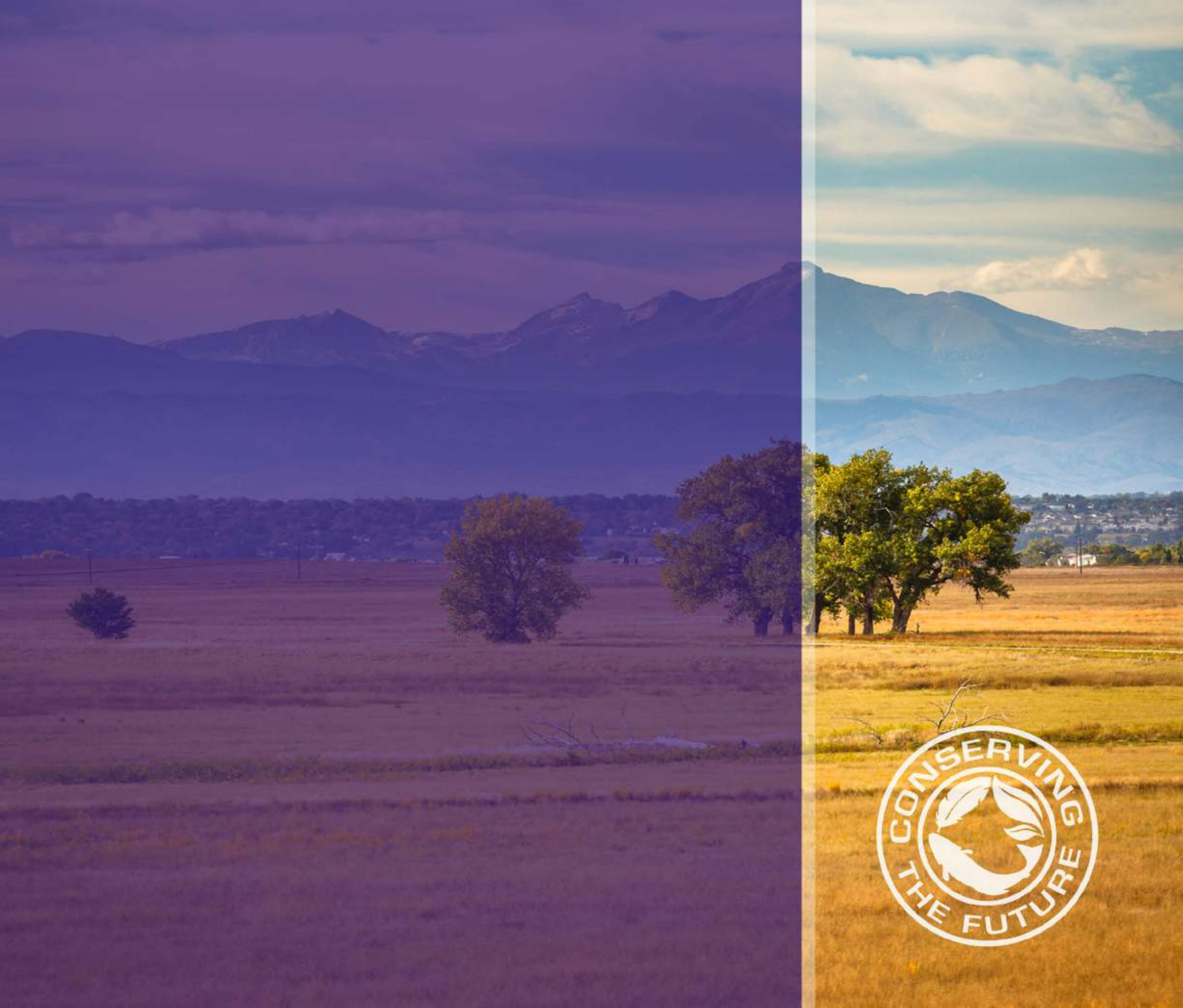
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Building a Diverse and Inclusive Workforce



Building a Diverse and Inclusive Workforce in our National Wildlife Refuge System

Introduction

Conserving the Future is an updated vision for the future of our National Wildlife Refuge System. Developed in 2011 by Service employees in partnership with stakeholders, this vision charts the course for the Refuge System's next decade. The vision's third chapter, Leading Conservation into the Future, is devoted to leadership and organizational excellence. In it, we endorse "deliberately developing a diverse, inclusive, competent, and caring workforce that will commit to conservation, embrace the responsibility of public service, and succeed in realizing this in effective, efficient, and innovative ways." We want to develop a workforce that embodies our Guiding Principles, one of which states that employees are our most valuable resource, are respected, and deserve an empowering, mentoring, and caring work environment. The specific language in *Conserving the Future* that embodies this principle reads: "Our workforce is diverse and inclusive, shares a passionate conservation ethic, and works together as a cohesive whole."

In the chapter Leading Conservation into the Future, we acknowledge that to better reflect the diversity of the country, to enhance public support for the Refuge System, and to ensure a workforce of the best and brightest minds, we need to engage and prepare a diverse group of qualified and enthusiastic professionals who want to make the Service and the Refuge System their life's work. We recognize that creating a culture of inclusion with people of diverse backgrounds in education, discipline, skills, and perspective is important to build a strong workforce.

