U.S. Department of Commerce

Senior Executive Service (SES) Candidate Development Program

Action Learning Project

Leveraging the Best Practices of Successful SES Candidate Development Programs to Improve Placement Rates

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October 20, 2011

Executive Summary

In May 2010, the President's Management Council launched a government-wide initiative to strengthen the Senior Executive Service (SES) corps. The initiative is co-led by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Office of Management and Budget, in partnership with the Chief Human Capital Officers Council. Inter-agency working groups were convened to analyze key issues, evaluate potential improvements, and identify a set of recommendations to benefit the SES corps in the years ahead. SES Candidate Development Programs (CDPs), already being used by many federal agencies, may be a key feature of this revitalized approach for maintaining a vibrant senior leadership corps.

The purpose of this project was to assist OPM in evaluating the current state of SES CDPs and how they can be best leveraged and/or modified to meet the government-wide need to develop and deploy senior leadership talent. This review, conducted between June and September 2011, focused on characteristics of SES CDPs that may be linked to higher placement rates into the SES for CDP graduates. When well executed, SES CDPs can meet the federal government's leadership succession management needs while also providing a qualified, diverse cadre of leaders with the capacity to lead organizations across government.

The project's findings generally show that the success of a CDP, as defined by a high placement rate into the SES, can be linked to both a broad and a more focused set of practices. The broad, systemic practices emphasize the establishment of a leadership pipeline for an agency and institutionalize the CDP as a critical vehicle for meeting an agency's executive leadership needs. The more focused or targeted set of practices typically forge a direct link between CDP participation and the filling of SES vacancies.

We found that the broader set of systemic practices includes:
- Clear expectations from top leadership that forge a strong nexus between the corporate culture and the CDP
- Active involvement by the Executive Resources Board (ERB) and other agency SES in creating developmental assignments that are mission-critical
- Providing CDP participants with developmental assignments longer than 120 days or multiple assignments
- Incorporating CDP participants into day-to-day leadership activities with the current SES corps

The more focused practices can be summarized as:
- Placing CPD participants in existing SES vacancies, or equivalent, during the CDP
- Advertising and actively promoting CDPs graduates to selecting officials when they are filling SES vacancies

In addition to these broad and narrow sets of practices that appear to distinguish agencies with high placement rates into the SES from those with medium or low placement rates, we also found a number of common practices that are necessary for effective functioning of all

CDPs, irrespective of placement rate. Finally, the project also revealed that there is no systematic data collection on CDPs, either at OPM or at individual agencies. The project's findings are described in more detail in the Findings and Conclusions section beginning on page 6. Recommendations that address ways to institutionalize best practices and to engage in on-going data collection that will foster a culture of continuous improvement for CDPs can be found on page 13.

We would like to thank the agency CDP coordinators that we interviewed for their time and support of this project.
We would not have been successful without your efforts.

We would also like to thank our project sponsors at the
Office of Personnel Management for giving us the opportunity to make a difference and tackle this important initiative that supports the Senior Executive Service.

Background

The SES was established by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. Top management positions had been subject to disparate rules and practices due to the over 60 separate executive personnel authorities that existed across the government at the time. The creation of the SES sought to "provide a unified, government-wide cadre of federal career executives with shared values, a broad perspective and solid leadership skills. This leadership corps, reformers believed, would move across agencies, bring their expertise and strategic thinking to a range of difficult issues and problems, and operate under a uniform and performance-based pay system."[1]

The law also abolished the Civil Service Commission and replaced it with three agencies— the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board that was set up to adjudicate employee work appeals; the Federal Labor Relations Authority to handle labor management issues; and OPM, a human resources agency that would set policies for hiring and pay for all civilian employees. While the Act gave greater authority to agencies to manage their executive resources, OPM was assigned the responsibility for government-wide leadership, direction, and oversight of the SES.

SES CDPs are managed by individual Federal agencies and approved by OPM in order to develop the executive credentials of high-performing leaders to qualify them for an initial career appointment to the SES. While each agency's CDP may be tailored to meet its organizational mission and succession planning needs, to obtain OPM certification each program must include the following elements:
- A development plan that addresses the executive core qualifications (ECQs) and a candidate's individual needs, and is approved by the agency's Executive Review Board (ERB);
- At least 80 hours of formal interagency training that addresses the ECQs and includes senior employees outside the candidate's agency;
- A developmental assignment with executive –level responsibility of at least 120 days, including at least one assignment of 90 continuous days in a position substantially different from the candidate's position of record; and
- A mentor who is a member of the SES.[2]

All CDPs are built around the five ECQs—Leading Change, Leading People, Results Driven, Business Acumen, and Building Coalitions—which embody the leadership skills needed to succeed in the SES. Typically, CDPs run for 18-24 months and are open to employees at the GS-14 or GS-15 level or at equivalent levels from within or outside the Federal government. Agencies are required to use merit staffing procedures to select CDP candidates. Participants who compete government-wide for their position in the CDP and are successfully certified by an OPM-administered Qualifications Review Board (QRB) are eligible for noncompetitive career appointment to any SES position for which they meet the professional and technical qualifications requirements. Since December 2009, government

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[1] "Unrealized Vision: Reimagining the Senior Executive Service", Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton, August 2009.
[2] 5 CFR 412.302(c)

agencies are required to submit their CDPs for OPM approval every five years. As shown in Table 1, to date OPM has approved ten agency programs and two are in the process of gaining approval.

