

Unlocking the Full Potential of America's Federal Workforce

December 15, 2015 at 3:30 PM ET by Shaun Donovan, Beth Cobert

Summary: Today, President Obama took executive action to attract, develop and retain the best talent needed to continue moving the Federal Government forward in the 21st Century.

In his December 2014 [address](#) to Federal Senior Executives, President Obama said, ***"[W]e need the best and brightest of the coming generations to serve. [T]hose of us who believe government can and must be a force for good...we've got to work hard to make sure that government works."*** Today, the President took executive action to attract, develop and retain the best talent needed to continue moving the Government forward in the 21st Century.

A high-performing, efficient and effective government relies on the skills and talent of a high-performing well-prepared and well-trained workforce. Federal employees defend our country overseas, deliver benefits to our troops when they come home, guard our borders, protect our civil rights, push the boundaries of science and space, help businesses grow and gain footholds in overseas markets, and help protect the air we breathe and the water our children drink.

A cornerstone of the President's Management Agenda is a commitment to unlocking the potential of the Federal workforce and building the workforce we need for tomorrow to drive greater effectiveness and efficiency within government and better harness taxpayer resources to spur economic growth. **That is why in December 2014, the President announced a series of initiatives to strengthen our Federal workforce** and recognize outstanding customer service: the White House Advisory Group to Strengthen the Senior Executive Service (SES), the White House Leadership Development Program (WHLDP), and the Customer Service Awards Program.

Today, we honored the public service of our Federal workforce and highlighted progress around the President's initiatives at the *Unlocking the Full Potential of America's Federal Workforce* event. **White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough announced the President's executive order on Strengthening the Senior Executive Service** [\[LINK\]](#). In 2016, more than 60 percent of the Federal Government's SES leaders will be eligible to retire. The impending SES "retirement wave" provides a unique opportunity to recruit and develop the next generation of leaders. Based on recommendations from the White House Advisory Group to Strengthen the SES, today's EO, and related administrative actions, focuses on 1) Hiring the Best Talent, 2) Strengthening SES Development, and 3) Improving SES Accountability, Recognition, and Rewards, among other actions to the Federal Government remains competitive in attracting and retaining world-class talent to serve the American people.

We also announced the inaugural winners of the President's Customer Service Awards. These talented public servants led efforts to improve services to the public and positively impacted American lives. This summer, Federal agencies nominated programs and employees that excelled in their fields to improve services to the public and exemplify how our

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government can deliver excellent service to our customers. This year's inaugural President's Customer Service Award recipients are:

Individual Awards:

- **Ms. Shawn Lynch, Social Security Administration - AL Field Office:** Shawn Lynch has led efforts to drastically reduce appointment wait times, increase registrations, and clear the backlog of applications at the Dothan, Alabama Social Security field office. Through her outreach to the community from March to July 2015, Ms. Lynch helped increase the number of registrations at the Dothan office by 488 percent and reduce the backlog of Supplemental Security Income overpayment files by around 70 percent.
- **Dr. Justin Springer, Veterans Affairs, DeBakey VA Medical Center:** The Mental Health Inpatient Unit at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center provides services to veterans when they are in the midst of a mental health crisis. Recognizing the importance of providing high-quality service during this critical time, Dr. Justin Springer systematically identified and implemented 19 different initiatives to improve customer satisfaction. His efforts have led to an almost 10 point increase in overall inpatient satisfaction since FY 2012.

Initiative Awards:

- **Global Entry Program:** The Global Entry Program has facilitated over 17.2 million crossings and saved over 287,000 working hours of Customs and Borders Officers by expediting clearance of pre-approved, low-risk travelers into the United States. The average wait time for members is 84 percent less than for travelers not enrolled in the program.
- **Consulate of Dhahran, Saudi Arabia Team, U.S. Department of State:** Faced with increasing safety concerns for its customers, the staff at the Consulate at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia devised innovative strategies to deliver direct, off-site services to hundreds of Americans for the first time. Through their efforts, the team eliminated the need for Americans to travel on dangerous roads to reach the Consulate and saved hundreds of travel hours for its customers.
- **BusinessUSA Veteran Entrepreneur Initiative:** The BusinessUSA Veteran Entrepreneur Initiative has streamlined a complicated process to provide veterans with easy access to resources on how to start or grow a new business. Previously, Veterans seeking this information had to navigate through multiple government websites that often used different terminology and provided inconsistent advice. Since its launch on July 1, 2014, over 250,000 veterans have been served.

We also had the opportunity to hear about the work of our inaugural class of [White House Leadership Development Fellows](#). These emerging leaders rotate to different agencies on complex, high-priority assignments to build and strengthen enterprise leadership skills and address cross-agency challenges. The application season for the next round of fellows will open in early 2016.

Finally, we also recognized the service of the 2015 Presidential Rank Award Winners. These career civil servants are recognized for their distinguished contributions to public service.

Along with honoring the work of our Nation's public servants, **we must also continue to hold the Federal workforce to the highest level of accountability for our citizens.** This is why OPM released a final rule in September 2015 to help standardize a framework for performance management of all SES members and holds leaders accountable for individual and agency performance. Fewer than three months since implementation of the rule, the new requirements are already being met by more than 90 percent of the agencies that voluntarily adopted the basic SES performance appraisal system. Agencies are also using executive reviews to gauge performance by collecting customer and employee perspectives, determining how well senior executives promote diversity, and analyzing their employees' productivity and effectiveness.

