

# Senior Accountable Official

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**Organisation:** U.S. Executive Office of the President/Office of Management and Budget

**Country:** United States

**Level of government:** Central government

**Sector:** General public services

**Type:** Methods, Organisational Design, Public Service

**Launched in:** 2014

**Overall development time:** 2 year(s)

**Link to the innovation's website**

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# Description

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Publicly naming a "senior accountable official" who is responsible for accomplishing a task has changed the way the U.S. President has accomplished his management agenda. Previously, agencies or positions were tasked, but that led to a lack of ownership. When a civil servant, regardless of political or career status, is named personally as the person responsible, it elevates the effort. By naming an individual, it removes the danger of nobody being accountable because every thought someone else was responsible. Depending on the task, the Presidents initiatives have been led by confirmed political leaders (such as agency heads working on cross-agency priorities like reducing homelessness), career leaders to strengthen employee engagement, senior executives to reform the senior executive cadre or technical experts to improve diversity or improve environmental sustainability. Initiatives using this model have demonstrated exponential success.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- In a large bureaucracy, it is easy to think it I someone else's job or hide behind the organization when the mission is not accomplished. By naming a specific person, that individual had the incentive and the accountability to lead. Additionally, it is clear to the staff that a particular person is in charge of the efforts.
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## Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality

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## Main beneficiaries

Government bodies, Government staff

# Results

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## Efficiency

- By naming a person, the steps of identifying ownership and responsibility are removed.
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## Effectiveness

- With the increased accountability, more attention is paid to the initiatives by the higher ranking officials.

# Development

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## Design

The idea was evolutionary at the Office of Management and Budget as staff analyzed what methods worked throughout the course of the Presidential Administration.

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## Testing

- With each new initiative, OMB required more specificity of who was accountable. What started with Departments shifted to Senior Leadership and eventually one key person at each agency.
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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- Specific wording in the White House memos and listing on public websites, as appropriate.

### Resources used:

- Staff are required to identify the appropriate senior accountable officials and maintain relationships with the the correct people.
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## Diffusion

- Accountability is a constant to all levels of government globally. With a small modification of making accountability personal, it removes a well-known barrier. This is a method that can work universally.
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## Challenges and solutions

- The greatest challenge is finding the correct person who has both the rank in the agency and the expertise. If the same person is named too many times it is not feasible that person will be accountable for all of the initiatives. However, if the identified person is not a high enough rank, the person will not be able to represent the agency. The solution was to require a senior person to identify the correct person and formally delegate the responsibility to the person, but the senior person maintains final accountability.
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# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- How to increase accountability without adding compliance or bureaucracy.
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## Conditions for success

- Senior leadership needs to be willing to be transparent about program ownership and to hold the named people accountable.
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## Other information

While it seems small because it didn't involve huge investments or pilots, oftentimes the small changes nudge people the correct way and accomplish more effective governing.

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