EPA

Study of Cultural Diversity

Literature Search and Best Practices

Literature Search and Best Practices Work Group

Tyrone Aiken

Richard Bashar

Darlene Cockfield

Ronald Blakely

Gangadhar Kori

Bob Knox

Kathleen O'Malley

Barbara Ostrow

Eduardo Rodela

Carolyn Scott

Hector Suarez, Group Leader

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Background

As a part of the Agency's Cultural Diversity Study, the Literature and Best Practices Work Group was created to research and benchmark diversity practices in the private sector and other Federal agencies. Through an extensive literature search and a structured interview process, the Work Group concentrated on organizational reasons for addressing diversity. The research focused on the basic elements of a diversity program, methodologies used for program development, implementation and overall program effectiveness.

The Best Practices Work Group was briefed by five Federal agencies on their diversity initiatives, including the Central Intelligence Agency, the Internal Revenue Service, Department of Labor, Department of Transportation, and the United States Army. The Work Group visited four private corporations including the Digital Computer Corporation, the Washington Post, Dupont and Proctor & Gamble. In addition, members of the group reviewed documentation and had discussions with officials from Hughes Aircraft, Corning, and Avon.
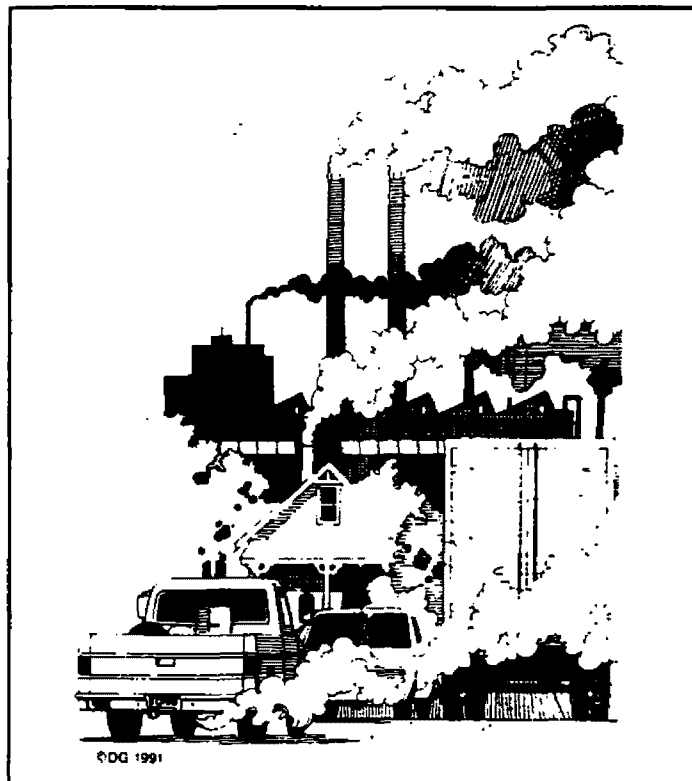
Findings In Brief

The organizations we surveyed decided to address cultural diversity to improve their capability to:

Address employee complaints about human resources issues (perceived inequities in awards, promotions, training, etc.).

Prepare to address the organizational concerns related to the Workforce 2000 predictions.

Address business goals in an increasingly diverse market (ie. minority and women employees on the staff may be better able to deal with minority and women customers).

Private and public organizations have used a variety of techniques to help implement the Diversity Initiative within their organizations. The most common included:

An aggressive recruitment strategy to attract qualified minorities and women.

A mentoring program to help employees grow by developing a formal support network.

Core groups that help individual or groups of employees focus on needs, feelings or attitudes that are of concern. These are not intended to be gripe sessions. The focus is on providing a forum for employees to be in a support group setting that can serve as a sounding board and fosters encouragement and support in areas of need.

Performance management criteria and rewards for managers that advance diversity efforts within the organization.

Comprehensive training strategies to address diversity in the workplace.

The Diversity and Total Quality Initiatives have been combined in several of the organizations surveyed. Their rationale, which is very much in line with the EPA strategy, is that continuous review and improvement of work processes can be significantly enhanced by inclusion of employees with diverse backgrounds and capabilities.

Organizations that are recognized as leaders in Managing Diversity have incorporated a comprehensive communications strategy as part of their effort. They are careful to use every opportunity to advance the concept of diversity in the workplace.
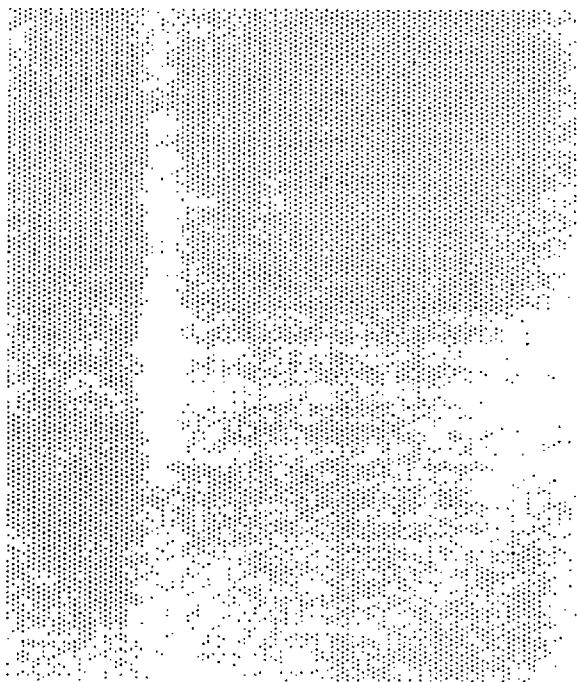
Recommendations

