

# Council of Federal Executive Secretariats Member Survey

March 14, 2012

Number of recipients: 191

Number of responses: 52

Response rate: 27%

Opted out: 2

Responses received from: departments of Agriculture, Corrections, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Federal Aviation Administration; Food and Drug Administration; General Services Administration; Internal Revenue Service; Millennium Challenge Corporation; National Counterterrorism Center; National Institutes of Health; National Labor Relations Board; National Transportation Safety Board; Small Business Administration; Social Security Administration; U.S. Agency for International Development; and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

## 1. How often have you attended Council meetings?

	almost always	4-6 times	once or twice	never	total
2011	13 (25%)	10 (19%)	18 (35%)	11 (21%)	52
2010	9 (21%)	12 (27%)	14 (32%)	9 (20%)	44
2009	10 (25%)	9 (23%)	5 (12%)	16 (40%)	40
Before '09	8 (21%)	5 (13%)	4 (11%)	21 (55%)	38

## 2. Please rate the quality of Council meetings and the meeting components. 1 is low; 5 is high.

	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Meet and greet	0	4 (8%)	11 (24%)	16 (35%)	15 (33%)	46
Continental breakfast	5 (10%)	4 (9%)	9 (20%)	11 (25%)	15 (34%)	44
Host welcome	0	3 (6%)	9 (20%)	12 (27%)	21 (47%)	45
Special speaker from host	0	0	8 (18%)	14 (30%)	24 (52%)	46
Breaks	3 (7%)	4 (9%)	7 (15%)	9 (20%)	22 (49%)	45
Best Practice	1 (2%)	3 (7%)	7 (15%)	13 (28%)	22 (48%)	46
White House update	0	5 (11%)	6 (14%)	13 (30%)	20 (45%)	44
Council meetings overall	0	2 (4%)	8 (17%)	15 (32%)	22 (47%)	47

## 3. Why do you attend the Council meetings? If you do not attend meetings, why not? (49 responses)

To meet counter parts at different agencies and develop contacts for better inter agency coordination when necessary.

When I was hired as the ONC ExecSec, It was recommended by my supervisor that I attend. It was an good opportunity to network and better understand the process.

To keep current on OES processes, challenges, and practices.

information

I find the meetings very valuable and am pleased to see that the group has become more formally organized. My office schedule makes it difficult to get to the meetings. Many common issues can be discussed and

managed by the communication that takes place at meetings. Raises the quality of the work and responsibilities by the Exec Sec offices.

To hear relevant best practices and to discuss issues that each agency wrestle with in performing the mission of the Executive Secretary.

To learn and share ideas.

It's nice to keep up the link between the WH and Exec Sec offices--great channel for information sharing. Share information and to find differences in operational procedures relevant to what OES is doing.

Maintain existing relationships with my counterparts at the other Agencies.

The sharing of information and camaraderie. I don't attend regularly because of other commitments.

Networking with peers, new ideas from best practices, general education about various Federal agencies other than my own

My Deputy is the Department's representative to the Council.

To obtain information as to how the Executive Secretariat operate within the different government agencies.

I have not been able to attend yet due to my schedule.

I find the networking outstanding and sharing best practices really superb.

For networking and to get a better understanding of other ExecSecs. This is not only assist my Exec Sec, but to further enhance ExecSec's across the Federal Gov't.

Gain insight on how to address issues that impact ExecSecs across departments/agencies. Establish interagency contacts.

I like to attend to get a big picture of the government and what exec secs do, to meet people, and to hear an interesting presentation.

To collaborate with other agencies

I attend the Council meetings for the networking and information sharing, sharing of best practices.

To help develop my Executive Secretariat program, gain ideas on best practices, and establish contacts.

I think I will be attending some meetings because I was named to the Plain Writing Committee (the name of the committee is something akin to that)

I have not been able to attend the Council meetings due to office schedule demands. However, I really depend on the information that is shared after the meetings.

To share experiences and practices. To learn from others.

To stay abreast of developments in the Execsec community; discuss best practices; network with staff from other agencies; and learn about the functions of other agencies because our office needs to transfer many letters.

To network with others; learn how other agencies handle correspondence; & best practices.

the biggest benefit is to share and discuss a best practice, second to that would be the networking. I pick and choose which meeting to attend based on the agenda. As a Deputy ES, my time is limited so I can't attend every meeting.

Good to connect with other ExecSecs, useful info. Miss most of them due to press of business.

I attend because I am new to the Exec Sec world (1.5 years in) and I like the industry info and standards shared, and being able to share with my office anything I have learned or interesting info

I find the information at the meetings useful -- but I send a staff member most months now because she reports the great info to me and I don't have to take the morning off to attend.

Distance to diverse sites is sometimes prohibitive.

The meetings are very informative. They are an opportunity to meet your counterparts from other federal agencies and to discuss best practices and get different viewpoints on topics that we all basically deal with.

It is also a great networking tool.

I attend to represent my agency.

Our Senior Operations Meeting conflicts with the schedule.

