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## Strategic Succession Planning - Executive-Level Leadership in a Government Agency

Tajah Adams  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Tajah Adams

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Julian Muhammad, Committee Chairperson, Public Policy and Administration  
Faculty

Dr. Kristin Dailey, Committee Member, Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Strategic Succession Planning: Executive-Level Leadership in a Government Agency

by

Tajah S. Adams

MA, Arizona State University, 2016

BA, Rockhurst University, 2014

Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

Walden University

May 2024

## Abstract

The Candidate Development Program (CDP) is responsible for the training, development, and succession planning of government senior executive service (SES) members. While not all SES must go through this program, the CDP initiative is operational in 10 out of 24 federal agencies governed by the Chief Financial Officer Act. In this quantitative study, the client organization wanted to know the strategies a government agency may use to increase executive-level employee development to prepare them for executive appointments. In the current study, a self-administered web-based survey was distributed to CDP Current Trainees, CDP Graduates, and CDP Agency Representatives. The findings led to five recommendations: Implementing an Anonymous Trainee Debriefing Tool, an Individual Development Plan Evaluation Tool, a Mandatory Constructive Feedback Process, Self-awareness Assessment, and Informal Trainee/Graduate Cohort Development. Individuals appointed to SES are placed in high visibility roles with significant responsibilities, and the client organization must ensure those entering the program, graduating, and being appointed into senior executive roles are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead federal divisions and agencies efficiently, thereby enhancing positive social change through operations of government agencies for public benefit.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this project to my son. May you grow up as a black man in America and know you can indeed do and be anything in this world and that your mom set the standard that no matter your circumstances, you yield the power through choices to be the change you want to see.

“The burden rests upon the leaders of the Afro-American community to instill in the youth, especially, the desire to further their education, because without it you are not going anywhere on this earth.” — Malcolm X.

## Acknowledgments

“If you cannot fly, then run. If you cannot run, then walk. If you cannot walk, crawl, but whatever you do, you must keep moving forward.” — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I want to thank my family, Marcus, and Ace; you two have supported me through this journey of highs and lows. Thank you for believing in me, challenging me, and loving me. To my extended support system, we did it. Thank you to my mentors and honorary family members (AI, AJ, JS, and JH); I promise I am done for now! To my chair, Dr. Muhammad, and second committee member, Dr. Dailey, thank you!

Growing up, I had no blueprint for what I could do with my life or who I could become. Through the love and support of people around me, I began to see that the world was enormous. I became determined to make sure I saw it. Now, it is my turn to reach back and make sure I provide the same grace, mentorship, leadership, support, and opportunities to those who come after me.

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## Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

### **Introduction**

In this quantitative study, I assessed a government agency's strategies to address gaps in their current candidate development program (CDP) to improve candidate readiness upon CDP completion. Completing the CDP suggests that members are prepared to function at the highest level of government and possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to succeed within any government agency they are assigned. This study is valuable for the client organization as the client wanted to evaluate the current state of the CDP to be informed on challenges to non-participating agencies of the CDP program, challenges to program graduates post-CDP completion, and effective programs and best practices to serve as a framework leading to an enhanced executive leadership development program across all executive brand agencies. This study was approved by the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) on January 29, 2024, with approval number 01-29-24-1157383. I examined how current executives in the CDP perceive their current leadership development and measure perceived readiness to lead since joining the CDP.

This evaluation serves as a foundation for improving the executive leadership development program across all executive brand agencies. Assessing the existing condition of the CDP resulted in insights into issues faced by agencies that are not participating, challenges encountered by program graduates after completing the CDP, and successful programs and best practices identified by current CDP participants. This evaluation enhances the executive leadership development program and can be used as the groundwork for crafting strategies, policies, and procedures in developing a candidate

succession plan at the executive level. Bleich (2019) wrote, "Leadership talent and the business of recruiting and retaining leaders at all levels of the organization is high stakes and risk fraught particularly given statistics of organizational mismatches in hiring underprepared candidates" (p. 105). Reducing the risk of candidate mismatch in the program will save the client time and money (resources). The current lack of succession planning can result in being caught off guard by leadership changes and leave organizations such as the client with no one prepared to take over in the executive leadership role. Fernandez-Araoz (2021) stated "Lack of attention to succession, poor leadership development, and lazy hiring practices are contributing factors to why organizations choose poor leaders. To avoid poor leadership selections, succession planning should start when leadership changes every time" (p. 104).

The findings of this study can be used by the client organization in implementing strategies that are most optimal for the ongoing development of candidates at the senior executive level of government. Additionally, the client organization can use the findings of this study to understand how past candidates adapted to their new roles when faced with unforeseen adversities not covered by the CDP. Lastly, the study findings fortify the need for succession planning within the federal government and the executive-level leadership development program.

This section includes a discussion of the problem statement of the study, the background information on the client organization and its context, the purpose of the study, the research question guiding the study, the relevance this study has to the public

and its potential for positive social change, a summary of data sources and analysis, and all definitions as they relate to the study.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem that I addressed through this study was: How can a government agency increase executive-level employee development and understand why leaders are not prepared to be appointed when called upon to lead post-CDP training? The client organization recognizes the need to enhance executive-level employee development and comprehend why leaders are unprepared to be appointed and flourish when called upon post-CDP training. According to Ibrahim et al. (2021), flourishing goes beyond people being happy; instead, it involves a person's ability to positively advance one's personal, social, and professional life to be productive. To lead and empower others toward positive social change, at the executive level, one must flourish in various aspects of their life, such as character, personality traits, strengths, and identity, to see their potential to make a difference in their organizations as leaders.

When there is a focus on candidate readiness and an understanding of executive leadership's attitudes, behaviors, and experiences within the CDP, it becomes possible to effectively address the leaders' requirements to lead before completing the development program. This is vital for a leader's success, considering the reality of challenges faced once "on the job" currently overlooked in the CDP. Futterman (2018) asserted that being able to answer the fundamental question of: What is needed for the future of the organization? is critical in helping lay the groundwork for identifying and cultivating successors (p. 20) within any organization; hence, the leadership pipeline is introduced.



Charan et al. (2011) propose that organizations employ the leadership pipeline to identify leadership requirements adequately and evaluate whether the leadership candidate meets all the prerequisites necessary for a leader to be considered ready to serve at the following highest leadership passage. The client organization can implement succession plan strategies with a successful leadership pipeline.

This study is generalizable to other government agency leadership development programs encountering comparable leadership obstacles and challenges. The findings of this study accentuate the importance of leadership development and succession planning in government entities, emphasizing the crucial role effective leadership plays in agency success following leadership appointment.

### **Organization Background and Context**

The client wanted to evaluate the current state of their CDP to be informed on challenges to non-participating and participating agencies, challenges to program graduates post-CDP completion, and effective programs and best practices to serve as a framework leading to an enhanced executive leadership development program across all executive brand agencies. The client organization is responsible for CDP oversight, but the training initiative allows individual agencies to administer their approved CDPs independently (OPM, n.d.). Out of the 24 Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Act federal agencies, currently, 10 agencies have client organization-certified Senior Executive Service (SES) CDP.

According to the Office of Personnel Management (n.d.), the SES was established under the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978; individuals selected to lead at this level are

expected to have “well-honed executive skills and serve in key positions just below the top Presidential appointee” (OPM, n.d). Due to their high visibility and significant responsibilities associated with these roles, the client organization must ensure those selected and graduating from the CDP are well-equipped to meet the role's demands.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to provide a government agency's executive leadership candidate development committee with strategies to address gaps in their current CDP to improve candidate readiness upon CDP completion. In this study, I identified strategies and best practices to address their leadership shortfalls, improve the CDP, and develop succession planning to reduce the gaps in executives who complete the program ready to perform at the executive level versus those who complete the program being unprepared to perform duties assigned as executive organizational leaders. Ericsson (1990), as cited in Bordage (2009), suggested that leaders should be considered experts. Bordage (2009) identified the importance of specific leadership development strategies for a leader to be an expert. These strategies, when implemented, should focus on the following:

1. Motivate the learner through improvement in real-life, final performance.
2. Consideration for the learner's pre-existing knowledge (learning curve);
3. Allow repetition of the skills multiple times;
4. Provide immediate feedback; and
5. Be varied (mixed) across content areas. (Bordage, 2009).

Despite strategies like the ones presented by Bordage (2009), many organizations need more time and resources to implement these changes. This difficulty leads to what Charan et al. (2011) termed *deep-seated development errors*. Charan et al. (2011) identified four common problems resulting from these difficulties:

1. Line management dissatisfaction with human resources,
2. Leaders do not learn what is necessary to perform at their leadership level,
3. There is a continuous lack of selection skills, perpetuating the ongoing error of placing people in the wrong positions,
4. Human resources lack understanding of the organization and its needs (p. ix-xii).

### **Research Question**

The research question (RQ) that I used to guide this study was: What strategies can a government agency use to increase executive-level employee development to prepare them for executive appointments?

According to Schepker et al. (2018), “establishing an ongoing assessment of the readiness of leadership candidates provides candidates with exposure to top organizational leadership and establishes proper review tools” (p. 552) in a continuous development environment. The best way to know what leaders need to be successful is to have conversations and observations of their work-life to adjust leadership development to adapt to the real-world experiences of senior executives. Leadership development programs must identify accurate work requirements for the executive level and what individuals in the CDP require to “transition from one passage of leadership to the executive passage” (Charan et al., 2011, p. 7). Understanding the hierarchy of work that

exists at the executive level, according to Charan et al. (2011), is when and where one should begin building their leadership development base.

Hunter and Hunter (1984, as cited in Griffith et al. 2019) concluded in their study on job performance that when individuals train on realistic tasks that will be required of their new roles, this training is deemed most effective. Zenger (2012, as cited in Griffith et al. 2019) said that employees who fail to receive realistic training create suboptimal working habits and develop poor leadership traits (p. 305). Charan et al. (2011) asserted that clearly conveying the criteria and expectations of individuals pursuing leadership development and leadership roles can facilitate an organization's succession planning and procedures for future leadership selection processes. In this study, I focused on pinpointing those essential processes, procedures, and strategies necessary to improve the development of the client's executive leadership candidates.

### **Relevance to Public Organizations**

Government agencies' operational standards and functioning are vital to the country's well-being, public safety, and national security. The executive-level leaders appointed to champion the values of their respective agencies are entrusted to embody the foremost commitment to their agencies' customers and the country's success. This leadership level should not be taken lightly, and whoever is appointed to lead should be capable of leading the agency with the utmost respect for themselves and their peers, committed to fully advancing the agenda of each agency.

However, what is often true is that “organizations do not realize that their leaders are underperforming and are hindering both agency progression and leadership

succession” (Charan et al., 2011, p. 30). In some instances, the agency is aware, but there is a lack of full acknowledgment of the organization's needs, so they are unable to identify and articulate requirements effectively. By instituting a clarity of leadership requirements, as championed by Charan et al. (2011, p. 31), the client organization can make better-informed development decisions for individuals based on where people fall short in skills, time application, and values.

This approach will move the client organization away from traditional generalized training and development methods. Instead, individuals will be able to understand their current leadership level and what is required of them to move to the following passage. Consequently, success at the new passage will be tied to the leader's growth and development rather than the success of a previous position (Charan et al., 2011, p. 31), being the main guide of leadership. Ultimately, this improves management of the executive leaders assigned to government agencies and improve the output for its customers.

### **Summary of Data Sources and Analysis**

In this study, I used a quantitative self-administered web-based survey method. The survey included multiple-choice, dichotomous, and Likert scale survey questions that I used to assess the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of Executive Service (ES) trainees and graduated professionals. I used the survey to focus on identifying the challenges executives face during the CDP and post-development program in real-world experiences.

I conducted a comprehensive review of the existing CDP policy and procedures to ensure the survey questions were aligned with the specific information being sought. I gathered relevant information related to the CDP's current operating demographics, which was appropriate for understanding the diversity of perspectives within the program. Acknowledging these perceptions of the CDP can lead to understanding why an individual perceives their CDP experience a certain way as opposed to how their peers perceive the CDP.

I also attended CDP committee meetings to gather input from current agency leaders involved in implementing the CDP. By attending these meetings, I was better able to understand how agencies are interpreting the client organization's current policies and how they may impact an individual's CDP experience. My goal for collecting this information was to formulate a comprehensive, user-friendly survey that could be used to thoroughly assess the CDP.

After the survey was formulated, it was distributed among CDP stakeholders for input. I compiled these data to apply its findings to the tools identified within the leadership pipeline theory to move the pendulum of the CDP from catching leaders up to what Beltran-Martin et al. (2008) called environments of ongoing learning. My goal was to inform the client organization of strategies and best practices and lead to a revised CDP that produces qualified executive leaders and succession planning practices. This study is generalizable to other government agency leadership development programs.

### **Definitions**

*At-Will Employee or Employee at Will (EAW):* Individuals who can be fired at-will of the company/organization without having to provide cause or reason.

*External Validity:* The extent to which findings hold true across contexts (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 185).

*Informed Consent:* It is an individual's right to make an informed and voluntary decision about participating in a research study (Burkholder et al., 2020, p.203).

*Internal Validity:* Confirmation that the data collected matches the research question (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 90).

*Objectivity:* “Extracting the researcher from the study as much as possible so that the findings of the study are disassociated from any researcher bias” (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 90).

*Reliability:* “The extent to which findings and results are consistent across researchers using the same methods of data collection and analysis” (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 180).

*Skill Requirements:* “The new capabilities required to execute new responsibilities” (Charan et al., 2011, p. 9). *Time Applications:* “new time frames that govern how one works” (Charan et al., 2011, p. 9).

*Validity:* “Accurately describe or reflect the phenomenon under study” (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 176).

*Work Values:* “What people believe is important and so becomes the focus of their effort” (Charan et al., 2011, p. 9).

### **Significance**

The study's findings are significant in that they include best practices and strategies to increase the number of internal candidates to government agencies prepared to take on leadership roles effectively at the highest level of government. I identified strategies to improve the current CDP and employee satisfaction within the CDP, resulting in the client organization's ability to effectively plan for the future workforce by identifying leaders early on within the organization. Succession planning is rare in the federal government as government entities face multiple unique challenges, such as merit systems and funding changes (Marrelli, 2022, p. 630).

Succession planning is used by organizations to prepare for seen and unforeseen future leadership changes, as change is always guaranteed. Organizational leadership changes can occur for various reasons, such as retirement, a desire for improved work-life balance, staffing, new employment opportunities, politics, etc. Without effective strategic succession planning policies, the organization risks not having enough qualified candidates to meet its needs, which can result in failure to perform. Hence, it is imperative that “all training initiatives should begin and end with the organization's needs in mind” (Griffith et al., 2019, p. 309), addressing both current and future leadership demands. Carlson and DelGrosso (2021) stated that while succession planning can be overwhelming, it is a necessary business strategy” (p. 16).

### **Summary and Transition**

In this study, I focused on assisting the client organization in identifying gaps within the CDP that result in candidate trainees being unprepared to lead at the executive



level post-CDP completion. Section 1 included an overview of the study, including an organizational problem statement, as well as the purpose statement of the study. Section 1 also included discussion of the research question guiding the study, the nature of the study, and its significance. The study's theoretical framework and background will be addressed in the next section.

## Section 2: Theoretical Approach and Background

### **Introduction**

In this study, I assisted the client organization in identifying strategies to increase executive-level employee development outcomes and understand why leaders are not prepared to be appointed when called upon to lead post-CDP training. The client organization is aware that the current CDP has some gaps within its training that contribute to executives being ill-prepared to lead even after completing the development program. Hence, the client organization wanted to enhance executive-level employee development by understanding what areas the current CDP needs to be realigned so leaders are better prepared for executive appointments. The findings from this study include strategies and best practices for the client organization to consider when redeveloping the current CDP, as well as use in the development of an executive leadership succession plan to reduce the gaps in executives who complete the program ready to perform at the executive level versus those who complete the program being unprepared to perform duties assigned as executive organizational leaders. In this section, the literature search strategy, theoretical framework, and literature review will be addressed.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

In conducting the research for this study, I used the Walden Library general search, which includes a standard list of databases, as well as a more focused search using the Public Policy and Administration database provided by Walden Library. I used the following terms to narrow down search results for the study: *executive leadership*

*development, senior executive development, leadership pipeline, succession planning, survey method, senior executive service, quantitative survey method, and government succession planning.* I also included a date range parameter of 2003 -2023 and peer-reviewed journals only.

