

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

- WHAT IS THE NASA SESCDP?
- WHO ARE THE PLAYERS IN THE SESCDP PROGRAM AND WHAT ARE THEIR ROLES?
- WHY DO THE CANDIDATES HAVE MENTORS? WHAT DO MENTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THE CANDIDATE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS?
- WHAT CAN MENTORS GET OUT OF THE PROCESS?
- WHAT SHOULD MENTORS AND THEIR CANDIDATES TALK ABOUT?
- WHAT SKILLS SHOULD THE MENTOR AND CANDIDATE FOCUS ON AS THE CANDIDATE GOES THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS?
- FIGURE 1: SUGGESTED MENTORING OPPORTUNITIES
- SO YOU WANT TO BE A MENTOR. DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT TAKES TO BE EFFECTIVE?
- WHAT CAN THE SES CANDIDATE DO TO MAKE THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP SUCCESSFUL?
- WHAT TYPES OF PROBLEMS CAN DEVELOP IN A MENTORING SITUATION AND HOW CAN THEY BE AVOIDED OR SOLVED?
- WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE HELP?
- FIGURE 2: POTENTIAL MENTORING RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS

What is the NASA SESCDP?

The NASA Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) offers individuals a structured approach to preparing for recurring openings in the SES. Program participants are generally GS-15's (some GS-14's) who have shown the potential to become outstanding leaders at the SES level. The program lasts 18-30 months and is structured around an Individual Development Plan (IDP) created by each candidate and their mentor.

The following core activities are the **MINIMUM** requirements necessary for successful completion of the SESCDP for certification by OPM. Additional NASA-specific requirements are also noted:

1. **OPM Certification Requirement:** Developmental Work Assignment(s). Successful completion of either:

- a) One developmental work assignment at least 180 days in length; **OR**
- b) Two developmental work assignments each at least 90 days in length.

The NASA Administrator, in a letter to all Officials in Charge of Headquarters Offices and Directors of NASA Centers, dated February 23, 2004, has set Standards for Selection into the SES. Below is an excerpt of that letter:

“Leaders in today’s NASA must have a strong people leadership skills and they must be effective resource managers. They must have a broad perspective, including the capacity to seek out and embrace divergent viewpoints and ideas, accept new challenges, and build alliances across geographical, organizational, functional, and cultural boundaries. They must be able to provide strategic solutions to problems through creative thinking and partnering; and an awareness of political, national, and Agency goals and vision.”

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

“These attributes may be acquired through experience in other agencies or academia, a variety of functional areas either within or outside of NASA, work experiences at multiple NASA locations, or a combination of such broadening experiences. Normally, such perspective is gained over a significant period of time in high-level positions or assignments that totally engage the individual in the culture and decision-making structure of the organization. The important aspect of this experience is the depth and breadth of the experience as opposed to a minimum time period.”

Each candidate’s experience and training will be reviewed to determine appropriate development necessary to meet the Standard for Selection into the SES. If you have primarily worked in a Center environment, you will be required to spend part of your development time at Headquarters. If you have worked primarily at NASA Headquarters, you will be required to spend part of your development time at a Center or multiple Centers.

2. Interagency Executive-level Training: No less than 80 hours in a formal, approved interagency executive-level training experience. The NASA Training and Development Division informs SESCDP candidates of the approved courses (e.g. OPM Executive Development Seminar, FEI, Carnegie-Mellon Senior Executive Seminar, Harvard Senior Executive Fellows Program.) NOTE: training completed prior to entry into the SESCDP program will not be counted toward this requirement.
3. Management of an organization for a MINIMUM of six months. (Requirement If candidate has not managed an organization with more than five people)
4. Individual mentoring from member of the NASA SES Corps. The mentor may not be in the candidate’s chain of command.

