



# WHITE HOUSE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

**PROGRAM GUIDE**

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## INTRODUCTION

The White House Leadership Development Program (WHLDP) aims to strengthen enterprise leadership across the government by providing senior-level federal employees with expanded perspectives and skill sets to address challenges facing the country. These increasingly complex challenges span agencies and jurisdictions, requiring senior leaders to work across agencies and organizational boundaries while leveraging networks to ensure the government continues to effectively deliver services to the American people.

**Vision:** To serve our Nation by cultivating enterprise leadership, at the center of government, to improve lives everywhere.

The program is primarily focused on:

- » **Developing Talent:** Building the next generation of leaders with an enterprise perspective and strengthening leadership capacities through leadership development sessions and a placement focused on the complex, cross-agency challenges that increasingly confront the Federal Government.
- » **Delivering Results:** Harnessing top talent from across the government to support the implementation of key administration priorities and to address mission-critical challenges.
- » **Building Community:** Building a strong community among current fellows and alumni that strengthens each other's purpose, commitment, and ability to serve our nation.

The WHLDP aligns the work required of fellows to mission-critical priorities such as the President Management Agenda (PMA). Fellows will work closely with cross-government performance teams to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of organizational performance, measure impact and deliver results, identify and embrace innovation to find new ways of doing business, and focus on outcomes and effective service delivery.



## **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

The WHLDP is sponsored by the Executive Office of the President (EOP) and the President’s Management Council (PMC). The program consists of a one-year placement and executive leadership development sessions for a small cohort of fellows.

The WHLDP provides an opportunity for a diverse cohort of high-potential career employees to develop executive leadership skills as they seek expand their leadership influence and impact. Fellows spend approximately 80 percent of their time in a placement assignment gaining on-the-job experience. The remaining 20 percent of their time is spent in leadership development sessions and experiences.

This guide provides more information on the program’s nomination and selection process, placement and leadership development experiences, and post-program activities.

## **PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

- » Provide fellows with a broad federal perspective on high-priority challenges and access to senior decision-makers at the center of government.
- » Develop a cadre of leaders with the skill sets and networks to address challenges through a cross-agency lens while learning how to implement solutions across organizational boundaries.
- » Strengthen implementation efforts on specific cross-agency initiatives that require broad coordination and long-term strategic planning to ensure delivery of tangible results.





## PROGRAM BENEFITS

- » Exposure to a variety of agency cultures, missions, functional areas, senior leaders, and new ways of delivering results in government.
- » Ability to address complex problems that cut across organizational and jurisdictional boundaries.
- » Heightened government-wide perspective on problem solving, best practices, and real solutions that can be applied in agencies and bureaus.
- » Experience relying on collaborative leadership skills, rather than technical expertise, to meet mission goals.
- » Firsthand experience integrating into a new organization's culture and fast-paced, ambiguous environment, fostering flexibility, and entrepreneurial skills.
- » Expanded professional networks for collaboration and career advancement.
- » Meaningful relationships with cohort members who provide peer-to-peer coaching and support.

## PROGRAM PARAMETERS

- » This program is open to career GS-15 and equivalent civil service employees from 24 CFO Act federal agencies.
- » There are two pathways into the program selection process:



### AGENCY NOMINATIONS

Agencies conduct an internal vetting process and provide up to six candidates for consideration in the program. All nominated candidates proceed to the next phase of the selection process.



### SELF-NOMINATIONS

Candidates complete the self-nomination process with their supervisor's recommendation and approval. The WHLDP will vet self-nominated candidates, putting forward a maximum of six candidates per agency for the next phase of the selection process.



- » The program duration is one year, starting at the beginning of each fiscal year (October 1).
- » The placement is full-time and will include weekly executive leadership development sessions.
- » A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be developed between the home agency and gaining agency.
- » Placement is non-reimbursable. The fellow's home agency is responsible for the fellow's salary, continued employment, and benefits.
- » There is no guarantee for placement into a Senior Executive Service (SES) position as a result of participation in this program. Participation does, however, provide an experience that may be used in developing Executive Core Qualifications.