Additionally, I also read “The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership Powered Company” by Ram Charan, Steve Drotter, and Jim Noel. I also used the client organization's website to further my understanding of the organization's structure.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this study, I provided a government agency’s executive leadership candidate development committee with strategies to address their leadership shortfalls and improve the CDP. As such, the theoretical framework that I used to guide this quantitative research was the leadership pipeline model, which incorporates elements from the human capital theory and the vocational personality theory, also known as Holland’s theory. The use of a theoretical framework was appropriate, as theoretical frameworks are often used in quantitative studies. When a study is designed around a theoretical framework, the theory is the primary means of understanding and investigating the research problem (Elsbai, 2022, slide 8). The human capital theory, introduced in the 1960s by Theodore Schultz, can “help predict how changes in skills and education once an individual is employed might affect turnover” (Benson et al., 2004, p. 325). vocational personality theory or Holland’s theory (1997) Kang and Gottfredson (2015) wrote, “Holland’s (1997) theory of vocational personalities and work environments tools can be used to assess

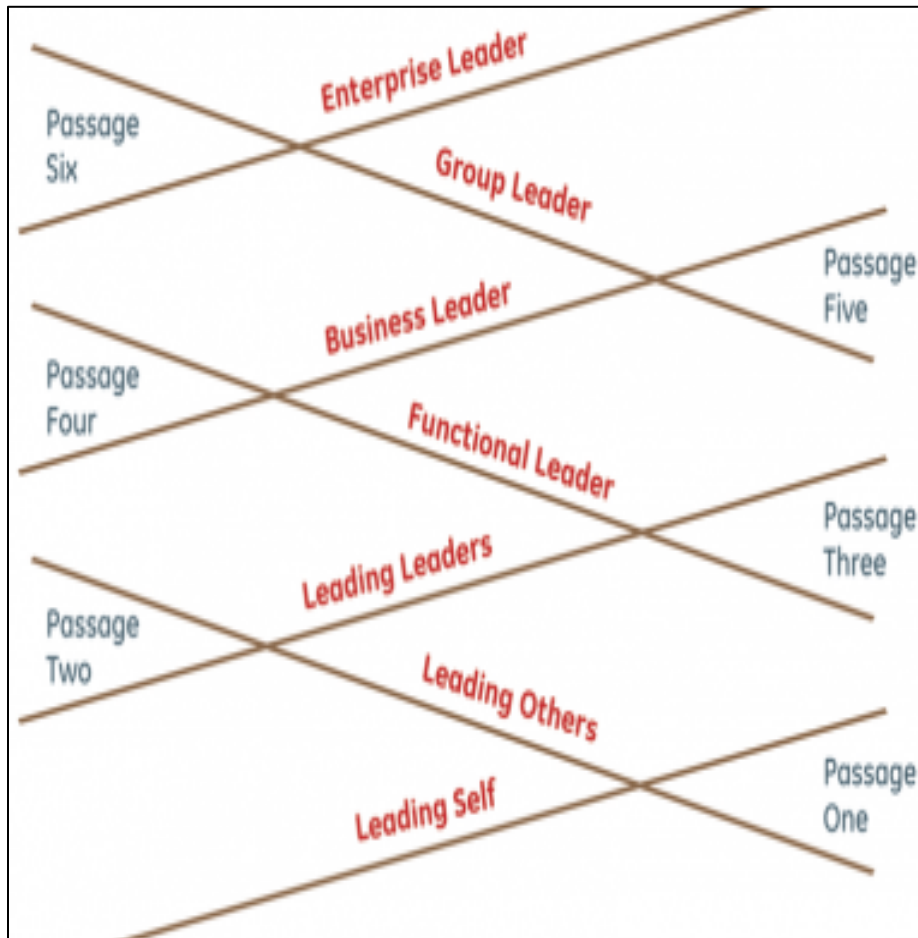
organizational settings, a person's history of environmental influences, and the choices individuals make within those environments" (p.41).

### **The Leadership Pipeline**

The leadership pipeline model is a framework used to assist organizations in identifying and cultivating leaders internal to their organizations. This framework can be used by the client organization in developing its succession planning. The leadership pipeline was formulated in the 1970s by human resources consultants Walter Mahler and Steven Drotter, who worked for General Electric (GE). Ram Charan, Steven Drotter, and James Noel expanded the original work and implemented its framework within companies' employee leadership development structure, further validating its value to company leadership succession planning (Charan et al., 2011). The leadership pipeline consists of *leadership passages*, as shown in Figure 1. The leadership passages say that within an organization, individuals lead themselves, lead others, lead leaders, become functional leaders, business leaders, group leaders, and, in the final passage, become enterprise leaders (LPI, 2019).

**Figure 1**

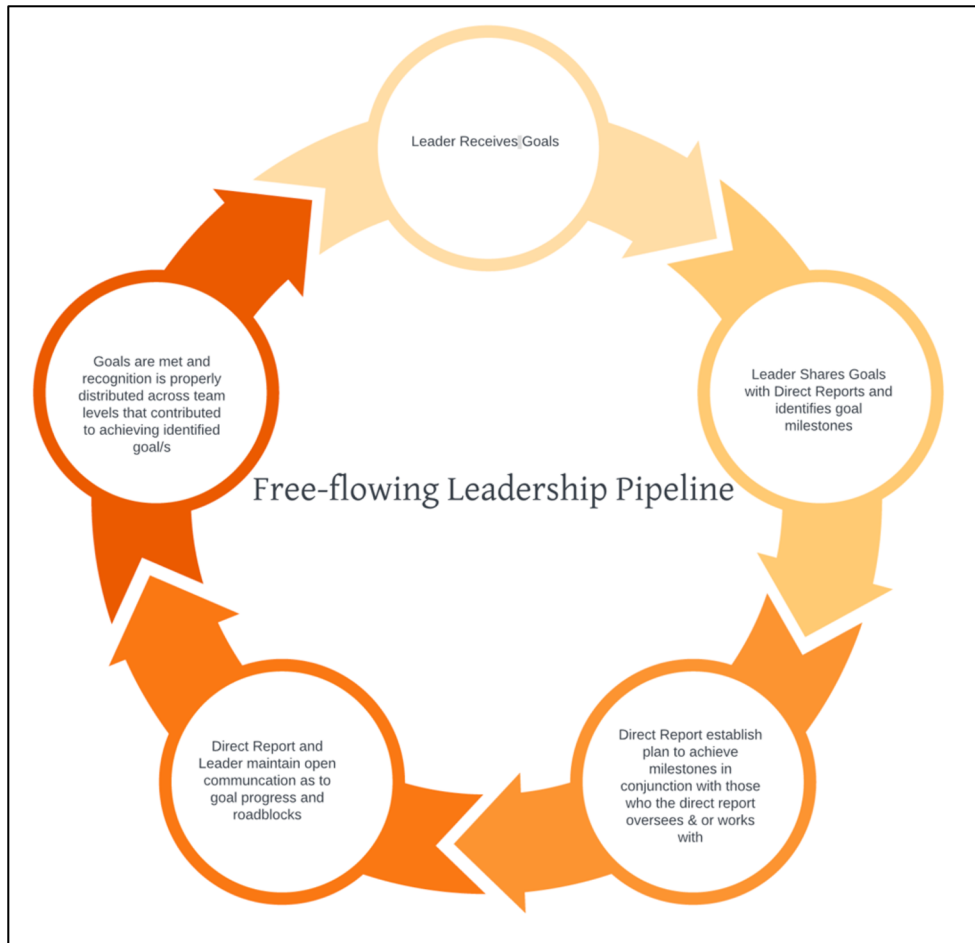
*Six Leadership Pipeline Passages*

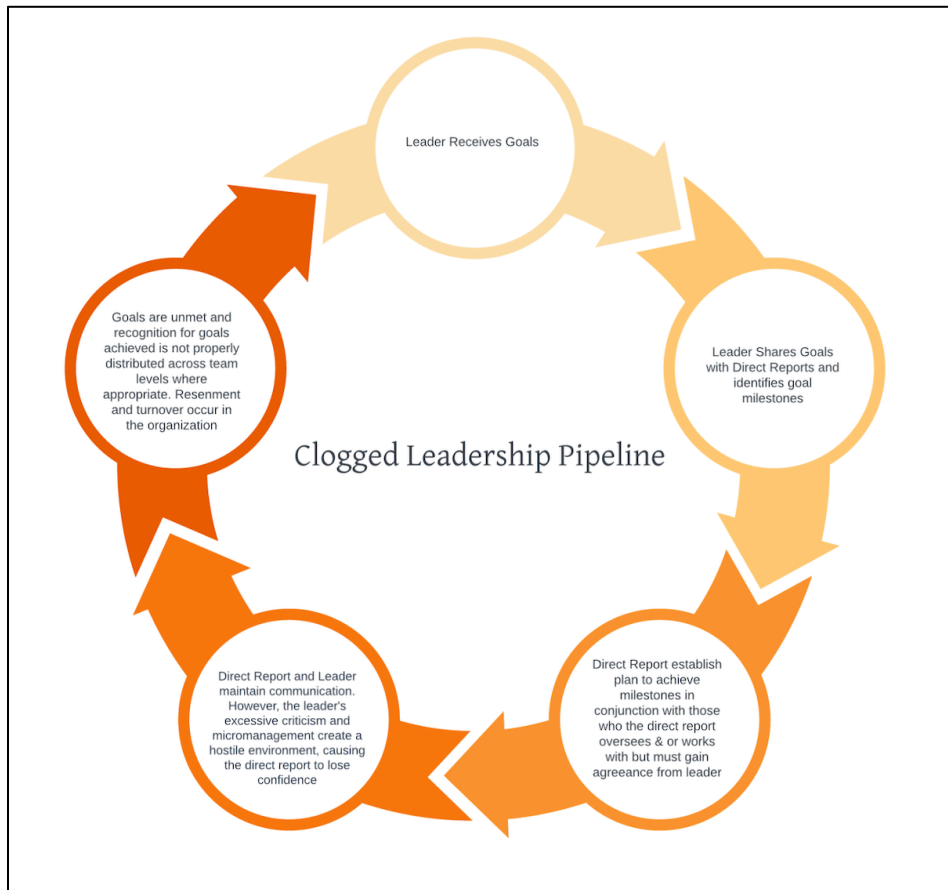


*Note.* From <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSJcPoDMXBU&t=124s> )

Once the executive leader's role is clearly outlined within the framework of the leadership pipeline, it is easier to comprehend the needs and prerequisites of leadership roles. It must be understood that bypassing passages is strongly discouraged within the leadership pipeline, and each passage must be reached without skipping ahead. When individuals skip passages, they typically result in what Charan et al. (2011) call a *clogged pipeline*.

A clogged pipeline can result in various negative effects on an organization that sometimes cannot be seen until too late, and organizations lose both valuable team members and resources as individuals tend to leave these environments to find what Rasheed et al. (2020) in their study on career adaptability and employee turnover intentions labeled these as *perceived career opportunities* (PCO). Acknowledging PCOs is important because, within a clogged pipeline, organizations should recognize that employees are no longer loyal based on time spent within the organization. Nowadays, an individual's resume consists of various opportunities, as individuals are more inclined to switch organizations if they perceive that opportunities are available elsewhere versus with their current organization (Rasheed et al., 2020, p.100). Clogged pipelines result in toxic environments. Employees who believe there is little hope of change within the pipeline see no other option than to leave to further their career goals and excel to the next leadership passage. See an illustration in Figure 2 of the results of a free-flowing leadership pipeline versus Figure 3, a clogged leadership pipeline.

**Figure 2***Free-flowing Leadership Pipeline*

**Figure 3***Clogged Leadership Pipeline*

Figures 2 and 3 show what happens when a leader who is developing themselves to navigate passages is in place and how it influences those in the leader's chain of command. Figure 2 displays a leadership pipeline that is free-flowing. These leaders choose to communicate effectively with subordinates/employees without viewing them as competitors vying for their position. Instead, these leaders are willing to provide opportunities to subordinates in order to allow individuals to excel personally and professionally, resulting in mutual growth and development. Figure 3 displays a clogged



leadership pipeline. These leaders who are having difficulty adjusting to their new passage demands have retreated to lower passage behaviors and tools of self-reliance, resulting in a lack of trust in others to execute tasks successfully. In this state, the leader depends on micromanaging team members to achieve goals, creating a more stressful environment for all involved. Clogged pipelines reduce the chances for both team members and the leader to experience growth and development.

Table 1 shows terms from the leadership pipeline passages with standard terminology that describes leadership positions in organizational charts within government entities.

**Table 1***Leadership Passages to Govt. Leadership Positions*

Leadership Pipeline Passages		Govt. Leadership Positions
Passage 1	Leading Self to Managing Others	Supervisor/Team Lead
Passage 2	Managing Others to Managing Leaders	Branch Chief
Passage 3	Leading Leaders to Functional Leader	Division Director
Passage 4	Functional Leader to Business Leader	Senior Executive Service 3-5
Passage 5	Business Leader to Group Leader	Regional Executive Leadership SES 1-2
Passage 6	Group Leader to Enterprise Leader	Presidential Appointee

Implementing programs or policies that lead to the development of high-quality internal candidate pools is beneficial for the organization as internal candidates typically are more likely to be committed to the organization and less costly of an investment (Griffith et al., 2019). In the interest of the client organization, individuals will be regarded as internal to government-structured agencies, not one specific government agency structure. The level of leadership at which the client organization develops leaders is intended for those leaders to lead across various government agencies effectively. The leadership pipeline model can be adaptable to multiple sizes of

organizations (Charan et al., 2011), which is ideal for the client organization's goals as the executive leaders are expected to leave the training and become functional or business leaders depending on post-CDP assignment.

### **Literature Review for the Study**

The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 led to the development of the SES. In explaining the SES, Athanasaw (2003) writes that the SES is a grade-less system where career status is based on executive talent, not duties of the position; assignments within the SES are tailored to meet government needs and for an individual to become a SES member is considered an elite status.

According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM, n.d.), the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program's (SESCDP) goal is to serve as a strategic succession management tool, enabling agencies to pinpoint and prepare prospective senior leaders. Throughout the developmental period, SES candidates are exposed to opportunities essential to enhancing their executive competencies, broadening their understanding of diverse government programs, and addressing issues beyond their specific agency and professional scope. When an individual has completed the CDP and graduates from an approved CDP, individuals may be appointed to a career SES position (OPM, n.d.). As I researched the SES, I could not return results specific to the outcome of senior executives post-CDP completion. However, controlling for peer-reviewed articles related to the SES studies have been done in regard to the leadership demands, attitudes, and culture of the SES. Morreale (2009) wrote, "Public leadership is at a crossroads. Leadership has received tremendous attention because of issues and incidents arising in

organizations causing the public to demand more effective leadership” (p132). Working in the federal government, executives are challenged to provide effective critical services to the American people and to be effective and efficient leaders within their agency (Athanasaw, 2003). In 2014, President Obama signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act (VACAA) of 2014. This act was the result of Congress becoming aware of performance failures within the Department of Veterans Affairs; because of the VACAA, SES members became at-will employees meaning they could be fired for any reason without requiring the agency to explain or give notice (Hur, 2023).

“The result of the VACAA has led to job insecurities for some individuals who pursue SES positions” (Hur, 2023, p. 876), but still, the client organization is driven to improve and better serve its SES to reduce insecurities and increase confidence to serve. The client organization recognizing this need is what Charan et al. (2011) would consider as having diagnosed their problem, and now pipeline repair is crucial. The Leadership Pipeline focuses on developing skills, time application, and work values. Hence, it is important to identify the root causes of performance challenges, as the traditional approaches to leadership development will not contribute to a free-flowing pipeline. When challenges are identified, transparent communication between leaders and subordinates can occur, or, in this case, senior executive candidates and client organizations (Charan et al., 2011). Hur (2023) explains in their study that the overall effect of the 2014 VACAA has led to an increase in SES performance, an “increase of approximately 12 percentage points in organizational performance, and the results are consistent with the theoretical expectations of challenging stress theory scholars suggests

that job insecurity would motivate employees to cope with the new threat by increasing the efforts they put into their work” this is not the way in which the client would prefer their SES to lead instead with the appropriate developmental training job performance and satisfaction will be because leaders have they need to be successful and truly enjoy their work.

### **Summary and Transition**

Utilizing the leadership pipeline theory to assess the current CDP will inform the client organization of developmental gaps that result in executive leadership candidates being unprepared for executive leadership roles post-program completion. The study uncovered best practices, policies, and strategies that can be implemented to assist in updating the CDP while promoting effective succession planning that can be used to alleviate the gap between unsuccessful and successful senior executives. The following section discusses the data collection process and analysis of the study.

### Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to provide a government agency's executive leadership candidate development committee with strategies to address gaps in their current CDP to improve candidate readiness upon CDP completion. I identified strategies to improve the current CDP and employee satisfaction within the CDP and aid in the client organization's ability to effectively plan for the future workforce by identifying leaders early on within the organization (succession planning). I used the quantitative self-administered web-based survey method, distributing a survey to current and past CDP stakeholders. In this section, I address practice-focused questions, methodology, strategy of data analysis, study validity, ethical procedures, sources of evidence, and the conclusion.

#### **Practice-Focused Research Question and Research Design**

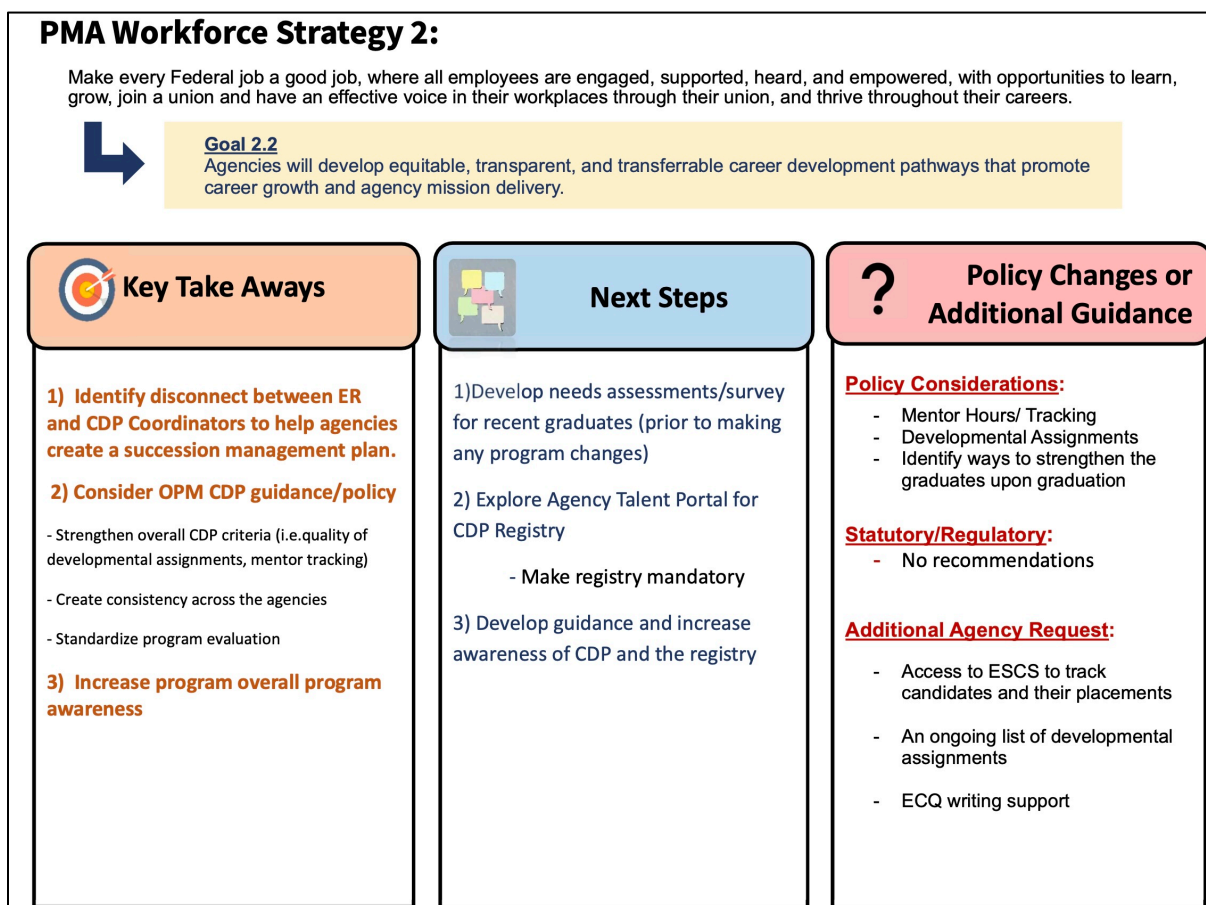
The research question guiding this study was: What strategies can a government agency use to increase executive-level employee development to prepare them for executive appointments?

In this study, I used a quantitative self-administered web-based survey methods approach. The survey was constructed by examining documents related to the existing CDP policy and procedures. I also gathered information from meetings that I attended to gain insight into the current climate of the CDP and its relevant stakeholders.

This question is important because the client organization, as seen in Figure 4, has been tasked with enhancing the delivery of the CDP and making it more effective in their agency's strategic goals.

**Figure 4**

*Tiger Team Meeting Note: CDP Overview*



Among the 24 federal agencies governed by the Chief Financial Office (CFO) Act, 10 currently have client organization-certified SESCDP in place, and the hope is that this number will increase. The study deliverables are that the client organization is informed on challenges to non-participating agencies of the CDP program, challenges to

program graduates post-CDP completion, and effective programs and best practices to serve as a framework leading to an enhanced executive leadership development program across all executive brand agencies.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Performing as a consultant to the client organization, I was tasked with defining the study methodology and carrying out data collection and analysis. Having spent 7 years working within the government agency framework, I have obtained a wide-ranging understanding of the various passages individuals must navigate as they excel in leadership roles. Having this broad understanding is beneficial as in my role; I have completed a comprehensive review of the CDP, participated in information-gathering meetings, and used this information to understand the CDP's current state from a different perspective than someone who may be more closely involved with the program. Once an understanding is gained, the client organization will provide relevant materials to me, such as CDP policies, procedures, meeting minutes, and guidelines, that were compiled to be used as a guide to implement the leadership pipeline suggested “clarity of requirements” (Charan et al., 2011, p.31).

Once the requirements were defined at the executive leader level, I collaborated with the client organization to develop a survey tailored to the client's specific “needs to know.” I engaged with CDP leadership across multiple agencies and provided the approved SurveyMonkey survey link that was disseminated to relevant CDP stakeholders. Following the survey period, I then downloaded the survey results for data analysis.



### **Methodology**

In determining the best way to study the CDP and identify strategies for the organization to achieve its goals, I found that a quantitative survey method to be most favorable. Quantitative methods can play a significant role in supporting the managerial discussion on methods for innovation in business practices (Kolková et al., 2022, p. 96). The research was designed to survey current CDP candidates, past and recently graduated candidates, and CDP agency representatives. The variables addressed in the survey were measured within one of four levels of measurement: (a) nominal scale, (b) ordinal scale, (c) interval scale, and (d) ratio scale (Table 2).

**Table 2***Scales of Measurement (NOIR)*

<b>Measurement &amp; Data</b>		<b>Example</b>
<b>Output</b>		
Nominal	Categorical	Can only be categorized like <b>Gender</b> : male/female, <b>Political affiliation</b> : Democratic, Republican, Independent, <b>Employment Status</b> : employed, unemployed
Ordinal	Rank Order	Data can be categorized and ranked such as 1 = likely, 2 = more likely, 3 = very likely, etc.
Interval	Equal Intervals	No true zero, such as weather zero-degree temps does not indicate there is no weather, can be categorized and ranked
Ratio	Equal Intervals	True zero value; age, weight, number of years working, able to categorize and rank

*Note.* Walden University, 2022

To reach the respondents, the 10 agencies with client organization-certified SESCDP in place, those agencies' CDP representatives were provided the survey via SurveyMonkey link. Each agency representative then distributed the link to its list of contacts. The email distribution was limited to current CDP participants, as well as past and recent graduates of the agency representatives CDP. Email recipients were asked to provide responses to questions within the survey. These questions were specific to their

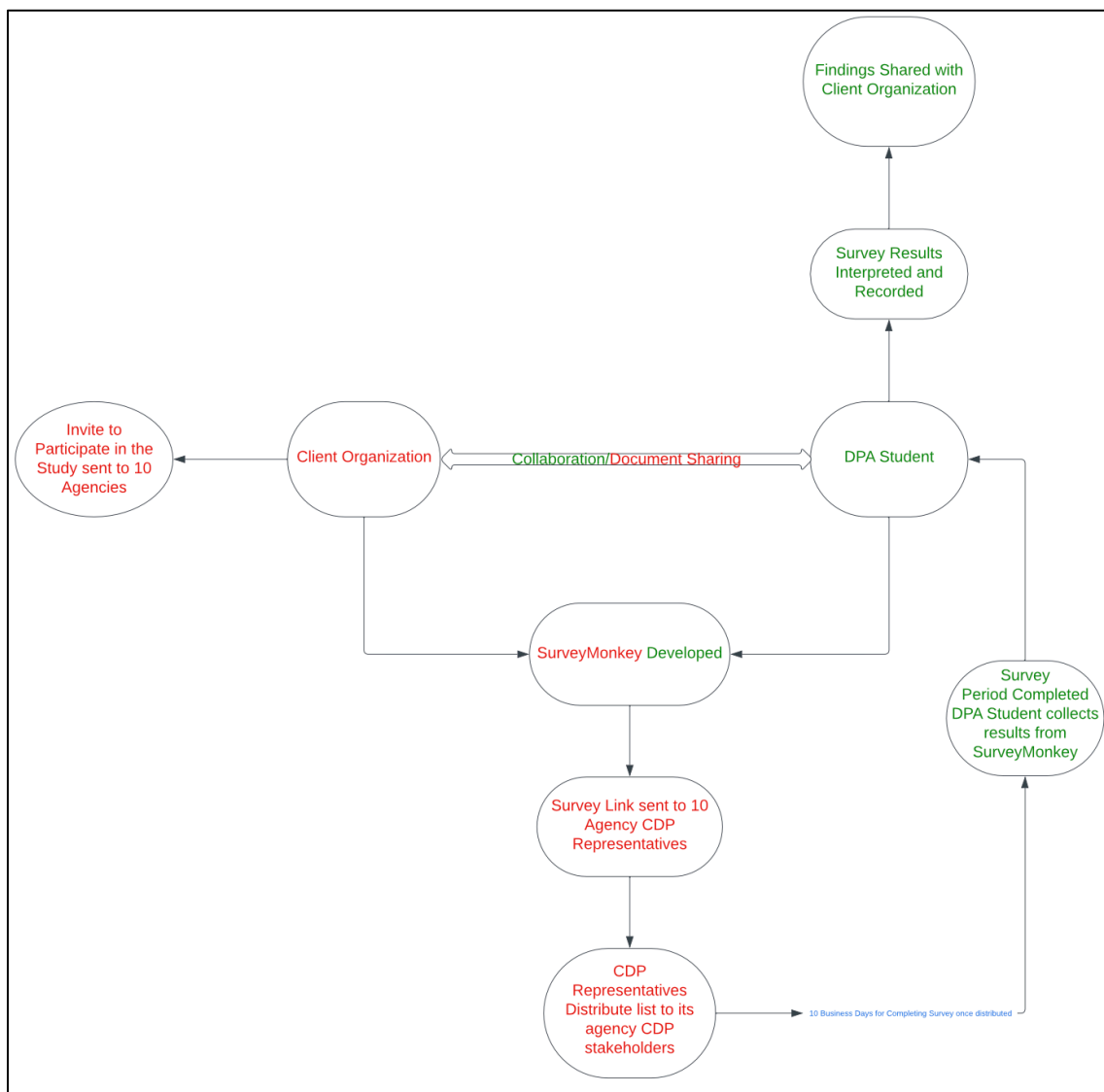
current relationship to the CDP: current CDP participant, past or recent graduate, and their current employment status (performing in an executive role: yes or no); the other questions consist of a review of the CDP. To encourage recipients to submit feedback, each survey recipient was notified that their participation is voluntary; however, their feedback contributes to the enhancement of the CDP program.

Overall, participant contributions supported the previously mentioned purpose of assisting a government agency's executive leadership candidate development committee in addressing gaps within their current CDP to improve candidate readiness upon CDP completion. This method was appropriate because the most effective way to comprehend the experiences of those who are currently or previously developed via the CDP is to afford those relevant stakeholders the opportunity to professionally critique the program without fear of reprisal for providing honest feedback that may be negative but also avoiding favoritism for those who offer more positive reviews. Every individual's experience is different, and capturing the reality of those experiences is a benefit to the CDP, which will make the program more adaptable to its diverse cohorts and ever-changing demands on executive leaders.

### **Procedures for Recruitment/Sources of Evidence**

I used a quantitative self-administered web-based survey methodology derived from information gathered from document reviews related to the CDP and committee meetings that were attended to gather input from agency leaders involved in the ongoing implementation of the CDP. This method was chosen because the web-based survey method, according to Burkholder et al. (2020), tends to provide respondents with a

greater sense of privacy, especially since personally identifiable information will not be collected. The document review process informed my understanding of how the current policies and procedures of the CDP are implemented to develop candidates and guide the program. The reviewed documents included reports, policies, procedures, training materials, and evaluation methods used within the program, as well as other materials deemed relevant by the client organization. To reach the respondents, the ten agencies with client organization-certified SESCDP in place, as identified by the client organization, were contacted, and notified of the opportunity to have their respective agencies participate in the study. Of the 10 agencies invited, those agency CDP representatives who accepted the invitation were then provided the survey via SurveyMonkey link to distribute to their relevant CDP stakeholders. Once the survey was distributed, the survey recipients had 3 weeks to complete the survey. See Figure 5 below for an illustration of the process of recruitment.

**Figure 5***Procedure for Recruitment***Strategy for Data Analysis**

Researchers use quantitative self-administered web-based survey research to develop a thorough understanding of the problems or concepts to be studied, leading to the development of a hypothesis to be tested. The results of quantitative studies often can

be interpreted as numbers that can be quantified and later summarized in statistical terms (Golafshani, 2003). This quantitative study focuses on identifying standardized, measurable, and common categories of the CDP training as it relates to executive training and readiness to perform post-CDP. Upon choosing the survey questions that best align with the research question, it is then that Bhandari (2022) says an “understanding of the measurement scale of variables can be made to support better choosing the type of univariate (frequency, percent, mean, mode, median, standard deviation, and range),” (p.126), to explain the survey results.

### **Issues of Validity/Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define trustworthiness as the extent to which one can have confidence in the study’s findings, comparable to the concepts of reliability, validity, and objectivity in traditional quantitative research (Laureate Education, 2016, pg. 1), henceforth this study will focus on validity. Simply put, validity is a study's ability to be replicated and receive similar results. Checking for validity often involves the following criteria for quantitative researchers: internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Refer to Table 3 as I address the steps necessary for ensuring validity of the study based on recommendations outlined by Burkholder et al. (2020), who focused on qualitative trustworthiness. It is important to point out that the criteria for validity and trustworthiness of a study's outcomes are similar. The choice of terminology depends on the type of study being done, quantitative or qualitative. I will use the terminology for quantitative studies, such as validity; although readers may be familiar with terminology typically found in qualitative studies and Burkholder et al. (2020)

reference qualitative study terminology, I simply exchanged these terms to align with the appropriate terminology for quantitative studies.

**Table 3***Validity Criteria with Relation to Study*

Validity Criteria	Strategies as suggested by Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 91	Relation to Study for Insuring Validity
Internal Validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inquiry audit</li> <li>• Triangulation</li> </ul>	<p>Inquiry Audit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher will keep detailed information as to survey development, data collection, and how questions/categories were developed.</li> </ul> <p>Triangulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control Group – Current CDP participants</li> <li>• Independent Variable – Graduate-CDP participants</li> </ul>
External Validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged engagement</li> <li>• Persistent Observation</li> <li>• Peer debriefing</li> <li>• Negative case analysis</li> <li>• Progressive subjectivity</li> <li>• Member checking</li> <li>• Triangulation</li> <li>• Reflexivity</li> </ul>	<p>Peer debriefing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher will continuously engage with the committee chair.</li> <li>• Limiting Research to leadership pipeline theory and comparing findings with existing studies utilizing the theory</li> </ul>
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflexivity</li> <li>• Thick description</li> <li>• Maximum variation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum Variation – seeking feedback from CDP currents, previous, and agency representatives</li> </ul>
Objectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmability Audit</li> </ul>	<p>Inquiry Audit/Reflexivity Journal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping records or raw data, documenting processes and procedures throughout the study to explain the researcher's thought process</li> </ul>



As for this quantitative study, we look at reliability and validity. Joppe (2000, as cited in Golafshani, 2003.) defines reliability as “The stability of results over time and consistency to be reflective of the study population. If the study is to be repeated using similar methods and the findings are duplicated, the research instrument is considered reliable” (p.598). Wainer and Braun (1998, as cited in Golafshani, 2003, p.599) say that validity happens when the mean of measurement accurately speaks for the study group and the researcher’s involvement is limited in the execution of the study. The limitation of this design is that the validity of responses can be difficult sometimes as participants’ behaviors and experiences may be different, and some participants may want to display themselves in a different light (more positive) than admit they have shortcomings in their leadership skills. Which is why ensuring anonymity is crucial.