In *Conserving the Future*, we outlined 24 recommendations to help us achieve our vision. In this paper, we focus on Recommendation #22: **Within the next 10 years, make our workforce match the diversity in the civilian labor workforce. Recruit and retain a workforce that reflects the ethnic, age, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, and language diversity of contemporary America.**

In the pages that follow, we outline the issues in building a diverse and inclusive refuge workforce, and we offer suggestions for moving toward the Refuge System's vision for our future workforce.

What are *diversity* and *inclusion*, why match the Civilian Labor Force, and why do we want to build a diverse *workforce*?

Definitions

Equal employment opportunity: The Service has an ongoing obligation under equal employment opportunity laws, executive orders, and other standards to prevent discrimination on the bases of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, retaliation/reprisal, disability, sexual orientation, parental status, and genetic information; and to eliminate barriers that impede free and open competition in the workplace. We conduct an annual self-assessment to monitor progress and identify areas where barriers may exclude certain groups. In conducting this assessment, we compare our internal participation rates with corresponding rates in the relevant Civilian Labor Force (CLF) as points of reference. Equal employment opportunity is focused on equality and equal access, and is primarily concerned with protected classes. Even with these protections, it is important to treat every individual with respect and to embrace differences in the workplace. In this way, *equal employment opportunity* is distinct from *diversity*.

Diversity means having many different elements, ideas and qualities. In short it means variety.

We define *workforce diversity* as the differences that influence personal perspectives of individuals in that workforce – not just those differences based on ethnicity, gender, color, age, race, religion, disability, national origin, and sexual orientation, but also differences in communication style, career path, life experience, educational background, geographic location, income level, marital status, military experience, parental status, and other variables that influence personal perspectives.

Inclusion is about recognizing, respecting, and valuing differences that influence personal perspectives. These unique perspectives make us react differently, solve problems differently, and see different opportunities. Superior organizational performance requires employing people with a diversity of thought.

Models of diversity

Why does "diversity" seem to be a loaded word for some people? Perhaps because of the history or evolution of models of diversity in the American workplace and their connection to equal employment laws and controversies. In the 1960s, we had a compliance-based model of affirmative action, grown out of early civil rights legislation aimed at redressing past discrimination. Although important for correcting obvious imbalances, this model gave rise to the idea that tokenism was the reason an individual who differed from the dominant group got hired.

In subsequent decades, diversity models still promoted that individuals outside the dominant group should be given opportunities within the workplace, but added that it was because it was the right thing to do, not just because it was equal employment opportunity law. This social justice model still invoked tokenism, but also brought in the notion of hiring based on a "good fit." From social justice developed the model of representation and diversity acceptance, where the scope of diversity expanded beyond gender, race, and ethnicity to include age, sexual orientation, and physical ability.

Today, the diversity model is one of inclusion that reflects our society's globalization, where value is placed on diversity of perspectives. The business case for diversity states that in a globalized society, an organization that employs a diverse workforce is better able to understand the demographics of the society it serves. Organizations that have a strong diversity/inclusion culture will realize higher productivity, lower absenteeism, and lower turnover, resulting in lower costs. Fostering an inclusive environment increases problem-solving capabilities, relevance, and the ability to attract and retain valuable employees.

Although the Service necessarily measures its workforce with statistics, the following outline of issues concerning, barriers against, and recommended solutions for achieving a refuge workforce that is diverse and inclusive goes beyond representation by numbers to focus on fostering an inclusive workplace environment in which differences are recognized, respected, and valued.

These recommended solutions are meant to complement or augment the actions offered in the Service's Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan. They include measures to recruit, hire, include, and retain by developing, engaging, and motivating members of a diverse, results-oriented, and high-performing refuge workforce across the nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE

Recruit

Recruiting consists of two components: recruiting applicants and conducting outreach to attract recruits. Recruitment is about finding the best sources for diverse top talent and identifying the best candidates who can contribute to the Service's mission and culture. The recruiting process is set up to ensure fair treatment. The goal of conducting outreach for recruitment is to continuously build a positive and inclusive image of the Service and its mission in the minds of potential candidates, the people who influence the candidates, and the communities in which they live.

Issue: Consultation with Diversity and Civil Rights when conducting outreach and recruitment

The FWS Director's Diversity Objectives and the Service's Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan outline the goals and strategies to promote increased diversity and inclusion in our workforce. In general, supervisors and hiring officials have not consistently utilized these resources when filling vacancies. In addition, there may be a lack of coordination between the outreach and recruitment efforts conducted by the Diversity and Civil Rights Office (DCR) and those conducted by the supervisors and hiring officials.

Recommendations

General tasks:

- To foster understanding of what recruiters do, the Service shall distribute a national recruitment plan that includes a summary of the recruiter's roles and responsibilities.

- Host webinars at project leader meetings to educate managers on the tools available to recruiters.

Tasks for managers:

- Consult with the regional recruiter as well as a Human Resources (HR) specialist before announcing vacancies. This would result in better feedback on the available hiring authorities to fill vacancies. It would also allow supervisors/hiring officials to share with recruiters what they need and allow for better coordination of and focus on recruitment efforts.
- Develop a professional relationship with the recruiter. Regional office supervisors should invite recruiters to attend workforce planning meetings and/or monthly staff meetings, project leader meetings, retreats, and town halls at regional and field offices. This would allow recruiters to meet supervisors as well as employees and give recruiters a better understanding of the skills needed when conducting outreach.
- Stay informed about various outreach initiatives that promote the importance of diversity and inclusion; keep in contact with your recruiter as well as your DCR office.