Table 1: OPM Certified CDPs

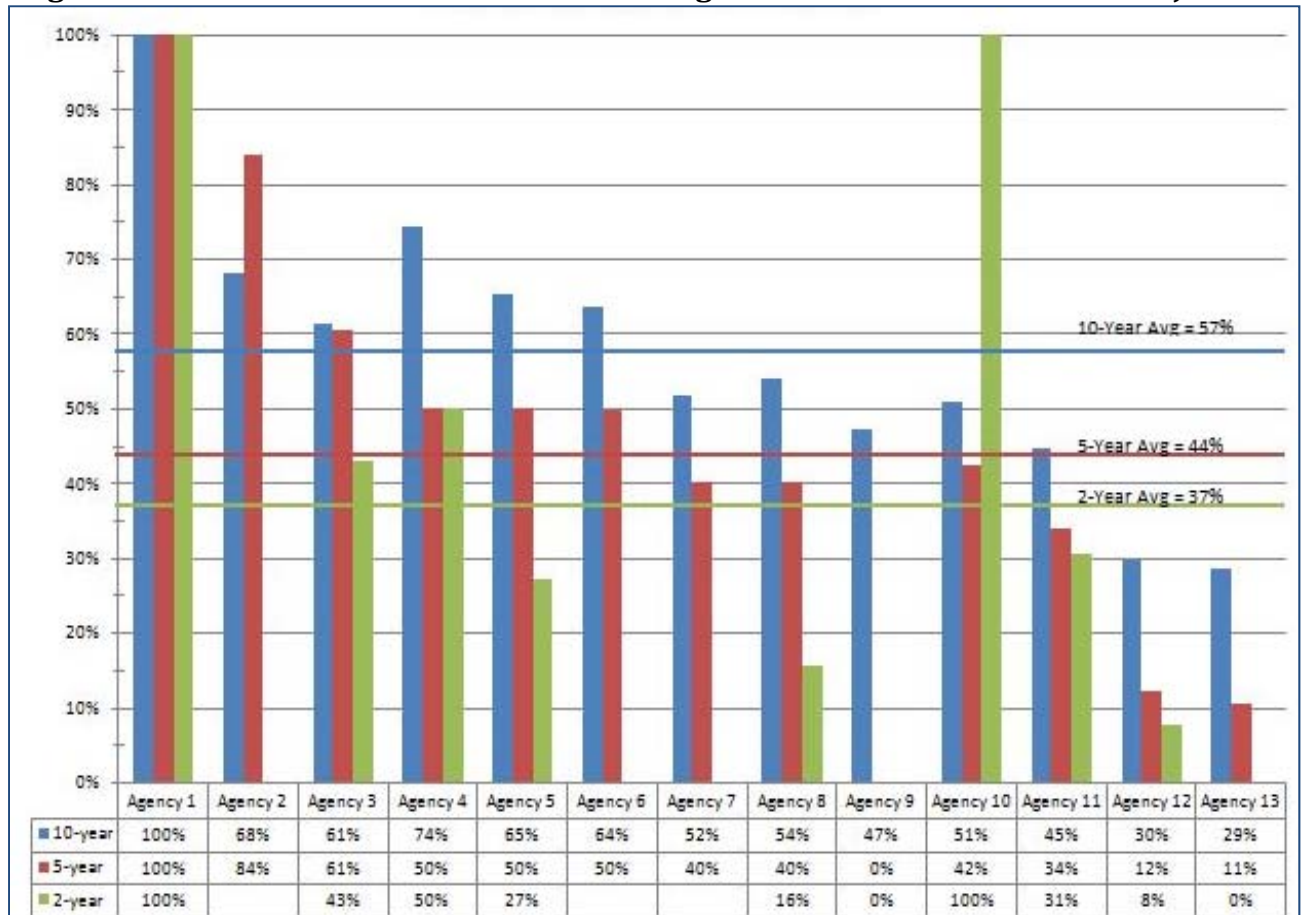| Agency	Date Submitted	Date Approved	Comments
U.S. Agency for International Development	March 2010	August 2010	
Department of Labor	April 2010	June 2010	
Department of Commerce	April 2010	October 2010	
Department of State	August 2010	November 2010	
Department of Homeland Security	August 2010	November 2010	
Department of Treasury	August 2010	February 2011	
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	September 2010	December 2010	
Department of Agriculture	October 2010	February 2011	
Department of Veterans Affairs	December 2010		Returned to VA for changes in January 2011
Internal Revenue Service	January 2011	February 2011	
Social Security Administration	May 2011	July 2011	
Department of Interior	June 2011		Returned to Interior for changes in July 2011

Source: OPM

One recommendation that resulted from the recent inter-agency working groups, convened under the auspices of the President's Management Council initiative to strengthen the SES corps, was the creation of a government-wide approach to prepare future SES. Strengthening CDPs could be a critical component of this approach, which is why OPM sought the assistance of the Department of Commerce SES CDP action learning team. The team was asked to evaluate the current state of CDPs and determine how they can be best leveraged and/or modified to meet the government-wide need for SES well equipped to meet the demands of these critical executive jobs immediately upon entry into the SES.

