Senior Executive Service Exit Survey Results April 2015

April 2015

a New Day for Federal Service

Contents

Executive Summary

In mid-2013, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued a new exit survey for prospective, standard distribution by all agencies across the Federal Government to departing members of the Senior Executive Service (SES). This SES Exit Survey enables Federal agencies to capture valuable information regarding the circumstances under which their senior executives leave the Federal Government, and to offer an opportunity for executives to provide candid feedback about their work experiences and their perspectives of their agencies. This report has been prepared to consolidate, and provide an examination of, the initial data that has been gathered since the implementation of the SES Exit Survey. This report specifically covers the period of April 2013 through July 2014, during which time a total of 221 executives from 24 different agencies provided responses.

These initial SES Exit Survey results indicate the following:

- **Executives are leaving with intent to continue working, in most cases for higher pay**. A total of 153 executives reported that they are retiring or resigning. Of those retiring and resigning voluntarily, 49% will be working for pay after they leave their agency, or intend to look for employment in the near future. Of those respondents who will be working after they leave their agency, the majority are interested in working full-time (71%), and expect an increase in compensation (59%).

- **Executives maintain pride for their home agencies and the Senior Executive Service.** The majority of respondents indicated they would recommend their agency as a good place to work (63%) and would recommend employment in the Senior Executive Service to others (62%).

- **Agencies can influence whether or not executives stay in the organization.** Although the majority of executives indicated no effort was made to encourage them to stay (70%), many indicated that their decision might have been changed by an increase in pay (37%), verbal encouragement to stay based on their value to the organization (24%), or an award (24%).

- **Work environment issues are the highest contributing factors in an executive's decision to leave.** Respondents were asked the extent to which a variety of reasons contributed to their leaving the agency. Work environment issues contributed the most to the decision (i.e., "political environment"—42%; "senior leadership"—38%; "organizational culture"—38%). Respondents also indicated that a "desire to enjoy life without work commitments" was a contributing factor in deciding to leave (38%).

These findings capture some of the core strengths and challenges facing today's Senior Executive Service members. Clearly, there is still pride in being a part of the Senior Executive Service and in the role of a public servant. These findings show that agencies can influence whether or not their SES members ultimately choose to stay or leave the organization. By shifting the work environment and organizational culture, and acknowledging and appreciating an executive's value to the organization, agencies may be able to convince their high-performing senior executives to stay.

Survey Background and Methodology

Purpose

OPM, in partnership with other agencies, designed the SES Exit Survey to capture valuable information regarding the circumstances under which senior executives leave the Federal Government and offer an opportunity for executives to provide candid feedback about their work experiences and their perspectives of their agencies. The information will enable Federal agencies to have increased awareness of the work environments they are providing their executives, and to inform their continued efforts to successfully recruit, manage, and retain their senior leadership workforce. The information will also be helpful to support agency and Governmentwide recruitment, engagement, retention, and succession planning efforts for current and future executives. With many SES members eligible for retirement in the near future, it is imperative for agencies to understand what they can do to engage and retain executives, while mitigating factors that cause executives to leave the Federal Government.

Methodology

Survey Content

The survey contains information related to the following topic areas:

- Future Plans
- Compensation
- Perceptions of the Agency
- Perceptions of the Senior Executive Service
- Succession Planning
- Stay Factors
- Reasons for Leaving
- Executive Core Qualifications
- Performance Management
- Demographics

Who Participated

A total of 221 members of the Senior Executive Service who were in the process of leaving their agencies responded to the survey.

How the Survey Was Administered

Agencies self-administered the on-line survey by sending a web link to each departing executive.

When Were Employees Surveyed

Agencies began administering in April 2013. The survey data examined in this report covers the time period between April 2013 and July 2014.

Response Rate

The response rate is difficult to calculate because OPM does not directly distribute the individual surveys to departing executives. Based on Enterprise Human Resource Integration data and agency information, OPM calculated a 30 percent response rate.

Data Analysis

In performing statistical analyses for this report, OPM employed a number of grouping procedures to simplify presentations.

Extent Items: These items asked the respondent to choose an answer on an "extent" scale comprised of the following options: "Not at all"; "To a Small Extent"; "To a Moderate Extent"; "To a Great Extent"; and "To a Very Great Extent." The results were then further grouped, as displayed in table below.