Issue: Certificate lists of eligible candidates should reflect recruitment efforts

Project leaders and selecting officials have been tasked with reaching out to a broader audience for recruiting and hiring. However, one challenge our agency continues to face is not having an applicant pool that is robust and inclusive of people from groups that are underrepresented in the Service. Are we reaching out to the right audiences? Are we leaving out specific recruitment techniques?

We propose that the Service provide additional support and guidance to selecting officials who undertake targeted recruitment activities in order to achieve a broader certificate list of eligible applicants. This support and guidance will require additional communication and follow-up during the recruitment process, but may provide selecting officials with the results needed for our agency to move forward toward our goal of a stronger workforce. The Service employs Diversity Employment Specialists (recruiters) in each region to assist with these outreach and recruitment efforts. The recruiters report to the DCR office for each region. If a relationship has not been established between a recruiter and the hiring official, they should develop one and keep an open line of communication. Having the hiring official work with the recruiters and engage them in the overall recruitment process will likely result in a better informed general public that can effectively apply to federal jobs with the Service. If we as an agency provide and follow some of these recommendations and the ones mentioned below as they relate to consultation with recruiters in outreach and recruitment efforts, this will provide a foundation that informs potential applicants about our opportunities, instructs them how to apply successfully, and establishes a communication strategy for when opportunities arise in the future.

Recommendations

The tasks outlined below assume that managers and selecting officials have completed the recommendations outlined in the previous issue, **Consultation with Diversity and Civil Rights when conducting outreach and recruitment**.

General tasks:

- Provide project leaders and selecting officials with a hiring authorities' toolbox, a visual aid that will be readily available once it is decided that a position will be filled.
- Make it a priority to focus on developing all of the above recommendations for both the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) and HR.
- Develop a central and standard way for sharing these ideas and efforts.
- Maintain regular communication between regional HR and hiring officials to distribute information about and implement regionally specific strategies.
- Develop or strengthen a central and standard way of sharing recruitment plans and efforts across programs and regions, and make it easy to access. This could assist others who are trying to fill similar positions or are looking for additional ideas on recruitment. It could also increase the likelihood of the resource being used.
- Ensure that the recruitment period is long enough to yield a sizeable applicant pool.
- Look for factors that could help pave the way for a stronger candidate pool.
- Post vacancy announcements during the peak period of student interest, such as in the fall.
- Explore ways we can bring people on board more quickly.

Tasks for managers:

- Make it a priority to consult with HR and the regional workforce recruiter to make sure you are fully aware of all available hiring authority options (e.g., direct hiring authority, noncompetitive placement of Pathways and Schedule A Appointments).
- Team with the regional workforce recruiter to prepare potential applicants with the basic skills and resources to successfully apply for a federal opportunity. This may prevent situations in which some applicants on the certificate of eligible candidates who appear well-qualified do not actually have well-rounded experience, while others who have the experience are not considered for the position because it is not well-represented in their application.
- Share your recruitment plans and efforts across programs and regions. Use the standard way of sharing these efforts (if developed as suggested above).
- Communicate regularly with the regional HR offices in order to implement the strategies listed in this document. In this way, regionally specific strategies can be distributed and implemented.

Issue: Positive education requirements within job series

Refuges within the NWRS are diverse in regard to purpose, location, organizational structure, positions, and types of work. Creating a diverse workforce to meet the Service's diverse needs compels us to use factors other than – or in addition to – educational requirements when recruiting or conducting outreach. Some individuals may not have the specific educational requirement deemed necessary, but do have the appropriate experience. There are some cases where it is appropriate to list positive educational requirements; however, there are other cases where management or people skills are more important than specific educational requirements.

Recommendations

General tasks for managers:

- Advertise traditional 485/486 positions as interdisciplinary (400 series or another professional series) whenever possible.
- Advertise all GS-13 and above Refuge Manager positions within the 0480 Wildlife Administrator Series whenever possible.

Short-term tasks for Human Resources:

- Communicate to managers their options for publicizing job opportunities by developing a communication plan – to deliver awareness, guidance, recommendations, and tools related to job series requirements (interdisciplinary option, etc.) – that reaches all managers and selecting officials.
- Consider revising the questionnaire on the job application to allow for experience that was gained outside of a National Wildlife Refuge, where appropriate. For example, instead of using the qualifier "…on a refuge," consider using "…on public land" or "…through field experience."

Long-term tasks for NWRS leadership:

- Periodically review positive education requirements in the 485/486 series to ensure they remain relevant with NWRS needs.

Hire

Within our current hiring process there are a number of opportunities to reduce or eliminate bias and inconsistencies. These biases and inconsistencies can be implicit, explicit, individual-based, or systematic. Regardless of our level of education or desire to be colorblind, neurological research shows that implicit bias informs our cognition and behavior. Although the following recommendations will not fully address the potential for bias, their implementation will minimize opportunity for such bias and inconsistency.

Issue: Unconscious bias in our hiring practices

Our current hiring practices could let in inherent or unconscious biases that result in a "like hiring like" effect. Our hiring practices often focus on the technical competencies that we perceive will allow someone to "hit the ground running." The technical aspects of a job are more clearly identified and articulated in the job analysis and position description, as opposed to communication skills, leadership qualities, and talent potential. It follows that our hiring process often overemphasizes technical competencies as opposed to "softer" skills. This may be due to supervisors receiving more training and being more comfortable selecting and evaluating on the basis of technical rather than nontechnical skills. Existing interview questions and techniques may not result in the most comprehensive assessment of candidates.

