



BEST PLACES TO WORK IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT®

FOSTERING DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

59.9

2019
GOVERNMENT-WIDE SCORE

The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® Support for Diversity category measures the extent to which employees believe that the actions and policies of leadership and management promote and respect diversity.

Corresponding Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Questions

- My supervisor is committed to a workforce representative of all segments of society. (Q. 45)
- Policies and programs promote diversity in the workplace (for example, recruiting minorities and women, training in awareness of diversity issues, mentoring). (Q. 34)
- Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds. (Q. 55)

Diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace leads to more engaged employees and better agency outcomes. Yet, with a government-wide “Support for Diversity” category score of just 59.9 out of 100, it’s an area where agencies can improve. Based on our research and discussions with agency leaders, the Partnership for Public Service and Boston Consulting Group have identified interventions that agencies can take to improve diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, even as employees telework due to COVID-19.

EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS



Increase knowledge about diversity, equity and inclusion across the organization

Before an agency can develop a culture where diversity, equity and inclusion thrive, employees must understand what the concepts mean and why they matter. Top-performing agencies educate their employees about what diversity, equity and inclusion look like in practice, obstacles that can stand in the way and why the concepts are critical to mission success.

Agency Example

When the Coast Guard developed a plan in 2019 to make its workplace more diverse and inclusive, it started with the basics. Recognizing that the principles of DE&I may not be common knowledge, the Coast Guard began with an education and awareness program that includes training and certifying more than 125 employees to fan out across the agency and serve as “change agents.” Responsibilities for these change agents include coaching staff, facilitating small-group dialogues about DE&I where participants are encouraged to ask whatever questions they have without shame or embarrassment, and teaching courses on topics that include privilege, microaggressions and discrimination.

“Too often in government, knowledge-building is equated with cultural potlucks, monthly observances and, at worst, events like ‘Taco Tuesday,’” said Miguel Joey Avilés, the Coast Guard’s chief of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. “At the Coast Guard, we’re doing it differently. We’re professionalizing DE&I.”



Demonstrate leadership commitment and hold leaders at all levels accountable

Building a healthy organization that embraces diversity, equity and inclusion requires robust support from leadership. This means ensuring that DE&I offices are well-funded and staffed, regularly speaking out about the importance of DE&I, and equipping leaders at all levels with the tools they need to meet their organization’s diversity, equity and inclusion goals while holding them accountable for doing so.

Agency Examples

At the Government Accountability Office, the perennially top-scoring midsize agency in the Best Places to Work “Support for Diversity” category, DE&I objectives are codified in the strategic plan. At the Farm Credit Administration, the leading small-size agency in the “Support for Diversity” category, all employees are required to include DE&I goals in their performance plans, and the agency’s busy executives not only preach the importance of DE&I, but regularly participate in programming alongside staff. And at the Coast Guard, leadership recently invested in two comprehensive studies aimed at improving how the agency recruits and retains women and underrepresented minorities, part of its data and evidence-driven approach to improving diversity, equity and inclusion.



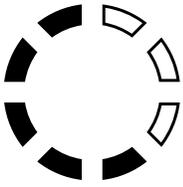
Empower employees to build a diverse and inclusive workplace, and advocate for their needs

Employees should have an opportunity to express their views on how their agency pursues diversity, equity and inclusion, and feel comfortable speaking up if their agency falls short. Some top-performing agencies have vibrant affinity groups – associations based on a common demographic trait like sexual orientation, ethnicity or veteran status. Affinity group meetings can provide a safe space for employees to propose new ideas and share their concerns while contributing to a more supportive and nurturing workplace.

Agency Examples

The Farm Credit Administration has seven affinity groups (called Special Emphasis Programs) that play an integral role in strengthening diversity and inclusion across the agency. Groups include the Federal Women’s Program, the Hispanic Employment Program, Blacks in Government, Pride, Veterans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and the Disability Program. The agency’s affinity groups typically meet monthly. Sometimes, groups invite outside guests to their meetings to train their members – for example, on how to communicate more effectively. Other times, meetings are spent discussing hot button issues at the agency. FCA’s director of Equal Employment Opportunity and Inclusion oversees the groups and meets with their managers at least once a quarter. These are good opportunities for the Special Emphasis Programs managers to convey any concerns their members have raised and to share their ideas to make the agency a more diverse, equitable and inclusive place to work.

“The creativity of the Special Emphasis Groups and the value their members get from coming together and generating new ideas is really terrific,” said Thais Burlew, FCA’s director of Equal Employment Opportunity. “Get everyone in your organization involved, give them the autonomy to come up with their own ideas, and let people show you what they can do.”



Think holistically

The most advanced agencies adopt a hire-to-rotate approach to diversity, equity and inclusion, focusing on the entire lifecycle of their employees. That means recruiting a diverse group of employees, onboarding them, providing robust and holistic developmental opportunities, and retaining them. The benefits to agencies are wide-ranging: a recent BCG study found that organizations with diverse leadership teams are more innovative.¹

Agency Examples

Agencies should recruit from diverse pools of talent, including minority-serving colleges and universities. The Farm Credit Administration and members of its Special Emphasis Programs make regular visits to these schools and share job announcements with on-campus contacts. FCA also has made a concerted effort to retain a diverse workforce. To make the agency a more appealing place to work for its younger employees and women, FCA recently began to grant 80 hours of additional leave to all new parents. Agencies also should provide developmental opportunities that prepare employees from underrepresented groups for leadership positions. Mentoring and coaching programs are one approach.

“Employees often tell us that having someone to talk to about professional development who is in a higher-level position and looks like them is extremely valuable,” said Zina Merritt, special assistant to the comptroller general for diversity and inclusion at the GAO. “The opportunity to share experiences with more senior-level colleagues about how they got where they are and the lessons they learned along the way makes our mentoring and coaching efforts a valuable part of our DE&I strategy.”

¹ <https://on.bcg.com/3dfhPpd>

Additional Resources

For more information about the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government rankings, see bestplacestowork.org.

For more information about the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government categories, including Support for Diversity, see bestplacestowork.org/analysis/categories.