



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE

**SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE
AND SENIOR LEVEL
CLASSIFICATION GUIDE**



Office of Human Capital Management
Executive Resources Staff

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USDA GUIDELINES FOR CLASSIFYING SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE (SES) AND SENIOR LEVEL (SL) POSITIONS

COVERAGE:

This chapter provides guidelines and procedures for classifying SES and SL positions. It incorporates the Office of Personnel Management's guidelines as well as provides USDA specific guidance and procedures for classifying and establishing SES and SL positions.

SES positions cover most of the top managerial, supervisory, and policy positions in the executive branch of the Federal Government and are classified above the GS-15. The only positions above the SES are those in the Executive Schedule-noncareer positions that make up the highest level of Presidential appointments.

Senior level covers positions classified above the GS-15 level, but do not meet the executive/managerial criteria characteristic of SES positions and they do not have the fundamental research and development responsibilities that are characteristic of scientific and professional positions. The incumbents of these positions usually serve as independent advisors or technical experts to high level management officials.

POLICY:

It is the policy of the Department of Agriculture that the establishment of all executive and senior level positions must be approved by the Secretary of Agriculture who exercises central control of all executive resources position allocations and is the appointing authority. The Assistant Secretary for Administration has classification authority for all executive and senior level positions. Classification recommendations to the Assistant Secretary will be made by the Executive Resources Staff. In addition, an agency cannot fill a SES or SL position without a space allocation authorized by the Secretary of Agriculture.

CLASSIFICATION OF SES POSITIONS:

For positions to be classified in the SES, they must meet **both** SES functional criteria, established by the Office of Personnel Management, and exceed the GS-15 grade level

criteria, based on the level of duties, responsibilities, and qualifications required by the position.

Functional Criteria

A position meets the SES functional criteria if it requires engagement in any of the following activities:

1. Directs the work of an organizational unit by
 - Assessing policy, program, and project feasibility
 - Determining program goals and developing implementation plans
 - Designing an organizational structure to promote effective work accomplishment; and
 - Setting effectiveness, efficiency, productivity, and management/internal control standards.
2. Is held accountable for the success of one or more specific programs or projects by
 - Obtaining the resources necessary to accomplish the program or project and assuming responsibility for their objective use; and
 - Dealing with key officials from within and/or outside the agency to obtain understanding and support for the program or project.
3. Monitors progress toward organizational goals and periodically evaluate and make appropriate adjustments to such goals by
 - Monitoring work status through formal and informal means to evaluate progress toward objectives;
 - Assessing overall effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity of the organization; and
 - Identifying, diagnosing, and consulting on problem areas related to implementation and goal achievement and making decisions on alternative courses of action.
4. Supervise the work of employees (other than personal assistants) and must meet the minimum requirements for coverage under OPM's *General Schedule Supervisory Guide*. Supervisory and related managerial responsibilities must
 - Require accomplishment of work through combined technical and administrative direction of others;
 - Constitute a major duty occupying at least 25 percent of the incumbent's time; and
 - Meet at least the lowest level of Factor 3 in the *General Grade Supervisory Guide* based on supervision on non-contractor personnel.

5. Otherwise exercises important policy-making, policy-determining, or other executive functions by
 - Reviewing staff recommendations on policies developed to effect the organization's mission;
 - Considering political, social, economic, technical, and administrative factors with potential impact on the recommended policies; and
 - Approving the policies or formally recommending action to the approving official.

Classification Criteria

Series Determination:

Although OPM's classification standards do not cover positions in the SES, they remain the primary tool in determining grade level above the GS-15. The occupational series' definitions are applicable and must be used in determining the appropriate series.

While the principal duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements of the position should be closely related to the work covered by an occupational series, they do not have to be perfectly matched. The correct series is usually apparent from reviewing the duties and responsibilities assigned to the position. In most cases, the occupational series will represent the primary work of the position, the highest level of work performed, and the paramount qualifications required.

When the work of the position is covered by two or more series in one occupational group and no one predominates, use the general series for that group, typically the -01 series, for the position. Use the general series also for positions that are not covered properly by any other series in the group but are related closely to the work of the group.

When the position covers work in more than one occupational group, you must consider all the following factors and make the most logical decision.

- Paramount knowledge required
- Reason for existence
- Organizational function
- Recruitment source

An alternate method for determining the series for some professional positions is the interdisciplinary approach. An interdisciplinary position involves duties and responsibilities that are closely related to more than one professional occupation. As a result, the knowledge and experience requirements can be met by persons qualified in either of the professional series involved.

This method of series determination is used for the sole purpose of adding flexibility to staffing professional positions. This flexibility allows the qualification requirements for the position to extend beyond those of a single series.