### **Ethical Procedures**

In Shefali Roy’s (2017) work titled “Why Ethics Matter,” ethics is defined as things that are identified as rights and wrongs, organizational values, codes of conduct, or standards. To uphold the ethical standards of the study and University, the identities of survey participants has remained anonymous. Prior to completing the survey, participants were notified of the study’s objectives: one being the interest of the client organization and two being the interest of a doctoral student. An informed consent notice was included in the survey for participants to acknowledge they were aware of their anonymity during the survey and the purpose of the survey, and as the researcher, my contact information was available if survey recipients had questions. The informed consent focuses on what Burkholder et al. (2020) say should be “what participants will actually do, in language

that is clear and easily understood” (p.204). Participants were made aware that the survey, while anonymous, is not confidential; therefore, the results of the study are shared with the client organization, but no identifiable information was collected or shared. In acknowledging consent, the participants can choose to proceed with the survey or close out of the survey and not provide feedback. Survey recipients who chose to continue with the survey were able to take the survey anonymously via the SurveyMonkey link, which was provided to CDP coordinators for distribution (emailing) to their relevant CDP stakeholders (past and present CDP participants). The survey period was three weeks from the time CDP coordinators are provided the link for distribution. During the survey period as the researcher, I monitored response activity and answer questions should coordinators or survey recipients have any questions. Any additional questions asked were recorded and placed in the appendices of this document for the purposes of transparency in the study and also to control for the researcher’s influence on participants. Upon survey submission, participants received a survey debriefing again acknowledging their anonymity and the purpose of the survey.

Aside from knowing who the link was emailed to, no other information as to respondents’ information was collected or provided to CDP coordinators or the client organization. Following the conclusion of the survey period, I securely downloaded the results from SurveyMonkey’s online platform and maintain the data on a password-protected USB drive for the appropriate timeframe as established by university policy. Upon reaching the designated timeframe, data disposal will be carried out via appropriate means of disposal by either deleting the drive or destroying it. When the survey period

concluded, the data was analyzed, and the client organization has been provided with the survey results in their totality. It is important to note that, aside from grouping responses based on agencies returning surveys and CDP status (current or graduate), no other identifiable information was collected or retained for the purposes of this study.

### **Sources of Evidence**

The research utilizes a quantitative self-administered web-based survey methodology derived from information gathered from document reviews related to the CDP and committee meetings that were attended to gather input from agency leaders involved in the ongoing implementation of the CDP. The document review process informed my understanding of how the current policies and procedures of the CDP are implemented to develop candidates and guide the program. The reviewed documents include reports, policies, procedures, training materials, and evaluation methods used within the program, as well as other materials deemed relevant by the client organization.

### **Summary**

This study assists the client organization in identifying gaps within the CDP that result in candidate trainees being unprepared to lead at the executive level post-CDP completion. In this section, I addressed practice-focused questions, methodology, strategy of data analysis, study validity, ethical procedures, and sources of evidence. The study's results and recommendations will be addressed in the next section.

## Section 4: Results and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

In this quantitative self-administered web-based survey study, I supported the client organization in identifying strategies to enhance executive-level employee development outcomes and understand why leaders are not prepared to be appointed when called upon to lead post- CDP training. The research question I used to guide this survey was: What strategies can a government agency use to increase executive-level employee development to prepare them for executive appointments?

My goal for this study was to address the organization's gaps in their current CDP to improve candidate readiness. When an individual completes the CDP, they are considered prepared to function at the highest level of government beneath presidential appointees and possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to succeed within any government agency they are assigned.

The study results can be used by the client organization to effectively plan for the future of the workforce by identifying leaders early on within the organization (succession planning) and training them in an efficient, effective manner. In this section, I address the data collection, data analysis, study findings, study deliverables and recommendations, evidence of trustworthiness, and lastly, the strengths and limitations of this quantitative self-administered web-based survey study.

### **Data Collection**

To reach the 28 CDP active trainees, 63 CDP graduates, and 13 agency representatives, the client organization received the official survey link from me and

distributed it to their agency representatives' contact list. Prior to receiving the official survey link, the client organization distributed an invitation to participate (Appendix A) in the survey to the 10 agencies with client organization-certified SESCO in place one week prior. During this 1-week waiting period between receiving the invitation and receiving the official SESCO Survey Launch (Appendix B) email, which contained the anonymous SurveyMonkey link, agencies were encouraged to ask questions regarding participating in the survey if they had any. Of the total of recipients listed above who opted to participate, they were given no special parameters or rules for taking the survey other than the survey is anonymous, voluntary, and should be completed at their leisure within the survey's open period of 2 weeks from the date it was received. Once the survey window concluded, as seen in Figure 5, I gathered the results from SurveyMonkey, downloaded them into an Excel spreadsheet, and then data analysis began. For a more detailed review, please refer to the steps provided in Section 3 and Figure 5.

On Monday, March 18, 2024, the client organization distributed the SESCO Survey Launch (Appendix B) containing the SurveyMonkey link to the same email group that received the invitation to participate. Along with the survey link, the email included pertinent information about the duration of the study, which would remain open until April 05, 2024. Upon receiving this information, agency CDP representatives then distributed the link to its list of contacts that fall within the survey parameters of either: Current CDP participants, Past/Recent graduates, or agency CDP coordinators/representatives. To encourage recipients to submit feedback, each survey recipient is notified via informed consent in order to proceed with the survey that their

participation is voluntary and anonymous, and in the email, their feedback will contribute to the enhancement of the CDP program.

When individuals answered “YES” to proceed after reading the consent form they were taken to the demographics section of the survey (Appendix C). The demographics section was how participants were then categorized. A participant’s answer to Question 3 in the demographics determined the survey the participant completes (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Survey taken based on Demographics Q4*

<b>Answer to Q4</b>	<b>Survey taken by Participant</b>
CDP Current Participants (Active Trainee)	Page 3: Current Candidate Development Program Participant
CDP Recent Graduate (0-3yrs working in SES role)	Page 4: Recent Graduate/Post Candidate Development Participants
CDP Recent Graduate (0-3yrs NOT working in SES role)	
CDP Past Participant (3+ years removed from CDP working in SES role)	
CDP Past Participant (3+ years removed from CDP NOT)	
CDP Agency Representative Responsible for CDP implementation/support	Page 5: CDP Agency Representative Responsible for CDP Implementation

At the conclusion of the survey period, the number of participants who completed the survey as Current Candidate Development Program Participants (Active Trainee) was 28. The total number of participants to complete the survey as Recent Graduate/Post Candidate Development Participants was 63; in the data analysis, I will identify the breakdown of those participants' demographics further. Lastly, the number of participants who completed the survey as CDP Agency Representatives Responsible for CDP Implementation was 13. In total, the survey received 108 responses, with 107 participants interacting with the survey in some capacity, either opening the survey and completing it in its entirety or opening it and then choosing not to complete it. There was one respondent who answered “No” after reviewing the anonymous survey consent form.

### **Data Analysis**

The SurveyMonkey tool is used by researchers to provide online survey links to potential participants, but behind the scenes, it also collects data that is useful in understanding the participants who opted to take the survey outside of the questions being asked. For example, of the 108 respondents, the average time spent on the survey was less than 8 minutes. Here, I break down the data collected to better understand the survey participants and the CDP community. Figure 6 displays the Demographics: Race/Ethnicity breakdown of survey participants. As you will see, 54.81% of participants identified as White, while 25.96% of participants identified as Black or African American, 7.69% were Hispanic or Latino, 3.85% as Asian or Asian American, and roughly 8% opted not to identify or identified in more than one category.



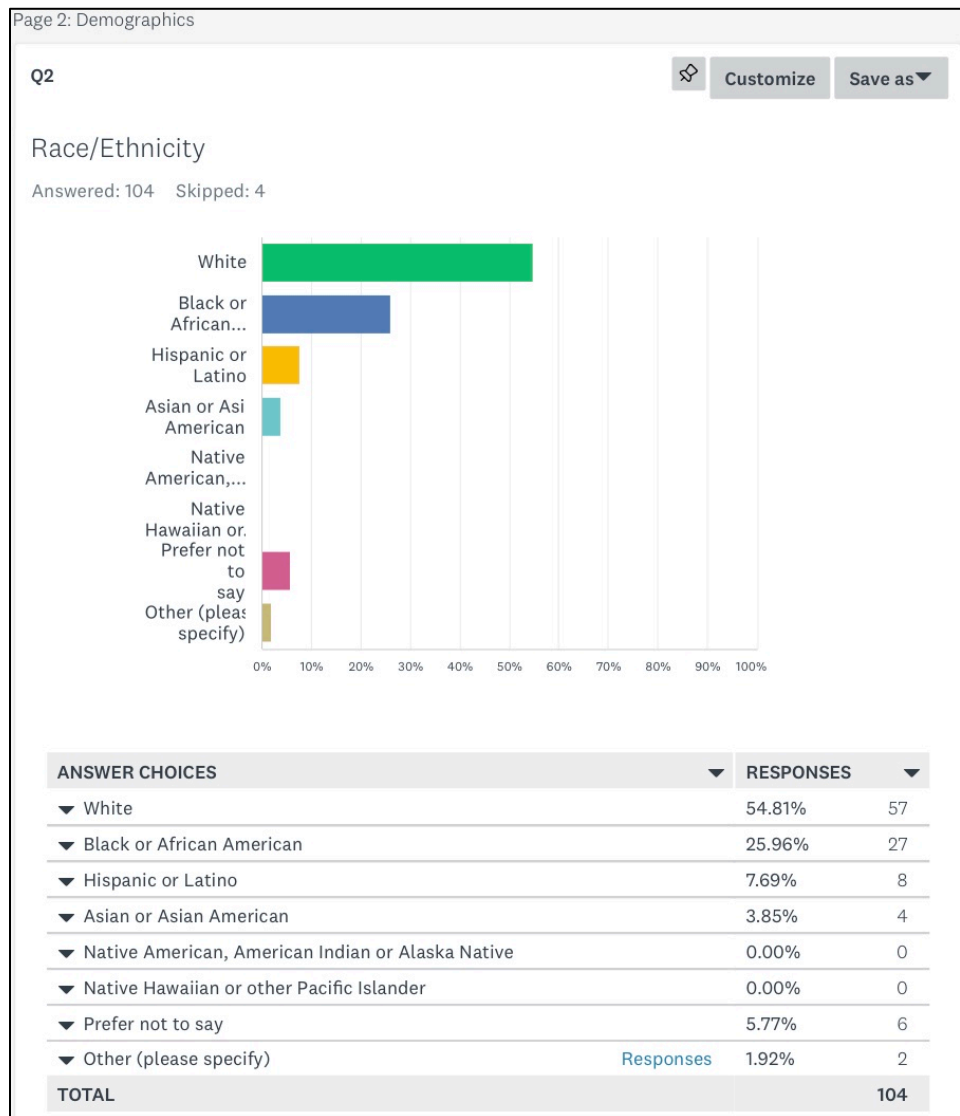
**Figure 6***Demographics: Race and Ethnicity*

Figure 7, Demographics: Gender, shows the breakdown based on gender for the participants. With respect to today's gender equality, it was important to allow participants not to be held to the typical two categories of male and female and allow participants the chance to showcase the diversity in senior leadership. Of the 108

respondents, only 104 completed the gender question. 49.04% identified as Female, 44.23% identified as Male, 5.77% preferred not to say, and 0.96% chose other, which allowed them to write in that they identified as Nonbinary.

**Figure 7**

*Demographics: Gender*

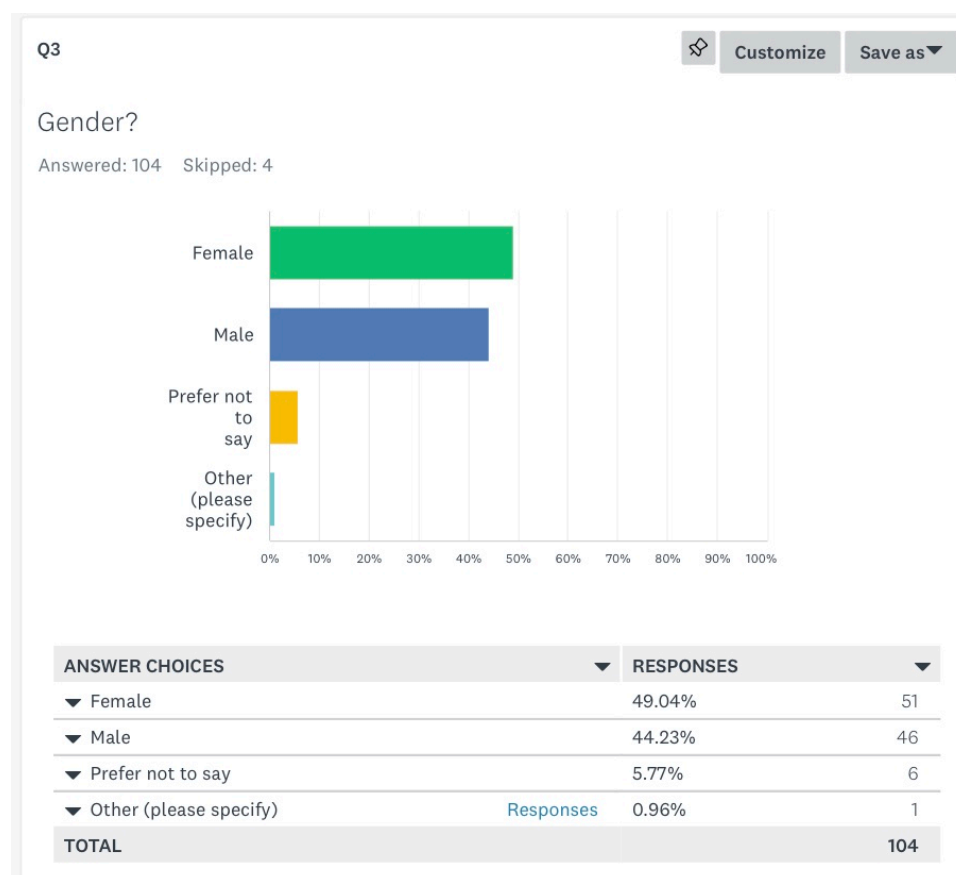
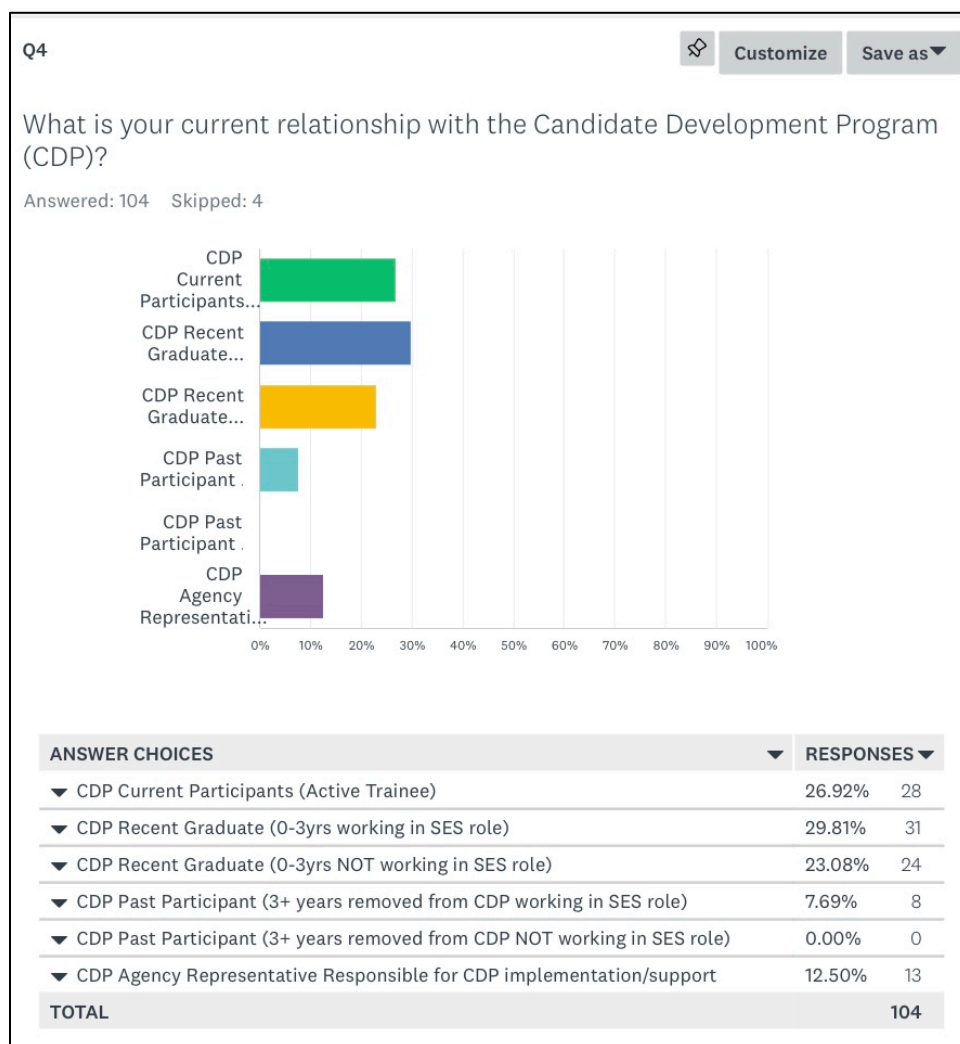


Figure 8 displays the breakdown of participants and their relationship to the CDP. As previously indicated, a total of 28 individuals (constituting 26.92% of the total) are identified as Current Candidate Development Program Participants (Active Trainees). A total of 63 participants completed the survey as Recent Graduate/Post Candidate Development Program (CDP) Participants. To further categorize the recent graduate/post-

candidate participants, users were separated by whether they were currently working in a senior executive role or not currently working in a senior executive role and the time since they participated in their CDP (0-3 years = recent graduate, 3+ years = past participant). The results showed that 29.81% of recent graduate respondents currently work in SES roles, having completed the CDP within 0-3 years. Additionally, 23.08% of recent graduates do not currently hold SES positions, despite having completed the CDP within 0-3 years.

