1. PURPOSE

This directive establishes policy and procedures, assigns responsibilities and provides guidance for the continuing professional development of the Department of Agriculture’s executive workforce.

2. SCOPE

This directive applies to all USDA Senior Executive Service (SES), Senior Level (SL), and Scientific (ST), Senior Science and Technology Service (SSTS), or Professional members pertaining to executive and professional development.

3. BACKGROUND

Training and development should not end once an individual becomes an executive. Executive applies to SES, SL, ST, and SSTS positions specifically intended for training purposes only. Continuing education is essential to ensure the executive remains relevant in today’s fast paced environment. Facing constant challenges, changing technologies and a fluid environment, executives must pursue ongoing professional executive development to succeed and grow. It is crucial that executives continue to strengthen and enhance their SES Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) and SL/ST senior leadership competencies broaden their perspectives, and strengthen their performance. In addition, continual learning is a fundamental competency within the SES ECQs. The definition of the continual learning competency provided by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is, “Assesses and recognizes own strengths and weaknesses; pursues self-development.”

Federal agencies are required by law (Title 5, U.S. C., Section 3396) to establish programs for the continuing development of executives. Executives are required to prepare, implement, and regularly update an Executive Development Plan (EDP) as specified by 5
CFR 412.401 on an annual basis. The EDP is a key tool to assist with continued development planning.

There are many tools which will be used for Executive Continual Learning and Development. Below are some of the activities that can be utilized for further executive development.

a. **360 Degree Feedback**: 360 degree feedback is a widely used method and tool to assist in identifying strengths and developmental needs.

b. **Formal Training**: This includes classroom training focused on executive development. For example, OPM offers formal training for Federal executives at its Management Development Centers and the Federal Executive Institute.

c. **Mentoring and Coaching**: Mentoring and coaching are very effective tools for personal and leadership development. A mentoring program is an effective way to transfer knowledge and information.

d. **Mobility Assignments**: Executives have the option to participate in mobility assignments. These assignments consist of details, special/short-term assignments, transfers, projects, use of Intergovernmental Personnel Act authority, sabbaticals, formal training, and other creative ways to expose executives to challenges or otherwise expand their capacity to serve.

e. Other resources and tools include books, book summaries, AgLearn’s Leadership Development courses and webinars.

4. **AUTHORITIES**

a. The Government Employees Training Act, Title 5, United States Code, Chapter 41 and related guidance issued by the Office of Personnel Management;

b. Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 410, Training;

c. Title 5, CFR, Part 412, Executive, Management, and Supervisory Development;


5. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

This is a new policy.

6. POLICY

a. The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) will monitor and track the development of its Executive workforce through the Executive Development Plan (EDP). The objective is to provide continuous, comprehensive, systematic, and cost-effective executive development and training that is transparent and consistent with merit system principles and Equal Employment Opportunity policies.

As specified in 5 CFR 412.401, USDA SES, SL, ST, and SSTS will engage in learning activities to demonstrate continued professional development. Learning plans or activities will be documented on EDPs. EDPs will be reviewed and approved by the executives’ supervisor on or before December 31st each year.

b. All executive members will identify professional continual learning by using an EDP. It is recommended that the AgLearn’s IDP feature is used to identify executive career development and training needs and requirements. As an option, executives may use the format shown Appendix III to document their EDP.

c. Financial assistance for individual executive continuing learning and development activities is subject to availability of funds, and is not an executive entitlement. Funding for continuing executive development will be decentralized and funded by each agency or office. However, some development opportunities that are provided at minimal or no cost should be considered to foster continual learning.

d. Each executive with supervisory responsibilities will complete a 360 degree assessment at least once every three years to gather feedback from their supervisor, peers, and employees. The results of the 360 degree assessment will be used by the executive in planning development efforts.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. Agency Heads will:

   (1) Develop their executive workforce through the Executive Continual Learning Program, which focuses on competencies identified as essential to ensuring effective performance and development at executive levels.

   (2) Establish internal quality controls, standard operating procedures and delegate authority to monitor program compliance.

b. The Executive Resources Board (ERB) will:
(1) Promote and support effective executive career development and training opportunities for USDA executives.

(2) Review annual reports of executive development.

(3) Propose or sponsor training to meet the developmental needs for executives.

(4) Promote executive participation in programs such as executive rotations, fellowships, details, and exchange programs as a means of continuous executive development and training.

c. Mission Area, Agency, Staff Office, or Office Training Officer or designee will:

(1) Provide coordination, support, and guidance where appropriate.

(2) Validate training requests based on training program requirements.

(3) Provide information and reports to the USDA Virtual University on executive training and development.

d. SES, SL, ST, and SSTS members will:

(1) Develop and maintain their EDP using AgLearn’s IDP feature at http://www.aglearn.usda.gov/ or alternatively the EDP format in Appendix III, by December 31st of each year and apply SES Executive Core Qualifications and SL/ST/SSTS senior leadership competencies acquired through training to the performance of their official duties.

(2) If using the format in Appendix III, submit a copy to the Virtual University at the ECLEDP@dm.usda.gov mailbox by December 31st of each year.

(3) Discuss and update performance and developmental needs and interests with their supervisor, assigned mentor, and/or coach.

(4) Ensure that training requests are consistent with their EDPs.

(5) Complete a leadership assessment and incorporate their assessment results into further developing and updating their EDP.

e. The USDA Virtual University will:

(1) Assist with the development of the Executive Continual Learning Program by providing minimal or no cost development opportunities and assessment tools and resources to USDA executives.
(2) Receive reports from Mission Area, Agency, or Staff Office training contacts and consolidate information to track and report program activities to the ERB and the Office of Personnel Management as required.

