

Retaining our diverse USGS workforce: A lifeboat to 2015

The Leadership Case for Diversity Action Learning Team, March 26, 2010

Jody Eimers, Mike Friedel, Pat Halseth, Ken Rice, with coaching from Jim Coleman

Race, ethnicity, gender, language, age, sexual orientation, religion, gender identification, socio-economic status, physical and mental ability, thinking styles, marital status, experience, education, science disciplines, and geographic location – our differences make USGS employees a robust and diverse population. The wide array of perspectives that results from our diversity underpins our scientific excellence, innovation, and success.

Several long-term actions are essential to build and maintain a diverse USGS workforce: retaining our current minority employees, expanding USGS minority recruitment, and supporting the Nation's minority science education. We have chosen in this assignment to explore a valuable first step -- to take immediate action to retain racial, ethnic, and gender minority employees. We believe the USGS should immediately begin four efforts to increase minority student retention. These efforts are to strengthen individual employee development plans, offer ability to provide other incentives to valued employees, make diversity an element of everyone's performance standards, and improve diversity training.

Individual Development Plans and Selected Career Development Opportunities

Individual Development Plans are an important means of expressing employees' aspirations and building consensus on career development. We believe these actions will contribute to employee satisfaction and, therefore, minority retention:

- We recommend that IDPs become mandatory, with annual review by both the employee and supervisor.
- IDPs should be maintained in an electronic database and their annual completion should be mandated, elevating them to the status of annual performance evaluations;
- IDPs should include elements such as temporary details, training, advanced education, mentoring, and career advancement planning;
- Develop an intranet "Craig's List" for listing of detail opportunities.

Other Incentives

Several other incentives may be effective in our effort to retain minority employees:

- We recommend that the process for obtaining retention bonuses becomes more streamlined and available for use;
- We suggest establishment of a competitive program for conversion of SCEP employees to permanent status whereby the ELT provides matching funds for 3 years for 1 employee per year;

Improve Diversity Training

Develop a new 4-hour diversity training course for the USGS that:

- Explicitly acknowledges the fears many of us have that by focusing on diversity, the USGS will compromise the quality of our science;
- Educates us about successes and failures of others' efforts to increase employee diversity;
- Presents vignettes that demonstrate experiences of USGS minority employees;
- Motivates us to view diversity as being in our self-interest and "the right way to go".

ELT Buy-In

Successful diversity policy in other Federal agencies show that:

- Buy-in and commitment from our Executive Leadership Team is the most important aspect of diversity management;
- It's important that diversity be mentioned explicitly in our strategic science plan, even if it's only one or two sentences.

In addition:

- Each ELT member could mentor a minority employee
- Each supervisor should have diversity action goal in their performance plan.

USGS science depends on the people who make up the USGS. It makes sense for us to draw the best of the best from all segments of the population. How we set priorities for future science is influenced by our backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge. Our partners' choice of which agency, university or NGO to work with is influenced by the diversity of our workforce; how much we look like our stakeholders. To thoughtfully and thoroughly address the needs of all employees and the American public we serve, we must truly resemble the American public in race, gender, and ethnicity. What if the USGS were to take these four steps to retain minority employees?

Retaining our Diverse USGS workforce: A lifeboat to 2015

Note: as other agencies are mentioned...extra from audience waves...Employee 1 wears a blue hat.

Introduction: Good morning....I and the rest of my colleagues with the able assistance of Jim Coleman. We worked on the leadership case for diversity. At this point, I invite each team member to introduce themselves. ((Set up that we are only working with the retention problem). We are going to discuss this issue using a story...we have asked several members of the audience to assist us..and you will notice the hats.

Narrator: The SS DOI has been sailing the ocean blue for more than 100 years. Recently, deferred maintenance caught up with the ship and it sank on today's voyage, scattering Bureau lifeboats across the ocean. Several employees and their leader from the ELT have made their way to the USGS lifeboat...join us now...we are all in this together...