As we round out 2015, we hope you'll take a moment to reflect upon how America's public servants work to make your life better each and every day. And **we hope you'll join the President in honoring the work our Federal employees do day in and day out on behalf of our Nation.**

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FACT SHEET: Executive Order on Strengthening the Senior Executive Service (SES)

One of the key pillars of the President's Management Agenda is building a world-class Federal workforce, starting with strengthening the Senior Executive Service. The Federal government's executive corps is comprised of thousands of hard working and dedicated leaders. The Administration is committed to investing in and supporting these leaders and ensuring agencies are developing talent pipelines for the future.

To this end, the President announced the creation of the *White House Advisory Group (WHAG) to Strengthen the Senior Executive Service* in December 2014. Comprised of 24 leaders from across the Federal government, the WHAG was charged with making recommendations to the Administration to improve the way the Federal government recruits, hires, develops, manages, retains, and ensures accountability for its senior career leaders.

Over the past year, OMB and OPM, working collaboratively with the WHAG, sought the viewpoints of many agencies and stakeholder groups and incorporated feedback and input on proposals that have led to the recommendations issued in an Executive Order on December 15 and additional actions the Administration will take to strengthen the SES. The actions focus on three key areas: 1) Hiring the Best Talent, 2) Strengthening SES Development, and 3) Improving SES Accountability, Recognition, and Rewards.

Implementation:

All agencies are required to implement four key recommendations – **1)** streamline the hiring process, **2)** develop a plan to increase rotations, **3)** increase aggregate spending on performance awards, and **4)** increase the initial basic rate of pay to ensure SES/SL/ST earn more than General Schedule employees where they work. A phased approach will be used to implement four other recommendations in the Executive Order – establish talent management and succession planning processes, require executive ownership of recruiting and hiring, increase professional development requirements, and create an onboarding program – among the 24 Chief Financial Officers Act agencies, with seven agencies implementing in FY2016, seven in FY2017 and the rest in FY2018.

The Executive Order also creates a Subcommittee of the President's Management Council (PMC) to advise OPM, members of the PMC, and the President on implementation of the order and additional ways to strengthen and improve the SES workforce. The Deputy Director for Management at OMB, the Director of OPM, and three other members of the PMC will serve on the Subcommittee. The Subcommittee will select at least two career members of the SES to advise them and will collaborate with the Chief Human Capital Officers Council.

1. HIRE THE BEST TALENT

- ***Require Executive Ownership of Strategic Recruitment and Hiring*** - Agency Deputy Secretaries (or their direct designees) will track and monitor SES vacancies and recruiting efforts on a regular basis, dramatically increasing senior leadership attention for recruitment and hiring.
- ***Streamline the Career SES Hiring Process*** - OPM will evaluate the final materials agencies are required to submit to OPM in order to make an SES selection determination and propose alternative materials acceptable for consideration. Based on guidance from OPM, agencies will make changes to streamline their hiring process to make it more efficient, effective and less burdensome for applicants and agency human resource officials.
- ***Establish Talent and Succession Management Processes*** - Building on successful models currently employed at the Department of Defense and in the Intelligence Community, agencies will establish a talent and succession management process for SES employees (and Senior Level (SL) and Senior Scientific or Professional (ST) employees as appropriate) to annually inform decisions about hiring, career development, and executive rotations.

2. STRENGTHEN SES DEVELOPMENT

- ***Increase SES Rotations*** - Agencies will develop plans to facilitate the rotation of their SES based on the needs of the agency and the developmental needs and growth opportunities of the executive. Rotations will provide more executives, especially those in generalist positions, varied work experiences, developmental opportunities and an enterprise-wide perspective. While agency-specific targets will not be required, the order establishes a government-wide goal of 15% of SES members rotating for a minimum of 120 days (including to different departments, agencies, subcomponents, functional areas, sectors, and non-Federal partners) during FY2017.
- ***Increase SES Development Requirements*** - Executives will complete a minimum of one professional development activity per year and receive a leadership assessment, such as a “360-degree” multi-rater evaluation, at least every three years to inform their individual developmental needs. Non-career SES and equivalent appointees will also participate in regular leadership assessments.
- ***Create SES Onboarding Program*** - Agencies will establish formal onboarding programs for new executives informed by a framework created by OPM and PPO and successfully piloted in six agencies in 2015. Onboarding will be provided for career and non-career SES, SL and ST employees, and SES-equivalent positions.

3. IMPROVE SES ACCOUNTABILITY, RECOGNITION AND REWARDS

- ***Retain and Reward More Top Performers by Increasing the Limit on Aggregate Spending on Performance Awards*** - The order increases the limit on aggregate spending on agency performance awards for SES and SL/ST employees from the current 4.8% cap to 7.5% (the average agency percentage spent in 2010 before OMB/OPM guidance restricted it). OPM will provide guidance, as appropriate, to agencies regarding the distribution of these awards and how they should allocate awards in a manner that provides meaningfully greater rewards to top performers.
- ***Increase the Initial Rate of Basic Pay for SES Employees so they Earn More than General Schedule Employees*** - The heads of agencies with SES positions that supervise General Schedule (GS) employees will implement policies for initial pay setting and pay adjustments, as appropriate, for career SES so their compensation will exceed that of their subordinate GS employees. Similar policies will be implemented by heads of agencies for SL and ST employees that supervise GS employees.

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- In addition to the reforms outlined in the Executive Order, OMB and OPM will undertake a number of administrative actions. For example, OPM will launch an education campaign on SES performance and accountability and will establish an expert team to consult two or three agencies to address SES conduct and performance challenges.

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