We often come across incredible candidates through our volunteer corps, internships, and youth positions. This is a great way to establish a relationship with an individual and see how he or she might perform as an employee. However, the process of selecting volunteers for employment often limits our pool of desired candidates because individuals with lower economic means or status are often limited in their ability to volunteer.

Recommendations

Short-term tasks:

- Review all aspects of the hiring process to identify any barriers to diversity and inclusion.
- Emphasize that hiring officials should clearly articulate desired competencies for the position and consider the use of selection panels to do a first round of interviews and provide feedback on candidates.
- Centralize the hiring process for entry-level positions within certain occupational series.
- Develop training or tools for hiring authorities to provide a broader perspective when hiring.
- Utilize Performance Based Interviews when making a selection.
- Ensure that hiring officials conduct a skill set and competency-based gap analysis prior to each selection.
- Use a broad panel of reviewers from outside the duty station involved in the hiring process to produce pools of applicants from which managers can select.
- Coordinate with Service recruiters early in the hiring process to identify additional resources to market the position.
- Use different hiring approaches for different grade levels or series.
- Utilize the direct-hire authority for Resource Assistant Interns. After meeting the criteria of internships, these interns may be converted to permanent positions within two years.
- Use open certs (continuously advertised positions) along with recruitment efforts to help provide a consistent connection between recruiting and filling positions.
- Target and subsidize volunteer positions.

Long-term tasks:

- Review periodic statistical reports that provide workforce demographics and underrepresentation in comparison with CLF data.
- Research hiring processes and evaluate what we have done in the past and why it has or has not worked, and then periodically integrate changes/updates to our practices. (Possible Human Dimensions Study.)

Issue: Need for consistency between regions in application of HR processes

Employees have shared instances where they are considered qualified for a position in one region, but unqualified in another; supervisors who have filled similarly graded positions in one office are told they can't do that at another; and position descriptions used by one region are considered deficient in another. Because few of us really understand the qualification and classification processes, they may appear arbitrary or without clear explanation. This leads to frustration and often distrust.

HR specialists are also frustrated because they feel challenged, judged, and second-guessed. Their workload is increasing with the number of applicants; where regions once had more staff, now fewer staff support more regions. It can also be challenging for an HR specialist to understand and accurately evaluate the myriad of positions used by the Service. Project leaders don't use standard position descriptions (SPDs) as much as they could, which means each position needs to be classified, and many of our old job descriptions need to be updated.

Recommendations:

- Ask the Directorate to recognize and examine the negative effect of inconsistent application of qualification and classification systems and policies across regions and to require HR to remove such barriers.
- Provide more transparency in the qualification and classification processes. This can be done through:
    - Providing managers and supervisors with clear and standardized training regarding how positions are classified and applicants are selected. This understanding will reduce the ignorance, skepticism, and mistrust with which many managers approach this aspect of the hiring process.
    - Requiring the use of standardized PDs and minimizing the development of "unique" positions. This will reduce the HR workload and help develop a shared understanding about frequently filled positions.
    - Posting and publicizing any necessary "unique" position descriptions so that we do not reinvent the wheel but rather draw from someone else's experience where possible.
    - Centralizing information or processes that are repetitive but subject to personal interpretation (e.g., provide information to supervisors who are new to the hiring process and don't know about "key words" or the paperwork required by HR).
    - Providing a clear avenue for appeal if someone believes they have been unreasonably eliminated from consideration for a position.
    - Developing specific and standard guidelines for Service position classification and qualification used by all HR teams.
- Develop a breadth of experience in the Human Resources program by doing the following:
    - Require extended details among the different Regions, HQ, and field stations. Typically employees in this program move less frequently and have less experience at different levels of the organization.
    - Provide HR specialists with comprehensive training that includes how they affect workforce diversity within the agency and how they can make valuable contributions to enhance it.
    - Develop cross-regional "peer groups" to help answer questions, evaluate issues, and brainstorm solutions to challenges, questions, and uncertainty that arises. No one should be both judge and jury or have to tackle things on their own.

Issue: Standard position descriptions (SPDs) for core occupational series

Position descriptions (PDs) may contain elements that present unreasonable or artificial competencies not critical to selection of the best candidate (e.g., GS-7 position needing to have watercraft-handling experience on day one when that is a minimal part of the duties or can be learned). In contrast, at least 80 percent of the duties described in an SPD are performed at least 80 percent of the time. It is recommended to contact your local HR office for guidance on developing SPDs.

Recommendations

General tasks:

- Ensure that SPDs are available for use in every region for core occupational series.
- Ensure the development and use of SPDs that accurately reflect the essential duties of the position.

Short-term tasks:

- Promote the use of SPDs for consistency in all field stations. SPDs can be an effective tool for field stations when recruiting, alleviating the need for individual PDs. (Note: Managers can find SPDs in "PD Express." The use of "PD Express" is mandatory.)
- Require supervisors and HR specialists to review and approve all PDs, standard or otherwise, to ensure they don't include selective criteria that are not an essential duty, skill, or requirement of the position.
- Establish objective to approve SPDs for all core occupational series. The PD should have the essential skills and duties at that level, specifically within the 0401, 0480, and 0025 series.
- Remember to incorporate soft skills when standardizing PDs.