OPM also expressed some concern that CDP placement rates into the SES—defined for this project as the percent rate of selection into the SES following successful completion of a CDP and obtaining QRB certification—varied considerably between agencies (see Figure 1). Even looking at a 10-year horizon (allowing a longer time for CDP graduates to be placed into the SES), placement rates varied from 100% to less than 30%. Moreover, there is substantial variability in how long it takes for CDP graduates who have QRB certification to obtain an SES position (see Figure 2). For some agencies, the average time between QRB certification and SES placement is less than 100 days, and for other agencies the average time between certification and placement is more than 500 days. Not surprisingly, agencies with high placement rates tend to average shorter time to placement.
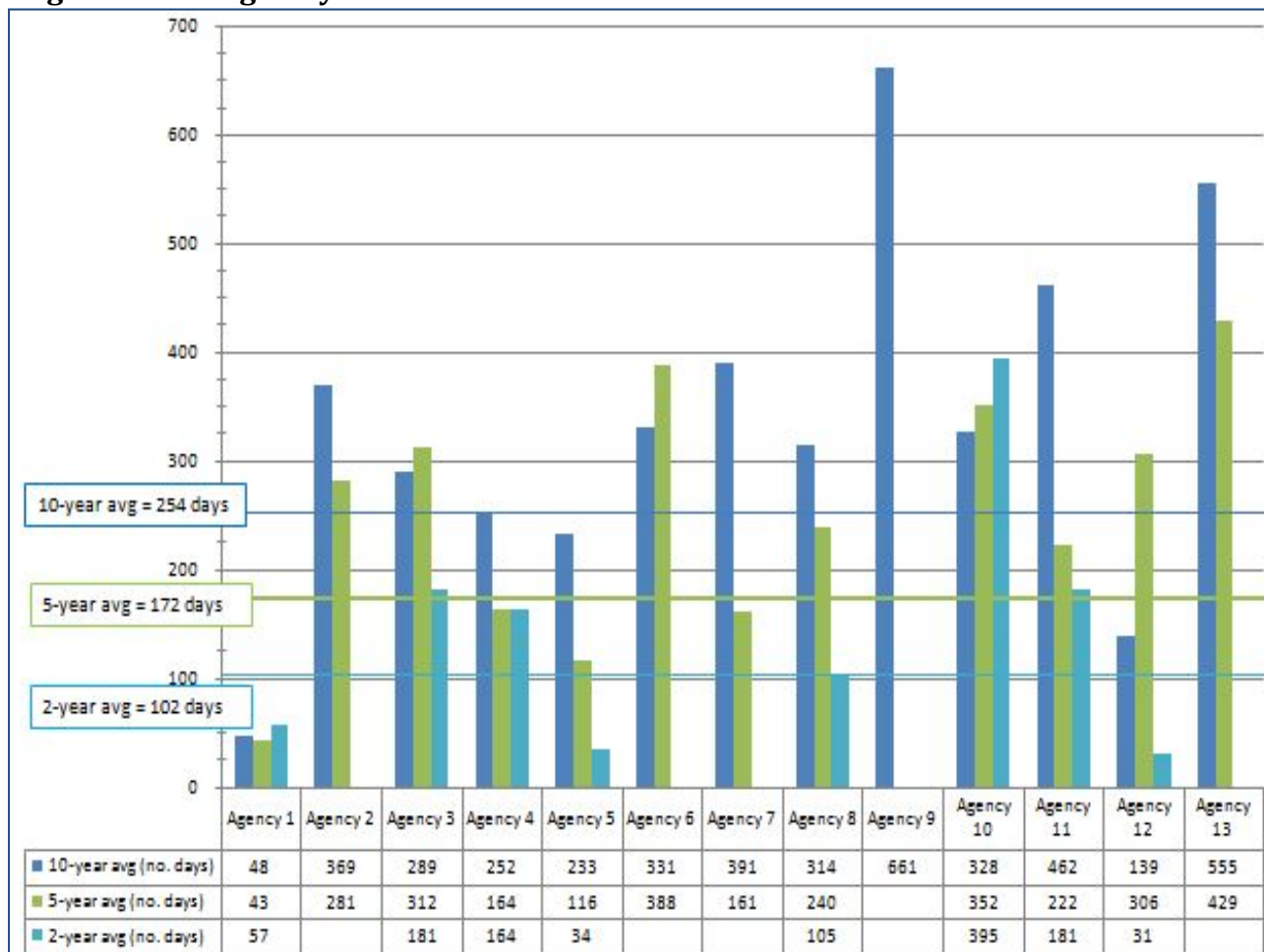
In this context, OPM officials also asked the action learning team to identify the distinguishing practices used by CDPs with high placement rates and provide actionable recommendations that might be used by agencies with medium or low placement rates to improve overall CDP placement rates into the SES. While most agencies and OPM view the placement rate for CDP graduates as the primary outcome measure used to determine the success of CDPs, it is important to note that not all agencies look at placement as the main purpose in running a CDP. Some agencies see a candidate's completion of the CDP and successful QRB certification as more important. However, because placement rate into the SES is largely viewed as the most important outcome measure for CDPs, it was the primary outcome measure used for this project.

Figure 1: Trends in CDP Placement Rates for Agencies Interviewed for This Project

	Agency 1	Agency 2	Agency 3	Agency 4	Agency 5	Agency 6	Agency 7	Agency 8	Agency 9	Agency 10	Agency 11	Agency 12	Agency 13
■ 10-year	100%	68%	61%	74%	65%	64%	52%	54%	47%	51%	45%	30%	29%
■ 5-year	100%	84%	61%	50%	50%	50%	40%	40%	0%	42%	34%	12%	11%
■ 2-year	100%		43%	50%	27%			16%	0%	100%	31%	8%	0%

Source: OPM's Executive and Schedule C System (ESCS) for QRB cases submitted since January 1, 2001. Placement rate is defined as number of defined for this project as the percent rate of selection into the SES following successful completion of a CDP and obtaining QRB certification. Blanks indicate no QRB approvals under Criterion B (CDP graduates) during that time period.

Figure 2: Average Days to Place in First SES Position

	Agency 1	Agency 2	Agency 3	Agency 4	Agency 5	Agency 6	Agency 7	Agency 8	Agency 9	Agency 10	Agency 11	Agency 12	Agency 13
■ 10-year avg (no. days)	48	369	289	252	233	331	391	314	661	328	462	139	555
■ 5-year avg (no. days)	43	281	312	164	116	388	161	240		352	222	306	429
■ 2-year avg (no. days)	57		181	164	34			105		395	181	31	

Source: OPM's Executive and Schedule C System (ESCS) for QRB cases submitted since January 1, 2001. Days to place is the number of days between first effective SES date and QRB approval date of CDP ECQ package for career SES appointments only. Blanks indicate no QRB approvals under Criterion B (CDP graduates) during that time period.