D. NASA Seminars.

- a) A one-week program of orientation and assessment of candidates’ executive competencies. The resulting information gained from the assessment is to be used to develop a series of intensive development experiences that will be included in the IDP;
- b) A one-week mid-term seminar providing exposure to new concepts, skills and perspectives; and
- c) The Congressional Operations program, The Human Element Program (THE), and either the Business Education Program (BEP) or Strategic Business Management (SBM), if not previously attended.

E. Participation in Special Assignments

Participation in assignments such as: Center-level organizational projects at another NASA location; Agency-level special assignments focused on organizational or institutional projects such as the NASA Strategic Plan, facilities planning, human capital planning, workforces planning or other similar efforts.

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

All of these activities and the associated mentoring process are designed to help the candidate develop five sets of skills and knowledge the Office of Personnel Management considers Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) for SES selection:

- Leading Change
- Leading People
- Results Driven
- Business Acumen
- Building Coalitions/Communication

Who are the players in the SESCDP program and what are their roles?

Several key participants are involved in the executive development process for the SES candidates. All contribute in important ways to the candidate's progress.

Mentor: The mentor is a SES incumbent, outside the candidate's chain-of-command, who acts as sponsor, teacher, counselor, door opener, etc. The mentor is a confidant who provides perspective, helps the candidate reflect on the experience they are developing, and provides open, candid feedback. The mentor plays an advisory, not an evaluative role, and therefore has a unique opportunity to serve as a "sounding board" for the candidate on issues and challenges they may not share with individuals within their own organization. The mentor helps the candidate formulate their IDP and reflect on what they are learning along the way. They are also often helpful in negotiating the developmental assignments.

Supervisor: SES candidates continue in their regular jobs while completing their developmental activities. As a result, their supervisor plays a vital role. Supervisors help candidates plan development activities and work assignments so that both are optimized. There are times when the supervisor must assist the candidate in prioritizing existing work assignments so that time is available for development. The supervisor continues to coach the candidate about job responsibilities and can play a valuable role in helping the candidate tie their newly developed skills into their current assignments.

Installation Training Office: The Installation Training Office is a key resource to the candidate, the mentor, and the supervisor. They provide information on a wide range of training opportunities and can help match opportunities to developmental needs. Training Office personnel can also provide candidates, mentors, and supervisors support when problems emerge in the development and mentoring processes.

Executive Position Manager (EPM): who is responsible for ensuring that candidates have an appropriate mentor. They also approve the IDP before it is forwarded to the appropriate Enterprise Associate Administrator or, for Headquarters' employees, the appropriate official in charge of each Headquarters' Code, then on to the Agency Program Manager for the SES Candidate Development Program (SESCDP), to be shared with the Chairperson Executive Resources Board for final approval.

Executive Resources Board (ERB): The ERB is an Agency-level group that provides overall direction to the SES Candidate Development Program. It ensures the quality of the mentoring relationships, approves each candidate's IDP, and has final approval authority within NASA for the successful completion of the program.

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

Why do the candidates have mentors? What do mentors contribute to the candidate development process?

The SESCDP provides candidates with a concentrated set of development experiences in a short amount of time. The mentor plays a valuable role in the development process by serving as a “touch stone” and objective advisor. Candidates often need someone to talk with as they face the challenges of performing new duties and learning new skills. The mentor can be invaluable in helping the candidate structure their Individual Development Plan. Sometimes the mentor also gets involved in helping the candidate negotiate their program developmental work assignments.

Unlike supervisors, mentors do not have the role of judging the performance of the candidate. Therefore, they are free to provide advice and counsel without appearing to be critical. Candidates can choose not to follow mentor advice without fear of repercussions.

Learning new things can be a challenge and cause the SESCDP candidate to face unexpected new circumstances and learning situations. The mentor can help the candidate step back and reflect on what they are learning. Mentors draw on their own SES experience to suggest alternative approaches to challenging situations; they can help candidates break old habits and develop new tools. Previous SESCDP candidates report that their mentor was valuable in helping them step out of their comfort zone to try new things.