## **PROGRAM SCHEDULE**

- » **October** - Orientation and the start of placements
- » **November** - Developmental programming begins
- » **September** - End-of-year honors and offboarding

## **NOMINATIONS AND SELECTION PROCESS TIMELINE**

*The following are targets and subject to revision:*

- » **February - Call for nominations**
- » **April - Self nominations due to WHLDP**
- » **May - Agency nominations due to WHLDP**
- » **June - Phase 1 interviews**
- » **July - Phase 2 interviews**
- » **August - Phase 3 interviews**
- » **August - Candidate notification of selection in the program**
- » **September - Onboarding processes**
- » **October - Orientation**



## AGENCY NOMINATIONS

Qualifying agencies may nominate up to six candidates who have their supervisor's sign-off and the formal nomination of the agency deputy secretary, or equivalent. While agencies will determine their own internal processes to select nominees, the WHLDP strives to make its selection process as equitable as possible. The program will work with each nominating agency to share guidance and best practices to ensure that the program and agencies are recruiting and vetting candidates in an equitable way.

## SELF-NOMINATIONS

Candidates from agencies which opt into the self-nomination route will submit their supervisor-approved applications directly to the program. The WHLDP will then vet candidates and up to six candidates from each agency will proceed to future selection rounds.

## REQUIRED NOMINATION INFORMATION

A complete application includes the following pieces:

1. Resume
2. Application form
3. Nomination letter from the agency deputy secretary, or equivalent  
([see Appendix D](#))

## SELECTION PROCESS

After reviewing all nominations, the WHLDP team implements a rigorous selection process to determine program finalists. After three rounds of interviews, the WHLDP will extend invitations to between 10 and 20 finalists. All candidates will be notified of their status at the conclusion of the selection process. Agencies will also be notified of their candidates' status.

To ensure equity, the WHLDP team will implement a blind application review. This process includes the removal of all names and primary identifying information on resumes and applications. Candidates move through the beginning stages of the selection process identified by a 4-digit unique identifier.

The program selection process consists of three phases of interviews that take place from June to August.



Phases include:

- » Phase 1: Interviews with current fellows and program alumni
- » Phase 2: Interviews with placement offices
- » Phase 3: Interviews with Executive Committee members

## PLACEMENTS

As part of the selection process, candidates will interview with placement offices. A matching process will determine the placement office and project that each fellow will spend their year with. Assignments are high-visibility initiatives that touch multiple agencies and stakeholders. Fellows are expected to drive cross-agency coordination, innovation, implementation, and performance management. Specific projects vary depending on the placement assignment and administration priorities.

Fellows will likely be matched to a placement assignment that leverages broad skill sets outside the fellows' areas of subject matter expertise. Placements are not meant to increase technical expertise but rather to provide an opportunity to develop leadership and collaboration skills.

Past placements include work in the following areas:

- » Customer Experience
- » Diversity Equity Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA)
- » Federal Workforce
- » Climate Change
- » Cyber security
- » Infrastructure Permitting







## THE FELLOW'S PLACEMENT EXPERIENCE

WHLDP placements are challenging assignments that expose fellows to new cultures and approaches, a whole-of-government perspective, and an enterprise leadership toolkit. Fellows are placed on cross-agency initiatives where they will have little formal authority, significant ambiguity, and a variety of stakeholders with competing priorities. Fellows may experience:

**Atypical Organizational Structures** - Most placements are situated in small offices with flat organizational structures and few, if any, support staff. Fellows will likely find that no task is too small for anyone in the office, including themselves, in order to achieve results.

**Leading Among Peers** - Due to flat organizational structures and cross-agency stakeholder management, fellows will coordinate and collaborate among peers and senior-level officials. These are often non-traditional leadership roles that require flexibility, entrepreneurship, and different collaboration incentives.

**Creative Leadership** - Fellows will often have no formal authority, nor will they be in placements where they can fall back on their subject matter expertise. In order to achieve results, fellows will have to identify stakeholders, build relationships and trust, understand competing priorities and timelines, and work through formal and informal chains of communication to drive collaboration toward a shared goal or outcome.

**Quick Learning** - Fellows will likely be in placements outside of their subject matter areas of expertise in order to encourage the development and use of leadership skills and tools. Fellows must develop a variety of competencies, including emotional intelligence, adaptability, resiliency, agility, political savvy, strategic thinking, and collaboration.



## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Across the program year, the fellows will be led through an engaging leadership development experience that includes development sessions, assessments, coaching, agency site visits, and engagements with senior leaders.

### Executive Learning

Fellows participate in a year-long executive leadership development experience that is designed to hone their leadership skills with hands-on learning. Sessions typically occur on Fridays and make up approximately 20 percent of the program year. Throughout the year, fellows will also receive assessments that help them understand their strengths and growth opportunities. Coaches assigned to each fellow will help them process the results of the assessments and map a way forward.

### Agency Experiences

WHLDP fellows are invited to host a visit to their home agency. These visits occur either in person or virtually, depending on the nature of speakers and visit experience. Fellows develop a plan that highlights the agency's mission and culture and the opportunity to engage with agency leaders.

### Engagements with Leaders

Throughout the year, the program and fellows identify senior leaders for the cohort to engage with. These speakers come from the current administration at the White House, Executive Office of the President, and agencies across government. Informal discussions with these leaders help fellows better understand the career paths available to them and the culture they work in.



## POST-PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT

Following the end of the program, fellows can stay connected to the program in the following ways:

- » **Alumni Association Activities** - From mentoring the next cohort of fellows to alumni events and training, fellows can maintain and expand their network of leaders across government by participating in the Alumni Association.
- » **Database of Participants** - WHLDP and the Alumni Association maintain a database of alumni to facilitate post-program networking and future alumni events.
- » **Support of Future Cohorts** - Alumni assist with interviews during the selection process, SES mentorship, and community building.





## **APPENDIX A: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Who will pay the fellow's salary?**

This is a non-reimbursable placement. Therefore, the fellow's home agency will pay their salary.

### **Where will the fellow be located?**

The fellow will be co-located with the placement office to maximize the experiential learning opportunity. This may be at an EOP office or agency depending on the goal and the specific work the fellow will be doing. Additionally, participants will meet for development sessions at to-be-determined, in-person locations.

### **Will the fellow have to/get to travel?**

There is traditionally little to no travel required. If the placement office would like the participant to travel as part of the assignment, they must fund the travel.

### **Does the fellow have to be located in Washington, D.C.?**

The placement work assignment will be located in Washington, D.C. Should an agency nominate candidates from outside of the Washington, D.C. area, the agency and candidate will identify an agreement for expenses associated with travel and relocation expenses if the candidate is selected for the program.

### **Is this a Candidate Development Program (CDP)?**

No. This is a developmental placement.

### **Does the placement qualify as a CDP developmental assignment?**

No. The placement assignment is non-supervisory.

### **Will the fellow's position be executive level?**

The White House Leadership Development Program placements are meant to build a foundation for enterprise leadership, giving a fellow experience working on cross-agency initiatives at a larger scale and outside of their agency perspective. The fellow is often one of the only full-time people to work on the cross-agency initiative and is not in a traditional leadership role with clear authority. Additionally, many of the positions are housed in small teams that do not have support staff. Fellows work all aspects of the program to drive the mission and are not set up to be in a traditional chain of command leadership position.



If a fellow is using the program as their placement for a CDP, the fellow's position must be executive level. Typically, positions are at the GS-15 level and may not meet CDP requirements. However, each placement provides significant exposure to senior leaders, the ability to learn and apply new organizational performance tools, and the opportunity to engage in high-level work on a large cross-agency scale. Fellows have the ability to help craft their positions and identify ways to add vision, value, and leadership to complex, cross-agency challenges, and the experience and type of work are largely fellow-driven.

### **Will fellows be promoted as a result of this program?**

This program does not guarantee promotion or entry into the SES or any other position. However, it provides development and experience that may help the fellow obtain such a position in the future.

### **What will happen to the fellow's home position while on placement?**

The WHLDP is a non-reimbursable developmental placement. As such, the fellow will retain their position at their home agency and will be allowed to return to that position at the conclusion of the placement. However, nothing prevents the fellow from assuming a different position following the program placement should the fellow seek out such an opportunity or the agency engage in a structured talent development plan with the fellow.

### **Is a security clearance required?**

Fellows do not need to possess a certain clearance level for this program. Should a clearance become necessary, agencies will be alerted to this change before formal nominations are due.





