



Natural Resources Conservation Service
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SUBJECT: EOP - HOW TO IMPROVE DIVERSITY ON YOUR TEAM

Purpose: How to improve diversity in your workplace.

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Diversity is commonly thought of in terms of sex, race, nationality, etc., but we need to remember that diversity has many forms. We are diverse because of our background, work experience within our organization, with different organizations, our personality, where we have lived, our hobbies, and who we are. It is important to our organization that we have diversity. If we all thought the same and had the same ways of resolving issues, we wouldn't have the creative resolutions that we do. Because of our diversity we come up with different ideas and solutions that make NRCS a stronger organization. Following is an article on how we can improve diversity in our workforce.

Issue 9 (May 2003) of the Social Sciences Institute (SSI) newsletter, *People, Partnerships & Communities*, discusses how to improve diversity in the workforce. Why is diversity important? Aside from improving teamwork and creating new paths to conflict resolution; diversity is important to everyone in our agency because our customer base is changing and becoming more diverse. We need to diversify with them.

So what is diversity?

The dictionary uses terms like variety, multiform, and unlikeness to define diversity. It is all the subtle and obvious differences between human beings; everything from abilities, religious affiliation or not, ethnicity, and even eye color, height or noise tolerance level. These differences make us unique individuals; but they can make it challenging for people to work together. Some people have difficulty relating to people that are different from themselves. However; the rewards are great, to the individuals involved, as well as to the team.

One of the many reasons the SSI gives for the importance of diversity, is that it enhances creativity. Why is creativity important to us? Creativity allows room for brainstorming, differences of opinions and the possibility of previously unused or under utilized solutions to resource concerns. It requires us to be flexible, open-minded, and accepting of new ideas and ways of solving problems. Creativity grows where broader diversity exists.

We all benefit from diversity. Diversity broadens our minds and enhances our ability to perform our duties.

Why is Diversity Important?

The U.S. Bureau of the Census reports that the current minority population is 29.1% of the total population. That number is expected to increase to 40% in 19 years. An organization is perceived by people outside the organization. If the organization demonstrates that it values and encourages diversity it will be successful in attracting diverse members. Diverse groups often create many solutions to a problem. When this happens everyone feels as if they belong and trust among members grows; creating a sense of belonging and opening new opportunities for groups to work together and creatively solve problems.

What Strategies Enhance Diversity?

- First an organization must assess their board. Do they represent the community they serve?
- Provide resources on diversity to your team. Some sources include NRCS Special Emphasis Program Managers, videos (can be checked out from the State Office), civil rights committee members, and the Social Science Institute.
- Create new partnerships with groups that work specifically with underserved and minority populations
- Develop relationships with schools that have a diverse student body.
- Ask community members and leaders to be part of your organization or to assist you in recruitment of new & diverse members.
- Try new networking channels to reach a diverse audience (i.e. community based organizations newsletters, foreign language groups)
- Invite diverse speakers and presenters to your meetings and events.
- Share your experiences and success stories and talk to other organizations about their successes.

What Recruitment Strategies Can Be Used?

Recruitment and developing a diverse team can be challenging. It requires creativity and a willingness to explore new and sometimes uncharted alternatives. Perhaps that is why so many organizations back off and find excuses not to proceed with their diversity efforts. Here are some strategies to assist in finding the people you're looking for:

- Cultivate relationships with diverse communities
- Advertise in foreign-language media
- Utilize current staff to expand staff membership
- Provide a fact/tip sheet to all staff members on steps to recruiting
- Assign a person to be responsible for recruiting
- Recruit through interpersonal contacts
- Emphasize the "worthy cause" aspect of conservation to assist in recruitment
- Keep in mind higher education, professional ranks, and students are fertile recruitment sources

What Retention Strategies can be used?

Most people feel challenged when they can gain knowledge and develop new skills and /or share their past experiences to help solve community issues. This environment keeps them interested and motivated, which in turn increases retention.

When dealing with retention issues it important to have open communication. This facilitates feedback and allows team members to say what they like and do not like about the team environment as well as what they need in order to be a successful part of the team. Here are some strategies that can be used:

- Treat all members time as you treat your own
- Be well organized
- Be considerate
- Recognize, recognize, and recognize. Rewards do not have to be large, but people like to be appreciated
- Review goals and accomplishments
- Assign direct responsibilities

The full article from *People, Partnerships and Communities* can be found on the web at http://www.ssi.nrcs.usda.gov/publications/1_PPCs/PPC009_Diversity.pdf

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