A New Day for the Civil Service
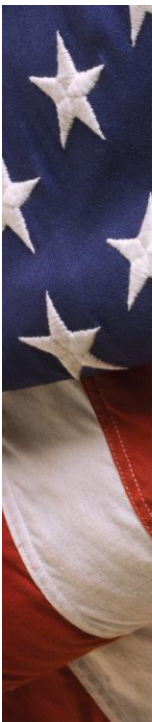
Senior Executive Service

Executive Core Qualifications

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
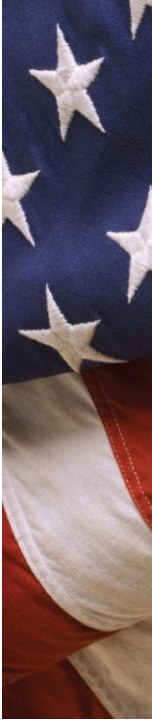

Topics

- **The Senior Executive Service (SES)**

- **The Qualifications Review Board (QRB) and its functions**

- **Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) and leadership competencies**

- **CCAR – Challenge, Context, Action, Result**

- **Do's and Don'ts**

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About the Senior Executive Service

- **The SES was established by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978.**

- **Members of the SES are selected for their leadership qualifications and serve in the key positions just below the top Presidential appointees.**

- **SES members are the major link between Presidential appointees and the rest of the Federal work force.**
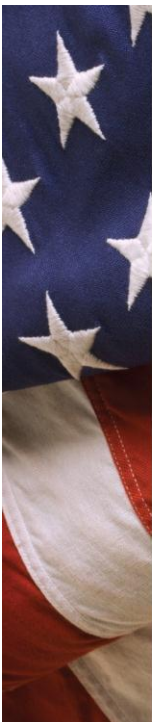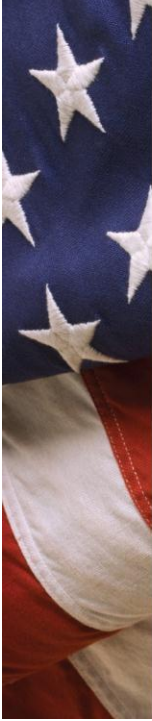
Executive Qualifications

- **"Executive Qualifications" are those required of all agency selectees for the SES [5 U.S.C. 3393]**

- **OPM has defined executive qualifications in terms of five meta-leadership competencies associated with SES-level jobs:**
  - **Leading change**
  - **Leading people**
  - **Results driven**
  - **Business acumen**
  - **Building coalitions**

- **Executive qualifications must be certified by a QRB convened by OPM for all initial career appointments to the SES**

- **Professional or technical qualifications agencies establish for individual jobs are reviewed by the agency ERB and selecting official**
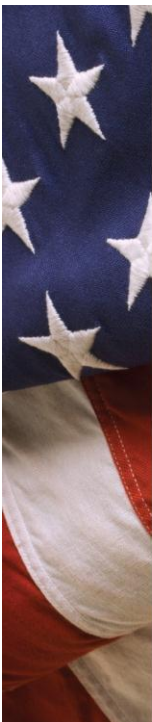
Qualifications Review Board

The QRB:

- **Reviews and determines whether a candidate has demonstrated executive level expertise required for initial career appointment to the SES.**

- **Is composed of three SES, each from a different agency. At least two Board members must be career appointees.**

- **Convenes weekly.**

Role of the QRB

- **Assesses the overall scope, quality, and depth of a candidate's executive qualifications within the context of the five Executive Core Qualifications.**

- **Makes the final determination about the candidate's executive core qualifications.**

- **Determines whether the candidate has demonstrated executive level expertise and possesses the executive qualifications needed for entry and success in the SES.**

- **Ensures that all new SES or SESCDP graduates have a broad perspective of government. The focus is on executive skills and not technical expertise.**

- **Does not rate, rank, or compare one candidate's qualifications against those of other candidates.**
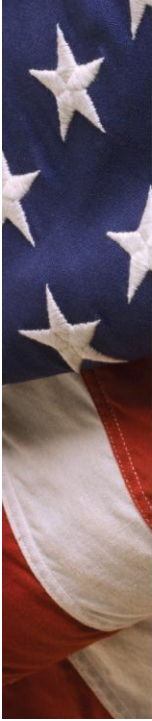
Submission Criterion