<u>Source</u>

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This project was designed to identify and recommend actions that SES CDP coordinators, agency leaders, and OPM can take to improve CDP placement rates into the SES. It is expected to supplement the efforts of the PMC inter-agency working groups mentioned earlier. Specifically, through this action learning project, our team attempted to identify the drivers and practices associated with higher placement rates.

To clarify the scope of our project, we conducted a business problem mapping exercise. The output of this effort was a series of six hypotheses with corresponding questions and information sources related to the operation and effectiveness of the ten OPM-approved CDPs vis-à-vis placement rates. The team vetted the business problem map with OPM officials and finalized it based on their feedback (see final *Business Problem Map* in Appendix B). Based on the business problem map (scope), timeline, and resources, our team divided the project into the following four phases:

Collection of data from OPM. The deliverable for this phase was an analysis of quantitative data from OPM that may help to support or disprove the hypotheses provided in the business problem map.

Interviews with SES CDP coordinators. For this phase, the team interviewed 14 CDP coordinators from the agencies that have an OPM-approved CDP, are in the process of obtaining OPM approval, or were recommended by OPM as a good source of information (see *List of Federal Agencies Interviewed for this Review* in Appendix A). The designated interviewer requested the agency's OPM CDP certification package; program statistics including number of CDP cohorts conducted/completed, class size, graduation rate, and diversity statistics; and program cost, including the selection process, development component, and any other administrative costs. We conducted each interview using a standard script (see *On-site Interview Script* in Appendix C).

Quantitative and qualitative analysis. During this phase, the team analyzed the output from the OPM data collection and SES CDP coordinator interviews to identify 1) where data prove/disprove hypotheses from our business map; 2) other data trends/key CDP characteristics that emerged; 3) possible attributes or practices by which to cluster or differentiate CDPs; 4) and gaps in the data. From this analysis, the team placed each agency CDP in a segment (high, medium, or low, as shown in Table 2) based on placement rate and then evaluated the clustering of like attributes/practices to determine which attributes/practices differentiated between the segments.

Development of final report and presentation of findings. During this phase, the team documented findings, conclusions, and recommendations for OPM, agency leaders, and SES CDP coordinators.

Table 2: SES CDP Placement Rate Segments

High **(71-100%)**	7 agencies
Medium **(31-70%)**	3 agencies
Low **(0-30%)**	3 agencies

<u>Source</u>: Self-reported CDP placement rates from 13 of 14 agency SES CDP coordinators interviewed for this project.

Findings and Conclusions

Based on our agency interviews and review of data provided by OPM, it was clear that success of a CDP, as defined by a high placement rate into the SES, can be linked to both a broad and a more focused set of practices. The broad, systemic practices emphasize the establishment of a leadership pipeline for an agency and institutionalize the CDP as a critical vehicle for meeting an agency's senior leadership needs. The more focused or targeted set of practices typically forge a direct link between CDP participation and the filling of SES vacancies. In addition to the practices that lead to a successful CDP, we also found a number of common practices that are necessary for effective functioning of all CDPs, irrespective of placement rate. Finally, we also determined that there is no systematic data collection on CDPs, either at OPM or at individual agencies.

I. Top Leadership Support and Commitment to CDPs is Critical for Program Success

According to the CDP coordinators we interviewed, the most critical success factor of a CDP is the support and commitment of an agency's top leadership team. Thomas Klein, a CDP candidate from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives who reviewed CDPs in 2008, reached the same conclusion. Specifically, Klein stated that top leadership's active support, commitment and involvement in the CDP "…is probably the single most important factor to the success of any CDP. Top leadership must provide sufficient resources to operate and maintain a high quality program, ensure that the necessary support is given to candidates to fully participate in and complete the CDP program requirements, and be fully engaged in and responsible for candidate recruitment, assessment, development, evaluation and graduation."[3]

This project confirmed these findings and identified specific practices demonstrating top leadership support that correlate to high placement rates for CDP graduates. When agency top leaders (both political and career) clearly articulate the agency's commitment to leadership development as both a priority and a shared responsibility, CDPs have a higher likelihood of becoming an integral and active pipeline for filling senior leadership positions. What our project team found was that there are a specific set of these leadership practices that distinguish high-performing agencies (vis-à-vis CDPs) from the rest.

Clear expectations from top leadership forge a strong nexus between the corporate culture and the CDP

All agencies with the highest placement rates have clear and communicated expectations and objectives regarding why the agency is running a CDP and what it expects to get from the program. These expectations and objectives emanate from the top leaders and cascade through the SES ranks. CDP coordinators reported that it appeared to foster a sense of ownership among current SES that is demonstrated in several ways:

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[3] "SES Candidate Development Program Study and Innovative Practices Report", Thomas H. Klein, March 2008.

- Top leaders tasked current SES to help identify specific skills sets needed to succeed as an SES in that agency.
- Top leaders communicated regularly their expectations for visibility and placement for CDP graduates, engendering active involvement by existing SES.
- Top leaders elevated the importance of the CDP selection process as a shared responsibility among current SES, as these CDP candidates are expected to join the SES peer group.
- Top leadership followed up on these expectations as part of regular and ongoing communications with other senior leaders.
- A special ERB was chartered to manage the CDP from the design to selection to candidate development to final recommendation for OPM certification. Active and ongoing "ownership" of the CDP by SES members of the ERB appears to be correlated with high placement rates.

> **BEST PRACTICE**
> At an agency with a high placement rate, the CDP is customized to improve the agency's leadership bench strength. The top leaders consider projected agency-wide SES vacancy rates and organization-specific attrition to determine leadership needs. The CDP is one component of a larger umbrella of leadership development programs to address the unique leadership needs and characteristics of the agency.

Not surprisingly, CDP coordinators reported that when top leadership stressed a corporate culture supporting CDPs, usually in the context of a broader leadership development strategy, managers and staff saw CDPs as a serious and viable vehicle to prepare candidates for SES positions. All agencies with high placement rates as well as one with a medium placement rate have adopted this practice.