Response Option	Grouped Category
Not at all	Not at all/To a Small Extent
To a Small Extent	
To A Moderate Extent	To a Moderate Extent
To a Great Extent	To a Great Extent/To a Very Great Extent
To A Very Great Extent	

Agreement Items: These items requested the respondent to choose an answer on an "agreement" scale comprised of the following options: "Strongly Agree"; "Agree"; "Neither Agree nor Disagree"; "Disagree"; and "Strongly Disagree." The results were then further grouped, as displayed in the table below.

Response Option	Grouped Category
Strongly Agree	Positive
Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	Neutral
Disagree	Negative
Strongly Disagree	

"Not Applicable" and "I Prefer Not to Respond" Responses: Responses of "Not Applicable" (N/A) and "I Prefer Not to Respond" were removed before calculation of percentages for Extent and Agreement items; however, frequencies for these data are listed in the report.

Percentage Totals: Total percentages for some of the tables in this report may not equal 100% due to rounding; however, all pre-rounded percentages create a total equal to 100%.

Survey Analysis

Primary Factors

Future Plans

Departing executives were asked to provide information regarding their plans for the future. The majority of the executives who took the survey indicated they were retiring or resigning (70%), with 97% of these individuals reporting they were retiring or resigning voluntarily. Almost half of the departing executives indicated they planned to work for pay (49%). Almost a quarter of the departing executives indicated they had not decided whether they were going to work for pay in the future (24%).

Which of the following best describes the circumstances under which you are leaving your agency?	Frequency	Percentage
I am retiring	129	59%
I am resigning	24	11%
I am transferring to another Federal agency	27	12%
I am accepting a non-SES position within a Federal agency	5	2%
I am leaving involuntarily	2	1%
Other	30	14%

N=217

I am retiring:	Frequency	Percentage
Voluntarily	124	97%
Involuntarily (Mandatory Retirement)	2	2%
Involuntarily for reasons other than Mandatory Retirement	2	2%

N= 128

Will you be working for pay after you leave your agency?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	59	35%
No, but I intend to look for employment in the near future	24	14%
No	45	27%
Undecided	41	24%

N= 169

The executives who stated their intent to work in the future reported the following: 33% indicated they planned to work for the private sector; 21% planned to work for themselves; and 16% planned to work in the not-for-profit sector. The executives who indicated they intended to work reported the following: 71% indicated they will be working full-time, and 59% for more pay. Of the executives who stated their intent to work, 66% indicated they intended to work in their agency in some future capacity as an employee or contractor.

Which of the following best describes the type of organization you will be working for after you leave your agency:	Frequency	Percentage
Government contractor	8	10%
Private company, not a Government contractor	27	33%
Self-employed	17	21%
State or local government	5	6%
Non-profit organization	13	16%
Work as a reemployed annuitant for a Federal agency	4	5%
Other	7	9%

N= 81

Will you be working full-time or part-time?	Frequency	Percentage
Full-Time	79	71%
Part-Time	32	29%

N=111

Will your compensation increase, decrease, or stay the same?	Frequency	Percentage
Increase	65	59%
Decrease	29	26%
Stay the same	16	15%

N= 110

If possible, would you work for this agency in the future as an employee or contractor?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, part-time	31	19%
Yes, full-time	36	21%
Yes, for a short-term assignment	43	26%
No	58	35%

N=168

Perceptions of the Agency and Senior Executive Service

Almost two-thirds of executives would recommend their agency as a good place to work (63%) and would recommend employment in the Senior Executive Service to others (62%); however, 23% of executives would not recommend their agency as a good place to work, and 13% of executives would not recommend employment in the Senior Executive Service.

I would recommend this agency to others as a good place to work.	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	106	63%
Neutral	25	15%
Negative	38	23%

N=169

I would recommend employment in the Senior Executive Service to others.	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	104	62%
Neutral	42	25%
Negative	21	13%

N=167

Succession Planning

With over half of the current SES workforce eligible for retirement in the next three to five years, it is critical that agencies have a pipeline of talent ready to take on senior level roles. Agencies currently are already required to develop a comprehensive management succession program (5 CFR 412.201); however, over half of the surveyed executives reported no formal succession planning efforts in their agencies (60%). Fifty-three percent of executives did report they had been asked to help prepare their successors.

