



Training and Development for the Senior Executive Service: A Necessary Investment

The Vision and the Business Case

The Federal Government is expected to accomplish its many missions with fewer workers and financial resources while meeting new challenges, improving services, and increasing efficiency and effectiveness. The Senior Executive Service (SES), a cadre of executives who provide day-to-day leadership of Federal agencies and serve as the link between political appointees and the career workforce, plays a critical role in agency success or failure. Research confirms that appropriately designed, delivered, and implemented training and development can improve individual and organizational performance. Accordingly, the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 envisioned that Federal agencies would manage the SES so as to “provide for the initial and continuing systematic development of highly competent senior executives.”

The Reality

MSPB’s research indicates that “systematic development” of career senior executives is frequently more a vision than a reality. Practices for managing senior executive training and development vary widely across Federal agencies, and some agencies reported that practices varied internally. Both the SES and the broader public are served poorly by this lack of consistency and coordination. Results of a 2011 survey of the SES conducted by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management suggest that an unacceptably high number of senior executive receive insufficient guidance and support for training and development.

The State of SES Training and Development

50%

of senior executives **did not** have an Executive Development Plan—a document expressly required by regulation.

30%

of senior executives reported that their developmental needs were **not** met.

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Senior Executive Service Survey Results for Fiscal Year 2011*, May 2012.

The Way Forward

In light of the importance of the SES role and heightened attention to agency performance and SES accountability, Federal agencies should view executive training and development as a necessary investment rather than a discretionary activity or expenditure. Accordingly, MSPB recommends that Federal agencies take a methodical and coordinated approach to the training and development of senior executives. To help agencies develop and implement a strategy that suits executives’ needs and aligns with agency goals and resources, the report—

- Identifies common barriers to training and development;
- Offers strategies to mitigate those barriers; and
- Examines training and development activities and provides information on their background, advantages, disadvantages, effectiveness, and costs.

For a copy of the full report, please visit www.mspb.gov/studies