



# Promising Practices for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce

As the Nation's largest employer, the Federal Government must be a model for promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). This commitment to DEIA is outlined in [Executive Order 14035](#) of June 25, 2021 (*Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce*): "the Federal Government must strengthen its ability to recruit, hire, develop, promote, and retain our Nation's talent and remove barriers to equal opportunity."<sup>1</sup>

By embracing DEIA, the Federal Government can best serve everyone in the workforce, as well as the American people. Institutions perform better and better serve their clients and customers when they are diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible. Robust DEIA initiatives build trust between employers and their workforces, improve decision-making and communication, and foster creativity.<sup>2</sup>

In line with this commitment to DEIA in E.O. 14035 and consistent with applicable law, Federal agencies have employed and continue to employ important DEIA initiatives and strategies that enhance employee experience, improve organizational health, advance their missions, and strengthen their workforces.<sup>3</sup> Agencies are encouraged to engage in these DEIA promising practices, including the following:

- **Chief Diversity Officers.** [Chief Diversity Officers](#) with the necessary resources and organizational influence to promote DEIA across the entire agency are critical to strengthening agency organizational health and advancing many of the promising practices highlighted here.
- **Data and DEIA Barriers.** Agencies are required to use data for [barrier analyses and EEO MD-715 reporting](#). In addition to this required use, agencies are also encouraged to make use of data, as

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<sup>1</sup> 86 Fed. Reg. 34593, 34593 (June 30, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Rana, Ritu, Effective Communication in a Diverse Workplace (February 27, 2013). International Journal of Enhanced Research in Management and Computer Applications Vol.2, Issue 2 (February 2013), Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2225761>.

<sup>3</sup> OMB Memorandum M-23-15, *Measuring, Monitoring, and Improving Organizational Health and Performance in the Context of Evolving Agency Work Environments*, outlines the steps agencies will take to ensure that agency decisions regarding work environments continue to improve organizational health and performance.

appropriate and consistent with applicable law, to better understand any obstacles to DEIA that may exist in their agencies. For instance, once a hiring process has ended, an agency should [use applicant flow data](#) to gain a better understanding of whether there are barriers at different stages of the hiring process. This and other data, such as [OPM's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey](#) and focus groups of agency employees, can inform agencies as they seek to obtain a more detailed understanding of potential barriers and interventions to consider in all phases of the employment cycle.

- **Targeted Recruitment and Outreach.** Agencies are encouraged to engage in diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible outreach to a wide variety of institutions of higher education, including Minority Serving Institutions, community colleges, and other educational institutions that draw a high percentage of their student populations from underserved communities, including first generation students.<sup>4</sup> Agencies are also encouraged to engage in outreach to programs such as Job Corps and Registered Apprenticeship programs that provide participants with important skills for the Federal workforce. Such recruitment and outreach efforts are likely to broaden the pool of applicants, enabling agencies to select the best possible talent.
- **Internships, Apprenticeships, and Fellowships.** [Internships, apprenticeships, and fellowship programs](#) that are open to all can help bring diverse talent into agencies. Such programs may be a good opportunity to recruit qualified candidates from underserved communities who may not otherwise learn about opportunities in the Federal Government. In particular, providing paid internships helps ensure these opportunities are accessible to the broadest set of students. Participant selection should be based on a comprehensive evaluation that looks at the breadth of an applicant's skill, abilities, and experience, in accordance with all relevant laws.
- **Job Postings and Position Descriptions.** Inclusive language in job postings can demonstrate the integrated nature of DEIA principles as they relate to the major duties and objectives of the job and the measurement of work outcomes and performance objectives.
- **Interview Process.** Because interviews are often applicants' first personal experiences with a potential employer, they can set the tone for a culture of inclusion and belonging. Agencies are encouraged to select potential interviewers from a broad and diverse interviewer pool. In addition, agencies should consider standardized questions and [structured interviews](#), which

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<sup>4</sup> E.O. 14035 defines underserved communities as referring to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, who have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. In the context of the Federal workforce, this term includes individuals who belong to communities of color, such as Black and African American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, Alaska Native and Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and North African persons. It also includes individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming, and non-binary (LGBTQ+) persons); persons who face discrimination based on pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions; parents; and caregivers. It also includes individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on their religion or disability; first-generation professionals or first-generation college students; individuals with limited English proficiency; immigrants; individuals who belong to communities that may face employment barriers based on older age or former incarceration; persons who live in rural areas; veterans and military spouses; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty, discrimination, or inequality. Individuals may belong to more than one underserved community and face intersecting barriers.  
E.O. 14035 § 2(a), 86 Fed. Reg. at 34594.

have been shown to promote a focus on job-related criteria and reduce bias in the interview process.

- **Hiring Authorities.** A variety of [appointing authorities](#) enable agencies to bring on talented individuals from underserved communities, including veterans, people with disabilities, and early career talent.
- **Workforce Flexibility Policies.** Consistent with applicable law and policy, agencies generally have discretion in managing their workforce and a range of flexibilities, like [alternative work schedules, telework, and remote work](#) that, when appropriately executed, can help broaden applicant pools and increase retention while promoting mission delivery.
- **Training Programs.** [Training programs](#) can help advance DEIA principles. Such topics could include inclusive and ethical leadership and decision-making, inclusive hiring practices, employee and customer experience, and inclusive communication—all of which can help create a workplace culture that relies on DEIA principles to maximize organizational efficiency and performance.
- **Employee Resource Groups.** Employee resource groups (ERGs) and affinity groups can foster a sense of inclusion and belonging in the workplace. Federal employees may form such groups around a shared identity, but they should be open to all employees, regardless of membership in a specific demographic group. Likewise, events that celebrate racial, cultural, or other aspects of employees' backgrounds (such as heritage month celebrations) can be valuable for building morale and shared understanding among employees and should be open to all employees.
- **Mentorship.** Mentorship relationships and programs aid employee retention by establishing an organizational culture that is attractive to top talent who may be seeking development and advancement opportunities. Agencies should encourage candidates and mentors participating in mentorship programs to provide regular feedback to program managers and encourage candidates to maintain an individual development plan.
- **Performance Management.** Performance standards should not include subjectivity or bias. Agencies are encouraged to identify the right performance appraisal strategy and evaluate diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility principles in performance plans that further goals and ensure accountability, fairness, and alignment with the agency mission.

The Federal Government is at its best when drawing upon all parts of society, and our greatest accomplishments are achieved when diverse and inclusive perspectives are brought to bear to overcome our greatest challenges. In developing, implementing, and measuring progress with respect to DEIA initiatives, agencies should review the [Governmentwide Strategic Plan for DEIA](#) and consult their general counsels. Additional resources available include access to an online learning community and weekly office hours, hosted by [OPM's Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility](#).