Does your agency have any formal succession planning efforts for executives? (e.g., interviews/debriefs that took place prior to your departure to ensure smooth transition of your duties)	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	63	40%
No	95	60%

N=158

Have there been—or were there prior to your leaving—any efforts made to involve you in preparing for your successor?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	86	53%
No	76	47%

N=162

Stay Factors

Stay factors are influences that determine what would encourage an executive to stay in their current role. Improved compensation and benefits, increased authority/support, and better work-life balance were the most-emphasized stay factor themes reflected in the SES exit survey. Increased pay was the highest rated factor that would have encouraged executives to stay (37%). Other stay factors included: verbal encouragement (24%); greater engagement from senior leadership (22%); performance or other awards (24%); better work-life balance (23%); retention incentives (20%); and increased autonomy in decision making (21%). Notably, most departing executives (70%) reported their agencies made no effort to encourage them to stay, and 28% of executives stated that nothing would have encouraged them to stay.

Was any effort made to encourage you to stay?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	58	30%
No	131	67%
No, I was asked or encouraged to leave	6	3%

N=195

What, if anything, would have encouraged you to stay?**select all that apply*	Frequency	Percentage
Work-Life Balance		
Relocation to a geographical location of your choice	16	9%
Increased telework opportunity	15	9%
Flexible or part-time schedule	28	16%
A change in job duties/responsibilities	25	15%
More comprehensive eldercare options	4	2%
Better work-life balance	39	23%*
Increased Authority/Support		
Greater engagement from senior leadership	38	22%*
Higher level position	21	12%
Greater scope of responsibility	21	12%
Increased autonomy in decision making	37	21%*
Increased delegation of authority	24	14%
Increased funding/resources	29	17%
Increased support in dealing with poor performers	17	10%
Verbal encouragement to stay based on your value to the organization	41	24%*
Developmental Opportunity		
Mobility assignment	15	9%
Sabbatical	16	9%
Coaching	10	6%
Executive development training	8	5%
Reassignment to a new job within the agency	17	10%
Compensation and Benefits		
Increase in Pay	64	37%*
Performance or other award	42	24%*

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*Cell is highlighted green to indicate the option was selected by at least 20% of the respondents.

	Frequency	Percentage
Retention incentive	35	20%*
Dual compensation waiver (if retiring)	18	10%
Student loan repayment	4	2%
Benefits	8	5%
Miscellaneous		
Other	35	20%*
Nothing would have encouraged me to stay	48	28%*

N=173

Reasons for Leaving

Work environment issues were the most commonly-cited factors for leaving, especially the following: the political environment (42%); senior leadership (38%); organizational culture (38%); and a desire to enjoy life without work commitments (38%). Executives also cited the following factors: lack of recognition for accomplishments (34%); stress on the job (30%); a more attractive job elsewhere (30%); insufficient pay (29%); lack of rewards (27%); and a lack of autonomy in decision-making (26%). Additionally, executives cited the following factors to somewhat lesser extent: relationship with the supervisor (24%); lack of opportunity for advancement (22%); performance evaluations (20%); and relocation (20%).

To what extent did each of the following contribute to your reasons for leaving the agency?	Not at all/To a Small Extent		To a Moderate Extent		To a Great Extent/To a Very Great Extent		N	N/A
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Advancement and Recognition								
Lack of opportunities for development	118	77%	12	8%	23	15%	**153**	20
Lack of opportunities for advancement	109	72%	10	7%	33	22%†	**152**	21
Lack of recognition for accomplishments	84	53%	21	13%	55	34%†	**160**	18
Performance evaluations	108	69%	18	12%	31	20%†	**157**	18
Work Environment								
Senior leadership	76	47%	24	15%	61	38%†	**161**	15
Political environment	64	40%	29	18%	66	42%†	**159**	17
Organizational culture	80	50%	20	13%	60	38%†	**160**	16
Job duties/responsibilities	116	73%	18	11%	26	16%	**160**	15
Supervisory duties/responsibilities	115	79%	10	7%	21	14%	**146**	25
Relationship with supervisor	106	67%	15	9%	38	24%†	**159**	15
Relationship with colleagues	136	87%	14	9%	7	5%	**157**	17