Agencies forward the candidate's application package to OPM for presentation to a QRB on the basis of one of the following criteria:

Criterion (A) - demonstrated executive experience

Criterion (B) - successful completion of a formal, OPM-approved SES candidate development program (CDP). Candidates that are certified by a QRB may be appointed to the SES without further competition

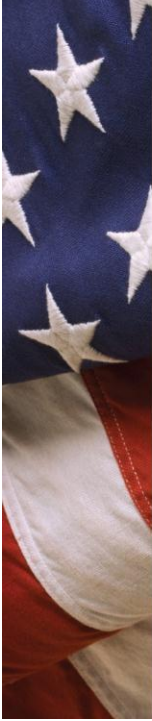**Criterion (C) - possession of special or unique qualifications that indicate a likelihood of executive success**
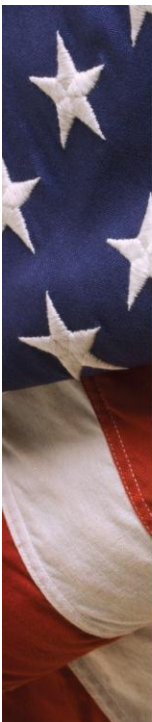
QRB Case Disposition

- An OPM staff member serves as a QRB Administrator for each Board. The QRB Administrator gives instructions about the certification process, answers questions from QRB members, and provides any other guidance and staff support as appropriate.

- The three Board members independently review one QRB case at a time.

- The final decision to approve or disapprove is by majority vote.

- QRB decisions are recorded along with any recommendations, and the selecting agency is notified usually the same day. The agency may then appoint the individual to the SES.

- Once certified, there is no time limit on QRB certification.

Disapproved Cases

**Specific reasons and areas of weakness for disapprovals are provided to the agency. Agencies may:**

First time disapproval:

- **Make revisions to this case**
- **Use an alternative action (e.g. resubmitting as a Criterion C)**
- **Resubmit the case to another QRB, as is**

Second time disapproval:

- **A new case on the same individual for the same position may not be submitted until the candidate has acquired additional qualifying experience in those areas where deficiencies were noted by the QRB.**

- **A new merit staffing competition to credit the additional experience is required and the closing date of the new announcement must be at least 12 months later than the closing date of the original announcement.**
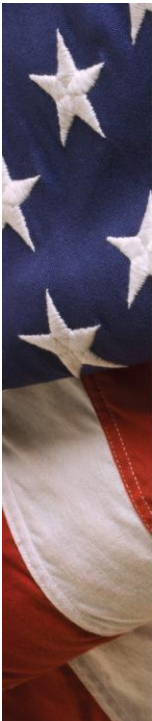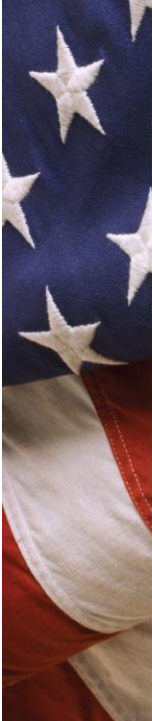
Executive Core Qualifications & Competencies

This concept holds that the Government needs executives who can provide strategic leadership and whose commitment to public policy and administration transcends their commitment to a specific agency mission or an individual profession.

The Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs):

- **Describe the leadership skills needed to succeed in the SES**
- **Reinforce the concept of an "SES corporate culture"**
- **Assess executive experience and potential (not technical expertise)**
- **Measure whether an individual has the broad executive skills needed to succeed in a variety of SES positions**
- **Are interdependent (successful performance in the SES requires competence in each ECQ)**

Executive Core Qualification & Competencies (cont')

Competencies are the personal and professional attributes that are critical to successful performance in the SES. They are based on extensive research of Government and private sector executives and input from agency Senior Executives and human resources managers.

There are 28 competencies:

- Twenty-two of the competencies are the specific competencies for the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs).
- The remaining six are the fundamental competencies and are the attributes that serve as the foundation for each of the ECQs.

