



**U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
Office of Human Capital**

**Senior Executive Service Selection Procedures and Guidelines**

**July 2019**



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement



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## 1. Purpose

To outline the Senior Executive Service (SES) selection procedures for initial appointments into the SES. This document serves as a guide to facilitate the hiring and recruitment of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) SES members. This guide does not confer a right or entitlement and ICE reserves the right to alter or adjust this guide, as needed.

## 2. Background

The SES is a select cadre of Federal leaders. The SES was established to ensure that the executive management of the United States Government is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the Nation and otherwise is of the highest quality. There are two basic approaches to filling career SES vacancies:

- Without a formal announcement, by selecting from existing SES, reinstatement of eligible SES, and Candidate Development Program (CDP) graduates; or
- With a formal announcement, which must be open a minimum of 14 calendar days and based on merit competition.

Agencies are required to establish an Executive Resources Board (ERB) to conduct the merit staffing process. Preliminary qualifications screening, rating, and ranking of candidates may be delegated to rating panels to screen applications and conduct interviews for appointment into the SES. These procedures will be used by the screening and interview panels to support the ERB in its goal to ensure the selection of the best candidates for appointment to the SES, while maximizing overall transparency in the process.

## 3. Overview

Initial career appointments to the SES must be based on merit competition. Generally, the process includes widespread public notification of the job announcement where diverse populations are engaged in the recruitment phase, preliminary review of applications by the ICE Executive Services Unit (ESU), rating and ranking of applicants by a panel with in-depth knowledge of the position's requirements, evaluation of each candidate's qualifications by the ERB, and final recommendation by the Chair of the ERB.

## 4. Role of ESU

The Office of Human Capital's ESU is charged with implementing processes and procedures to meet the needs of the ERB, conform to Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regulations, and adopt best practices on behalf of ICE.

The ESU works with the program offices to establish the qualification standards and rating plans, establish the recruitment plans, coordinate approval of new vacancy announcements, post the vacancy announcements, and review applications to see if they meet minimum qualifications and conform to the requirements in the vacancy announcements. In addition, the ESU coordinates the rating panels, checks recommended candidates' references, coordinates the production and collection of relevant document(s) for the ERB, and reviews the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) package.

The ESU prepares and submits U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Executive Action Request packages for approval of vacancy announcements and selection recommendations for required positions .<sup>1</sup>

The ESU coordinates with DHS on the putative selectee's ECQ package for the OPM Qualifications Review Board; and (following OPM approval) eventually coordinates the entrance on duty (EOD) date of the selected senior executive.

For Vacancies of First Impression (i.e., newly allocated or over-allocated positions for which no prior package has been recently created), the ESU will coordinate with the Chair of the ERB.

The ESU will provide weekly reports on the status of SES vacancies to the Executive Associate Director (EAD) of Management and Administration (M&A) as well as the Chair of the ERB.

## **5. Applicant Documentation**

Applicants seeking initial appointment to the SES are required to provide a résumé, ECQ statements, and relevant Technical Qualification statements as part of their application. Current senior executives and CDP-certified applicants have the option to provide an ECQ statement, but are not required to do so; however, they must submit the relevant Technical Qualification statements.

## **6. Timeframes**

Interviews, ICE selection recommendation for DHS consideration, and submission of candidates' ECQ packages to OPM must be completed within 90 days of the announcement closing or the selection becomes void and the process must be completed again.

## **7. Application Review**

ESU will review all applications for positions to the SES and refer those who meet the requirements outlined in the vacancy announcement to a screening panel for further evaluation.

## **8. Applicant Screening Panel**

The screening panel will be comprised of senior executive leadership from across ICE. The ESU will identify panel members, ensuring a diverse complement of executives and equitable rotation from different ICE offices.<sup>2</sup>

Screening panel membership cannot be further delegated. Once selected, the panel member must complete the review of all applications for the vacancy pending before the screening

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A, ICE SES Positions Requiring DHS ERC Approval.

<sup>2</sup> Given both its representational role and reporting chain through the DHS Office of General Counsel, *see* DHS Delegation Order No. 0400.2, § II.B. (Sept. 14, 2004), ICE Office of the Principal Legal Advisor (OPLA) executives will not ordinarily participate in the screening or interviewing of applicants for ICE SES positions. However, with the permission of the Principal Legal Advisor or Executive Deputy Principal Legal Advisor, where a vacant ICE SES position entails unique technical skills in an area upon which a specific OPLA executive regularly provides legal advice, that OPLA executive may participate in screening and first interviews.

panel. Extenuating circumstances may permit substitution with the express permission of the Chair of the ERB.