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† *Cell is highlighted green to indicate the option was selected by at least 20% of the respondents where the scale option "To a Great Extent/To a Very Great Extent" was chosen.*

To what extent did each of the following contribute to your reasons for leaving the agency?	Not at all/To a Small Extent		To a Moderate Extent		To a Great Extent/To a Very Great Extent		N	N/A
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Lack of autonomy in decision making	94	60%	23	15%	41	26%[†]	158	17
Work-Life Balance								
Geographic reassignment	119	83%	9	6%	16	11%	144	26
Long work hours	111	71%	18	12%	27	17%	156	15
Work hours not flexible	122	81%	10	7%	18	12%	150	15
Workload	106	68%	24	15%	27	17%	157	15
Job stress	86	54%	24	15%	48	30%[†]	158	15
Commute	113	72%	18	12%	26	17%	157	14
Personal Reasons								
More attractive job offer elsewhere	96	63%	10	7%	46	30%[†]	152	23
Desire to pursue education	132	91%	4	3%	9	6%	145	27
Relocation	109	77%	5	4%	28	20%[†]	142	28
Personal health reasons	127	83%	13	8%	14	9%	154	20
Care for a family member	115	80%	10	7%	18	13%	143	25
Desire to leave the workforce	108	72%	14	9%	28	19%	150	20
Desire to enjoy life without work commitments	79	52%	16	11%	58	38%[†]	153	20
Compensation and Benefits								
Insufficient Pay	88	54%	27	17%	47	29%[†]	162	14
Unsatisfactory benefits	127	81%	20	13%	10	6%	157	15
Lack of awards	95	59%	22	14%	43	27%[†]	160	16

F=Frequency, %=Percentage

Executive Core Qualifications

The Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) are leadership skills designated by OPM to evaluate individuals for entrance into the SES and to evaluate their performance. The five ECQs are:

Leading Change- This core qualification involves the ability to bring about strategic change, both within and outside the organization, to meet organizational goals. Inherent in this ECQ is the ability to establish an organizational vision and to implement it in a continuously changing environment.

Leading People- This core qualification involves the ability to lead people toward meeting the organization's vision, mission and goals. Inherent in this ECQ is the ability to provide an inclusive workplace that fosters the development of others, facilitates cooperation and teamwork and supports constructive resolution of conflicts.

Results Driven- This core qualification involves the ability to meet organizational goals and customer expectations. Inherent in this ECQ is the ability to make decisions that produce high-quality results by applying technical knowledge, analyzing problems and calculating risks.

Business Acumen- This core qualification involves the ability to manage human, financial and information resources strategically.

Building Coalitions- This core qualification involves the ability to build coalitions internally and with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, nonprofit and private sector organizations, foreign governments, or international organizations to achieve common goals.

The survey asked executives to rank the ECQs in order of importance to achieve success in their position. Leading People (44%) was rated the most important of the five ECQs. Results driven was rated the second most important.

Please rank the following Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) in order of importance to achieve success in your position:	1 Most important for success		2		3		4		5 Least important for success		N
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Leading Change	33	19%	34	20%	35	21%	37	22%	32	19%	171
Leading People	75	44%‡	37	22%	26	15%	16	9%	16	9%	170
Results Driven	38	23%‡	45	27%	45	27%	26	15%	15	9%	169
Business Acumen	12	7%	17	10%	20	12%	38	23%	82	49%	169
Building Coalitions	15	9%	36	21%	42	25%	50	30%	26	15%	169

F=Frequency, %=Percentage

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‡ *Cell is highlighted green to indicate the option was selected by at least 20% of the respondents where the option was chosen as the most important for success.*

Performance Management

Executive performance is evaluated on a pay-for-performance system where senior executives are rated each year on a combination of demonstrated leadership through the five ECQs as well as measurable results. A majority of executives (84%) indicated they were rated either "Outstanding" or "Exceeds Fully Successful" on their most recent performance appraisal. About three-fourths (74%) of the executives agreed their rating was a reflection of their performance, while 17% disagreed.