## Who will conduct the fellow's performance review?

The fellow's home agency supervisor will conduct formal performance reviews, but the placement assignment supervisor will provide feedback to the fellow's home agency supervisor and will work with the fellow to create a performance plan based on the placement assignment. The placement assignment supervisor will also provide feedback to inform the final performance review at the end of the placement.

## What happens if the placement is not a good fit for the fellow?

The WHLDP program director will meet regularly with fellows to check in on their progress and fit with the developmental and placement pieces of the program. The director will also receive feedback from placement assignment supervisors. Should the placement assignment not be a good fit for the fellow, the program director will work to identify a new placement assignment.

## What if the fellow cannot complete the program for personal or work reasons?

Should the fellow be unable to complete the program for personal or professional reasons, the fellow must notify the program director as soon as possible. The program director will work with the fellow and placement supervisor to ensure that any work with which the fellow was involved is transitioned and that necessary stakeholders are briefed on the status of the project. The fellow's slot will not be refilled mid-program.

## APPENDIX B: ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES

All candidates are expected to be high-performing employees (i.e., annual ratings of "exceeds expectations" or equivalent) with a demonstrated commitment to public service. Candidates must also have an interest in stepping outside their current function to develop an enterprise viewpoint of government and a willingness to take on a variety of roles and work to further the mission of the placement assignments.

The list below provides insight into some of the attributes that contribute to a successful experience. Agencies should consider this list when selecting candidates for the WHLDP.

### Service-Oriented

Candidates should have a clear desire to serve in the Federal Government and a commitment to public service. Candidates should demonstrate interest in developing leadership skills to better serve their agency as they move into positions of increasing responsibility.



### **Committed to Growth**

Candidates should demonstrate interest in developing leadership skills to better serve their agency as they move into positions of increasing responsibility. Candidates should also demonstrate a curiosity and humility towards their own growth and development.

### **Adaptable**

Candidates should be comfortable working in unfamiliar and ambiguous situations, adapt quickly to new environments and cultures, and be able to work on projects without clear structure and direction.

### **Collaborative**

Candidates should believe the government can and should work collaboratively. Candidates should have experience working on a project or program that requires coordination across multiple groups.

### **Strong Communicator**

Candidates should possess strong written and oral communications skills. They should be able to write and talk about complex programs and information in succinct and effective briefings. Candidates should be able to communicate with a variety of audiences and team members, including soliciting perspectives and feedback from a diverse set of stakeholders.

### **Change Maker**

Candidates should be able to build and communicate a vision of success and engage relevant stakeholders to ensure they are invested in priority goals and outcomes. Candidates should possess the ability to translate vision into action.



## **Community Builder**

WHLDP will require the candidate to foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders, demonstrate a commitment to building networks, and collaborate across boundaries to build strategic relationships and achieve common goals.

## **Strategic Planner**

Candidates should be able to understand program objectives and implement long- and short-term plans consistent with organizational, individual, and team goals.

## **Politically Aware**

Candidates should be able to identify internal and external politics that affect organizations achieving program outcomes and should be able to react accordingly.

## **Motivated**

Candidates should be self-starters able to identify paths and projects that add value to the placement assignment, especially in the absence of a formal structure. They should be able to position the project for future success by identifying new opportunities and developing or improving programs, products, and services.

## **Solution-Focused**

Candidates should be able to identify challenges and problems that may negatively impact organization outcomes and identify and implement alternative solutions while taking calculated risks to accomplish project objectives.

## **Resilient**

Candidates should be able to focus on achieving objectives even in difficult circumstances, remain positive, monitor their own emotional reactions, overcome obstacles, sustain high levels of energy following a setback, and withstand criticism while maintaining composure.

## **Agile**

Candidates should be able to think on their feet, respond positively and quickly to unexpected events and demands, and adapt to achieve objectives in changing conditions, new information, or unexpected problems.

## **Team Player**

Candidates should be willing to integrate into a small team, take on any task needed to move the project forward (“no task is too small” philosophy), lead through collaboration, step outside of the traditional chain of command roles to find innovative ways to lead, and be friendly, approachable, and trustworthy.