Mentors also serve as powerful role models. The SESCDP candidate not only relies on the mentor for advice, but also watches the mentor in action. Many candidates report that they shadow their mentors during meetings and day-to-day operations. The role of an SES incumbent comes alive as candidates observe and later discuss their mentor’s actions. The career path followed by the mentor also serves as an example for the candidate contemplating their potential path into the SES.

What can mentors get out of the process?

The mentoring relationship can also benefit the mentor. The most consistent feedback from mentors is that they gained personal satisfaction from watching their candidate grow during the course of the program. Many report that the mentoring relationship continued well beyond the end of the formal program activities. To the surprise of many mentors, involvement in program activities provided them with development as well. Many mentors find that their candidate’s questions cause them to think about things in new ways and really examine their own actions and habits. Mentors learn vicariously through the experiences and reflections of their candidates. Discussions with candidates also provide the SES mentor a view into the perspectives and experiences of people lower in the organization; an important view for them to stay in touch with as they make executive-level decisions.

What should mentors and their candidates talk about?

Candidates can talk with their mentors about anything. However, early in process some mentor/candidate pairs have trouble generating conversation. In general, the candidate should direct the conversation during mentoring sessions by coming prepared with items to discuss. Early in the process discussion generally focuses on the creation of the Individual Development Plan. Former candidates also report spending their first meetings just getting to know their mentor by having them share stories about their career, SES experiences, and development. As the program progresses, most candidates want to talk with their mentor about the experiences they are having in the program and challenges they are facing.

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

Some candidates schedule regular discussion appointments with their mentors (i.e., once every two weeks, once a month). Other candidates schedule meetings with their mentors to coincide with major events in their IDP. Regardless of the arrangement, the candidate and the mentor should work together to schedule mentoring sessions and ensure that the conversations focus on the issues meaningful to the candidate.

There are specific times during the SESCDP when it is highly recommended that the candidate and the mentor talk. Suggested in [Figure 1](#) (below) is a set of events around which discussion is recommended. Candidates and their mentors can use these suggestions to anticipate how they might want to spend their time together.

What skills should the mentor and candidate focus on as the candidate goes through the development process?

As mentioned earlier, the SESCDP is designed to develop candidate skills and knowledge in five areas. These skill/knowledge sets are referred to as Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs), a term developed by the Office for Personnel Management:

- Leading Change
- Leading People
- Results Driven
- Business Acumen
- Building Coalitions/Communication

An abbreviated description of each skill/knowledge set is available in the [SESCDP Guidelines and Procedures](#) on the NASA web site. Complete descriptions are available in OPM's "[Guide to Senior Executive Service Qualifications](#)."

Candidates will receive feedback on their current skill/knowledge level in each ECQ during the NASA SESCDP Orientation Seminar. This feedback will help the mentor and candidate identify development and coaching needs. Throughout the mentoring relationship, discussion should be focused on the degree to which the ECQs are being developed and demonstrated. At the end of the program, each candidate's proficiency in the ECQs will be evaluated; the evaluation will form the basis of the program completion documentation submitted to OPM.

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

Figure 1: Suggested Mentoring Opportunities

Suggested Meetings	Potential Discussion Topics
<p>Initial Mentoring Meeting(s) – share expectations and create preliminary IDP.</p>	<p>Time in this initial meeting should be spent with the mentor and candidate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting to know one another. • Sharing their expectations (hopes and concerns) for the mentoring relationship. • Formulating the preliminary content of Sections I, II, and III of the Individual Development Plan (IDP) – <i><u>prior to this meeting the mentor should read the candidate's SESCDP application and complete the "Mentor Page" (Section IB) in the SESCDP IDP and be prepared to discuss it with the candidate.</u></i> • Completing and signing Section IV of the IDP, identifying the candidate's technical skills that need to be developed.
<p>Mentoring Meeting after NASA SESCDP Orientation</p>	<p>After the Candidate Orientation, the mentor and candidate should discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the candidate learned at Orientation. • Feedback the candidate received during the Orientation. • Revisions to the IDP.
<p>Mentoring Discussions about Developmental Assignments</p>	<p>The mentor and candidate should talk:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Before each assignment</u> to answer the following questions: What experiences does the candidate need to have? What skills should they focus on developing? 2. <u>Mid-way through each assignment (at least)</u> to answer the following questions: How is the assignment going? Are the skill development experiences materializing? What challenges are being faced and how might they be dealt with? What support can the mentor provide? 3. <u>After each assignment</u> to complete the Interim Report to HQ and to discuss the supervisory evaluation.

