below whether you wish to voluntarily accept the reassignment and/or waive the 15/60-day period. Please sign and date a completed copy of this letter and return to your human resources office within 5 work days after receipt.

Secretary's name
Secretary

____ I voluntarily accept the proposed reassignment.

____ I do not wish to accept the proposed reassignment.

____ I wish to waive the 15/60-day period.

____ I do not wish to waive the 15/60-day period.

Signature

Date

EXHIBIT 15.1

SAMPLE REASSIGNMENT LETTER
SES only
Outside the commuting area
(Use Office of the Secretary letterhead)

Name & Address
of SES member

Dear Mr./Ms.

This is to advise you that you will be reassigned from your current position of _____, ES-__ to the position of _____, ES-__, in city/state. This reassignment action will not affect your career appointment. The reassignment will be effective no earlier than 60 calendar days from your receipt of this letter.

This reassignment is due to (must provide statement of reasons)

In accordance with 5 CFR 317.901(b)(2), you must be given written notice at least 60 calendar days before the effective date of a reassignment outside your commuting area.

Please indicate below whether you wish to voluntarily waive the 60-day period, sign and date in the space provided. Please return a completed copy of this letter to your human resources office within 5 work days after receipt.

Secretary's name
Secretary

I wish to waive the 60-day period.

I do not wish to waive the 60-day period.

Signature

Date

EXHIBIT 15.2

SAMPLE REASSIGNMENT LETTER
SES only
Within commuting area
(Use Office of the Secretary letterhead)

Name & Address
of SES member

Dear Mr./Ms.

This is to advise you that you will be reassigned from your current position of _____, ES-__ to the position of _____, ES-__, city/state. This reassignment action will not affect your career appointment. The reassignment will be effective no earlier than 15 calendar days from your receipt of this letter.

In accordance with 5 CFR 317.901(b)(1), you must be given written notice at least 15 calendar days before the effective date of a reassignment within your commuting area.

Please indicate below whether you wish to voluntarily waive the 15-day period and sign and date in the space provided. Please return a completed copy of this letter to your human resources office within 5 work days after receipt.

Secretary's name
Secretary

_____ I wish to waive the 15-day period.

_____ I do not wish to waive the 15-day period.

Signature

Date

EXHIBIT 15.3

SAMPLE REASSIGNMENT LETTER
SL/ST/SSRS only
Outside the commuting area
(Use Office of the Secretary letterhead)

Name of SL/ST/SSRS Employee
Address

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr.,

This is to advise you that you will be reassigned from your current position of _____, SL/ST/RA-(series) to the position of _____, SL/ST/RA-(series), in (city/state). This reassignment action will not affect your career appointment. The reassignment will be effective no earlier than 60 calendar days from your receipt of this letter.

This reassignment is due to (provide brief statement of reasons)

Department policy provides for a written notice at least 60 calendar days before the effective date of a reassignment outside your commuting area.

Please indicate below whether you wish to voluntarily waive the 60-day period and sign and date in the space provided. Please return a completed copy of this letter to your human resources office within 5 work days after receipt.

Sincerely,

Secretary's name
Secretary

I wish to waive the 60-day period.

I do not wish to waive the 60-day period.

Signature

Date

EXHIBIT 15.4

SAMPLE REASSIGNMENT LETTER
SL/ST/SSRS only
Within commuting area
(Use Office of the Secretary letterhead)

Name of SL/ST/SSRS Employee
Address

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr.,

This is to advise you that you will be reassigned from your current position of _____, SL/ST/RA-(series) to the position of _____, SL/ST/RA-(series), in (city/state). This reassignment action will not affect your career appointment. The reassignment will be effective no earlier than 15 calendar days from your receipt of this letter.

Department policy provides for a written notice at least 15 calendar days before the effective date of a reassignment outside your commuting area.

Please indicate below whether you wish to voluntarily waive the 15-day period and sign and date in the space provided. Please return a completed copy of this letter to your human resources office within 5 work days after receipt.

Sincerely,

Secretary's name
Secretary

I wish to waive the 15-day period.

I do not wish to waive the 15-day period.

Signature

Date

EXHIBIT 16

**SAMPLE DECLINATION LETTER
SES/SL/ST/SSRS**

**Declination of reassignment outside the commuting area; eligible employee
elects Discontinued Service Annuity
(Use employing agency letterhead)**

Addressed to
individual
who signed
reassignment letter

I am in receipt of your letter dated _____, reassigning me to the
SES/SL/ST/SSRS position of _____, ES/SL/ST/RA-(series), in
city/state, at my current salary.

For personal reasons, I am unable to accept this reassignment. I understand that by
declining the reassignment, I become eligible for discontinued service retirement.
Consequently, I hereby decline the reassignment and apply for discontinued service
retirement to be effective _____.

Sincerely,

Name
Title

EXHIBIT 17

DOCUMENTATION FOR SES NONCAREER APPOINTMENTS

Submit 1 copy of the following to ERS:

1. Form AD-67;
2. Executive Personnel Transaction Form;
3. Employee's job application (OF-612, or resume);
4. Form OPM 1652, Request for SES Noncareer or Limited Appointment Authority; and
5. Qualification Analysis.