Experience and training that strengthen and demonstrate the competencies enhances a candidate's overall qualifications for the SES.
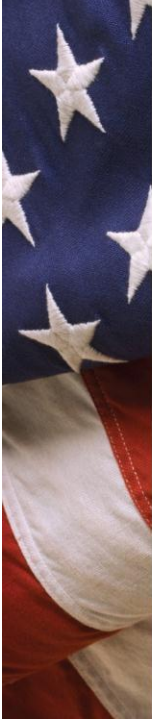
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Leading Change

Involves the ability to bring about strategic change, both within and outside the organization, to meet organizational goals. Inherent is the ability to establish an organizational vision and to implement it in a continuously changing environment.

Competencies:

- Creativity and Innovation
- External Awareness
- Flexibility
- Resilience
- Strategic Thinking
- Vision

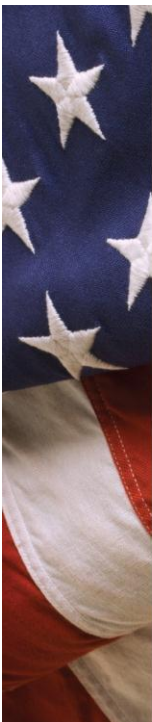UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Leading Change
What should the focus be?

In describing your experience, here are some questions to ask:

- **What was my organizational vision?**

- **How did I transcend my vision into action? What initiative did I take?**

- **Did I strategically initiate and implement transformational change?**

- **How did I deal with unexpected organizational changes/obstacles (to internal/external pressures)**

- **Did my vision achieve measurable results that impacted the organization?**

Leading People

Involves the ability to lead people toward meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals. Inherent is the ability to provide an inclusive workplace that fosters the development of others, facilitates cooperation and teamwork, and supports constructive resolution of conflicts.

Competencies:

- **Conflict Management**

- **Leveraging Diversity**

- **Developing Others**
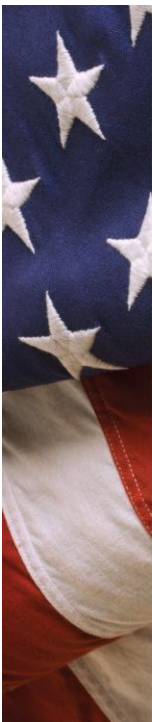
- **Team Building**

Leading People
What should the focus be?

In describing your experience, here are some questions to ask:

- **What is the largest staff size I have led? What challenges did leading a large staff present?**

- **Was I leading versus managing?**

- **How did I lead my team through a challenge? How did I motivate them to achieve set goals?**

- **How did I contribute to the professional development of my employees (individually or as a team)**

- **How did I deal with conflicts that arose within my team?**

- **How did I leverage diversity amongst my team? (age, cultural, race, skill levels)**

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Results Driven

Involves the ability to meet organizational goals and customer expectations. Inherent is the ability to make decisions that produce high-quality results by applying technical knowledge, analyzing problems, and calculating risks.

Competencies:

- **Accountability**

- **Customer Service**

- **Decisiveness**

- **Entrepreneurship**

- **Problem Solving**

- **Technical Credibility**

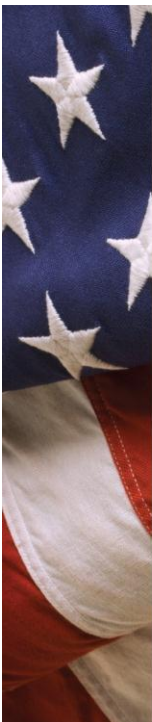UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
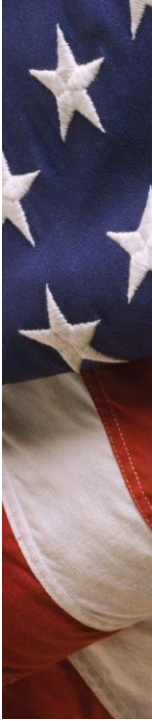
Results Driven
What should the focus be?

In describing your experience, here are some questions to ask:

- **How did the priorities and objectives I set lead to high quality/quantity results?**

- **How did I address the needs of customers and stakeholders (internal and external)?**

- **How did my decisions and actions impact results?**

- **Did I identify problems and implement solutions that resulted in improving services?**

Business Acumen

Involves the ability to manage human, financial, and information resources strategically.

Competencies:

- **Financial Management**

- **Human Capital Management**

- **Developing Others**

- **Team Building**

Business Acumen
What should the focus be?