Information Sharing of all Exec Secs

I attend the Council meeting to learn about best practices and to learn/develop better methods of communication/collaboration with other Federal Executive Secretariats and the White House.

To stay up to date; meet counterparts.

I am the Executive Secretary at my Department. I felt the meetings were not attended by the right-level of people. There was no real action items or agenda from one meeting to the next. It became a monthly social club.

To network with federal colleagues. To learn about how they use their Exec Sec offices and tools to manage and communicate with their staff and track correspondence.

When I don't attend, it's always due to workload and scheduling conflicts.

I attend to have a better understanding and communication with the process of other agencies.

Hoping to achieve synergies among federal partners; get information regarding WH taskings to my Department; and get new ideas for best practices.

Wish I had the time to do so but it is extremely difficult to get out of the office.

They are very informative. It helps to hear how other agencies handle the same challenges we face at SSA.

I try to keep up with what changes and best practices other Federal Exec Secs are doing.

To receive and give information to make the work process and atmosphere of Exec Sec Ofc. become a better place to work. Also to enhance customer service.

The meetings are informative and very helpful to my work. Issues are relevant and decisions are meaningful to the Federal government as a whole.

To gain insight and network of other agencies best practices and process.

#### **4. What should be the function of the Council? (41 responses)**

To help its members learn about the workings of their counterparts so coordination becomes easier.

Educate its participants on expectations and processes of the position. Serve as a support group for new comers to the office, and update on current policy changes that affect the work we do. I would like for all ExecSec divisions to work with a singular voice and cut duplication of efforts across the government. Create a forum where questions can be asked as to best practices.

To provide a mutually supportive environment for problem-solving and for keeping current on new trends and practices.

It should serve as an advisory group which provides recommendations and guidance.

Information sharing.

Best practices, inter agency communication, other shared info.

A cross-agency correspondence tracking system would be great

Does not appear that the Council has established any documented procedures for anything. Even when it is decided at the Council meeting to do it "this way," the Agencies still revert back to how its process.

We can discuss and provide guidance, but we cannot write or enforce policies

The Council can't establish policies for departments/agencies. It can be a forum for interagency discussion, drafting SOPS that departments/agencies can use or tailor as they see fit, etc.

Not sure.

I don't believe that I have enough information to comment.

Provide guidance, examples, best practices; not policies -- we are all set up differently

style (GPO? AP? other?);

1. share best practices 2. networking opportunity 3. place to go for answers to Execsec questions (i.e., "Can anyone recommend a good tracking system?")

The Council should be a forum to share best practices.

It should be a resource for all who perform like functions to share information, best practices and provide great ideas on moving government forward to work smarter.

Discuss best practices and networking

To discuss best practices, etc.

Information Sharing and updates

The Fed Exec Sec Council should be like the Fed CIO Council. It should help tackle challenges across the interagency.

A networking body for information sharing across agencies.

Sharing information and best practices, both related to the work Executive Secretariats do, but also career development opportunities and networking.

The primary function should be to share information and best practices

Information sharing; building networks and common practices; build relationships with colleagues, learn more about other departments.

To empower those in Exec Secs with tools that can make their Agency better, as well as, create a likeness or conformity in Exec Secs across Federal Government.

To share best practices and to develop better methods of communication/collaboration between Federal Executive Secretariats and the White House. The Council should establish interagency correspondence policies and procedures.

The function of the Council should be to establish and govern interagency correspondence policies and procedures.

Give direction, communicate, lessons learned.

To assist other agencies with issues, procedures and process of day to day events, good or bad.

The function should be to help streamline processes/functions to work more efficiently within each agency.

To collaborate on Excesses Functions and process to assist each other ensuring that we have a cycle of flow especially as we coordinate on tasks from higher echelons within the Gov't.

**5. The Council's role in establishing interagency correspondence policies and procedures should be:**

More Active 25 (62%)

Less Active 1 (3%)

Status Quo 14 (35%)

Total 40

Skipped 12

Comments

Inter agency correspondence is a rarity, establishing set procedures may only make things more difficult. Instead we should promote flexibility and foster contacts so we are working collaboratively.

I understand status quo to be quite active -- establishing a standard procedure through consensus.

Not sure yet; I am new to the Council and still observing.

Not policies or procedures--but best practices and recommended guidelines (voluntary)

**6. What level of responsibility does your executive secretariat office have in ensuring compliance with the Plain Writing Act?**

High – My ES has lead responsibility for meeting all requirements set forth in the Act (writing reports, web page, training, etc.). 20 (38%)

Medium – My ES collaborates with the designated lead to revise templates, incorporate plain writing principles in a style guide, etc. 12 (23%)

Low – My ES involvement is limited to editing documents in accordance with plain writing principles. 11 (21%)

None – My ES has had no involvement. 6 (12%)

Don't know. 3 (6%)

**If you did not answer "High," which office is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Plain Writing Act?**

Do not know.

Office of Communications and Outreach

We are component office, the Departmental office has lead.

