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Opportunities to Advance Diversity, Equity & Inclusion within DOE Office of Science Program Business Practices:
Recommendations from the SC D&I Working Group

Introduction

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a cornerstone to effectively advancing the U.S. research and scientific innovation enterprise. In 2018, the Department of Energy Office of Science (SC) established a cross-organizational SC Diversity & Inclusion Working Group (D&I WG) to assess what SC was currently doing to support DEI through its awards management and related business practices. Over the previous decade, several SC Committee of Visitors (COVs) reviews had highlighted the need to track demographic information of applicants and awardees to help ensure fair, transparent, and objective decision making and to take appropriate steps to increase the diversity of researchers and students supported on SC awards. The SC D&I WG was charged to identify opportunities for SC to advance DEI and demonstrate that DEI is foundational to SC business practices. Implementing the recommended actions of the SC D&I Working Group creates an opportunity for SC to be among the lead Federal science agencies in supporting best practices that promote DEI in all the research related activities that it supports.

Process

The SC D&I WG was led by the SC Office of the Principal Deputy Director (SC-2) staff and consisted of representation from each SC Program Office. The process of the SC D&I WG involved reviewing the current SC DEI promoting practices and the practices of other major science organizations, and reviewing recommendations from SC-sponsored equity workshops, external reports, and the peer review literature. The D&I WG then conducted a systematic review of SC's business processes related to its management of extramural research awards, identifying several opportunities and proposed actions to advance DEI.

SC Business Processes Reviewed

Fifteen recommendations were developed by the SC D&I WG in the following SC business process areas:

- Award making policies and practices within existing authorities (3 recommendations);
- Solicitation language and use of letters of intent and pre-applications (2 recommendations);
- Peer reviewer selection processes for all types of SC peer reviews (2 recommendations);
- Peer reviewer and SC program management guidance and resources (2 recommendations);
- SC proposal review processes (1 recommendation);
- S&T research performance reviews and scientific facility reviews (3 recommendations);
- SC workshops and roundtables (1 recommendation); and
- Federal advisory committees and subcommittees (1 recommendation).

Proposed actions were organized into 15 recommendations in an internal report to SC's Senior Management that was reviewed and approved in 2020. The recommendations have been further organized into seven categories of action for SC implementation.

DOE Office of Science Offices Represented in the SC D&I Working Group:

Advanced Scientific Computing Research, Basic Energy Sciences, Biological and Environmental Research, Fusion Energy Sciences, High Energy Physics, Nuclear Physics, Small Business Innovation Research/Small Business Technology Transfer Programs, Workforce Development for Teachers and Scientists, and the Office of the Principal Deputy Director (Chair).
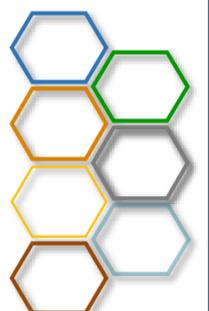
The 15 Recommendations were Organized into 7 Categories of SC Action

The SC D&I WG recommended actions serve to ensure that SC's business processes are supportive and inclusive of women and all underrepresented groups in STEM fields; allow for more rigorous tracking of diversity of applicants, awardees, and reviewers; limit and mitigate potential implicit bias behaviors; and encourage inclusive and professional behaviors in all SC-sponsored activities.

DEI Supporting Policies & Practices

- Build on SC's Statement of Commitment through proactive communication of DEI expectations.
- Promote and communicate existing Federal regulations and requirements for non-discrimination in funding solicitations.
- Promote and utilize existing flexibilities under financial assistance agreements that support diverse individual circumstances.

Standard Review & Selection Criteria & Protocols

- Update and standardize the use of letters of intent and pre-applications to ensure transparency of requirements, promote diverse participation, and equitable consideration of applications.
- Establish a standard set of diversity-promoting review criteria for competitive pre-applications reviews.
- Establish a standard set of diversity-promoting program policy factors for funding solicitations.
- Establish a set of diversity-promoting review criteria for S&T performance reviews and for SC scientific facility reviews.

Peer Reviewers

- Establish guidance and goals for balancing the demographics of reviewers on review panels and within reviewer pools.
- Develop a comprehensive strategy for recruiting new reviewers to increase the overall pool of reviewers and the diversity of reviewers, and for decreasing barriers to reviewer participation.
- Update and standardize SC's reviewer guidance and orientation content to include expectations for professional conduct, emphasis on appropriate constructive feedback aligned with review criteria, and implicit bias awareness and mitigation training.

Demographic Tracking

- Track and document demographics of applicants throughout all review, decision, and selection processes, assuring appropriate confidentiality and non-disclosure.
- Document the demographics of reviewers invited and served for all types of SC peer reviews.
- Increase the response rates to demographic questions by SC applicants and reviewers.
- Track demographics of SC Federal Advisory Committee Subcommittee Members.

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SC-Sponsored Meetings

- Establish guidance for conducting SC-sponsored workshops and roundtables that includes SC's requirements and expectations for diverse participation and respectful and inclusive behaviors.

- Establish similar guidance for SC Federal Advisory Subcommittees (e.g., COVs) that provides expectations for diverse membership and professional and inclusive conduct.

- Provide similar expectations as a condition of SC support of external meeting and conference proposals.

Program Manager Guidance & Supporting Tools

- Develop informational and instructional materials on the SC Statement of Commitment and Federal civil rights requirements as they apply to award recipients and recipient institutions, including procedures for reporting or mitigating concerns.

- Develop informational resources and tools for SC Program Staff for the implementation of new guidance and requirements for all SC D&I WG recommended actions.

- Host learning sessions and training opportunities for SC Program Staff, as well as develop an internal repository for guidance and tools.

- Develop informational resources and tools for SC Designated Federal Officials (DFOs) and Program staff for the implementation of new guidance for Federal Advisory Committee Subcommittees.

Community Engagement

- Create a communications plan for providing updates on SC DEI efforts, including a web presence for communicating SC DEI actions relevant to applicants, awardees, reviewers, and scientific community.

- Develop resources (e.g., fact sheets, slides, templates, etc.) for use by SC Program Staff to communicate new policies and guidance to the community.

- Include DEI guidance for subcommittee activities on SC Federal Advisory websites.

Overview of SC Implementation of Recommended Actions

A new SC DEI Working Group has been established that will implement the report's recommended actions. The group will focus on a phased approach over the next 2-3 years, recognizing that some actions will require longer development times than others. Each group of actions will be implemented through a process that includes action development, leadership feedback on the proposed implementation strategy, and focus groups or pilot testing for feedback prior to rollout. Finally, formal implementation will include written guidance, tools, training/familiarization, as well as broader community engagement. The latest information on SC implementation will be posted here: https://science.osti.gov/sw-dei.

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