Active involvement by the ERB and other agency SES in creating developmental assignments is important

One element of a CDP that provides a candidate with the opportunity to practice and demonstrate executive leadership is the developmental assignment. The way CDPs approach these developmental assignments shows a distinction between programs with a high placement rate and others. When an agency's top leadership team, either through the ERB or other agency SES, is involved in creating developmental assignments, it can benefit CDP participants in the following ways, according to CDP coordinators:

- Assignments identified and supported by the ERB may be more likely to be in an existing executive leadership role.
- ERB support in these assignments can increase the visibility of the candidate and his/her accomplishments among the ERB members and their network.
- Developmental assignments are more likely to be oriented around agency priorities, which can increase the visibility and importance of the assignment and provide the CDP participant with additional opportunities to network with existing agency SES.

<u>Providing CDP participants with developmental assignments longer than 120 days or with multiple assignments yields additional benefits</u>
While some CDPs require just the minimum developmental assignment required by statute—120 days, including at least one assignment of 90 continuous days in a position substantially different from the candidate's position of record—other CDPs offer either an extended developmental assignment or multiple assignments to CDP participants. We found that providing these additional opportunities for developmental assignments was another distinction of programs with high placement rates. Such practices can yield additional benefits for SES placement following OPM certification. For example:

- Given the complexity of some agency priorities or projects, an extended developmental assignment may give the candidate time to engage in a full challenge/context/action/result (CCAR) cycle, which might not be possible in 120 days. Extended details that result in notable accomplishments demonstrate timely and relevant executive competence which can be important to selecting officials.
- Multiple assignments can broaden a candidate's executive accomplishments and competencies, increasing opportunities to meaningful collaboration with existing SES as peers, and building a more robust portfolio of agency-relevant executive experience.

> **BEST PRACTICE**
> At one agency with a high placement rate, two 6-9 month assignments, outside of a candidate's home component and in a new occupational field must be completed. One of the assignments must also be outside the agency, unless the candidate is external.

It should be noted that agencies that required either extended or multiple assignments did so in the context of experiences that their organization values. Some felt that both Headquarters and field experience is critical and built that into the program. Another required experience in other components of the agency. Again, the developmental assignments—both in length and location—related directly to and supported the respective agency's definition of what experience was needed to become an effective member of the SES corps.

Four out of six agencies with high placement rates adopted these practices associated with developmental assignments—involvement of the ERB and/or other SES in creating assignments and offering longer or multiple assignments. Only one of the seven agencies with medium or low placement rates did so. The agencies with medium or low placement rates usually left the identification of a developmental assignment to the candidates themselves and did not necessarily encourage longer or multiple assignments.

<u>Incorporating CDP participants into day-to-day leadership activities with the current SES corps boosts placement</u>
Another practice for integrating CDP participants into the SES network of an agency is to include them in day-to-day senior leadership activities with the current SES cohort. Several CDP coordinators described practices such as including CDP participants in senior budget meetings, SES annual meetings, weekly leadership meetings, and ad hoc meetings among SES to address critical management topics. These experiences go beyond the learning seminars and experiences that may include SES members as trainers to educate

CDP participants. Rather, it brings candidates into the real-time executive level functions of the agency. According to CDP coordinators, the candidates experienced the following benefits from this practice:

- Gained insight into the broad range of executive issues with which an agency may be grappling.
- Become fluent in communicating with current SES on the executive leadership approaches the agency is employing to manage important issues.
- Were viewed as SES peers and partners by agency senior leadership.

Half the agencies with high placement rates employed this practice. None of the agencies with medium or low placement rates did so.

II. Programs That Have a Direct Link between CDPs and the Filling of SES Vacancies Generally Lead to High Placement Rates

Perhaps the most straightforward way to achieve high placement rates for CDP graduates is to design a CDP that identifies existing SES vacancies at the design phase and directly links selection of CDP participants to these existing vacancies. The current regulations for CDPs require a nexus between an agency's human capital strategy (and on-going workforce assessments) and the CDP. But, agencies may go beyond this and design a CDP to address an urgent, mission critical need to fill existing or imminent vacancies in their SES corps.

<u>Placing CPD participants in existing SES vacancies, or equivalent, during the CDP supports high placement</u>
Some agencies have designed CDPs around a set of specific SES positions. Before advertising the CDP, the CDP coordinator will engage senior leaders of internal organizations in candidate assessment and selection. Participants are then placed into an acting executive position for the duration of the CDP, in addition to doing other developmental activities to help to prepare him/her for an SES position within the organization. Thus, the candidate is selected into an SES-level position for which he/she will be eligible for permanent non-competitive placement after CDP graduation and QRB certification.

For the duration of the CDP, therefore, the candidate learns the position and its challenges, becomes familiar with its stakeholders, and discovers how that position fits into the larger organization and other key facets of being a senior leader in the organization. Upon graduation and placement into the SES position, the new SES is able to immediately deploy a breadth of executive knowledge and skills unique to the position as well as the larger organization. Having served in the position and established rapport with future SES peers as well as direct and indirect reports, the CDP graduate is essentially being "groomed" for the specific position into which he/she was placed following the CDP selection process. These types of programs have placement rates near, or above, 90 percent.

It is worth noting, however, that this approach may introduce a challenge to meeting future leadership needs. Focusing entirely on a subset of existing SES vacancies may meet workforce needs when the CDP is launched, but a selection process that narrowly selects candidates for identified positions (and specific occupational classifications) may not create a diverse talent pool for the future. Workforce needs for SES may change between the time initial selection occurs and when the CDP is completed and candidates are certified. One CDP coordinator having experience with this type of program suggested that having a combined selection/placement process—selecting some candidates for specific positions and others for a general talent pool—might provide a more robust model when CDPs are run only once every few years.