In describing your experience, here are some questions to ask:

- **What is my experience in creating and administering budgets and resources?**

- **How did I procure and utilize resources? What obstacles did I face in doing this?**

- **What was the size of budget and resources I managed? How much money saved?**

- **What is my experience with a multi-sector workforce? Percentage of backlog eliminated/reduced? Length of processing time reduced?**

- **How did I utilize technology to create or improve programs?**
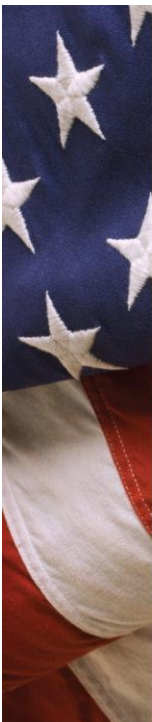
Building Coalitions

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.

Competencies:

- **Partnering**

- **Political Savvy**

- **Influencing/Negotiating**

Building Coalitions
What should the focus be?

In describing your experience, here are some questions to ask:

- **What groups/networks (internal and external) did I partner with to achieve a goal?**

- **How did I bring groups together? What challenges did I face doing that?**
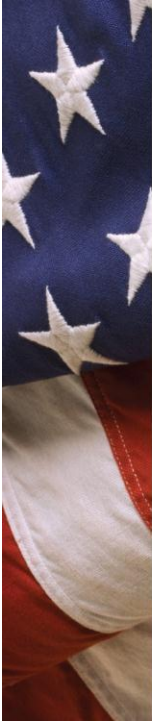
- **What did I do to build coalitions?**

Fundamental Competencies

Should be addressed over the complete ECQ narrative. The narrative, in its totality, shows mastery of these fundamental competencies overall.

Competencies:

- **Interpersonal Skills**

- **Oral Communication**

- **Integrity/Honesty**

- **Written Communication**

- **Continual Learning**

- **Public Service Motivation**

Challenge-Context-Action-Result (CCAR) Model

ECQ statement should include no more than 2 examples (per ECQ) of relevant experience that matches the ECQ criteria. Describe specific challenges, actions and results.
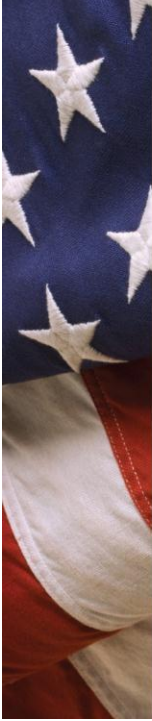
- **Challenge – describe a specific problem or goal**

- **Context – individuals and groups you worked with and/or environment in which you worked to address a challenge**

- **Action – what you specifically did to address the challenge**

- **Result – measures/outcomes that had some impact on the organization**
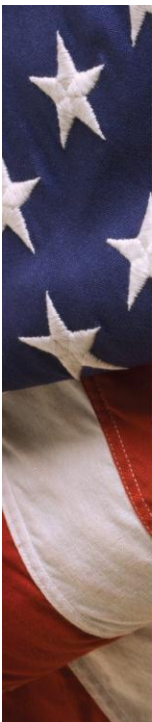
(CCAR) Model

Quick Example

Challenge

Energy Information Administration (EIA) lacked a formal, corporate, and strategic approach to managing and operating its web assets. My vision was to completely revamp the way EIA approached its web management activities by developing and integrated, corporate approach. Program officials strongly resisted my initial efforts to consolidate web management as they feared that giving up the existing approach would cause them to lose control of their resources.
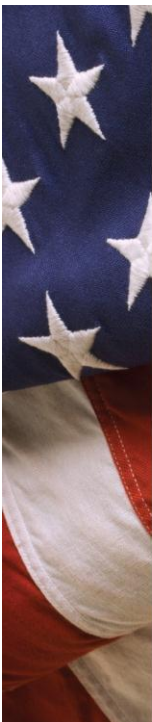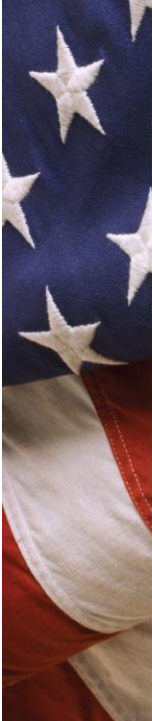
Context

The agency had taken a completely decentralized approach to web operations, with each program office independently managing its own substantial web holdings. Therefore, the agency hosted a myriad of websites and applications that had disjointed navigation models and produced a high amount of redundancy and duplication.