The screening panel will evaluate the candidates' written applications. The evaluations will be based on the established qualification standards, in accordance with merit principles. The panel members will use rating sheets provided by ESU to document their evaluation. The screening panel members will meet and confer on applications to ensure consensus in their final recommendations and the ESU will provide guidance on the rating categories. Applications will be screened using the following categories, with the highest rated applications listed in the Top category:

- Top;
- Middle; or
- Bottom.

The results of the screening panel will be shared for informational purposes with the EAD or Associate Director (AD) of the respective hiring office.

## 9. Referrals to the First Interview Panel

ESU will schedule first-round interviews for all candidates ranked in the "Top" category as well as current ICE employees ranked in the "Middle" category.

There are some exceptions on ICE employee interview referrals. An ICE employee may not be referred for an interview, if he or she applied to the initial vacancy and the following apply:

- The ICE employee scored in the middle on the previous vacancy;
- The ICE employee previously had an interview for that position;
- A non-selection was made on the initial vacancy; and
- The ICE employee is applying to the re-advertised position.<sup>3</sup>

## 10. Interview Panels<sup>4</sup>

### A. The First Interview Panel

- 1) The first interview panel will be comprised of senior executive leadership from across ICE. ESU will identify panel members, ensuring a diverse complement of panel members. Panel membership shall correlate to the level of the executive position within the program office. The SES supervisor over the vacant position may serve on all interview panels.<sup>5</sup>
- 2) Interview panel membership cannot be further delegated. Once selected, the panel member must participate in all interviews pending before the interview panel.

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<sup>3</sup> Employees meeting all these conditions may not be referred.

<sup>4</sup> The Agency reserves the right to implement the Office of Personnel Management's structured interview approach when conducting interviews.

<sup>5</sup> Members of the résumé screening panel may also serve on the first interview panel.

Extenuating circumstances may permit substitution with the express permission of the Chair of the ERB.

- 3) ESU and the hiring program office will develop the interview questions to be used by the interview panel. To expedite question development, ESU will maintain an archive of suggested interview questions. The questions will relate to senior executive ECQs and be tailored to the duties of the position. All questions will be reviewed and approved by ESU prior to dissemination to the interview panel. All applicants will be asked the same questions within the allotted time for the interview. Panel members may ask follow-up questions of the applicants during the interview.
- 4) The first interview panel will evaluate each candidate's responses during the interviews to assess whether the applicants have the knowledge, skills, abilities, and job-related qualifications necessary for the position. All applicants' answers will be assessed in accordance with merit principles, in alignment with the qualification standards for the position.

The panel members will use the First-Round Interview Panel form, provided by ESU, to document their evaluation. The panel will not assign a numerical score; rather the panel members will determine whether the candidates warrant a second interview and will provide a written rationale for their decision. The panel members may meet and confer on applications to ensure consensus in their final recommendations. The ESU will provide guidance to the panel on the rating categories. Applicants will be screened using the following categories:

- Recommended; or
  - Not Recommended.
- 5) Results of the first-round interview will be shared for informational purposes with the EAD or AD of the respective hiring office.
  - 6) If multiple candidates are recommended, ESU will schedule second-round interviews for all recommended candidates. ESU will maintain the first interview panel notes and transmit the recommended candidates' formal applications to the second interview panel. This will ensure an independent review of the recommended candidates at the second level.
  - 7) ESU will conduct reference checks on the recommended candidates external to ICE.
  - 8) In cases where the first interview panel recommends only one applicant for the position, the ERB will determine whether a second-round interview is required.

#### B. The Second Interview Panel

- 1) For positions within ERO and HSI, the second interview panel will be comprised of senior executive leadership from within the program office. With input from the program office, ESU will identify panel members. Panel membership will correlate to the level of the executive position within the program office. The second interview panel will consist of different senior executives other than those from the first interview panel.



- 2) For the ICE Executive Associate Directors (EAD) and Deputy EADs for HSI, ERO and all OPR positions, the second interview panel will be comprised of senior executive leadership from across ICE. ESU will identify panel members, ensuring a diverse complement of panel members. Panel membership will correlate to the level of the executive position within the program office. The second interview panel will consist of different senior executives other than those from the first interview panel.
- 3) Since M&A senior executive positions have a direct impact on all program offices, for positions within M&A, the second interview panel will be comprised of members of the ERB or their designees to ensure that they have a role in the selection decisions.
- 4) When there is a line-of-business connection to DHS, ICE will invite the relevant DHS office to participate in the second interview panel. For example, the DHS Chief Financial Officer will be invited to participate in the second interview panel for the ICE Chief Financial Officer.
- 5) Once the interview process has begun, the panel member must participate in all interviews pending before the interview panel.
- 6) The questions for the second interview will be developed using the same procedures as those described for the first interview and disseminated to panel members.
- 7) For current or former ICE employee candidates, ESU will provide the second interview panel with relevant documentation related to the candidates' history at the Agency.
- 8) The second interview panel will evaluate each of the candidate's responses during the interview to assess whether the person has the knowledge, skills, abilities and job-related qualifications necessary for the position. All applicants' answers will be assessed in accordance with merit principles, in alignment with the qualification standards for the position.