> **BEST PRACTICE**
> At one agency with a high placement rate, the CDP is designed to groom senior leaders for specific SES positions. Candidates participate in the program full-time, completing classroom training and a series of rotational assignments. Certified program graduates awaiting placement are considered SES in waiting, and if eligible, will receive an increase in salary as a result of their QRB certification.

Placement is increased by advertising and actively promoting CDP graduates to selecting officials filling SES vacancies

Another practice associated with high placement rates for CDP graduates into the SES is to actively increase the visibility and marketing of these graduates to selecting officials. A number of agencies have established written policies to raise the visibility of CDP graduates as a candidate pool for future SES vacancies, but only a few agencies take active steps to make sure that this is the case. Senior leadership buy-in, radiating from top leadership, is a critical factor in creating visibility and a high probability of placement into the SES for CDP graduates. Internal websites with full profiles and accomplishments of CDP graduates provide critical information when organizations are recruiting for SES positions. Clear expectations from senior leaders that CDP graduates will receive priority consideration, helps to raise the visibility and opportunities for these graduates. Moreover, some agencies engage top leaders of large organizational units in supporting consideration and placement of CPD graduates. This also increases the visibility of candidates to selecting officials.

Of agencies with the highest placement rates in our sample, five out of six utilized this practice. Only one of the seven agencies with medium or low placements rates utilized this practice.

> **BEST PRACTICE**
> Several agencies with a high placement rate ensure that certified CDP graduates receive first consideration for SES vacancies. An internal intranet site for SES hiring managers includes certified graduates' profiles and, if desired, resumes. Before filling an SES position, the SES hiring official must certify that he/she has looked at the repository and not found anyone suitable for the vacancy.

III. Some Practices Are Integral to the Effective Functioning of All CDPs

The previous sections described the practices that seem to distinguish agencies with high placement rates from those with medium or low placement rates. At the same time, the interviews revealed two key practices that seem integral to the effective functioning of CDPs regardless placement rate. In other words, these practices characterize CDPs with high placement rates, but were also adopted by some CDPs with medium or low placement rates.

<u>Major organizational units are engaged in the selection process and structure of the CDPs</u>
Leaders of major organizational units often play an active role in the CDP selection and development processes. CDP coordinators in agencies that engaged top leaders of major organizational units explained the following reasons as being important for doing so:

- Leaders of major organizational units see the broader needs, and success factors, of their SES corps and help to select candidates most likely to fill these organizational needs.
- Leaders of major organizational units meet with and learn about the CDP participants, thus developing a professional relationship with the participants.
- Engagement in the selection process may also include funding positions in the CDP, so leaders of major organizational units may believe they have some "skin in the game."
- Leaders of major organizational units help identify valued activities and experiences that increase exposure and leadership development, tailoring the CDP to cultivate key competencies germane to the agency and its internal business units.

> **BEST PRACTICE**
> At one agency with a medium placement rate, each business unit within the agency has its own internal selection process (using a standard set of criteria). The mini-ERBs review the assessment results of the written application and conduct a structured interview. Business unit nominees are then assessed at the agency level, with selections made by the agency-level ERB that includes the top level executives of the major

<u>Interaction of SES in CDP-Coordinated Activities</u>
Most of the CDP coordinators that were interviewed for this project believed it was important for a CDP to include group activities that included interaction with the current SES corps in their agency. Such activities provided opportunities to learn about the life and role of SES, from the perspective of current serving SES, engage SES in discussion about leadership theories and practice, and network with SES in a social setting.

These activities took the form of seminars, book clubs, lunches, and field trips. The purpose was to expose the candidates to potential future peers and to learn something about the executive leadership culture of the agency.

> **BEST PRACTICE**
> At one agency with a low placement rate, over 100 SES have been involved in at least one aspect of the program (e.g., selection, development). They attend CDP kick-off events, participate in training sessions, provide individualized coaching on writing ECQs, serve as mentors and assignment sponsors, and network with the candidates at monthly SES networking events.

IV. Collection of CDP Data is Needed to Fully Evaluate

Their Effectiveness

As the project team was collecting information about specific CDP programs from the CDP coordinators, the team sought additional information that would provide an overview of the current state of CDPs. Examples include historical information on placement rates, candidate (and graduate) diversity, time from graduation to placement in the SES, etc. The information could be used to benchmark CDPs and to provide for continuous improvement. It could also assist potential CDP applicants in comparing and evaluating CDPs across government and to assess how a given program may support their career objectives.

We found that there seems to be no systematic data collection related to CDPs despite the time, effort, and funding that often goes into developing and conducting CDPs. The team was unable to find consistent historical or consolidated data on:

- Numbers of CDP applicants/selectees/graduates/certified under Criterion B
- Placement rates for CDP graduates
- Diversity statistics for CDP applicants/selectees/graduates/Criterion B certified
- Cost per candidate to develop and manage CDPs
- Time between graduation to criterion B certification
- Time between criterion B certification and placement in SES

The dearth of data regarding CPDs appears to be a systemic problem and is addressed in the Recommendations section that follows.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, the project team developed a compact, targeted set of recommendations intended to help both agencies and OPM enhance the design and implementation of CDPs across government. The recommendations derive from the set of practices associated with CDPs having high placement rates and which appear to be most effective in using the CDP to fill agencies' need for senior executive talent. Additionally, these recommendations address ways to institutionalize best practices and to engage in on-going data collection that will foster a culture of continuous improvement and co-learning across agencies. The recommendations are divided into two sets—one set for agencies running (or preparing to run) CDPs and one set for OPM.