Bureau for Management

Public Affairs

Office of Public Affairs

Although our management policy office has the lead, ES was requested to provide a key member of the team.

In the Executive Office for U.S. Trustees, the Office for Planning and Evaluation oversees communications with the press and public.

Our Exec Sec does not do the actually writing of correspondence.

Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Executive Secretariat

**7. How knowledgeable are you about the requirements of the Plain Writing Act and the resources available to federal agencies to implement them? 5 indicates very knowledgeable; 1 indicates no knowledge.**

5	15 (29%)
4	14 (27%)
3	11 (21%)
2	11 (21%)
1	1 (2%)
Total	52

**What kind of plain writing information sharing would be most useful to you? (e.g., training resources, more information on the council's website, presentations or announcements at council meetings, etc. )**

website resources

training resources and examples

Best practices in selling PL practices to writers.

all of the above

More training resources, more information on the council's website, presentations, etc.

presentations at meetings

Plain writing of technical reports and documentation of agencies' scientific work.

All of the above.

training resources

More information on the Council's Website

training resources

training resources

Training resources and presentations would be very useful.

All

Training resources and presentations and updates at Council meetings

Training resources; guidance on how to launch plain writing activities in my agency and suggestions for innovative activities.

short presentations at council meetings

information on the Council's website.

training resources, presentations

Resources on the Council's website

all of the above

### 8. What best describes your organization?

Department	21 (40%)
Sub-agency	16 (31%)
Stand-alone agency	13 (25%)
Board/Commission	2 (4%)

### 9. What is your position at your organization?

Director	17 (33%)
Deputy Director	6 (12%)
Assistant/associate director	8 (15%)
Team leader	9 (17%)
Team member	12 (23%)

#### Comments

Project Manager

Branch Chief

Manager

Writer-Editor

Director of component within our ES

Senior Executive Analyst

Interagency Coordinator

Executive Secretary

Management and Program Analyst

Supervisor of Operations

Executive Secretary

Superv. Correspondence Analyst

Deputy ExecSec for NCTC

### 10. Other comments you would like to share. (19 responses)

I think the Council should focus less on developing set procedures and instead work to educate its members on the roles and responsibilities our agencies in the Federal family. Also to discuss the different roles each Exec. Sec. is responsible for. Every agency has its own unique idiosyncrasies that can be difficult for people outside the agency to understand. I believe it would be usefully for the council members to better understand those.

The council should consider a workshop or lunch and learn for members new to the executive secretariat process and offer a mentoring program.

As stated above, I have been pleased to see the progress of this group since I have been involved beginning around 2001. It provides an opportunity to connect with other agency Exec Sec colleagues and compare notes on the many issues faced by the Exec Sec office responsibilities. I was pleased to host meetings both during my time at HHS and again at DOT. I am hoping to be able to participate again.

I find the meetings of great value. I hope to be able to attend more when our Executive Secretary can not make it. I hope we can have a representative at every meeting.

I checked "3" on the speaker question because I don't consider it the best use of my time to learn about, for example, prosthetics -- as I did at my first Council meeting in 2006. I much prefer the meetings in which subjects are covered that directly relate to my job, such as the meeting on the tracking system in 2011. I attended that meeting because of the subject matter. Eric, you are doing a great job and are taking the position of President to a higher level -- much appreciated.

Great Job!

Look forward to collaborating with newer agencies in 2012

The discussions tend to repeat themselves when new members attend meeting.

More of the Council meeting should be devoted to the Best Practice session and less to the host agency speaker. These speakers often talk at great length about things that have nothing to do with the work of the Council members.

I haven't been to many meetings, so maybe you do this already. Maybe at each meeting the host exec sec could give us a brief snapshot of their office: staff size; how many analysts, editors, writers, admin people; how many are feds or appointees; a short list of what they do besides correspondence (such as FOIAs, briefing books, White House report, anything else). Just a thought.

I feel like my answers have not been very helpful and I do apologize for that, but I am a recent addition to the Committee and haven't been sufficiently involved to give very insightful responses, I'm afraid.

I think the Council is doing an excellent job in staying active.

It is important for each agency representative or subagency representative should be able to vote or speak for his or her agency.

I wish we had not eliminated the continental breakfast. So that staff from the hosting agency wouldn't have to pay for refreshments from their own funds, a basket for free will offerings could be set out. I appreciate all the work that Council Chairs have done and are doing and that the committees are doing. I appreciate this opportunity to network with staff from other agencies and hear about best practices.

I don't wish to discourage staff level ES from attending the meetings, but until the Council attracts ES leadership level members, it is not going to be an effective player in the interagency ES community. We are off to a great start this year with Eric at the helm. Keep it up!

Committees are a great idea; should be where the work gets done. Wonder if there are other Federal Councils that have meetings and share best practices?

Do not shut out the people that accompany the ES or represent their agency. Most likely that person really knows the events of the ES office.

The Council is as good as its participants and their involvement; therefore, there should be more effort to encourage other departments/agencies to participate.

I think having the Council is a great tool for this unique group of supporter who is vital to its Department or Agency's Mission.