

TO: Craig N. McLean  
Chair, NOAA Science Council

FROM: Natasha White, Ph.D.  
Chair, NOAA Science Council Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Tiger Team

SUBJECT: Best Practices - Recruitment and Hiring of Underrepresented Groups in STEM

During the April 13th meeting of the NOAA Science Council, the Council discussed the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Report “Scientific Brain Drain: Quantifying the Decline of the Federal Scientific Workforce”. The result of the discussion was a charge to form a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Tiger Team, composed of representatives from each line and staff office, to identify best practices/solutions for hiring and retention of underrepresented groups and addressing other workforce challenges.

The DEI Tiger Team met on May 11th and engaged in a discussion on best practices/solutions. The team’s findings have been summarized below, organized into 4 discrete themes: Corporate Accountability, Building the Talent Pool for NOAA STEM Careers, Tapping into the STEM Talent Pool, and Retaining and Advancing Talent.

**Corporate Accountability:** Holding agency-wide leadership, from first line managers to SES leaders, accountable for driving change across the agency using data-driven approaches. NOAA leadership should establish clear targets for improving diversity among STEM professionals and utilize performance-based incentives and consequences when targets are not met or adequately justified.

Best practices include:

- Initiation of a **formal NOAA Recruiting Program** via the OHCS Talent Acquisition Branch.
- Effectively **assess labor demand** (position needs, competencies, etc.) annually to focus STEM talent acquisition on technical skills relative to NOAA S&T priorities.
- Enhanced **training for hiring managers** to reduce unconscious bias, marketing of hiring authorities, crafting of position descriptions, awareness of hiring incentives, and inclusion training.
- Conduct **assessment of NOAA’s STEM workforce** to identify gaps (i.e gap from graduation to employment) and barriers to advancement for STEM professionals from underrepresented groups.
- Mandate **exit interviews** to understand who is leaving and reasons for departure and initiate periodic **stay interviews** (eg. during the performance review cycle) to determine if there are concerns that need to be addressed to encourage retention. Emphasis should

be placed on the BIPOC community and other diverse groups to ensure inclusivity and retention.

**Building the Talent Pool for NOAA STEM Jobs:** There are sizable numbers of diverse STEM students and professionals possessing interdisciplinary STEM skills applicable to NOAA’s mission, who fall outside of the traditional ocean and atmospheric science network. NOAA will increase the number and diversity of these individuals seeking jobs, student opportunities, and grants with NOAA and its affiliate partners (e.g. EPP/MSI Cooperative Science Centers (CSCs), Cooperative Institutes (CIs), NGOs, private industry partners).

- Effectively assess **labor supply**, using a data driven approach to guide targeted engagement with existing NOAA education and training programs (i.e. EPP/MSI, WoodsHole Partnership Education Program and the Lapenta Internship program) as well as national, regional, and local diverse talent pools that meet STEM labor demand.
- Conduct targeted engagement and partnership building with **diversity-oriented STEM professional organizations**.
- Implement an **operational communications plan** to deliver ocean and atmospheric science content (e.g. career information, NOAA science in action, communication of science priorities, technical workshops, provision of NOAA data/products/services, advertisement grants) to target audiences.
- Improve frequency and intent of **science communication with CSC partners** to improve R&D and training alignment to include potentially embedding science staff at partner universities.
- **Empower staff** to become NOAA “recruiters” in their community through provision of quality, easily digestible communications materials on NOAA’s science mission, STEM talent needs, career pathways, and specific recruitment opportunities. Recruitment activities should be incentivized and become part of official duties.

**Tapping into the STEM Talent Pool:** NOAA must build an effective “HR Bridge” that allows for enhanced recruitment strategies that effectively link qualified diverse candidates with NOAA labor demand.

- **Utilize non-competitive Federal Hiring Authorities, such as the Conservation Corps Act 2019 (CCA-DHA)** to recruit qualified diverse candidates with technical skills in demand in NOAA.
- **Maximize entry-level recruitment from CSCs and improve engagement with other MSI** engineering, computer science, math, social science and other STEM departments beyond typical environmental sciences.
- Encourage the use of **Diverse Hiring Panels** at all hiring levels (entry-level through executive) and ensure that all panelists have DEI training prior to participation.

**Retaining and Advancing Talent:** ensuring current and future staff experience an inclusive environment with opportunities to advance.

- Encourage continued growth and engagement of **Employee Resources Groups**, including engagement at the local level.
- Continued emphasis on real and authentic **messaging from NOAA Leadership** that communicates the progress and/or challenges faced in the effort to diversity the STEM workforce through new hires and retention efforts.
- Establish clearer pathways to **advancement for the current STEM workforce** through leadership development. Where possible, embed career ladders.
- Increase training and preparation of **internal candidates** for pay band-4 and -5 positions with emphasis on encouraging participation from diverse candidates.
- Assess the **lack of diversity at the SES level** (including SL and ST levels) and establish guidelines on how to make improvements. Increasing diversity at the SES level will expand the agency's ability to make decisions regarding our scientific mission, advancement of technology and infrastructure as well as recruitment, retention, and advancement of employees.

### ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: List of representatives to the NOAA Science Council's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Tiger Team

## Attachment 1: NOAA Science Council DEI Tiger Team Participants

### NOS:

- Steve Thur
- Lonnie Gonsalves

### OAR:

- Shannon Louie, CI Administration Office Director
- Ms. Nicole Mason, OAR EEO Diversity Program Manager
- Dr. Ariel Stein, Deputy Director Air Resources Laboratory
- Mr. Tim Ash, OAR Employee Services Division

### OCIO:

- Tejuana Terry

### Office of Education:

- Natasha White
- Jacqueline Rousseau

### NMFS:

- Alex Katana
- Nicole Cabana

### OMAO:

- Shantrell "Nikki" Collier, OMAO Assistant CIO
- Jason Merriweather, NOAA CPC Deputy Director

### NESDIS:

- Rhea Donfor

### NWS:

- Lisa Love

### To be forwarded materials and updates for awareness:

- Kenny Bailey