Recommendations for Agencies
Agencies who administer their own CDPs should consider implementing one or more of the following practices:
- Charter a special ERB to oversee the CDP
- Require hiring and selecting officials to certify that they have considered CDP graduates prior to advertising an SES position
- Structure CDPs to include assignment to SES-level or deputy-to-SES-level positions as their position-of-record
- Optimize developmental assignments by offering:
  - Extended developmental assignments that allow candidates to realize agency-relevant accomplishments (exceeding 120 days)
  - Multiple developmental assignments to broaden executive competencies and build executive portfolio
- Maximize exposure to senior leaders as an integral part of the CDP

Recommendations for OPM
OPM, as the hub for government-wide leadership, direction and oversight of the SES, could strengthen the overall program management and measurement of CDPs by implementing several key practices. These include:
- Require agencies to collect and report on key CDP performance data, for example:[4]
  - Numbers of CDP applicants/selectees/graduates certified under Criterion B
  - Placement rates for CDP graduates (and define "placement rate")
  - Recommend agencies initiate an SF-50 for candidates at the beginning and completion of a CDP
- Redesign existing OPM websites to further increase the visibility and viability of the CDP to key stakeholders (hiring officials, prospective applicants, CDP participants and graduates, and CDP coordinators):
  - USAJOBS: Redesign the SES section to add a central registry of SES CDP graduates government-wide. Include full, searchable profiles of all CDP graduates to:
    - increase visibility to federal hiring officials

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[4] A template for identifying and collecting critical implementation and placement data can be found in Appendix E.

- promote the program to potential candidates (for example, a match-making/interview service available for prospective CDP applicants to talk to CDP graduates)
  - OPM (opm.gov) website: Expand the SES CDP section to create a forum for sharing of CDP data and provide resources for prospective CDP applicants to benchmark and compare CDPs:
    - CDPs statistics, by agency and year
    - Names/contact information for all SES CDP coordinators
    - Lists of current participants and graduates
- Improve sharing of government-wide CDP data with agencies
  - Improve CDP data management and analysis capabilities (better integration of data from ESCS and EHRI)
  - Annual meeting for CDP coordinators to review best practices and successes

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Closing Remarks

SES CDPs, when well executed, can play a vital role in meeting the government's leadership succession management needs while also providing a qualified, diverse cadre of leaders with the capacity to lead across government. As the President's Management Council continues to make progress on the government-wide initiative to strengthen the SES corps, OPM and CDP coordinators are now positioned to take advantage of key recommendations and improvements for CDPs as described in this report. These improvements and recommendations will keep CDP programs as a viable option to fill the SES corps with well qualified candidates.

APPENDIX A: List of Federal Agencies Interviewed for this Review

1.   Department of Agriculture

2.   Department of Commerce

3.   Department of Energy

4.   Department of Health and Human Services

5.   Department of Homeland Security[5]

6.   Department of Housing and Urban Development

7.   Department of Labor

8.   Department of State

9.   Department of Veterans Affairs

10.   Environmental Protection Agency

11.   Internal Revenue Service

12.   National Aeronautics and Space Administration

13.   Small Business Administration

14.   Social Security Administration

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[5] Because Homeland Security's CDP is new, no historical placement rate data was available. Placement rate data from any CDPs previously run by components of the Department of Homeland Security was not included in the data analyzed by the project team because the programs are no longer in existence.

APPENDIX B: Business Problem Map

Relevant Questions Associated with the Project Objective	Hypothesis	Data that Would Allow Us to Test the Hypothesis	Accessibility of this Data
1. How many SES positions were filled with CDP graduates, versus candidates from inside the agency but not CDP graduates, versus outside/non-government candidates?	Agencies with lower placement rates have the majority of SES positions filled with inside candidates who are not CDP graduates.	SES positions filled in the last two years using OPM records.	OPM - Criterion B SES selections (versus A and C). To also include CDP candidates selected via competitive announcement (e.g., candidates), need to go to Agency Coordinators.
2. Is it more likely for SES positions (particularly in highly technical offices/agencies, e.g., NOAA) to require that candidates possess technical competencies specific to the department or office he/she was hired to lead versus candidates considered to be "generalists"?	Agencies with lower placement rates prioritize technical competencies and agency-specific experience over general leadership competencies when hiring for an SES position.	Review of SES job announcements	Option 1 - we save and review announcements from this point forward. Option 2 - contact Exec Resources Offices. Bigger issue may be developing categorical mappings to conduct meaningful statistical analysis.
3. How large are agencies' executive pipelines (including CDP size) compared to the human capital needs (attrition, retirement, hiring projections, total number of SES positions, etc.) projected in leadership succession plans?	Agencies with lower placement rates have CDP class sizes and pipelines that are misaligned with future capital needs as outlined in their leadership succession plans.	Agency SES Coordinators	SES CDP Coordinators
4. How many SES employees worked at another agency prior to becoming an SES? How many worked at two other agencies? Three?	Breadth of experience across agencies is not a driving factor in selecting an SES candidate; this does not vary by SES placement rate.	CPDF	OPM
5. How does the diversity of SES CDP classes compare with the diversity of those graduates placed into SES positions and the SES overall (including gender, race/ethnicity)?	The overall Federal workforce is more diverse than SES CDP classes; diversity is further restricted when looking at the SES overall as well as CDP graduates placed into SES positions.	Five years of data from OPM.	OPM; however, diversity statistics for CDP classes will need to be obtained from SES CDP Coordinators
6. What is the total cost of agencies' CDPs (both selection of candidates and administration of the program)?	The expenditure associated with CDPs is high given its use to fill SES positions in those agencies with low placement rates. Additionally, those agencies have little additional ROI data.	OPM has some information from prior data collections; updated statistics are needed from CDP Coordinators	OPM can provide this information with the agreement of CDP Coordinators; additional information will be at the discretion of CDP Coordinators

APPENDIX C: Final On-site Interview Script

 Thank you for agreeing to meet with us. As mentioned, we're members of the Department of Commerce SES Candidate Development Program. We're doing an action learning project sponsored by OPM looking at agency CDPs to identify best practices and success measures.