Long-term tasks:

- Ensure that the Refuge System and HR periodically review the SPDs for accuracy and relevance.

Issue: Emphasize soft skills

Recruitment and selection practices often overemphasize hard skills over soft skills when evaluating and selecting candidates for positions.

Hard skills (technical competencies) are specific skills, training, and experiences that can be drawn from a résumé or other documentation. Examples of the hard skills for our mission-critical positions include: fishery or wildlife biology, ecology, conservation, fields and outdoor skills, data collection, environmental education, and geographic information systems (GIS). Soft skills (nontechnical competencies) refer to a cluster of personal qualities, habits, and attitudes that make someone a good employee and compatible coworker. Examples of soft skills include: drive/work ethic, communication, leadership, problem solving, strategic thinking, teamwork, and negotiation.

One reason for our emphasis on the hard skills is because supervisors receive more training and are more comfortable selecting and evaluating on the basis of technical versus nontechnical skills. But soft skills can be just as important an indicator of job performance. An increased emphasis on soft skills in addition to hard skills may result in a more inclusive pool of candidates who would be successful in our positions.

Recommendations

- Seek out sources of information on behavior interview questions and techniques that measure soft skills.
- Utilize performance-based interviewing. Incorporate behavior questions in interviews. Here is an example of a question to help evaluate problem solving: "Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem."
- Interview top candidates more than once. The first interview can focus on technical competencies; the second can be conducted by another individual or panel and focus on the candidate's nontechnical competencies (soft skills).
- Work with Human Resources on the questions to be included in the vacancy announcement application and the scoring system. While essay questions may be included, they cannot be scored. Provide input into a crediting plan to put more weight (points) on questions that evaluate soft skills. For example, a candidate who answered that he or she is proficient in Spanish would be credited additional points on that question for a Park Ranger position near a large Hispanic community.
- Consult with your Human Resources and/or Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Office on asking the appropriate interview questions to evaluate soft skills. Questions must focus on previous performance and personal skills as they relate to the position. Questions aimed at an individual's race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, and family status are not appropriate.

Include

Too often, we have associated the term "inclusive" with demographics, assuming that inclusion means supporting women and minorities. But it is more than promoting gender or racial diversity. Inclusion is about recognizing, respecting, and valuing any difference that influences personal perspectives. Our unique perspectives help us react differently to solve problems and create different opportunities. The best organizational practices for superior performance are directly linked to employing and retaining people with a diversity of thought and ideas. An inclusive workplace is one that fosters such a diversity. We recommend that the Service conduct programs specifically to promote inclusion, revamp diversity training, and emphasize the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Issue: Develop and conduct programs to promote an inclusive workplace and workforce

Developing and fostering a culture of inclusion is critical to obtaining and maintaining a diverse workforce in any organization. Anecdotal information illustrates that employees may feel isolated within the agency, especially if they are posted to areas far from the communities they know well and lack a peer group with whom they feel comfortable. Both the agency and the employees need to be mindful of the impact that social isolation can have on an employee's quality of life.

Currently the agency struggles with how to address that problem because we don't have a way to accommodate employees based on community connections. In many cases, the only way for an employee to feel "at home" is to leave the agency. While the agency isn't under any obligation to help employees maintain cultural connections, social isolation of employees impacts our ability to retain diverse staff, and consequently we will have a difficult time reaching our goal and the Americans we serve. Through suggested practices, managers and supervisors can take a proactive approach to make all employees feel part of the refuge team, and therefore less isolated.

Recommendations

<u>Short-term tasks for all employees:</u>

- Offer your fellow employees an opportunity to shadow you on the job and experience the work you do firsthand. If approved by their supervisor, invite them to shadow a project or work assignment that you are leading. Share with them the fun and exciting opportunities of your position, such as working with wildlife in the field, which is always a highlight for employees. By having them shadow you, they will likely meet colleagues and community partners, which will enable them to form a larger professional network and feel included in the larger picture.

<u>Short-term tasks for managers:</u>

- Provide all station employees the opportunity to work together on a variety of projects and programs. The goal is to create a team atmosphere of inclusion around exciting, priority work projects. Projects such as visitor service events, biological field days, team trainings, etc., are great ways to break down barriers and bring staff together. To start at a refuge, the manager would identify a staff member or two, depending on the station size, to organize opportunities throughout the year for employees to work as a team.

<u>Long-term tasks for managers:</u>

- Invest in existing diversity. As a system it is important to facilitate opportunities for new as well as veteran employees to meet, train, and learn from others with similar backgrounds and cultures. These opportunities should recognize the role their culture and community play in the conservation work of the Service. As an example, Alaska's Refuge Information Technician (RIT) program is a model of how to accomplish that goal. The program is a hugely successful refuge outreach and education program that has been in existence for more than 30 years. Alaska Natives comprise most of the RIT program staff because they possess local knowledge and cultural links to the people they are to reach and educate. Annually, the Refuge System provides a weeklong RIT training that focuses half of the sessions on western science and half on Alaska Native cultures. RIT staff members cite, as a reason for continuing with the Service, that their culture and communities are openly acknowledged and valued. By facilitating opportunities (special trainings, workshops, or meetings) within your area or region that build upon and acknowledge the diversity of your staff, you and the Service send a message of inclusion and worth.

