

[Launching the Senior Executive Service Development Program](#)

We are pleased to announce the launch of a **new Senior Executive Service (SES) Development Program**:

While the numbers of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander federal government employees closely reflect the total population of AAPIs in the country, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islander representation at SES, mid and senior level management remains low.

In response, the Asian American Government Executives Network, with participation from the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission launched a program to identify and aid applicants in preparation for the SES selection process through intensive training, education, and mentoring.

See our two-year anniversary highlights at:

http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/10112011_aapi_highlights_of_2yr_achievements.pdf

We also encourage federal employees to help AAGEN develop this new program by taking this survey: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/AAGEN_SES_Development. Their survey will collect data to examine Federal employees' career advancement strategies and work experiences. The survey results will provide information to senior executives and leaders on the challenges and barriers facing Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, as well as other groups.

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Posted by Thomas Phan on October 21, 2011 at 02:28 PM EDT

It is uniquely challenging for any career employee to rise to the Senior Executive Service (SES) level in the Federal government, and for many of us the road to SES has often been a long and challenging one.

My own long road to the SES first began in 1981 when I left Vietnam for the United States. In Vietnam, I served as a military officer in a special combat unit until I was captured during a mission and kept as a P.O.W. in a communist concentration camp. As a P.O.W., I was tortured and buried alive, and I nearly died of starvation. Managing to miraculously escape, I sailed

across the Pacific Ocean for 17 days, 10 of which I was without food, to come to the United States.

Upon arriving in the United States as a refugee, I sought to learn English and achieve the American Dream. Fortunate encounters with kind people led to college and work. My days cycled through a full day of university classes to an 8-hour night shift at work. The hard work and sacrifices paid off, and I graduated with a bachelor's degree from George Mason University and a master's degree from Johns Hopkins University. Ultimately, I opted for a career in public service to contribute to a country that had been so good to me, and I worked my way up through the federal government until I stood at the gateway of the SES.

The near-death experiences in Vietnam and my struggles as a refugee taught me courage, resilience, and strength; these qualities helped me to persevere through 12 years of pursuing a SES position. I took English classes, participated in leadership training sessions, enrolled in certification programs, and worked diligently to ensure I was always a top qualified candidate for the positions I sought. In 2009, I proudly joined the SES as the Director of the Office of Business Policy and Operations at the Office of Science in the Department of Energy.

As many of you know, President Obama has signed two Executive Orders — [one re-establishing](#) the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI) and the other [promoting diversity and inclusion](#) in the federal workforce. Following on those steps, I am pleased to announce the launch of the [Senior Executive Service \(SES\) Development Program](#) to identify and aid applicants in preparation for the SES selection process. This program, which is being launched by the Asian American Government Executives Network with participation from WHIAAPI, the Office of Personnel Management and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, will provide intensive training, education, and mentorship. Applications for this innovative leadership program will be accepted until December 16, 2011.

Thomas Phan is a Senior Executive and the Director of Business Policy and Operations in the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Science. He also currently serves as the Executive Director of Asian American Government Executive Network.