Past participants of the CDP were defined as individuals who completed the program three or more years ago, and those respondents made up 7.69% of the responses in this category. Notably, there were no responses from CDP participants who had been separated from the program for three or more years and were not employed in a SES role. Lastly, the number of participants who completed the survey as CDP Agency Representatives Responsible for CDP Implementation was 12.5%.

**Figure 8***Demographics: Relationship to CDP*

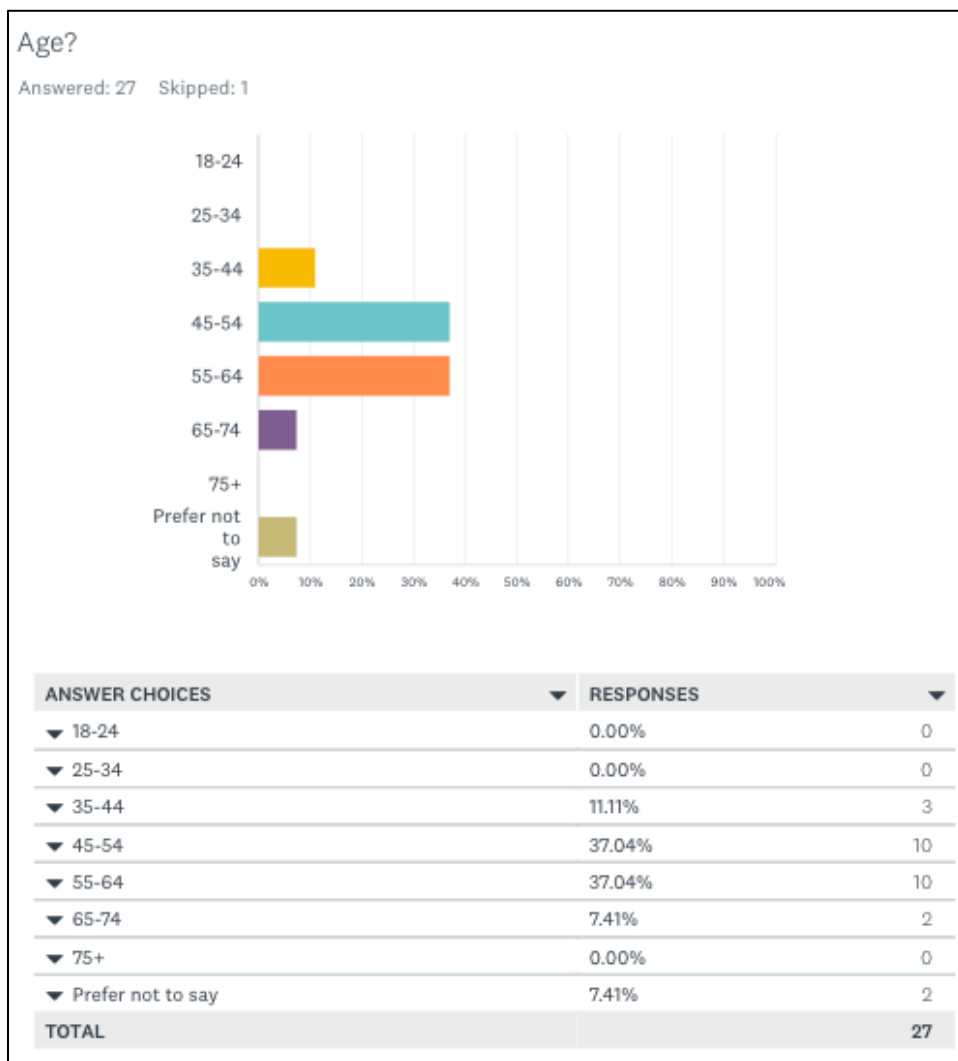
Question 4 (Figure 8) concludes the basic demographic questions asked of every respondent in the study. Question 4 was the branching question used to determine the survey questions respondents would receive henceforth. The following information is a breakdown of the data analysis of the survey responses based on CDP Current

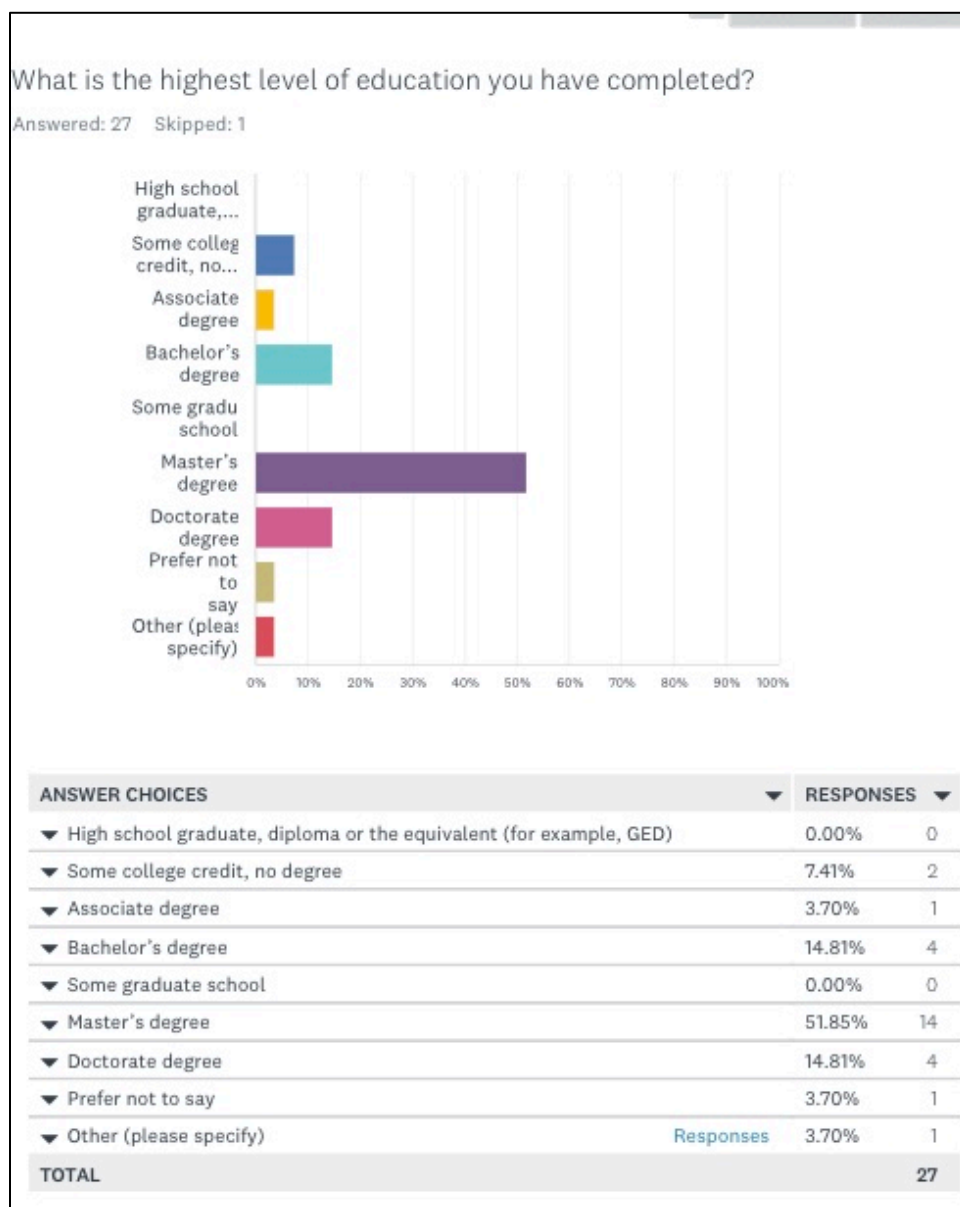
Participants (Active Trainee), CDP Recent/Past Participants, and CDP Agency Representatives.

Please note that once a respondent was directed to their respective survey based on Q4, additional demographic questions were asked that will be addressed. These questions were omitted from the initial demographics section at the behest of the client organization, which was concerned about relevancy when applying to each respondent category (i.e., salary and highest education level).

#### **CDP Current Participants (Active Trainee)**

The CDP Current Participants (Active Trainee) recipients were asked a total of 34 questions (Appendix D). These questions were written in the present tense and used to identify how respondents currently perceive their experience in the CDP. Of the 27 participants who completed the survey, the survey showed (Figures 9 & Figure 10) that most participants were between the ages of 45-64, with 37.04% of respondents selecting 45-54 and 37.04% selecting 55-64. Also, most respondents' highest level of education was a master's degree, with 51.85% of respondents selecting that option.

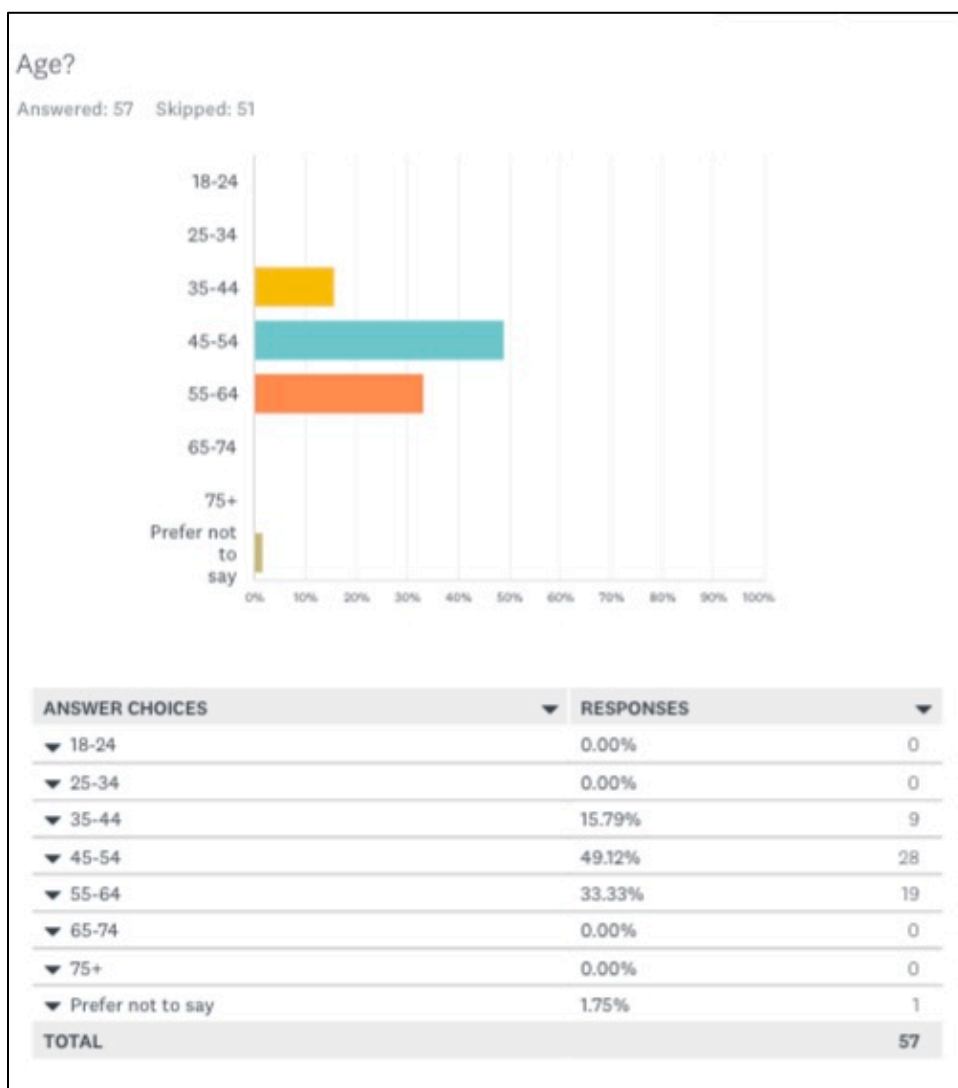
**Figure 9***CDP Active Trainee – Age*

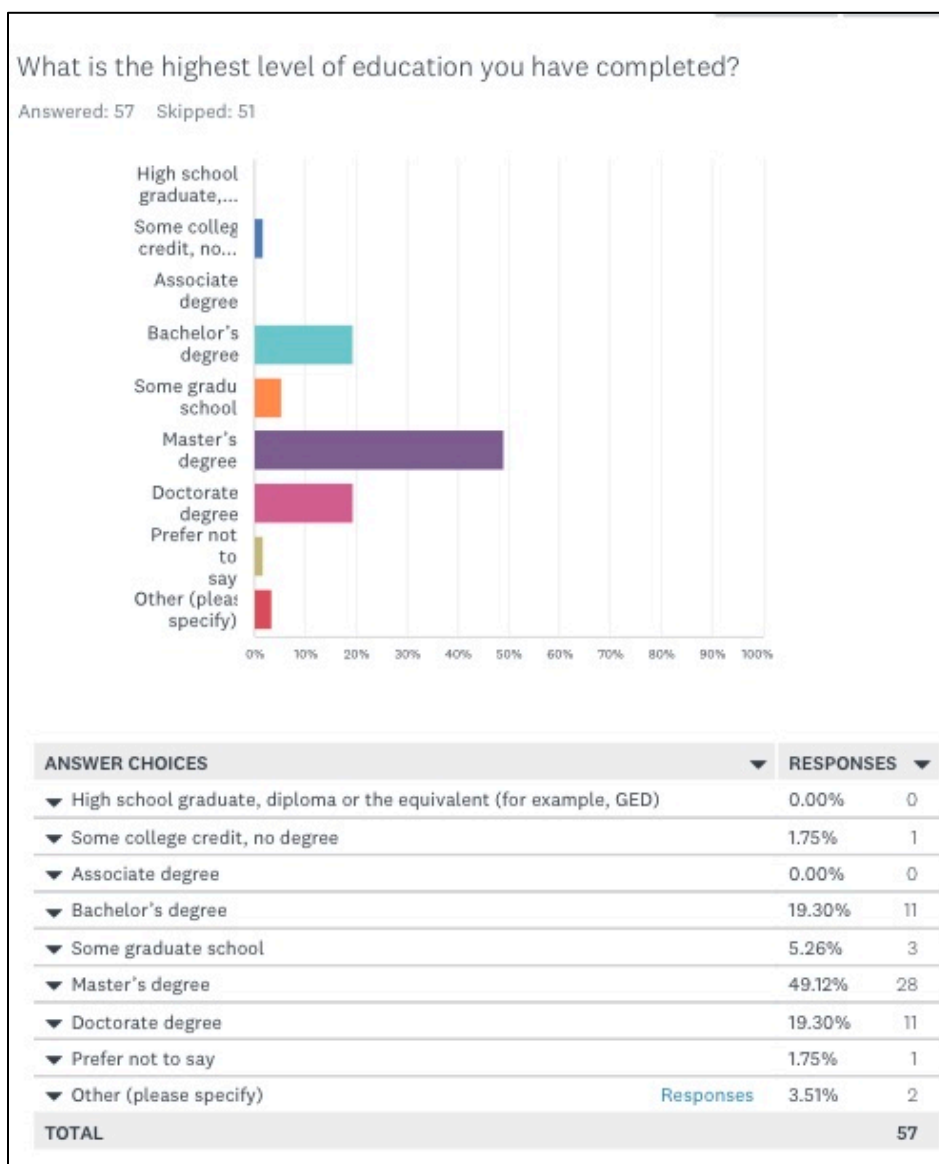
**Figure 10***CDP Active Trainee – Highest Level of Education***CDP Recent/Past Participants**

The Recent Graduate/Past CD Participants recipients were asked a total of 40 questions (Appendix E). These questions were written in the past tense and used to

identify how respondents perceived their time during the CDP. Of the 63 participants who completed the survey, the survey showed (Figure 11 & Figure 12) that most participants were between the ages of 45-54, with 49.12%. In addition to age, most respondents' highest level of education was a master's degree, with 49.12% of respondents selecting that option.