(3) Assign a Departmental Program Manager.

(4) Work with the ERB to promote executive participation in programs such as executive rotations, fellowships, details, and exchange programs as a means of continuous executive development and training.

(5) Evaluate the overall effectiveness and efficiency of USDA Executive Continual Learning programs annually.

(6) Manage, track and oversee Executive Development Program activities and EDPs and provide an annual report to the ERB no later than March 31st of each year.

f. The USDA Virtual University Program Manager will:

(1) Serve as the program liaison for the Virtual University.

(2) Provide administrative oversight and annual program reports for effectiveness and efficiency to the ERB.

(3) Serve as liaison to agencies to coordinate and administer the Executive Continual Learning Program.

8. PROCEDURES

In cases where executive development activities require funding, upon approval by the executive’s supervisor, an SF-182 form will be submitted through the executive’s agency financial office for further processing, program registration, and payment.

9. DEFINITIONS

a. Competency: A behavior or set of behaviors that describes effective performance in a particular work context (e.g., job, role or group of jobs, function, or whole organization). Competencies can help ensure that individual and team performance aligns with the organization’s mission and strategic direction.

b. Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs): The five qualifications considered necessary for effective performance in any SES position and are the basis of a Qualifications Review Board certification for career appointment to the SES. The ECQs are Leading Change, Leading People, Results Driven, Business Acumen, and Building Coalitions. There are 28 sub-level competencies associated with the ECQs, including the six cross-cutting fundamental competencies of Interpersonal skills, Oral Communication, Integrity/Honesty, Written Communication, Continual Learning,

c. **Executive Development Plan (EDP):** This plan functions as a detailed guide of learning experiences to support SES, SL, ST, and SSTS continued professional development. It outlines developmental opportunities and assignments to allow the individual to develop a broader agency and government-wide perspective. EDPs should define a senior executive's short-term and long-term developmental activities which will enhance the executive's performance. These activities should meet organizational needs for leadership, managerial improvement, and organizational results. EDPs should be reviewed annually and revised as appropriate by the executive participating in the program.

d. **Training:** A planned, prepared, and coordinated program, course, curriculum or routine of instruction/education in a particular field or subject area which will improve individual and organizational performance and assist in achieving the agency’s mission and performance goals.

e. **Department Program Manager:** A person within the Virtual University designated to administer this program across USDA, assists in implementing Departmental policy, serves as liaison to agencies, and monitors the Executive Continual Learning Program.

f. **360 Degree Assessment:** A 360 degree assessment is a process where data is collected, reported, and used in a way that is intended to bring about increased effectiveness on the part of the participant in key leadership competencies and behaviors for their position. Data is collected through an efficient, computer-based survey designed to gather measurements about areas of individual competence from a variety of individuals, including supervisors, customers, peers, and direct reports. The resulting report helps the individual identify their strengths and developmental opportunities to support increased personal and organizational success. In the process, an individual evaluates their current leadership behaviors and makes plans for improvement.

-END-
Appendix A
Sample Executive Development Plan

The Executive Development Plan serves as the blueprint for all short-term and long-term developmental activities to enhance an executive’s performance. Developmental activities should focus on developing the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs), but may also cover development in technical skills if the Executive assignment has recently changed. Plans shall be updated annually.

**ECQs for Executive Performance**

**Leading Change:** Creativity and Innovation, External Awareness, Flexibility, Resilience, Strategic Thinking, Vision  
**Leading People:** Conflict Management, Leveraging Diversity, Developing Others, Team Building  
**Results Driven:** Accountability, Customer Service, Decisiveness, Entrepreneurship, Problem Solving, Technical Credibility  
**Business Acumen:** Financial Management, Human Capital Management, Technology Management  
**Building Coalitions:** Partnering, Political Savvy, Influencing/Negotiating

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<td>Developmental goals to support the achievement of your Performance Plan</td>
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<td>Book clubs, speaker forums, conferences, inter-bureau initiatives, peer coaching, leadership circles</td>
<td>Details/rotational assignments, task force, inter-bureau/agency initiatives</td>
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Executive signature:  
Supervisor signature:

Date:
APPENDIX B

USDA Executive Development Plan Process

1. At the beginning of each fiscal year, all Executives (SES, SL, ST, and SSTS) will develop learning goals that may derive from the previous year’s Performance Plan, results from the 360 degree assessment, or other information, and include anticipated learning required to accomplish the forthcoming year’s Executive Development Plan.

2. The Executive Development Plan can consist of learning that is:

   a. Formal Training: Any course (classroom-based or e-learning) having an agenda, curriculum, and instructor (i.e., courses, seminars, educational programs, and degree/certification programs).

   b. Informal Training: Any learning activity that is not covered under formal training that may be unstructured such as details, rotational assignments, task force participation, inter-bureau/agency initiatives, supplemental reading, speaker forums, conferences, mentoring, peer coaching, web-based training, and leadership circles.

3. The completed EDP will be reviewed, approved, and signed by the Executive’s Supervisor. If the EDP is not completed using the recommended AgLearn IDP feature at http://www.aglearn.usda.gov/, a scanned copy of the signed EDP (Appendix III) should be completed and e-mailed to the Virtual University ECLEDP@dm.usda.gov mailbox by December 31st of each year for tracking purposes.

4. The Virtual University will manage, track and oversee all electronic submission to the Virtual University ECLEDP inbox and provide an annual report to the ERB office no later than March 31st of each year.