Action

To overcome resistance, I met with them individually and in groups and strongly championed the integrated approach. I demonstrated how the current approach was highly duplicative and inefficient and was hampering progress in advancing its missions and meeting customer needs. To garner broader support, I created and led a study group in examining critical issues and also led them in a series of exercises to gain an understanding of the major shortcomings of the existing website.
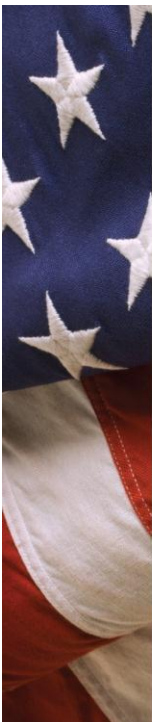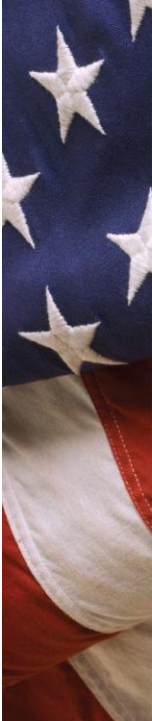
Result

As a result of my leadership, the corporate approach to web management became a prominently featured in EIA's Strategic Plan, making it one of the agency's top priorities over the next five years. Progress in implementing the new plan has already made the EIA web a much more dynamic and responsive tool that is now widely used by customers and stakeholders.
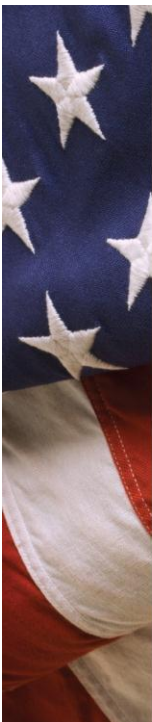
General Concepts

Make Sure:

- **Write-up is focused on demonstrated executive leadership**

- **Examples are less than 10 years old**

- **Candidate followed CCAR model**

- **Examples were clear and easy to follow**

- **Candidate did not leave open ended questions throughout write-up**

- **Examples are relevant to leadership**

- **Candidate addressed a majority of competencies**

- **Examples organized well**

Reviewing and Writing Tips

Make sure to:

- **Strictly adhere to 1 inch margins, 12pt font and 10 page narrative limit. (Number pages)**

- **Limit introductory summaries to 2 paragraphs (it counts towards 10 page narrative limit)**

- **Follow the CCAR (Challenge-Context-Action-Result) model**

- **Quantify experience (numbers, percentages, and timelines)**

- **Use measurable results (whenever possible)**

- **Use action oriented verbs (Active Voice vs passive voice)**

Reviewing and Writing Tips

Make sure to:

- Describe experience and accomplishments in a clear and organized manner. Be succinct.

- Use personal "I" instead of the third person

- Write in Layman's terms

- Proofread
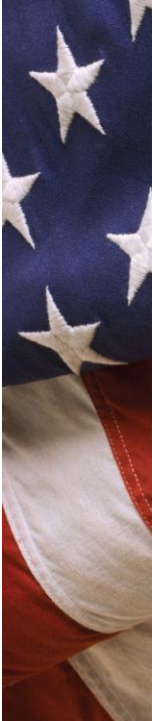
- Spell out and limit the use of Acronyms

Reviewing and Writing Tips

Avoid:

- Using the same example for more than one ECQ

- Vague statements

- Statements that describe personal beliefs, philosophies, or commitment to a social or political cause

- Grammatical errors and typos

- Using examples or experiences that are older than 10 years

Reviewing and Writing Tips

Avoid:

- **Referring readers to other parts of the ECQ narrative**

- **Overuse of bolding and underlining**

- **Making disparaging remarks about former managers**

- **Revealing information about political affiliation or activities**

- **Using bureaucratic words and expressions**

- **Including ECQ definitions**

Resources

Guide to SES Qualifications

www.opm.gov/ses/references/GuidetoSESQuals_2010.pdf

www.opm.gov/ses