Issue: How to revamp diversity training and/or create diversity enrichment activities

Diversity training is an annual legal requirement of Service employees. Training sessions have a negative connotation for some, but the purpose is to allow further development of your staff in a safe environment. If training continues to be an obstacle, employees should be encouraged to participate in enrichment activities that offer flexible and varied approaches of introducing and reinforcing the benefits of diversity. Even with budget restrictions, training is easily achieved in a myriad of ways such as attending the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, WV, or local training opportunities with regional private companies; inviting instructors to remote stations to conduct in-house training sessions; or enrolling in online courses, which require no travel expenditures. Training all employees tends to have immediate benefits to individuals in the different stages of career development by providing examples of expectations of both new hires and long-term employees.

The mandatory diversity training tends to occur in two ways within our agency. Training currently is very EEO focused, and it tends to be repetitive, nondynamic, and fairly general in nature. Examples of this are easily seen in online training courses in which diversity topics are interlinked with other legally required training that all employees must complete annually. Although the intentions may be good, the overall execution of these training sessions is too general and does not fully expose the audience to the breadth of diversity issues. Diversity training should be comprehensive and direct in order to strengthen our workforce. This type of training can occur online or in instructor-led classroom courses.

Recommendations

Short-term tasks for all employees:

- Assist in identifying nontraditional sources that could substitute for training opportunities – such as museum visits, films, books, and online testimonials from actual employees – and sharing them with coordinators.
- Make supervisors aware of diversity training opportunities in the area.
- Ask your supervisor to attend diversity training sessions if held in your general area.

Short-term tasks for managers:

- Make learning about diversity a priority throughout the year. Do not limit training to the annual or biannual requirement. Figure out methods of incorporating diversity training/enrichment activities into other programs and staff meetings/retreats. Take diversity training seriously. Managers easily set expectations for their staff on how most topics are received.
- Contact NCTC or your Regional office to host diversity training sessions or diversity enrichment activities at their location to minimize travel cost. Open this session up to the entire staff/neighboring stations and make attendance mandatory to stress the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Long-term tasks:

- Develop or seek out dynamic training or enrichment exercises that let participants experience, in a safe learning environment, what it feels like to be a diversity candidate. This can be accomplished in a role-playing scenario similar to Jane Elliott's Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes exercise. If conducted in a safe and professional manner, such an exercise and follow-up discussion could make strides in fully understanding diversity and what actions participants can take to minimize obstacles.
- Seek ways of incorporating new or time-tested diversity training session or diversity enrichment activities such as Diversity Change Agent into other established training (LE refresher, Refuge Academy, Project Leader Academy, Wage Grade training sessions, Stepping Up to Leadership). For example, NCTC is focusing on integrating diversity models into training sessions where appropriate as well as working to be more inclusive. Diversity and inclusion will be achieved only when embraced and practiced by all employees. This should not be limited to managers and supervisors.

Issue: Promote retention of a diverse and inclusive workforce by creating a cultural change in the organization by emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion

Once people realize the value that diversity brings, they will value, encourage, and nurture it throughout the organization. Individually and together, we can recognize, respect, and value differences that influence personal perspectives. We can fully maximize the strength and effectiveness of our agency only by fully embracing the well-being and contributions of our people; by encouraging individuals to reach their full potential, in pursuit of organizational objectives, without anyone being disadvantaged by our differences.

Recommendations

Short-term tasks for all employees:

- Emphasize the importance of diversity within the agency at all levels. For example, broaden the scope of the Diversity Change Agent training by offering it or similar training to project leaders; include a diversity training component in all of our training classes where appropriate. NCTC is doing this now. Encourage staff and employee engagement and participation: for example, host multicultural days and encourage employees to share their cultural backgrounds by hosting a potluck where employees can share food that represents their culture.

- Develop your soft skills (personal qualities, habits, and attitudes that makes one a good employee and compatible coworker). Examples of soft skills include: drive/work ethics, communication, leadership, problem solving, strategic thinking, teamwork, and negotiation.
  - Include soft skill development in Individual Development Plans (IDPs).
  - Encourage all employees to seek training and work opportunities to develop or improve a soft skill. For example, participating on a team project can help improve one's collaboration skills.
  - Seek out self-evaluation tools such as Myers-Briggs, 360s, etc., to improve self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. NCTC can provide these tools.

Short-term tasks for managers:

- Significantly increase the human dimension component of supervisor training and make it mandatory.
- Provide supervisors, in addition to required EEO training, with training in diversity-specific human dimension awareness, including specific challenges surrounding certain groups, sensitivities to certain cultures, and how to encourage participation and mentoring.
- Make existing EEO and diversity training more interesting by encouraging nontraditional training opportunities such as community events and culturally themed movies and plays.

Long-term tasks:

- Integrate programs, presentations, and training opportunities that highlight the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce. This should be emphasized at all levels and can be achieved by viewing materials provided by regional and national DCR offices. For example, the Region 4 DCR office purchased short instructional videos (less than 10 minutes each) that celebrate diversity (e.g., "Village of 100"). Making these brief programs available to all – not just supervisors – would achieve greater positive impact.

Retain

Retaining a diverse workforce is just as important as recruiting a diverse workforce. Efforts to recruit and hire diverse employees become futile if we cannot retain those employees. To retain a diverse workforce, the Refuge System must develop and foster the best practices for a culture of inclusion. Through short- and long-term practices, employees and managers can take a proactive approach to retaining employees by helping them feel part of the refuge team.

The Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) 2013 manual on "Human Resources Flexibilities and Authorities in the Federal Government" states that "policies and programs that promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace," as well as other nonmonetary strategies, are often cited by employees as factors in job satisfaction and longevity over and above monetary benefits. Other factors in employee retention include opportunities for career growth and improvement skills, mentoring programs, and alternative work schedules.

Through short- and long-term practices, employees and managers can take a proactive approach to retaining employees and helping them feel part of the refuge team.

Issue: Address the perception of unfairness

Recommendations

Tasks for managers:

- Remember that fairness is in the eye of the beholder, so it is important to communicate with your entire staff to determine if your employees feel they are treated fairly. For example, even in a staff that appears monocultural, some workers may feel there is a bias against them because they are at a different pay grade or in a different pay series than the dominant one. Employees who feel unfairly treated may assume, correctly or incorrectly, that it is because they are different in some way from those in the dominant culture. The best practice is to communicate about differences and biases and seek out and address feelings of unfairness in your staff before perceptions are solidly formed.

Issue: Promote retention of a diverse and inclusive workforce by addressing specific workplace/employee needs

Recommendations

Short-term tasks:

- Develop and conduct mentoring programs: implement mentoring programs, both formal and informal, for the benefit of all employees.
    - Encourage employees to choose mentors with whom they can be comfortable. Try to pair new employees with more experienced staff to provide support, either through a formal program or an informal work relationship. If opportunities are available and employees demonstrate preferences, new employees can be paired with more experienced employees of similar background and experiences. This practice promotes a peer-to-peer community that allows employees to share successes, common issues, and concerns, which can make their introduction to the Service more successful.
    - Provide participants with information about mentorship and how it differs from career coaching. (NCTC can offer tools and so can some online training.)
- Provide opportunities for community engagement inside the workplace. Every newly hired or recently relocated employee wants to feel that he or she is part of a community. Lack of community involvement or acceptance is a common reason for an employee to leave an agency or field station. Providing insights into activities throughout the community and providing support outside the workplace can mean the difference between an individual staying in a duty station or moving on. For example, an office could develop a community engagement board where employees post activities from throughout the community so that new hires can obtain support outside the workplace.
- Partner with Rotary clubs or other civic organizations (e.g., Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau) to offer information and opportunities for new employees to connect with people both locally and nationally.
- Provide a fact sheet of all information available for all new hires. Make sure that providing a "welcome packet" is on the checklist for bringing in a new employee. Provide assistance in identifying the demographic of your community – the urban team is doing this.

Short-term tasks for managers:

- Get to know new employees well before they arrive at your station. Once you have selected a new employee, find times to call or write, without interfering with the person's current job. The goal isn't to brief them about their new duties and responsibilities, but rather to find out more about them, build rapport, and offer support. Find out what questions they may have thought of since accepting the position. Ask how the Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move logistics are going and offer support where you can. Find out if there is any local information they need: the temporary quarters listings, local post office information, the nearest state DMV office, etc., are things most new employees will need to know sooner rather than later. Helping a new employee with the transition before he or she arrives is an ideal way to build good communications and trust with that new staff member.
- Plan in advance how best to introduce the new employee to the staff and the refuge. Once a new employee arrives at your station, carry through with your welcome plans. Managers should take it upon themselves to check in on and encourage all hires. If employees feel that they have opportunities for advancement and growth in a job, they may be more likely to continue on that path.
- Clearly express your expectations for employees both on and off the job.
- Identify tools necessary to do the job.
- Establish how feedback will be given or expected.
- Explain how new employees contribute to the team.

Long-term tasks:

- Help the new employee transition from "new" employee to a knowledgeable and experienced member of your refuge. Helping build the "new" employee's confidence and sense of value to the refuge operations over time changes how others and the employee view their position on the staff.
- Develop internal mechanisms to help support and nurture diversity candidates beyond training (e.g., developing a multicultural calendar with all major religious holidays on it and reminding supervisors to check this before

scheduling certain events). Evaluate whether cultural accommodations should be made to share experiences and opportunities to support one another, including developing "community of practice" cohorts.

Issue: Provide career opportunities through geographically flexible positions

Service employees are encouraged to work in different programs and regions in order to broaden their work experience and gain different perspectives. Some employees, however, are geographically restricted, possibly because they have a partner whose career is not mobile, or they want or need to be close to relatives, or they want to stay in a particular community. Some of these geographically restricted employees have the desire to broaden their work experience but do not know how to go about it since they are not mobile. In the worst-case scenario, employees become bored or unmotivated and eventually may have to choose between staying in their desired community or leaving the Service. We offer recommendations for keeping geographically restricted employees engaged and motivated so that we can retain them for the duration of their careers.

Recommendations

<u>General short-term tasks:</u>

- Ask the Directorate to consider criteria to determine which jobs can be geographically flexible.

<u>Short-term tasks for employees who are geographically restricted:</u>

- Think about doing a short-term job swap with someone in your office. Or, if you are able to leave home for a short period of time, think about a short-term job swap in a different location. Include intentions to do a job swap in your IDP or by asking to attend leadership training.
- Ask your supervisor or a trusted colleague to keep you in the loop with regard to vacancies in positions of interest to you, with the idea that you could do a short-term detail while the permanent search is being conducted. This could give you experience in different program areas, albeit for a short time.
- Utilize the newly established job detail Google site to find out about work details and other opportunities.