**Figure 11***CDP Graduates - Age*

**Figure 12***CDP Graduates – Highest Level of Education***CDP Agency Representatives**

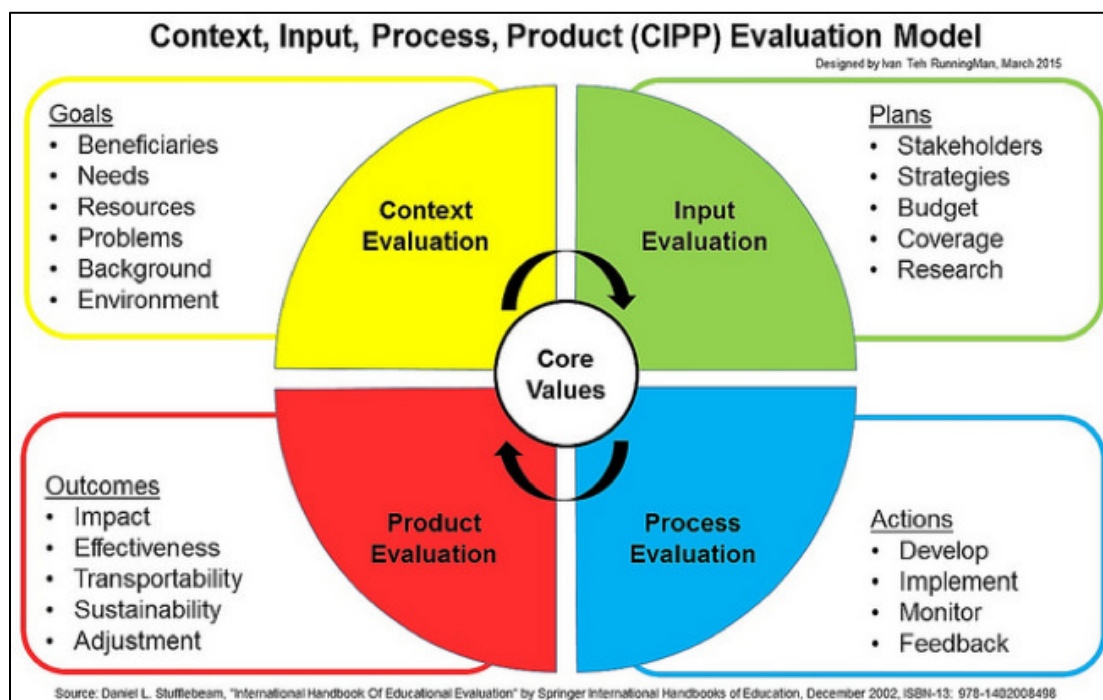
The CDP Agency Representatives were asked a total of 21 questions (Appendix F).

These questions were asked to help gauge the perspective of agency representatives

regarding how their agency runs their CDP's. No further demographics were collected regarding the agency representatives.

### **Findings**

The following information discusses the findings of the study. The survey included both multiple-choice and Likert scale questions. The multiple-choice questions were specific to CDP training offerings available to participants, while the Likert scale questions focused on the same CDP training; however, the Likert questions were used to gauge participant's perspectives. Once the survey concluded, the data was entered into SPSS for descriptive analysis to be run. Following the importation of data into SPSS, the questions addressing the research question, "RQ1: What strategies can a government agency use to increase executive-level employee development to prepare them for executive appointments?" were organized using the CIPP model, which helped facilitate the organization of the descriptive statistics, as you will see in Tables 5-12. Because I looked at the perspectives of the CDP from three different groups, this model made it easier to keep the questions analyzed consistent. Yale University (2019) published the image (see Figure 13) below to understand the CIPP best. Figure 13 is what I used to guide my decision on which group each question should fall into.

**Figure 13***CIPP Evaluation Model*

While considering the viewpoints of all study participants is essential for addressing the research question, my analysis prioritizes the feedback from active trainees and graduates of the program. Their perspectives are crucial for the client organization to gauge sentiment towards the CDP and to further support their goal of implementing targeted strategies for addressing program gaps. Hence, the following data begins with the study outcomes of “CDP Active Trainee and CDP Graduate.”

As noted in Section One, the survey included multiple-choice, dichotomous, and Likert scale questions aimed at assessing the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of Executive Service (ES) trainees and graduate professionals. Using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations, according to Bhandari (2022),

assists a researcher in the analysis of the data and aids in establishing an understanding of the variables in order to identify differences and similarities among both respondent groups. Looking at the frequency output in Table 5, we can see that the majority of respondents from both groups feel or felt adequately challenged by the CDP. However, 37% of active trainee respondents said “No” in response to the question, whereas 3.5% of the CDP Graduate respondents expressed the same sentiment about whether they had felt challenged. In Table 5, you also see whether respondents in both groups felt that they received constructive feedback on their leadership development, which is a primary objective of program participation, fostering leadership growth. Among CDP Active trainees, responses were almost split evenly between “Yes and No.” In contrast, the majority of the CDP Graduate group reported receiving constructive feedback; however, 21.1% said they did not. This shows that, on some level, there is a disparity that exists, and seeing the difference between both groups regarding constructive feedback is valuable as the client considers how it implements its “development” tools for future CDP trainees. Table 6 is then able to use descriptive statistics to provide insight into how quickly participants in the CDP could apply their new knowledge and skills to their leadership responsibilities.

**Table 5***Context – Descriptive Statistics CDP Trainee/Graduate*

			Valid %
CDP		Yes	63.0
Active Trainee	Do you feel adequately challenged while in the Candidate Development Program?	No	37.0
		Yes	48.1
N=27	Do you receive constructive feedback on your leadership development during the CDP?	No	51.9
CDP		Yes	96.5
Graduate	Did you feel adequately challenged while in the Candidate Development Program?	No	3.5
N=57		Yes	78.9
	Did you receive constructive feedback on your leadership development during the CDP?	No	21.1

**Table 6***Context – Descriptive Statistics CDP Trainee/Graduate.2*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
CDP			4.04	.980
Active Trainee	How quickly are you able to implement what you have learned in the CDP thus far into your day-to-day responsibilities?			
	Valid N (listwise)	27		
CDP			4.26	.791
Graduate	How quickly were you able to implement what you learned in the CDP into your day-to-day responsibilities?			
	Valid N (listwise)	57		

In Table 7, these questions were classified as the program “Input” (Figure 13).

What does the CDP have in place now, and how useful is it? It was important for me to know how respondents perceived these resources and their usefulness, especially from

the perspective of graduates who are tasked with leveraging these tools and resources to assume executive leadership roles at government organizations. Both groups shared similarities in how they answered these questions in response to their sentiments towards specific resources offered during the program. What is worth pointing out is that both groups found the usefulness of the Individual Development Plan (IDP) to be the least useful of all.

**Table 7**

*Input – Descriptive Statistics CDP Trainee/Graduate*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid %
CDP			4.15	.864	
Active Trainee	How would you rate the networking opportunities provided during the Candidate Development Program?		4.11	.751	
	Indicate the level of importance you place on the mentoring prescribed for the Candidate Development Program.		4.19	.962	
	Interactive Elements of the CDP SES Mentor		4.33	.832	
	Interactive Elements of the CDP 80-hour Formal Training		4.37	.839	
	Interactive Elements of the CDP Coaching		3.30	1.103	
	Interactive Elements of the CDP Individual Development Plan		4.67	.679	
	On average, how often do you participate in active mentoring with your SES mentor?				

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid %
Which training delivery method do you find most effective regarding the Candidate Development Program (CDP)?					
	In-person hands-on				96.3
	Virtual/live online sessions				0
	Recorded Webinars				0
	Self-paces online modules				3.7
	Other				0
	Valid N (listwise)	27			
CDP			4.19	1.025	
Graduate	How would you rate the networking opportunities provided during the Candidate Development Program?		4.07	.942	
	Indicate the level of importance you placed on the mentoring prescribed for the Candidate Development Program.		4.32	1.429	
	Interactive Elements of the CDP SES Mentor		4.56	1.402	
	Interactive Elements of the CDP 80-hour Formal Training		4.45	1.501	
	Interactive Elements of the CDP Coaching		3.44	1.783	
	Interactive Elements of the CDP Individual Development Plan		4.54	.847	
	On average, how often did you participate in active mentoring with your SES mentor?				
	Which training delivery method did you find most effective regarding the Candidate Development Program (CDP)?				



	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid %
In-person hands-on				78.9
Virtual/live online sessions				8.8
Recorded Webinars				0
Self-paces online modules				1.8
Other				10.5
Valid N (listwise)	57			

After learning how respondents perceived the resources offered within the program, I was interested in knowing how they felt about the CDP's operational structure. I wanted to know if respondents felt confident in specific areas, the perceived pace of the program, and if participants felt their specific leadership needs were being addressed to facilitate their leadership development. Table 8 provides insights into these inquiries. What I learned is that the perception of confidence for active trainees and graduates differed, and I learned what training programs these groups found most valuable. Interestingly, the data shows that both groups found the developmental assignment to be the most valuable, and both groups agreed that the Individual Development Plan (IDP) was not valuable, with a 0% score. However, 28.1% of CDP graduates responded that the interactive group discussions were valuable, as opposed to 14.8% of active trainees finding it valuable. This is good information when considering how to engage participants as a collective. What is also interesting is that mentoring and coaching are ranked low; however, they are integral pieces of the program.

**Table 8***Process – Descriptive Statistics CDP Trainee/Graduate*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid %
CDP		27	2.00	1.109	
Active Trainee	How confident do you feel in applying the knowledge and skills gained from CDP in your day-to-day leadership role?		2.33	1.109	
	How would you describe the overall pace of the Candidate Development Program?		3.41	.844	
	How would you describe the length of the Candidate Development Program?		3.44	.974	
	Indicate your agreement with this statement: “The CDP is effectively addressing my specific leadership challenges.”				
	Which aspect of the training program do you find to be most valuable?				14.8
	Formal Training Hours				59.3
	Developmental Assignment				14.8
	Interactive group discussions				0
	Individual Development Plan (IDP) Assessment				3.7
	Mentoring				0
	Coaching				7.4
	Other				
	Valid N (listwise)	27			
CDP Graduate		27	1.51	.685	
	How confident did you feel in applying the knowledge and skills gained from CDP in your day-to-day leadership role?		2.77	.655	
	How would you describe the overall pace of the Candidate Development Program?				

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid %
How would you describe the length of the Candidate Development Program?	3.32		.760	
Indicate your agreement with this statement: “The CDP effectively addressed my specific leadership challenges.”	3.88		.683	
Which aspect of the training program do you find to be most valuable?				8.8
Formal Training Hours				40.4
Developmental Assignment				28.1
Interactive group discussions				0
Individual Development Plan (IDP) Assessment				12.3
Mentoring				5.3
Coaching				5.3
Other				
Valid N (listwise)	57			

The final classification for survey question categorization was to consider the product (Figure 13) of the CDP. Within Table 9, I wanted to analyze respondents' feedback to questions like Did the program meet your expectations and overall satisfaction with the CDP? Some notable findings from the dataset reveal that 10.5% of the CDP graduate group when asked if the overall training had prepared them for executive roles, said “NO.” However, despite this, the majority, when asked about the overall satisfaction, leaned more toward positive satisfaction levels. Similarly, the current trainees had relatively similar responses when looking at the same variables. The group leaned more toward being satisfied, and the majority responded with a “yes” to the

questions asking if the training was sufficient to prepare them for executive leadership positions.

**Table 9**

*Product – Descriptive Statistics CDP Trainee/Graduate*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid %
CDP			2.35	1.198	
Active Trainee	What is your level of satisfaction with the Candidate Development Program thus far?		3.37	1.115	
	To what extent is the Candidate Development Program enhancing your ability to adapt to and lead through change?		2.59	.888	
	How would you rate the effectiveness of the candidate development program training in enhancing your leadership skills thus far?		4.19	.921	
	Indicate your agreement with this statement: "I believe the CDP will positively impact my leadership skill development at the conclusion of the program."		1.89	.641	
	To what extent is the CDP meeting your expectations?		3.85	.770	
	How satisfied are you with the overall CDP requirements thus far?				
	Have you seen any measurable improvements in your leadership skills or performance since being in the CDP?				
	Yes				85.2
	No				14.8
	Do you find the overall training duration requirement sufficient to prepare you for executive leadership roles?				
	Yes				96.3

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid %
	No				3.7
	Valid N (listwise)	27			
CDP Graduate	What is your level of satisfaction with the Candidate Development Program thus far?		1.63	.672	
	To what extent did the Candidate Development Program enhancing your ability to adapt to and lead through change?		3.63	.983	
	How would you rate the effectiveness of the candidate development program training in enhancing your leadership skills thus far?		2.11	.772	
	Indicate your agreement with this statement: "I believe the CDP positively impacted my leadership skill development."		4.30	.784	
	To what extent is the CDP meeting your expectations?		2.32	.602	
	How satisfied are you with the overall CDP?		4.33	.787	
	Have you seen any measurable improvements in your leadership skills or performance since being in the CDP?				
	Yes				91.2
	No				8.8
	Do you find the overall training duration requirement sufficient to prepare individuals for executive leadership roles?				
	Yes				89.5
	No				10.5
	Valid N (listwise)	57			

The feedback from agency representatives is valuable due to their frequent interactions with CDP participants, which the client organization lacks. Consequently, these individuals offer a unique perspective on the CDP because of their roles. The data

provided in Table 10 through Table 13 is less about comparing it to the data of the CDP trainee and CDP graduate, but more of an inquiry into how these individuals perceive the program after being exposed to CDP trainees whom they engage with about program completion, milestones, requirements, and barriers.

Additionally, the data also provides insights for the client organization into the potential influence agency representatives can have on their CDP implementations. For instance, in Table 12 and aligned with the perspectives of both CDP trainees and CDP graduates, the Individual Development Plan (IDP) received a 0% rating concerning perceived value. This observation highlights and can justify the importance of the client organization scrutinizing the IDP, its engagement strategies, and the approach to enforcement onto trainees. By delving into the functionality of the IDP, the client can explore different avenues for enhancing the IDP phase of the program and the value of the CDP as a whole.