## APPENDIX C: ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The following roles and responsibilities are provided as a guide for nominating agencies, candidates, and placement teams. Further information on roles and responsibilities will be provided to those candidates who ultimately enter the program.

During the program year, fellows will be expected to work on their placement assignment full-time, except for the time devoted to developmental programming. To obtain maximum benefit from the program, the expectations are as follows:

### Fellow

- » Transition home agency work to designated staff and ensure continuity
- » Prepare for the program by researching their placement assignment
- » Participate and engage in all aspects of the program
- » Attend all scheduled development sessions in their entirety
- » Craft an Individual Development Plan (IDP) at the start of the program
- » Make time for reflective thinking on personal and professional experiences throughout the year to unveil new discoveries, understandings, and insight into their leadership style and goals
- » Support the selection process for the next cohort
- » Expand networks and build new relationships
- » Share learnings with cohort members
- » Maintain an open mind to diverse perspectives and new areas of learning
- » Provide ongoing, constructive feedback to the program
- » Participate in leadership assessments
- » Schedule regular check-in meetings with their home agency supervisor to provide progress updates and comply with requirements regarding time and attendance
- » Following program completion, join and participate in the WHLDP Alumni Network
- » Serve as a mentor to future cohorts of WHLDP fellows



## Nominating Agency

- » Manage an equitable internal agency selection process that upholds DEIA best practices
- » Nominate up to six, high-quality candidates for consideration to the program
- » Obtain deputy secretary approval for each candidate
- » Communicate to candidates and supervisors the potential time commitment required to participate in the selection process
- » Consent to allowing the individual to participate in the program if selected and to return to the home agency once the program is complete
- » Continue to pay the salary and benefits of any agency candidate selected into the program
- » Ensure there is a point of contact for the program to provide information and other communications to the home agency
- » Allow time for transitioning the fellow's workload to another employee
- » Identify opportunities for fellows to remain connected to their team during their program year
- » Assign a mentor or executive coach (outside the supervisory chain) to the fellow who can help facilitate introductions to other agency executives, engage senior leadership, and help ensure the fellow has a touchpoint and stays visible at the home agency
- » Facilitate meetings between the fellow and agency deputy secretary or other senior leaders as appropriate to discuss the placement assignment and benefits of the experience
- » With input from appropriate agency points of contact, work with the fellow to craft a re-entry plan at least two months prior to completion of the program year Support the fellow's transition back to the home agency upon completion of the placement.
- » To the extent feasible, find new opportunities within the agency for the fellow to leverage their experience gained as a WHLDP fellow to best support the agency mission

## Placement Office

- » Craft a position description for the placement assignment that lays out broad duties and projects, including areas where the fellow can take a leadership role on key projects
- » Participate in the review of candidate application packages and Phase 2 interviews in the selection process
- » Process the incoming fellow's MOU and security clearance
- » Provide a workspace, computer, phone, building access, or any necessary tools to successfully work and onboard





- » Determine a mutually agreeable work schedule and flexibilities
- » Provide a positive onboarding experience to support the success of the fellow; introduce the fellow to the cross-agency project team
- » Provide background materials regarding the project assignment to fellow
- » Establish concrete objectives for the fellow and work with WHLDP and fellow to complete project scope documents
- » Protect the fellow's development session time commitment
- » Provide work to the fellow that is GS-15 level or higher and identify stretch opportunities to provide experience and exposure for the fellow
- » Provide feedback to the program and the fellow's home agency

## **APPENDIX D: SAMPLE AGENCY NOMINATION LETTER**

On behalf of [agency name], it is my pleasure to nominate [candidate's name or names, if multiple candidates] to the White House Leadership Development Program.

I recognize that the WHLDP provides a unique opportunity for [candidate's name or names] to gain insight that leaders need in order to address mission-critical challenges with a broad cross-agency perspective. [Candidate's name or names] has demonstrated exceptional promise as a future leader and [agency name] is committed to their continued growth and development.

[Candidate's Name] possesses the requisite experience and traits to be an asset to the placement program as well as the motivation to develop the necessary skill sets to take on future leadership positions. Thank you for your consideration of their selection into the program.

Sincerely,

[Nominating Official]

Deputy Secretary [Position Title]

[Agency Name]



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