Generally, when a position involves work and knowledge pertaining to more than one profession, classification to the predominant series is preferable and the most practical solution. In order to be designated interdisciplinary, the professions or disciplines involved must be logically compatible. There must be an obvious degree of commonality in the core education, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the qualification requirements of either profession. The position descriptions for these positions must state that they are interdisciplinary, and show the tentative title and series for each profession. The final classification of the position is based on the qualifications of the employee selected and is recorded on the position description once the position is filled.

Titling SES Positions:

Because OPM classification standards do not cover SES positions, you are not bound to the prescribed titles OPM has assigned to occupational series. Generally, titles of SES positions should communicate an immediate understanding and identification of the job. Titles should be short, meaningful, and generally descriptive of the work performed. Since SES positions are among top management, their titles should also reflect this level of management. Once basic titles have been established for positions in a series, those titles should be used consistently throughout your agency.

SES Level Determination:

As stated, OPM's classification standards and guides remain the primary tool for determining the grade level of Federal positions. You should use the same classification principles in your analysis. To be classified at the SES level, the position must meet both the functional criteria described above and grade level criteria. Using appropriate OPM classification standards and/or guides, you must evaluate the position and determine whether it substantially exceeds the GS-15 level.

In your position evaluation statement, you must clearly provide an explanation and examples that demonstrate that the position meets at least one of the functional criteria, as well as exceeds the GS-15 grade level criteria. Just simply stating that the position meets the functional criteria or exceeds the GS-15 level is not sufficient. You must identify the standards and guides used in your evaluation. It should also describe the position's organization location and working environment and any position comparisons used. There is no need that evaluation statements be lengthy; however, they should have enough information so that the Executive Resources Staff would know and understand all

of the facts and conclusions that were considered in arriving at the series and grade of the position. At a minimum, position evaluation statements must address the following:

- Classification References
- Introduction (include organization location, working environment, subordinate staff, etc.)
- Title and Series Determination
- Grade Determination (how does the position meet OPM's functional criteria and the duties and responsibilities exceed the GS-15)

Evaluation statements are required for any request to establish a new SES or SL position.

CLASSIFICATION OF SL POSITIONS

You should follow the same guidance for classifying SL positions as described for SES positions above. However, functional criteria would not be applicable. Instead, you would need to explain how the position meets the definition for a Senior Level position.

Attached is the format for new SES positions. SL positions would follow the same format with the omission of Part VI- Responsibilities for the Work of Others.

Establishing new SES or SL positions may be done with a prior approval request to recruit or reassignment action.

REDESCRIPTIONS OF EXISTING SES/SL POSITIONS

If an agency wants to redescribe or modify an existing, encumbered SES/SL position, the agency may do so outside of the prior approval process. The agency must submit to the Executive Resources Staff, the revised position description, completed OF-8, and a brief description of the changes and its effects on the classification.

If an agency wants to redescribe or modify a vacant SES/SL position and is submitting a "request to recruit" prior approval package, the revised position description should be included. The agency should provide a brief description of the changes and the impact on the classification.

NEW REQUIREMENT FOR SES POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

All SES position descriptions must include applicable Presidential Management Agenda Initiatives. All new positions should have a section that identifies these initiatives. Existing positions should have an amendment that identifies the applicable initiatives. Position descriptions that are included as part of a prior approval package must have the management initiatives identified.

SES POSITION DESCRIPTION FORMAT

I. INTRODUCTION:

The introduction should include a brief discussion on the organizational location of the position, the agency's and/or organization's mission, and how the incumbent of this position helps in accomplishing the mission.

II. MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

Describe the major duties and responsibilities. Clearly relate the diversity of programs and/or functions involved.

III. PRESIDENTIAL MANAGEMENT AGENDA INITIATIVES

Identify Presidential Management Agenda (PMA) Initiatives that are applicable to the incumbent's position (As an option, PMA initiatives may be included in Part II-Major Duties and Responsibilities.)

IV. KNOWLEDGE REQUIREMENTS:

Describe the kinds of knowledges, skills and abilities that are required for acceptable performance. This should include managerial skills, as well as specialized or technical skills. Describe the required depth and breadth of knowledge, and the diversity of knowledges/skills required.

V. SCOPE AND EFFECT OF WORK:

Describe the impact this position has on accomplishing the agency's mission, the magnitude of the incumbent's accomplishments (who or what is affected), and the budget in which the incumbent is directly and/or indirectly accountable. Identify the typical contacts that the incumbent must make to successfully perform duties.

VI. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORK OF OTHERS:

Describe the staff (i.e., number of employees, grade levels, number of divisions/subordinate supervisors, diversity of jobs/functions, etc.) and the incumbent's supervisory duties and responsibilities. Also include a statement that addresses the EEO responsibilities in employment and program delivery.

VII. SUPERVISION AND GUIDANCE RECEIVED:

Describe the incumbent's freedom to act-the degree of personal or procedural control and guidance. Indicate to whom the incumbent reports and the level of supervision/guidance received.