**Table 10**

*Context – Descriptive Statistics Agency Representatives*

			Valid %
CDP Agency Rep N=7	Do you feel your agency adequately challenges participants while in the Candidate Development Program?	Yes	85.7
		No	14.3

**Table 11***Input – Descriptive Statistics Agency Representatives*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid %
CDP		4.57	.787	
Agency Rep How would you rate the networking opportunities provided during the Candidate Development Program?				
Interactive Elements of the CDP Individual Development Plan		5.29	1.113	
Interactive Elements of the CDP Coaching		4.86	1.345	
Interactive Elements of the CDP 80-hour Formal Training		4.57	1.512	
Interactive Elements of the CDP SES Mentor		5.71	.488	
Which training delivery method has your agency found to be most effective regarding the Candidate Development Program (CDP)?				
In-person hands-on				71.4
Virtual/live online sessions				28.6
Recorded Webinars				0
Self-paced online modules				0
Other				0
Valid N (listwise)	7			

**Table 12***Process – Descriptive Statistics Agency Representatives*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid %
CDP			3.33	.516	
Agency Rep	How would you describe the length of the Candidate Development Program?		2.57	.787	
	How would you describe the overall pace of the Candidate Development Program?		2.29	1.496	
	Which aspect of the training program do you find to be most valuable?				42.9
	Formal Training Hours				14.3
	Developmental Assignment				28.6
	Interactive group discussions				0
	Individual Development Plan (IDP) Assessments				14.3
	Mentoring				0
	Coaching				0
	Other				0
	Valid N (listwise)	7			



**Table 13***Product– Descriptive Statistics Agency Representatives*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid %
CDP			1.86	.690	
Agency Rep	What is your level of satisfaction with the Candidate Development Program thus far?		4.17	.753	
	To what extent is the Candidate Development Program enhancing your ability to adapt to and lead through change?		1.86	.900	
	How would you rate the effectiveness of the candidate development program training in enhancing your leadership skills thus far?		4.00	.816	
	Indicate your agreement with this statement: “I believe the CDP will positively impact my leadership skill development at the conclusion of the program.”		4.14	.900	
	How satisfied are you with the overall CDP requirements thus far?				
	Do you find the overall training duration requirement sufficient to prepare you for executive leadership roles?				
	Yes				71.4
	No				28.6
	Valid N (listwise)	7			

Utilizing descriptive statistics and frequencies is beneficial to this study in recognizing differences and similarities among the groups. The data showed that both groups held a favorable perspective toward the CDP. The data does help highlight where

the client organization can pinpoint opportunities for program enhancements.

Consequently, this leads to the answering of the research question: What strategies can a government agency use to increase executive-level employee development to prepare them for executive appointments?

### **Deliverables and Recommendations**

There are 5 recommendations for the client organization to consider as strategies to implement in order to increase executive-level employee development to prepare them for executive appointments.

#### **Recommendation 1: Anonymous Trainee Debriefing**

It is recommended that the client organization consider the adoption of an anonymous CDP debriefing process. This strategy can be implemented with minimal effort by agencies simply by providing them with a hyperlink for dissemination to trainees at the conclusion of their program cohorts or prior to their graduation. When an agency opts to participate in the debrief, collecting data from trainees becomes mandatory, which contributes to an ongoing assessment of CDP efficiency. Furthermore, this strategy will highlight areas for improvement based on trends and demands of evolving work environments from individuals on a recurring basis. This, in return, allows the client organization to stay abreast of workplace demands, environments, and technological advancements that can influence leadership development, contribute to the adaptability of the CDP program, and encourage a proactive approach to the implementation of the CDP. This study is the first for the client organization to seek feedback from the three stakeholder groups, providing a foundation for reference to

further engage and improve the CDP. Future research can also look at the results of this study and reevaluate how programs like the CDP evolve over time and the adaptability of these strategies, especially with the advancement of Artificial Intelligence. Making seeking this feedback even more valuable.

## **Recommendation 2: Individual Development Plan (IDP) Evaluation on Implementation**

How the IDP is perceived among all three respondent groups is relevant to the perception of CDP satisfaction and value. The IDP serves as a tool designed to assist employees in both personal and professional development (OPM, 2024). However, according to Table 8, Table 11, and Table 12, the IDP received consistently low rankings from all survey participants indicating it was at least not as valuable or beneficial as other training tools.

The IDP is a necessary piece of the CDP, as all senior executives are required legally to complete IDPs (OPM, 2024); it is therefore recommended that the client organization considers implementing what Charan et al. (2011) term “Building a Framework for Self-Management” around the IDP. This approach focuses on leadership accountability and not just telling someone what they must do but also showing how and what the success of self-management looks like by establishing a standard. The client should focus on universal measures and requirements each senior executive should achieve, and that standard needs to be effectively communicated (Charan et al., 2024). Since each organization uniquely implements its programs, certain aspects, such as the IDP, should adhere to nonnegotiable predetermined standards of where executives should

be functioning at the conclusion of the program. Rath and Conchie (2008, as cited in Ding & Yu, 2022) discuss leadership as two concepts: (1) everyone has strengths as part of human nature, and (2) the greatest area of an individual's growth and development resides in their strengths (p. 1110). So, the individual development plan should be focused on developing these leaders' strengths and not just be received as a tedious task to check a box, but truly challenge the strength and fortitude of trainees to grow as leaders aiming for the "golden standard" as established by the client organization. This should include requiring specific training, personality tests, and strengths and weaknesses tests that are administered before and after the training.

### **Recommendation 3: Constructive Feedback**

Following up on recommendation two, recommendation three tackles the lack of constructive feedback reported by participants (Table 5). Trainees should be given organization-specific training, personality assessments, or evaluations of strengths and weaknesses before and after participating in the CDP. The initial and final assessment is mandatory, with an optional mid-point reassessment for trainees who want to evaluate goal alignment. These results should be interpreted and discussed not just among trainees and supervisors but as the basis for IDPs and IDP adjustments. Pre-test and post-test assessments are vital for establishing individual baseline attitudes (Floyd et al., 2022), professional perspectives, and identifying preconceived biases. The post-test should include a comparison evaluation and check (Floyd et al., 2022), examining how individuals have developed since the beginning of the program. This will result in constructive feedback conversations and can prevent gaps in performance development.

Charan et al. (2011) point to performance feedback as a common gap within leadership pipelines (p. 182). Therefore, it is imperative that the client organization does not dismiss the perspective of those who believe they, in fact, did not receive constructive feedback.

#### **Recommendation 4: Self Awareness Assessment Resource Recommendations**

Recommendation three encourages the client organization to implement pre-test and post-test assessments of candidate trainees to one ensure each candidate receives constructive feedback and two ensure a measurable tool is available to track progress. Recommendation four is a review of a couple of resources to consider based on recommendation three. First, we have the VIA Institute on Character Assessment. This assessment creates and defines the character strengths of individuals to guide them to live a more "virtuous life" (Northouse, 2021, p. 132). VIA suggests that character strengths fall within six virtuous classification types: Wisdom & Knowledge – Cognitive Strengths, Courage – Emotional Strengths, Humanity – Interpersonal Strengths, Justice – Civic Strengths, Temperance – Strengths Over Excess, and Transcendence – Strengths about Meaning (Northouse, 2021).

Second, this resource comes from The Centre of Applied Positive Psychology (CAPP) (Northouse, 2021), which contends that the strengths of every individual are fluid and a person's strengths continuously evolve over time. CAPP developed a (Strengths Profile) that focuses on three elements: (1) performance – how good we are at doing something, (2) energy – how much vitality we get out of it; and (3) use – how often are we able to do it (Northouse, 2021, p. 135). When a Strengths Profile assessment is completed, individuals observe a breakdown of their strengths based on four results:

realized strengths, unrealized strengths, learned behaviors, and weaknesses (p. 135).

Realized strengths are the strengths individuals use regularly; people prefer opportunities that allow them to use these strengths. Unrealized strengths are the strengths an individual uses less often but typically turns to them when necessary to achieve a goal.

Learned behaviors are the results of life experiences that usually appear as a response mechanism to an individual's environment or circumstances. Lastly, there are weaknesses that typically result in poor performance" (Northouse, 2021, p. 135). IDPs and constructive conversations should be built around this area of weakness. Weaknesses require a significant amount of time and attention to overcome. This assessment is good for implementing post-test examination measures.

#### **Recommendation 5: Informal Trainee/Graduate Crossover Events**

Recommendation four proposes the establishment of a cohort tasked with facilitating roundtable discussions or open forums, where SES mentors, coaches, and current trainees, come together for guided informal sessions designed to encourage information sharing and camaraderie. This cohort should avoid becoming work. Rather, it is devoid of significant obligation, and participants want to attend because of the benefits and knowledge gained. Becoming a Senior Executive signifies entry into an elite group of leaders, which for some trainees can be intimidating and, for current senior executives, isolating. In some instances, only another senior executive can fully comprehend the complexity and demands of the role.

However, this study showed that there is value in having these connections. In Appendix G, you will see that 73.68% of CDP graduates indicated they stayed in contact

with their CDP-required SES mentor after completing the program, and 26.32% did not. Study participants in all three groups recognize the usefulness of this resource (Table 7 and Table 11), and that is something that should be enhanced to shrink that 26.32% window. This cohort is a place that allows mutuals to continue to foster their growth and leadership ambidexterity, a skill that completing the program signifies. Upon graduation, these individuals will be the best of the best and can be successful in any organization. Liu et al. (2019) state that fostering innovation within peer groups leads to “leader ambidexterity.” This means promoting respect for diverse knowledge, skills, and abilities among each cohort member and fostering a culture where ideas and opinions are encouraged and valued on a continuous basis.

When employees understand their roles, the vision for the organization, and themselves and feel valued, these individuals, according to Liu (2019), are far more likely to view their work positively and thrive in their careers. The cohort should be designed to focus on maintaining the support among these leaders that encourages these outcomes. The IDP enhancements and constructive feedback all contribute to implementing strategies that focus on senior executive outcomes when graduating from the program. After all, these individuals lead agencies that ultimately serve the public. Therefore, when an agency leader is underperforming, the effects impact the agency's performance and output. It is beneficial to the client organization to ensure that the executive leadership pipeline is free-flowing and that trainees become successful graduates, making room for future trainees and that the performance standard is clear.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In this section, I explain how I went about ensuring the trustworthiness of the study by addressing the validity criteria in relation to the study that was previously addressed in Table 3.

#### **Internal Validity**

Inquiry Audit – As the development of the study was underway, meetings were had, and information on dates, times, and participants was saved via the Microsoft Teams platform, commonly known as Teams. This was the best way for the client organization and me to have virtual discussions to study objectives, survey questions, and data collection processes. In Figure 13, I mention that to process my data in SPSS, I had to categorize the data using the CIPP model. This change is noted and recorded for future reference should questions arise as to the model choice used; however, I believe Figure 13 and the explanation provided clearly explain its use.

#### **External Validity**

Peer debriefing –I maintained regular communication with my committee chair through this process, predominately via cellular devices. I was able to have my questions answered and get guidance when unanticipated obstacles arose within the process of getting the study started properly, as well as questions about informed consent, the university process, and data analysis. Communicating this way allowed for timely exchanges and ensured pertinent questions were overlooked. My chair was informed in real-time about significant milestones the study experienced



**Reliability**

Maximum Variations – For this study, I was able to collect feedback from CDP current trainees, graduates of the program, and program implementers. These stakeholders, while anonymous, the demographics, (Figures 6, Figure 7, and Figure 8) collected speak to the diversity present in the survey sample.

**Objectivity**

Inquiry Audit/Reflexivity Journal - Sufficient documentation should exist and be available to show how the study evolved over time from conceptualization to data collection and analysis. Appendix A through Appendix D, as well as emails, the raw data from the SurveyMonkey platform, and meeting notes, all contribute to ensuring study transparency and objectivity throughout the study process.

**Strengths and Limitations of the Study****Strengths**

I am pleased with the number of responses to the survey. I am also happy with the diversity present within the sample, which enhances the representativeness of the findings. I believe the transparency of the study will allow for it to be reproduced by others to investigate leadership programs further, not just for the client organization but also across many organizations that spend resources on developing personnel and want to investigate ways to improve their leadership pipelines. Lastly, despite concern about whether current trainees would participate, they did, and anything over zero was a good amount for me.

## **Limitations**

As for study limitations, I would say that because my client organization is in an oversight role versus agency representatives, it made it difficult to control for selection biases from agency representatives who were charged with disseminating the survey to CDP stakeholders. While we solicited their support, I could not control who they distributed the survey to except for making it clear it needed to be someone in either of the three categories. Hence, the survey risks selection biases. Also, without having a connection to the sample size and the only interaction coming from an email that could have been manipulated for each respondent, social desirability bias could also play a role. Maybe some participants answered in a more favorable light because they were not sure about the true anonymity or did not want to admit they may still be struggling as leaders as trainees and graduates. As for overcoming these limitations, the client organization could begin establishing a CDP roster made up of trainees and their graduation cohort years. By doing this, they remove the limitation of not having access to the trainees and can then directly ask for feedback or communicate directly with these individuals to explain the purpose of specific studies.

## **Summary**

This concludes Section 4: Results and Recommendations. This section reviewed the data collection, data analysis, study findings, study deliverables and four recommendations, evidence of trustworthiness, and lastly, the strengths and limitations of this quantitative self-administered web-based survey study. In Section 5, I will address the dissemination plan, and the conclusion of this study followed by a summary.

## Section 5: Dissemination Plan and Conclusion

### **Dissemination Plan**

The results of this study are valuable for the client organization as it evaluates the current perceptions of the CDP, providing insight into challenges within the CDP program, challenges to program graduates post-CDP completion, and best practices to serve as a framework leading to an enhanced executive leadership development program across all executive brand agencies. This self-administered web-based survey encompassed multiple-choice, dichotomous, and Likert-scale survey questions used to assess the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of 84 Executive Service (ES) trainees and graduate professionals combined.

I compiled the study results in the form of figures, tables, and written text that will be disseminated to the client organization in the form of a virtual meeting via the Microsoft Teams platform and email. Ahead of this meeting, the client will receive a copy of the presentation and the write-up for this study to review and prepare any questions they may have. The information provided in these resources will include survey results, participant demographics, and a breakdown of identifiable similarities and differences found between the three categories of respondents used to justify the recommendations provided in the study.

It is anticipated that the outcomes of this study will be generalizable across a broader audience of leadership development programs that seek to enhance their leadership outcomes as a result of participation in their specific development programs provided; therefore, agencies can use this study as a foundation for further exploration

into their specific program implementation strategies. Hence, at the time of publication, a ProQuest link to this document will be provided to the client organization enabling wider access.

To ensure the sustainability of the study's findings and ongoing inquiry into the CDP, the leadership stakeholders at the client organization will be key at using this information to justify and advocate for changes made within the program addressing common barriers and to prioritize enhancement strategies to continue to add value in the CDP.

### **Conclusion and Summary**

In this quantitative study, I have provided a government agency's executive leadership candidate development committee with actionable strategies to address gaps in their current CDP to improve candidate readiness upon CDP completion. Successful completion of the CDP suggests that graduates are prepared to function at the highest level of government and possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to succeed within any government agency they are assigned. Effective leadership at their appropriate leadership level fosters increased organizational performance. Organizations with superior leadership at all levels often experience organizational pride (Charan, 2011), and those who lead underneath the executive leader feel valued and encouraged to thrive; ideally, the leader and its subordinates share a vision (Northouse, 2021); hence future executives thrive to rise to the standard of leadership their executive possess and displays.

In the previous chapters, I covered the details of this study. In Section 1, I covered the organization's background, problem statement, study purpose, sources of data,

definitions, and study significance. In Section 2, I looked at the conceptual framework guiding this study, as well as relevant literature. In Section 3, I discussed the data collection process and analysis, the research question, my role as the researcher, methodology, data analysis strategy, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. In Section 4, I presented the results and recommendations of the study, and section five reviews the dissemination plan of the study and conclusion.

I identified five strategy recommendations to support the government agency's executive leadership candidate development committee in identifying strategies to address gaps within their existing CDP. As noted by Charan (2011), when an incoming executive leader is not prepared to work at their appropriate leadership level, this is when a clog in the executive leadership pipeline occurs. It is my hope that through this study, the exploration and investment for creating free-flowing pipelines through programs such as the CDP leads to positive social change for the customers of these agencies (i.e., citizens) who deserve operational efficiency.

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## Appendix A: Invitation to Participate Email

From: Client Organization

Sent: March 07, 2024

To: Client organizations with certified SESCO DP plans in place

Subject: SESCO DP Survey Announcement

Good afternoon CDP Program Managers,

In the spring of 2023, the (████████████████████) group led efforts (through a ██████████) to reevaluate the current state of the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) to inform on the effectiveness of agency programs and best practices and collaborate on ways to enhance and impact leadership development for the Workforce of the Future.

As a follow-on action, and in partnership with doctoral student Ms. Tajah Adams (who also participated in the ██████████), the ██████████ team is conducting a wider-scale study (survey-driven) based on information and feedback learned in last year's sessions. The focus of this anonymous quantitative study is to obtain data (target audience noted below) on the various aspects of the program (including challenges faced by agencies, participants, and graduates) leading to the identification, development, and implementation of strategies to bridge gaps and enhance program and participant experience.