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

Mentoring Discussions about Seminar Attendance	<p>The mentor and the candidate should talk:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Before each seminar</u> to review the seminar content and answer: What should this seminar help the candidate accomplish?2. <u>After each seminar</u> to share learnings with the mentor and to define on-the-job opportunities for the candidate to practice the new skills/use the new knowledge. <p>It is also suggested that the mentor and candidate take a few minutes in their meeting before the NASA Mid-term Candidate Seminar to openly discuss how the mentoring process is going and how each could work to improve it.</p>
Creation of Final Program Report	<p>The mentor and candidate meet near the end of the program to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the degree to which the activities in the IDP have been accomplished.• Discuss, candidly, the skill and knowledge development that occurred during the program. Discussion about how ongoing development could be fostered can also be helpful.• To share what each of them took away from the experience.• To draft the Final Program Report.
Creation of OPM Certification Package (if applicable)	<p>After the Program is completed, the candidate may want to meet with the mentor as they are formulating their OPM paperwork.</p>

So you want to be a mentor. Do you know what it takes to be effective?

Effective mentoring comes from a combination of experience, commitment, and skill. The most valued mentors have a wealth of experience and are willing to share stories of their successes and their failures. Commitment to the development of the candidate is also essential. The effective mentor views the mentoring relationship as an opportunity to help develop the candidate's ability to think critically and make decisions, not just to develop specific leadership skills. Mentors must commit their time to the relationship; making themselves accessible to the candidate and spending the time necessary for the candidate to really reflect on what they are learning. Often candidates and their mentors spend informal time together so that they separate themselves from the pressures on the work environment.

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

Finally, effective mentoring requires some skills. Some mentors feel they have these skills upon entering the mentoring relationship. Many more report that they develop these skills, skills that are valuable to them throughout their SES experience, more fully as a product of the relationship. Effective mentors have and, through their mentoring experience, continue to develop their skills in:

Listening	listening (and observing body language) for deep meaning
Questioning	using open-ended questions to stimulate others to reflect on their experiences and think in new ways
Giving Feedback	helping others reflect on the nature and implications of their behavior and actions without being overly critical
Resolving Difficult Issues	openly discussing and resolving relationship and other sensitive problems

What can the SES candidate do to make the mentoring relationship successful?

The SES candidate should take active responsibility for driving the mentoring relationship. The checklist below provides some ideas for how to create and maintain an effective mentoring relationship:

- Make sure the mentor you are matched with (either through your choice or assignment) is a person you respect and from whom you believe you can learn.
- Spend considerable time in the initial stages getting to know your mentor (ask them to tell their career, success, and failure stories) and working with them to clarify expectations and ground rules for your relationship. Make sure you talk about how much time each of you can commit, your ideas of confidentiality, any situations that could negatively impact your program participation or the mentoring relationship.
- Establish a calendar of mentoring sessions or agree on how meetings will be scheduled. Do not leave meetings to chance.
- Be prepared to provide your mentor with feedback (positive and negative) about the quality of guidance and advice you are receiving.
- Set and discuss your long-term career goals with your mentor.
- Ask your mentor to identify activities you can participate in (above and beyond your formal IDP) that can help you develop. Talk about your experience with your mentor.
- Work to balance your program involvement with your ongoing job responsibilities.
- Keep conversations with your mentor confidential (unless otherwise discussed with your mentor).

