



Highlights of [GAO-09-110](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

A diverse Senior Executive Service (SES), which generally represents the most experienced segment of the federal workforce, can be an organizational strength by bringing a wider variety of perspectives and approaches to policy development and implementation, strategic planning, problem solving, and decision making. In a January 2003 report (GAO-03-34), GAO provided data on career SES members by race, ethnicity, and gender as of October 2000 and a statistically estimated projection of what the profile of the SES would be in October 2007 if appointment and separation trends did not change.

In response to a request for updated information on the diversity in the SES, GAO is providing information from the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Central Personnel Data File (1) on the representation of women and minorities in the SES and the SES developmental pool (i.e., GS-15 and GS-14 positions) for the executive branch as of fiscal year 2007 and comparing this representation to fiscal year 2000 levels and to levels GAO projected for October 2007 in its 2003 report; (2) for fiscal years 2000 and 2007, the average age at which women and minorities were appointed to and retired from the SES as well as information on those in the SES reporting targeted disabilities; and (3) on the overall processes used in executive branch agencies for selecting and certifying members into the SES.

GAO is making no recommendations in this report.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-110](#). For more information, contact George H. Stalcup at (202) 512-6806 or stalcup@gao.gov.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Diversity in the Federal SES and Processes for Selecting New Executives

What GAO Found

The representation of women and minorities in the SES and the SES developmental pool increased governmentwide from October 2000 through September 2007, but increases did not occur in all agencies. Over these 7 years, increases occurred in more than half of the 24 major executive branch agencies, but in both 2000 and 2007 the representation of women and minorities continued to vary significantly at those agencies. In 2003, we projected that increases would occur in the representation of women and minorities in the SES and SES developmental pool by 2007. These increases generally did occur.

Governmentwide	October 2000			September 2007		
	Number	Percent		Number	Percent	
		Women	Minorities		Women	Minorities
SES	6,296	23.2	13.9	6,555	29.1	15.8
SES developmental pool (GS-15s and GS-14s)	137,785	28.0	17.0	149,149	34.3	22.5

Source: GAO analysis of OPM's Central Personnel Data File.

Looking beyond racial, ethnic, and gender profiles, GAO also reviewed the average age at appointment to and retirement from the career SES as well as the disability status reported by career SES employees for fiscal years 2000 and 2007. For the most part, career SES members were, on average, about age 50 at the time of their appointment to the SES and about age 60 at the time of their retirement. The average age at appointment to and retirement from the career SES generally did not vary much by race, ethnicity, or gender. GAO also calculated how long, on average, individuals served in the SES, and found that the length of their stay in the SES did vary. For example, women stayed in the SES longer than men; women who voluntarily retired stayed, on average, for 11.4 years, and men who voluntarily retired stayed, on average, for 8.8 years. The average length of service among minorities ranged from 4.1 years for Asian/Pacific Islander women to 12 years for American Indian/Alaska Native men. Governmentwide less than 1 percent of the career SES in 2000 and 2007 had self-reported targeted disabilities, and their representation declined slightly over this time.

Executive branch agencies have established processes for selecting members into the SES and have developmental programs that are designed to create pools of candidates from which new members can be selected. These agencies use Executive Resources Boards to review the executive and technical qualifications of eligible candidates for initial SES career appointments and make recommendations based on the best qualified. An OPM-administered board reviews candidates' qualifications before appointment to the SES.