<u>Short-term tasks for managers:</u>

- While the Directorate is looking at criteria for geographically flexible positions, managers can undertake a more informal process within your management group or region to do the same (e.g., Region 4 developed its own criteria for geographically flexible positions).
- Think about whether some positions can be co-located with nearby Service offices or with other federal or state offices.
- Work with your colleagues in management to develop best management practices for increasing communication and trust with employees in remotely located positions. An interagency team is currently working on this issue. Also, this could be a topic for supervisory training.

<u>Long-term tasks for managers:</u>

- Encourage HR to develop training for employees and managers on how to manage employees in remotely located positions.
- Work with Information Technology Management (ITM) to enhance communication for remotely located employees by increasing access to distance technology tools (Skype, teleconferencing, etc.).

Issue: Build flexibility into the workplace to meet employees' personal and professional needs

The amount of time and energy we invest in our professional careers and our personal lives ebbs and flows over time, depending on which life stage we find ourselves in. Often, we ride these ups and downs without too much disruption. Sometimes, however, we need extra support to get us through. Some employees have resiliency built into their lives (family that lives nearby, a supportive community), which enables them to better cope with the ripple effects of life-changing events such as starting a family, caring for a loved one who has fallen ill, or caring for oneself in a time need. For other employees, the weight of these events is a heavy burden. As an organization, we aspire to help each other during times of need so that employees are not forced to decide between taking care of their personal needs and leaving the Service.

Supporting our employees in a time of need is a way in which the Service can better retain employees and invest in its people. Employees who can more successfully meet their home and work obligations are generally happier and more productive. Alternative work schedules or telework can help with balancing work and home life, and we offer strategies for building trust between managers and employees who use these alternatives.

Recommendations

Short-term tasks for all employees:

- Take advantage of your present options.
    - Explore work schedule options. One mechanism of support currently available to employees is the option of switching to a more flexible work schedule, when and where appropriate. The options for working an alternative work schedule are described in FWS Manual 226 FW 1, "Hours of Duty." Another potential mechanism for support is the Service's Telework Program, which is explained in FWS Manual 226 FW 4, "Telework Program." While these privileges are currently available to many employees, supervisors are sometimes hesitant to approve their use for fear of losing management control over employees who work a nontraditional schedule or who work from home.
    - Become aware of work schedule options that offer more support. Some employees need more support than an alternative work schedule or approval to telework. For example, an employee may need to scale back on work hours for a short duration, or take an extended leave of absence. Therefore, this section also offers suggestions for how to support employees whose needs extend beyond the current mechanisms in place.
- Consider options and collect information if you think you need to shift to a part-time schedule or take a leave of absence. Collect information on: What will this mean for your salary? Health benefits? Years of service? Time-in-grade?
- Think about how long you will need to work a reduced schedule and what your reduced schedule will look like, or how long an extended leave of absence you will need.
- Think about whether your position could be job-shared with someone.

Short-term tasks for managers:

- Make it a practice to ask employees at their mid-year performance review about their work/life balance. You may discover that some employees are finding it harder than others to maintain this balance.
- Think about whether a different work schedule or an extended leave of absence could help alleviate the stress of an employee who is having a particularly difficult time managing this balance.
- Work with peers to share information about how to manage employees who work an alternative schedule or who telework. Schedule time to talk about this at project leaders meetings and/or supervisor trainings.

Long-term tasks for Human Resources:

- Develop "Frequently Asked Questions" for managers and employees on alternative work schedules and teleworking.
- Offer training on alternative work schedules and teleworking, focusing on how to facilitate communication and build trust between managers and employees.

Issue: Use the Individual Development Plan to help meet employees' professional goals

The IDP process is one where the supervisor and the employee work together to identify an employee's career development goals and the strategies for achieving them. The Service has instituted a policy (231 FW 2) making IDPs mandatory for all permanent full-time employees in an effort to foster a culture that encourages, supports, and invests in the short- and long-term development of its employees.

By working with employees to create an IDP, supervisors develop a better understanding of their employees' professional goals, strengths, and development needs. At the same time, employees who are encouraged to develop IDPs are more invested in their careers. They take personal responsibility and accountability for their career development by striving to acquire or enhance the skills they need to perform at their desired level of competence. Thus the IDP process works to increase employee satisfaction and retention.

The IDP should not be a "wish list," but a realistic working document. Employees should review their IDPs with their supervisor at least twice a year – once at their annual performance review and once at their mid-year review. This will ensure that the IDP remains relevant and that the employee is following through with the actions in the IDP.

Short-term tasks for all employees:

- Spend time developing your IDP for your performance review. Think about your interests and where you picture yourself in the future.
- Talk to colleagues in other programs about what they do, as it may give you some ideas for your own career goals.
- Ask a mentor or someone whose professional opinion you trust to review your IDP before presenting it to your supervisor.

Short-term tasks for managers:

- When scheduling a mid-year or end-of-year performance review with your employees, remind them that developing an IDP is part of the review process. All employees should be prepared to present an IDP to their supervisor at their review.
- At every performance review, look at the employee's previous IDP and check to make sure the employee is following through with his or her goals and action items. Make modifications to the IDP as needed.

Long-term tasks for Human Resources:

- Place more emphasis on the importance of IDPs at supervisor training.
- Place more emphasis on the importance of IDPs at new employee training.
- Institute a mandatory requirement for IDPs to be part of the performance review process.