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

What types of problems can develop in a mentoring situation and how can they be avoided or solved?

Most SESCDP mentoring relationships have been very beneficial to both the candidate and the mentor. However, sometimes problems in the relationship or the process need to be confronted and discussed. Figure 2 below details some of the challenges candidates and mentors have experienced. A brief description of each potential problem and its likely cause are provided. Strategies for avoiding and dealing with each problem are also described. The reader will notice that open discussion and problem solving is the strategy for dealing with all the challenges. Some candidates who have experienced one or more of the problems report that talking through their concerns with their mentor was one of their most important learning experiences. They felt that learning to confront difficult interpersonal issues invaluable even though they suggested that others work to prevent the problems by setting clear expectations and communicating frequently.

Where can I go for more help?

Candidates often seek mentoring from more than one person. Although you have one formal mentor as part of the SESCDP, there is nothing that precludes you from seeking advice and counsel from others. Multiple perspectives can be helpful; however, getting too many perspectives can be time consuming and confusing.

Feel free to contact your Installation Training Office or Agency SESCDP Program Manager, Jan Moore (NASA HQ, Code FT, (202) 358-2184) for more information on or support with mentoring.

Bibliography

Bell, C. R. (1998). Managers as Mentors: Building Partnerships for Learning. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Peddy, S. (1998). The Art of Mentoring: Lead, Follow, and Get Out of the Way. Houston, TX: Bullion Books.

Shea, G. F. (1997). Mentoring: A Practical Guide. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications.

Wickman, F. and Sjodin, T. L. (1997). Mentoring: A Success Guide for Mentors and Proteges. Chicago, IL: Irwin Professional Publishing.

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

Figure 2: Potential Mentoring Relationship Problems

Potential Problem – Description	Likely Causes	Preventative Strategies	Solution Strategies
<p><u>Dependency</u> – candidate becomes too dependent on mentor for advice and becomes hesitant to make decisions without mentor “approval”.</p>	<p>Candidate inflates the status of the mentor.</p> <p>Mentor overly critical of candidate decisions early in relationship instead of challenging candidate to explore the implications of their decisions.</p> <p>Mentor too eager to “help” (answers questions/takes actions too quickly).</p>	<p>Establish relationship as a partnership of individuals learning from each other.</p> <p>Candidate: take mentor advice as input, avoid “checking” with mentor too frequently.</p> <p>Mentor: ask questions and encourage independent thought – offer advice sparingly.</p>	<p>Openly discuss perceptions of dependency (mentor will probably notice it first). Commit to new ways of working together.</p>
<p><u>Candidate Experiences Relationship as Evaluative vs. Developmental</u> – Candidate perceives mentor as a judge who can negatively impact his/her career instead of as a career advisor.</p>	<p>Candidate inflates the status of the mentor.</p> <p>Mentor overly critical of candidate decisions early in relationship instead of challenging candidate to explore the implications of their decisions.</p> <p>Mentor too eager to “help” (answers questions/takes actions too quickly).</p>	<p>Balance discussions between what is going well and improvement opportunities.</p> <p>Candidate: work on taking feedback and advice as developmental assistance not criticism; avoid defensive reaction and develop active listening skills.</p> <p>Mentor: ask questions and encourage independent thought – offer advice sparingly.</p>	<p>Openly discuss perceptions of evaluative climate (candidate will probably notice it first). Commit to new ways of working together.</p> <p>Take a seminar together on giving and receiving feedback.</p> <p>Invite a facilitator to sit in on a few of your meetings and give you suggestions.</p>