What performance rating (or equivalent) did you receive on your last performance appraisal?	Frequency	Percentage
Outstanding	80	45%
Exceeds fully successful	70	39%
Fully Successful	20	11%
Minimally satisfactory	0	0%
Unsatisfactory	0	0%
I did not receive a performance rating	8	5%
I prefer not to respond	1	-

N=179

To what extent do you agree or disagree that this rating was a reflection of your performance?	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	68	41%
Agree	55	33%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	15	9%
Disagree	15	9%
Strongly Disagree	14	8%
I prefer not to respond	3	-

N=170

Demographics

Agency Participation and General Demographics

A diverse group of executives responded to the survey. Respondents represented 24 agencies, ranging from large Departments to small, independent agencies. The following are the five agencies with the largest number of respondents: Department of Defense; Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of the Treasury; General Services Administration; and Department of Labor.

Most executives have worked with their agencies for at least 11 years (59%) and have been a member of the Senior Executive Service for over 5 years (60%). The majority of SES were career SES (88%) and were appointed to the SES from a Federal service position (83%).

Which agency do you work for?	Frequency	Percentage
Department of Agriculture	10	5%
Department of Commerce	3	1%
Department of Defense	21	10%
Department of Education	1	<1%
Department of Energy	2	1%
Department of Health and Human Services	6	3%

Which agency do you work for?	Frequency	Percentage
Department of Homeland Security	10	5%
Department of Housing and Urban Development	3	1%
Department of Justice	0	0%
Department of Labor	13	6%
Department of State	5	2%
Department of the Interior	6	3%
Department of the Treasury	16	7%
Department of Transportation	1	<1%
Department of Veterans Affairs	21	10%
Broadcasting Board of Governors	0	0%
Environmental Protection Agency	9	4%
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission	0	0%
Federal Communications Commission	0	0%
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission	0	0%
Federal Trade Commission	0	0%
General Services Administration	15	7%
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	0	0%
National Archives and Records Administration	1	<1%
National Labor Relations Board	0	0%
National Science Foundation	1	<1%
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	10	5%
Office of Management and Budget	0	0%
Office of Personnel Management	3	1%
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative	0	0%
Small Business Administration	4	2%
Social Security Administration	0	0%
U.S. Agency for International Development	0	0%
Railroad Retirement Board	1	<1%
U.S. Office of Government Ethics	1	<1%
National Transportation Safety Board	1	<1%
No Response	57	26%

N=221

Do you work in an Office of the Inspector General?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	4	2%
No	160	98%

N=164

Almost half of the respondents reported they had worked in their agency for more than 20 years; 9% stated they had been a member of the SES for more than 20 years; and slightly more than two-fifths reported they were age 60 or older.

How long have you worked in this agency?	Frequency	Percentage
Less than one year	2	1%
1-3 years	22	13%
4-5 years	23	14%
6-10 years	20	12%
11-20 years	20	12%
More than 20 years	77	47%

N=164

How long have you been a member of the Senior Executive Service?	Frequency	Percentage
Less than one year	17	11%
1-3 years	25	16%
4-5 years	21	13%
6-10 years	45	28%
11-20 years	37	23%
More than 20 years	14	9%

N=159

What is your age group?	Frequency	Percentage
Under 30	3	2%
30-39	6	4%
40-49	15	9%
50-59	70	42%
60 or older	72	43%

N=166

A majority of the respondents reported they were career SES (88%), and appointed from a Federal service position (83%). A majority of the respondents indicated their race as White, while seven percent of the respondents indicated they were of Hispanic national origin.

What type of appointment do you hold?	Frequency	Percentage
Career	147	88%
Non-Career	16	10%
Limited Term	5	3%
Limited Emergency	0	0%

N=168

From where were you appointed to your senior position?	Frequency	Percentage
From a Federal service position	135	83%
From the private sector	10	6%
From state or local government	1	1%
From military service	3	2%
From academia	4	3%
Reinstatement	1	1%
Other	9	6%

N=163

Please select the racial category or categories with which you most closely identify *select all that apply	Frequency	Percentage
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	2%
Asian	10	6%
Black or African American	20	12%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0%
White	132	82%

N=162

Are you Hispanic or Latino?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	11	7%
No	151	93%

N=162

UNITED STATES
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Employee Services
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415