



Department of Commerce (DOC)

Succession Planning Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. What is succession planning?** Succession Planning is the ongoing strategic process by which Department of Commerce organizations recruit, retain, and develop talent to build a pipeline that ensures the continuity and growth of an organization's mission through leadership and workforce shifts. Succession planning enables organizations to identify and develop potential candidates for future leadership positions, strengthen competencies, prepare employees to be competitive in the merit selection process, and fill leadership gaps.
- 2. What is the goal of succession planning?** More than 24% of the DOC Senior Executive Service (SES) population is eligible to retire, that number will balloon to nearly 48% in the next five years (NFC, 2024). To ensure the continuity of DOC's mission delivery, the Office of Human Capital Strategy (OHCS) initiated a thorough succession planning program in February 2021.
- 3. What are the benefits of succession planning?** Participating in the succession planning program provides employees with feedback to help them identify career goals and development opportunities based on aspirations and current career status. Participation also provides employees with additional professional contacts and resources for when they formally apply for potential new positions.
- 4. What are the steps in the succession planning framework?** The succession planning process spans 5 phases:
 - 1. Establish Succession Planning & Management Strategy:** Establish overarching succession planning and management priorities and align goals and policies to broader human capital goals and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) objectives.
 - 2. Determine Leadership/ Key Position Demand:** Identify and maintain a prioritized list of key positions based on risk level, including position requirements, competencies, risks, and success criteria. Also utilize hiring, retirement trends, and attrition data to understand shifts in demand.
 - 3. Evaluate Talent:** Develop a process to evaluate talent pools, assess them against success criteria, and identify competency gaps and position risks.
 - 4. Mobilize & Develop Talent:** Create a structured approach to filling competency gaps, communicate gaps to leaders, integrate assessment results into formal development plans, and support employee development through targeted programs.
 - 5. Ingrain a Succession Mindset:** Develop policies and plans for talent management efforts while leveraging succession planning to grow the next generation of diverse talent.



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5. What makes a successful succession planning program? A successful succession planning program is one that is well-structured and includes a diverse pool of candidates. It is a program that is supported by leadership and provides training and development opportunities for potential successors.

6. Does participation in the succession planning activities guarantee promotion? In the civil service system, no determinations of who will succeed an employee are made until all qualified candidates are provided equal opportunity to apply and be considered for the position. Situations where a candidate is "pre-determined" before the competitive selection process are considered "pre-selecting", or "pre-positioning", and should be avoided.

Succession planning assess individuals' motivation, aspirations, and readiness, identifies skill gaps, and drafts a development plan to close identified gaps to build a talent pool for critical positions in the organization.

Participation in succession planning activities neither replaces the merit staffing process nor guarantees selection for a leadership position. Federal law requires that all initial career appointments to the Senior Executive Service to be based on merit competition (Source: OPM).

7. How are HR professionals involved in succession planning? HR professionals play a pivotal role in succession planning by identifying potential successors, developing their skills through training programs, and implementing the succession plan. They also ensure communication between management and employees, evaluate the effectiveness of the succession plan, and develop strategies to retain high-potential employees. Additionally, they oversee the smooth transition of roles and compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

8. How are employees involved in succession planning? Employees are integral to the succession planning process. They should complete self-assessments, performance evaluations, and participate in training and development programs. Additionally, employee feedback can help refine the succession plan, and inform available development opportunities such as job rotation and cross-training.

9. How does succession planning support diversity and inclusion? Succession planning can support diversity and inclusion by deliberately identifying and developing diverse candidates for leadership roles. [Click here for additional information on how to embed DEIA into succession planning.](#)

10. How often should succession plans be updated? There is no set rule, but it's generally recommended to review and update the succession plan annually. However, significant changes in the organization or its environment may necessitate more frequent updates.