ELT: Ok we need a plan to get to safety. A strategic plan. Let's see...we need a mission, a direction, a time line. Our mission is to get this boat to land!!

Employee 1: Let's add to the mission that we ALL get there together...not just the boat!!

ELT: Excellent idea!! USGS is known for putting its people first.

Narrator: Having diversity as an integral part of an organization's strategic plan was listed as one of the leading diversity management practices in a review of government agencies by the GAO.

Employee 2: I don't think this boat will ever make it to safety...in the distance, I can see the Office of Surface Mining boat and it looks much more seaworthy.

ELT: Wait...wait! Let's sit here and discuss a plan...made just for you that makes you feel safe. We don't want to lose your talents and expertise. We need every one of you to move us forward.

Narrator: Opportunities for professional development and training are important reasons why employees choose to stay with an organization. In USGS, these are incorporated into the Individual Development Plan. We recommend that these become mandatory, with annual review by both the employee and supervisor. Further, IDP's should be electronic and monitored similar to Performance Plans. In the plan, retention strategies could include temporary details, training, advanced education, mentoring, and career advancement planning. We also suggest development of an intranet "Craig's List" for listing of detail opportunities.

Employee 2: Thanks...but the National Park Service boat just came into view and it looks like a great party is going on...I'm going over there.

ELT: Wait...if you stay, I will personally work with you to make sure you feel safe and I will assign "Blue Hat" to watch over you and insure your safety during our voyage.

Narrator: We recommend that all ELT members become mentors to minority employees and that they insure that supervisors have diversity action goals in their performance plan.

Employee 3: I'm gone!! The Bureau of Indian Affairs boat looks like it has a great group of interesting, smart, and fun people...

ELT: Don't go...we can be fun and interesting, too. If you stay, I will institute training for all our people that will teach them to value and respect all our differences and our contributions.

Narrator: We recommend development of a 4-hour USGS-centric diversity program that explicitly acknowledges the fears many of us have that by focusing on diversity, the USGS will compromise the quality of our science. The training should also educate us about successes and failures of others' efforts to increase employee diversity. It could also present vignettes that demonstrate experiences

of USGS minority employees; and motivates us to view diversity as being in our self-interest and “the right way to go. We also suggest that we develop several electronic highlights of our diverse workforce such as a twitter series “A day in the life of ...”, a podcast series about the science conducted by our minority employees, and a webpage of success stories.

Employee 1: I can't take it anymore...I'm heading over to the Fish and Wildlife Service boat...it looks like a zoo over there!! Look at the cute animals...and they have fish!

ELT: No...we can't afford to lose an excellent boater like you! Let's talk about this for a moment...we can offer much more than FWS.

Narrator: We recommend that the process for obtaining retention bonuses becomes more streamlined and available for use. Also, we suggest establishment of a competitive program for conversion of SCEP employees to permanent status.

Narrator: The lifeboat finally reaches the harbor....

ELT: We've made it...all of us. I don't think that would have happened without the skills, experiences, and knowledge of each and every one of us. Thank you...I appreciate all of you hanging in there....and I'm excited about the progress we made along the way.

Note: Colored hat people walk by.

Employee 1: Look at that boat...shouldn't we be like that?

Employee 2: Look at the colors in their flags...it's wonderful.

Employee 3: And the music...I've never heard that before...

ELT: Wouldn't it be great if we were just as colorful and just as exciting as they are? I will make sure that happens in the future.

Narrator: Individual buy-in and commitment by our executives is the most important aspect of diversity management.

Note: Everyone steps out of boat and reassembles at head of class.

Jody: USGS science depends on the people who make up the USGS. It makes sense for us to draw the best of the best from all segments of the population.

Michael: How we set priorities for future science is influenced by our backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge.

Ken: Our partners' choice of which agency, university or NGO to work with is influenced by the diversity of our workforce, how much we look like our stakeholders.

Pat: To thoughtfully and thoroughly address the needs of all employees and the American public we serve, we must truly resemble the American public in race, gender, and ethnicity. What if, the USGS were to take these steps to retain minority employees?