The target audiences of the survey would be 1) Program Coordinators, 2) Recent Graduates, and 3) Current participants.

██████████ will launch the survey on March 18, 2024, and we invite your full participation, and that of your current candidates and recent graduates.

Findings will be presented to CDP program managers through a roundtable forum in the Fall of 2024.

We thank you in advance for your continued support, collaboration, and participation.

## Appendix B: Official CDP Survey Email

From: Client Organization

Sent: March 18, 2024

To: Client organizations with certified SESCDP plans in place

Subject: SESCDP Survey Launch

Good morning,

We are excited to share the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) survey link with you.

Survey Link: [Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program Survey](#)

The [REDACTED] group, in partnership with doctoral student Ms. Tajah Adams, seeks your valuable input as a program coordinator, current CDP participant, or CDP graduate. Your perspectives will play a pivotal role in informing us about the effectiveness of agency CDP programs and the implementation of best practices to foster leadership development for the Workforce of the Future.

The purpose of this anonymous survey is to gather data on various aspects of the Candidate Development Program. We aim to understand the challenges faced by agencies, current participants, and graduates; leading to the identification of strategies that can be used to bridge gaps identified within the program and improve the overall program and participants' experience.

Please complete this survey, choosing the appropriate category that aligns with your relationship to the CDP: 1) Program Coordinators, 2) Recent Graduates, and 3) Current participants. We invite your full participation, and that of your current candidates and recent graduates. We encourage you to share this survey with the appropriate groups. The survey will close on **April 5, 2024**.

We thank you in advance for your continued support, collaboration, and participation.

## Appendix C: Survey Demographics with Branching for Survey Grouping

### Demographics

Your participation:

- is completely voluntary and can end at any time you wish
- is anonymous (your name will not be requested)
- involves completing a survey
- involves little or no risk

To protect your privacy, this survey will **not** collect, track, or store your identity or contact info. In place of a consent signature, your completion of the survey would indicate that you consent to your responses being analyzed in the study.

#### \* 1. Race/Ethnicity

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Asian or Asian American
- ☐ Native American, American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other (please specify)

#### \* 2. Gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other (please specify)

#### \* 3. What is your current relationship with the Candidate Development Program (CDP)?

- ☐ CDP Current Participants (Active Trainee)
- ☐ CDP Recent Graduate (0-3yrs working in SES role)
- ☐ CDP Recent Graduate (0-3yrs **NOT** working in SES role)
- ☐ CDP Past Participant (3+ years removed from CDP working in SES role)
- ☐ CDP Past Participant (3+ years removed from CDP **NOT** working in SES role)
- ☐ CDP Agency Representative Responsible for CDP implementation/support

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## Appendix D: CDP Current Participants (Active Trainee)

1. Age
2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
3. What is your level of satisfaction with the Candidate Development Program thus far? (Very satisfied, Satisfied, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied)
4. How confident do you feel about applying the knowledge and skills gained from CDP in your day-to-day leadership role? (Very Confident, Confident, Moderately Confident, Slightly Confident, Not Confident at all)
5. How would you describe the overall pace of the Candidate Development Program? (Too slow, Somewhat slow, Just Right, Somewhat fast, Too fast)
6. How would you describe the length of the Candidate Development Program? (Too short, Somewhat short, Just right, Somewhat long, Too long)
7. What level of importance do you place on ongoing mentorship or coaching following the Candidate Development Program?
8. To what extent is the Candidate Development Program enhancing your ability to adapt to and lead through Change? (No enhancement, Minimal enhancement, Moderate enhancement, Substantial enhancement, Significant enhancement)
9. How would you rate the networking opportunities provided during the Candidate Development Program? (Very Poor, Poor, Neutral, Good, Excellent)
10. How well does the Candidate Development Program align with your leadership development goals?
11. To what extent do you engage with fellow participants or trainers while in the Candidate Development Program?
12. How frequently do you actively participate in Candidate Development training discussions or activities?
13. SES Mentor, 80hr Formal Training, Coaching, Individual Development Plan (Not Useful, Somewhat Useful, Moderately Useful, Extremely Useful)
14. Which aspect of the training program do you find to be most valuable?
15. How long is the Development Assignment you need to complete for the Candidate Development Program?
16. Which training delivery method do you find most effective regarding the Candidate Development Program (CDP)?
17. Which leadership skill do you feel the Candidate Development Program focuses on most?
18. How would you rate the effectiveness of the candidate development program training in enhancing your leadership skills thus far? (Extremely effective, Very effective, Somewhat effective, Not so effective, Not at all effective)
19. Do you feel adequately challenged while in the Candidate Development Program?
20. How well is the Candidate Development Program training content aligned with your current responsibilities and challenges?

21. On average, how often do you participate in active mentoring with your SES mentor? (Every day, A few times a week, About once a week, A few times a month, Once a month, Less than once a month)
22. Indicate your agreement with this statement: "I believe the CDP will positively impact my leadership skill development at the conclusion of the program."  
(Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree)
23. To what extent is the CDP meeting your expectations? (Below expectations, Met Expectations, Exceeded expectations)
24. Indicate your agreement with this statement: "The CDP is effectively addressing my specific leadership challenges." (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree)
25. On average, how many hours per week are you dedicating to CDP activities?
26. Indicate the level of importance you place on the mentoring prescribed for the Candidate Development Program. (Not at all important, Not so important, Somewhat important, Important, Extremely important)
27. Do you find the overall training duration requirement sufficient to prepare you for executive leadership roles?
28. How likely are you to recommend or encourage someone to partake in the CDP?
29. Have you seen any measurable improvements in your leadership skills or performance since being in the CDP?
30. To what extent does the CDP encourage a culture of continuous improvement and feedback?
31. Do you receive constructive feedback on your leadership development during the CDP?
32. How satisfied are you with the overall CDP requirements thus far? (Very dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, Satisfied, Very Satisfied)
33. How quickly are you able to implement what you have learned in the CDP thus far into your day-to-day responsibilities? (Not at all quickly, Somewhat slowly, Neither quickly nor slowly, Somewhat quickly, Quickly)
34. How would you rate the support and guidance provided by CDP agency facilitators during your time in the CDP?



## Appendix E: CDP Recent Graduate/CDP Past Participant

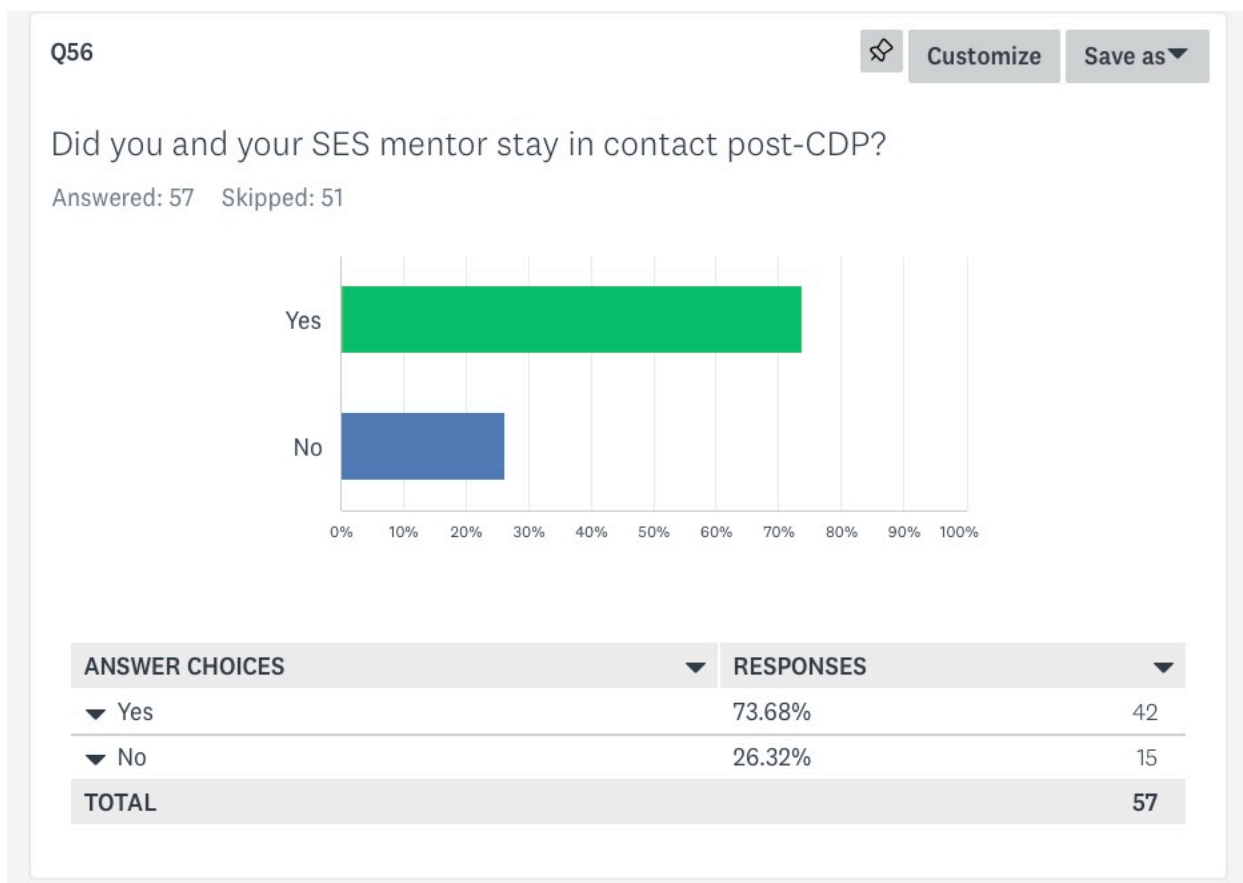
1. Age
2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
3. Salary Range?
4. What is your level of satisfaction with the Candidate Development Program training? (Very satisfied, Satisfied, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied)
5. How confident did you feel about applying the knowledge and skills gained from CDP in your day-to-day leadership role? (Very Confident, Confident, Moderately Confident, Slightly Confident, Not Confident at all)
6. How would you describe the overall pace of the Candidate Development Program? (Too slow, Somewhat slow, Just Right, Somewhat fast, Too fast)
7. How would you describe the length of the Candidate Development Program? (Too short, Somewhat short, Just right, Somewhat long, Too long)
8. What importance did you place on ongoing mentorship or coaching following the Candidate Development Program?
9. To what extent did the Candidate Development Program enhance your ability to adapt to and lead through change? (No enhancement, Minimal enhancement, Moderate enhancement, Substantial enhancement, Significant enhancement)
10. How would you rate the networking opportunities provided during the Candidate Development Program? (Very Poor, Poor, Neutral, Good, Excellent)
11. How well did the Candidate Development Program align with your leadership development goals?
12. How would you rate the process of finding a developmental assignment?
13. To what extent did you engage with fellow participants or trainers while in the Candidate Development Program?
14. How frequently did you actively participate in Candidate Development training discussions or activities?
15. SES Mentor, 80hr Formal Training, Coaching, Individual Development Plan (Not Useful, Somewhat Useful, Moderately Useful, Extremely Useful)
16. Which aspect of the training program did you find to be most valuable?
17. How long was the Development Assignment you need to complete for the Candidate Development Program?
18. Which type of training delivery method was most effective regarding the Candidate Development Program (CDP)?
19. Did you and your SES mentor stay in contact post-CDP?
20. Which leadership skill do you feel the Candidate Development Program focused on most?
21. How helpful was the Candidate Development Program in preparing you for the QRB?

22. How would you rate the effectiveness of the candidate development program training in enhancing your leadership skills? (Extremely effective, Very effective, Somewhat effective, Not so effective, Not at all effective)
23. Did you feel adequately challenged while in the Candidate Development Program?
24. How well did the Candidate Development Program training content align with your current responsibilities and challenges?
25. On average, how often do you participate in active mentoring with your SES mentor? (Every day, A few times a week, About once a week, A few times a month, Once a month, Less than once a month)
26. What was the most valuable thing your SES mentor provided you?
27. Indicate your agreement with this statement: "I believe the CDP positively impacted my leadership skill development." (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree)
28. Indicate your agreement with this statement: "I believe the CDP adequately prepared me for the QRB."
29. To what extent did the CDP meet your expectations?
30. Indicate your agreement with this statement: "The CDP effectively addressed my specific leadership challenges."
31. On average, how many hours per week did you dedicate to CDP activities?
32. Indicate the level of importance you placed on the mentoring prescribed for the Candidate Development Program. (Not at all important, Not so important, Somewhat important, Important, Extremely important)
33. Do you find the overall training duration requirement sufficient to prepare individuals for executive leadership roles?
34. How likely are you to recommend or encourage someone to partake in the CDP?
35. Have you seen any measurable improvements in your leadership skills or performance since being in the CDP?
36. To what extent does the CDP encourage a culture of continuous improvement and feedback?
37. Did you receive constructive feedback on your leadership development during the CDP?
38. How satisfied are you with the overall CDP? (Very dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, Satisfied, Very Satisfied)
39. How quickly were you able to implement what you learned in the CDP into your day-to-day responsibilities? (Not at all quickly, Somewhat slowly, Neither quickly nor slowly, Somewhat quickly, Quickly)
40. How would you rate the support and guidance provided by CDP agency facilitators during your time in the CDP?

## Appendix F: CDP Agency Representative Responsible for CDP Implementation/Support

1. What is your level of satisfaction with the Candidate Development Program training?
2. How would you describe the overall pace of the Candidate Development Program?
3. How would you describe the length of the Candidate Development Program?
4. What importance does your agency place on ongoing mentorship or coaching following the Candidate Development Program?
5. To what extent does your agency's Candidate Development Program enhance an individual's ability to adapt to and lead through change?
6. How would you rate the networking opportunities provided by your agency during the Candidate Development Program?
7. SES Mentor, 80hr Formal Training, Coaching, Individual Development Plan (Not Useful, Somewhat Useful, Moderately Useful, Extremely Useful)
8. Which aspect of the training program do you find to be most valuable?
9. How long is the Development Assignment your agency requires for the Candidate Development Program?
10. Which training delivery method has your agency found to be most effective regarding the Candidate Development Program (CDP)?
11. Which leadership skill do you feel the Candidate Development Program focuses on most?
12. How would you rate the effectiveness of the candidate development program training in enhancing individuals' leadership skills?
13. Do you feel your agency adequately challenges participants while in the Candidate Development Program?
14. How well does your agency's Candidate Development Program training content align with your current responsibilities and challenges faced by individuals at the SES level?
15. Indicate your agreement with this statement: "At my agency, I believe the CDP positively impacts the participant's leadership skill development."
16. Indicate your agreement with this statement: "At my agency, the CDP effectively addresses individuals' specific leadership challenges."
17. Do you find the overall training duration requirement sufficient to prepare individuals for executive leadership roles?
18. How likely are you to recommend or encourage someone to partake in the CDP?
19. To what extent does your agency CDP encourage a culture of continuous improvement and feedback?
20. How satisfied are you with the overall performance of your agency CDP?
21. How would you rate the support and guidance provided to agencies from workforce development leadership?

## Appendix G: CDP Graduates: SES Mentor Contact



## Appendix H: Executive Summary / Client Organization

This study was done to evaluate the perceptions of the Candidate Development Program (CDP) from the perspective of current candidate development trainees, graduates, and agency representatives. This self-administered web-based survey encompassed multiple-choice, dichotomous, and Likert scale survey questions used to assess the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of 84 Executive Service (ES) trainees and graduate professionals combined. Using the Leadership Pipeline framework as the study's theoretical framework and based on the results of the survey, I have established 5 recommendations that will answer the question guiding this study: RQ1: What strategies can a government agency use to increase executive-level employee development to prepare them for executive appointments?

Based on the study results, below is a list of recommendations to consider:

Recommendation 1 – Implementing Anonymous Trainee Debriefing Tool

Recommendation 2 – Individual Development Plan Evaluation Tool

Recommendation 3 – Implement a Mandatory Constructive Feedback Process

Recommendation 4 – Self-awareness Assessment Recommendations

Recommendation 5 – Informal Trainee/Graduate Cohort Development

Using these recommendations will result in actionable strategies used to address the gaps identified in the study and help enhance strategies that are least favorable among participants. When these gaps can be addressed, it can result in more meaningful experiences for the CDP trainees and enhance their feelings of preparedness upon graduating.