The information that you provide will be combined with that from other agencies and will not be personally attributed to you or your agency. The one exception is a best practice or any other program characteristics that you would like linked to your organization.

We will be preparing a report of our results for OPM and plan to share that with those who contribute to this project. We hope to offer an opportunity to bring you all together so that you can not only hear what we found but meet and talk with each other. The timeframe for completing the report is late October. Thanks again for meeting with us and let's get started.

<div align="center">###</div>

Opening question if we have no information on their program:

Can you very briefly describe your SES CDP, highlighting any characteristics beyond the basic OPM requirements of the 120 rotational assignment and 80 hours of training?

1. What do you consider to be the factors or practices most important to the success of your SES CDP? If necessary, follow up with these probes:

   - Do you communicate with agency SES hiring officials and their projected hiring needs? How?

   - Do your SES members actively participate in the program (e.g., mentoring, DA sponsors, attending events)? How?

   - Do you give preference to CDP graduates when filling positions? If so, through what process/policy?

   - Are the CDP graduates made visible to SES at your agency? Are they included in ongoing SES activities? Please describe.

   - Please describe rotational assignments – how are they established? Are they both within and outside of your organization? Are they assignments into existing SES positions, project management, etc?

   - Location of the program within your organizational structure (e.g., training office, executive resources office, level to whom it reports)?

2. What do you think might be factors or practices that present a risk to your program's success?

3. How have you evaluated your CDP and what measures of success have you used?

   • Placement rates into SES positions in your agency during the program? After graduating from the program?

   • Placement into SES positions in other agencies during the program? After the program?

   • Leadership effectiveness before/after program?

   • Compliance with OPM regulations? Did your program change significantly since OPM issued the new 412 regulation?

   • Other measures of success?

   • How have the data been used?

4. How does your SES CDP uniquely align with your agency's mission, values, and strategic or other plans/ initiatives?

   • Agency strategic plan? Human Capital plan? Leadership succession plan?

   • Are technical as well as leadership competencies considered during program selection process? Development planning? How?

   • Does future SES staffing needs play a role in your program selection process?

5. A couple more background questions on how your program is administered:

   • How does your organization pay for the program (e.g., centrally funded, split in some way with participant's organization)?

   • Have you selected candidates from outside of your organization? If so, how does it work? For example, do they stay in their agency or join yours?

6. Is there anything else that we should have asked but didn't?

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APPENDIX D: Clustering Analysis

SEGMENTS	ATTRIBUTES										
	Clear and Communicated Expectations and Objectives Regarding Why the Agency is Running a CDP and What It Expects to Get From It (e.g., skill sets, exposure / placement expectations, etc.)	Direct Connection Between Agency SES Staffing / Technical Requirements and Candidate Pool	Strong Incentives to Select From CDP (do they have a policy and do they follow it)	Active, High-Level Involvement of Leaders from Major Operational Units in Selection Phase	Active, High-Level Involvement of Leaders from Major Operational Units in Development Phase	Active, High-Level Involvement of Leaders from Major Operational Units in Placement Phase	Active and Broad Interaction of SES in CDP-Coordinated Activities, e.g., SES participate as students in Core training, coffees, seminars, etc.	Active and Broad Interaction with Day-to-Day SES Business, e.g., SES staff meetings, strategic planning activities, taskers/fires, etc.	Strong Pool of ERB -Vetted DA's to Choose From	Actual Vacant SES Slots Made Available for DA or other Designated Positions	Additional DA's Beyond OPM 120 day Requirement
High (71-100%)											
Agency 1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	1
Agency 2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	2
Agency 3	X			X	X		X	X			X
Agency 4	X	X	X			X					
Agency 5	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X
Agency 6	X		X		X		X				
Agency 7	X	X		X		X	X	X		X	
Medium (31-70%)											
Agency 8	X	X	X	X			X				X
Agency 9		X			X		X				
Agency 10				X	X		X		X		
Low (0-30%)											
Agency 11							X				
Agency 12		X									
Agency 13				X	X		X				

Note: Placement rates reported by CDP coordinators.

APPENDIX E: Proposed CDP Participant Tracking Spreadsheet (*names & data are fictitious for illustrative purposes*)

Employee Name (Last, first)	Candidate's Employing Agency	CDP Class Name or Number	CDP Class Start Date	CDP Graduation or Completion Date	QRB Certification Date	Date of First Permanent SES Appointment	# of Days to Place	Agency of First Permanent SES Appointment	Still Employed at Agency?	Separation Date from Agency
Doe, Jennifer	Dept. of Technology, Office of the Secretary	2009	4/1/2008	12/15/2009	1/23/2010	8/15/2010	204	Dept. of Technology, Office of Management	Yes	N/A
Jones, Matthew	Dept. of Technology, Office of Finance	2009	4/1/2008	12/15/2009	1/23/2010	4/22/2011	454	International Finance Agency	No	4/21/2011
McDonald, Olaf	Dept. of Technology, Bureau of Mobile Applications	2009	4/1/2008	12/15/2009	1/23/2010	Not Placed Yet	635	TBD	Yes	N/A
Shepherd, Mary	Dept. of Technology, Bureau of Mobile Applications	2009	4/1/2008	12/15/2009	1/23/2010	9/14/2011	597	Dept. of Law, Office of the CIO	No	9/13/2011
Smith, Ronald	Dept. of Technology, Bureau of Mainframes	2009	4/1/2008	12/15/2009	3/14/2010	7/8/2011	481	Dept. of Technology, Bureau of Mainframes	Yes	N/A
TOTALS				5		4	2,373			

Date of Report: 10/20/2011
Total # of Days to Place: 2,373
Average Days to Place: 474.6
Percent Placed (Class of 2009): 80%