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

<p><u>Tension between Candidate, Mentor, and Supervisor</u> – sometimes candidates feel caught between the expectations and advice of their supervisor and that of the mentor. Issues of loyalty and power can develop.</p>	<p>The mentor and supervisor have vastly different styles, experience, etc. (this can be an advantage to a candidate who can learn from both).</p> <p>The supervisor does not understand or support the mentoring relationship.</p> <p>The candidate (knowingly or unknowingly) pits the mentor and the supervisor against each other.</p>	<p>Share expectations for the mentoring relationship with the supervisor (these expectations should be formulated in the initial mentoring meeting).</p> <p>Openly discuss the IDP with the supervisor.</p> <p>Mentor, supervisor, candidate openly discuss how the three-way relationship can be of most benefit to all.</p>	<p>Open three-way conversation of developing concerns and agreement on new ways of working.</p> <p>SESCDP Program Manager or facilitator support can be called upon if necessary.</p>
<p><u>Lack of Trust</u> – candidate, mentor or both lack the trust in the other to make the mentoring relationship productive. Sometime trust centers on the degree to which each party feels the other is committed to the intent of the process.</p>	<p>Lack of clearly stated expectations for the relationship.</p> <p>Lack of follow-through on commitments made to one another.</p> <p>Inappropriate use of information shared in mentoring conversations.</p>	<p>Develop a clear list of agreed upon expectations and ground rules during initial mentoring meeting. Revisit list periodically to check on health of mentoring relationship.</p>	<p>Openly discuss the sources of mistrust and agree on new ways of operating.</p>
<p><u>Jealousy from Others</u> – co-workers or others become jealous of the candidate's involvement in the program and opportunities for new experiences.</p>	<p>Insecurity.</p> <p>Co-worker perception that they will be asked to work harder to “cover” for candidate during absences.</p> <p>Perception that candidate selection process was somehow unfair.</p> <p>Candidate agitation or arrogance about program involvement.</p>	<p>Let others know about program involvement as necessary – do not over publicize involvement.</p> <p>Candidate and mentor ensure that supervisor is making adequate efforts to compensate for candidate absence</p>	<p>Generally this problem is best left alone unless it threatens the long-term working relationship. The candidate may wish to talk with the other person if the relationship is threatened. An empathetic supervisor can also intervene effectively.</p>

MENTOR GUIDE

(Enclosure 8)

<p><u>Disappointment with Progress</u> – one or both parties are disappointed with the development progress of the candidate.</p>	<p>Mentor does not perceive change in behavior or development of candidate.</p> <p>Candidate not willing to change.</p> <p>Experiences included in IDP are not providing adequate development opportunities (the experiences themselves may be inadequate or the candidate may be completing them more as requirements than development experiences).</p>	<p>Candidate and mentor discuss how change will be gauged throughout program and specifically as a result of each major experience (assignment/seminar).</p> <p>Share observations of development occurring/not occurring. Collect feedback from others as helpful. Amend IDP if necessary.</p> <p>Candidate: be open to experimenting with new behaviors, take risks to use new approaches. Discuss results with mentor.</p>	<p>Openly discuss developmental progress. Commit to new ways of working if necessary.</p>
<p><u>Candidate/Mentor Mismatch</u> – despite attempts to solve problems in the mentoring relationship a very small percentage of candidate/mentor pairs continue to feel their relationship is not productive.</p>	<p>Lack of chemistry between the parties.</p> <p>Lack of trust cannot be overcome.</p> <p>Conflicting expectations for the relationship.</p> <p>Lack of investment on the part of one or both parties.</p>	<p>Consider initial mentoring match. Challenge match (if assigned) when history or circumstances suggest the relationship will not be productive.</p> <p>Develop a clear list of agreed upon expectations and ground rules during initial mentoring meeting. Revisit list periodically to check on health of mentoring relationship.</p> <p>Openly confront problems as they develop.</p>	<p>Candidate: expand relationships to include additional “informal” mentors in development process.</p> <p>Contact SESCDP Program Manager or local program official for reassignment.</p>