The panel members will use the Second-Round Interview Panel form, provided by ESU, to document their evaluations of each candidate. The panel will not assign a numerical score; rather, the panel will determine which candidates warrant recommendation to fill the SES position. The panel members may meet and confer on applications to ensure consensus in their final recommendations. Applicants will be screened using the following categories:

- Highly Recommended;
  - Recommended; or
  - Not Recommended.
- 9) The EAD of the hiring office prepares the ERB Selection Memorandum that supports the selection decision on behalf of the ERB Members.
  - 10) ESU will provide the applicants' packages, second-round interview panel notes, consensus documentation, ERB Selection Memorandum and an ERB summary of the applications to the ERB.

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## 11. Executive Resources Board (ERB)

- A. The ERB will review the second interview panel documentation and ensure that the records adequately document the basis for the qualification, rating, and ranking of the candidates as well as the justification for the selection of the recommended candidate.
- B. The ERB will finalize the ERB Selection Memorandum to the ERB Chair ensuring that it fully justifies the selection of the recommended candidate as well as the non-selection of the other candidates.
- C. The Chair of the ERB serves as the Selecting Official on the selection certificate.
- D. The ERB Chair will sign the selection documents and return them to ESU for execution.

## 12. Final Documentation

ESU will coordinate the final documents to support the selection and EOD date of the selectee and coordinate, as appropriate, with the ERB and DHS.

### A. ECQs

- 1) The selected applicant's ECQ package will be reviewed and approved by ESU and the EAD or AD of the respective hiring office.
- 2) Approved packages will be submitted to the Chair of the ERB for approval and signature, prior to dissemination to DHS.
- 3) ESU will coordinate with DHS on the ECQ package for review by the Office of Personnel Management's Qualification Review Board.

### B. Salary Recommendations

ESU, in concert with the hiring program office, will draft the salary package, to include compensation recommendations and justifications, for review and signature by the ICE Deputy Director.

### C. Offer Letter

ESU will draft the final offer letter for the selected candidate.

### D. Probationary Period Documents

- 1) Senior executives must serve a one-year probationary period following initial appointment into the SES. Successful completion of the probationary period confers noncompetitive SES reinstatement eligibility.
- 2) ESU will provide the supervisor of the newly appointed executive the SES Probationary Period Certification form no later than 45 days prior to the end of the probationary period.
- 3) The signed Probationary Period Certification form will be returned to ESU within 10 days of receipt and filed in the employee's electronic Official Personnel Folder.

**Questions:** Any questions regarding these procedures should be addressed to ESU.



## APPENDIX A

## ICE SES POSITIONS REQUIRING DHS EXECUTIVE RESOURCES COUNCIL APPROVAL

Program	Position	Appt Type	Functional Concurrence	Series	Position Designation
OD	Deputy Assistant Secretary/Deputy Director, ICE			340	CR
OD	Congressional Relations Director	Noncareer	X - (OLA)	340	G
M&A	Executive Director, Management and Administration	Career		340	CR
M&A	Assistant Director, Human Resources Management	Career	X - (CHCO)	340	CR
M&A	Assistant Director, Information Governance	Career	X - (PRIVACY)	301	CR
M&A	Assistant Director, Diversity and Civil Rights	Career	X - (CRCL)	260	CR
M&A	Chief Financial Officer	Career	X - (CFO)	505	CR
M&A	Director, Facilities and Asset Administration	Career	X - (CRSO)	340	CR
M&A	Director, Office of Procurement	Career	X - (CPO)	1102	CR
M&A	Chief Information Officer	Career	X - (CIO)	2210	CR
M&A	Director, Office of Policy	Career	X - (POLICY)	340	G
OPR	Assistant Director, Office of Professional Responsibility			1811	CR
OPLA	Principal Legal Advisor	Noncareer	X - (OGC)	905	G
ERO	Director, Enforcement and Removal Operations	Career		1801	CR
HSI	Director, Office of Homeland Security Investigations	Career		1811	CR

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