Through our benchmarking efforts, we have drawn a number of conclusions on how best to incorporate cultural diversity into a comprehensive organizational effectiveness strategy at EPA:

A high degree of involvement and commitment is necessary from our senior managers. Through example, they can set the new course toward promoting cultural change within the Agency. By example they should ensure that their hiring reflects the work force demographics, and that promotions, awards and other human resource decisions are based on performance.

We will need new skills and an enhanced level of awareness in understanding and using individual differences for benefit of the organization. This learning process will require an integration of training and development at all organizational levels and for all employees.

The change process will require an extended period of time to implement and maintain, contingent on the size of an organization and the availability of resources.

Successful implementation will necessitate the integration of diversity factors into the overall review, revamping and utilization of agency human resources policies and practices.

Need to define and articulate sound business resons for addressing diversity in the workplace.

The Diversity Initiative needs to be clearly articulated in written policies and practices which outline specific programs, goals, expectations, and methods of accountability. An appropriate level of staff and resources need to be devoted to implement and follow through with the action plan.

A comprehensive training strategy is necessary to effectively implement & advance the concept of diversity in the workplace.

Introduction

In May, 1990, the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) launched a comprehensive initiative to address cultural diversity as a management priority. This action was taken in an effort to address employee concerns that the Agency was not making the maximum use of available talents within the Agency. The Initiative is to be one of the centerpieces of the management Improvement and cultural change agenda set by William K. Reilly and F. Henry Habicht, the Administrator and Deputy Administrator of EPA. A taskforce was created to develop the framework for an EPA Cultural Diversity Study. The goal of the taskforce "Is to construct a profile of past practices and prevailing attitudes with regard to staffing, staff development and general sensitivity towards minority and women's concerns. This process should also assist In the Implementation of total quality management principles which are based, In part, on creating an Institutional culture that will draw upon the unique contribution of each person In the workforce."

The Workforce Diversity Taskforce was organized Into four working groups:

> Literature Search and
> Best Practices
>
> Employee Survey,
>
> Data Analysis, and
>
> Training.

The Literature Search and Best Practices Work Group developed and used a set of Interview questions to guide the group's Interview process In benchmarking organizations that have launched a diversity Initiative. A systems perspective on workforce diversity was the underlying principle of the Interview guide. The guide followed a program development format to Include questions pertaining

to what prompted the search for managing diversity, what activities or processes were used to assess the diversity Issues, and what types of programs resulted from their organizational assessment. The interviews focused on the organizational reasons for addressing cultural diversity, basic parts of their initiatives, methodologies used, the effectiveness of the Initiatives, and the organization's point of contact for Cultural Diversity.

The group was briefed by several Federal agencies on their diversity Initiatives, Including the Central Intelligence Agency, the Internal Revenue Service, Department of Labor, Department of Transportation, and the United States Army. A number of private corporations were visited, Including the Digital Computer Corporation, the Washington Post, Dupont, and Procter & Gamble. In addition, members of the group reviewed documentation and had discussions with officials from Hughes Aircraft, Corning, and Avon.

Through discussions with corporate senior managers, Human Resource and Equal Employment Opportunity staffs, we sought to obtain differing views and experiences In managing cultural diversity In the workplace. We were pleased with the open and enthusiastic discussions that took place during all of our visits.

Throughout our reviews, we recognized the Importance of drawing sound conclusions about the necessary conditions required to support and develop a culturally diverse workforce. But, we also recognized the need to maintain a degree of confidentiality regarding specific problems or Issues that were confided during our Interviews. The conclusions generated In this report are based on the thoughts and perceptions of the members of the Best Practices Group, coupled with the experiences and Ideas of the officials from the organizations we contacted.

Need for Valuing and Managing Diversity

It is important to note that our senior agency management recognizes that EPA's continued success depends upon our ability to capitalize on cultural diversity as an integral part of the Agency's Change Management Triad. The other two crucial components of the Change Management Triad are Strategic Planning and Total Quality Management.

As an Agency, we need to continue to enhance our awareness and recognition that EPA is committed to forging an approach to environmental protection that is cognizant of how it might impact diverse communities.

As is the case for most of the corporate cultural diversity initiatives, we also have sound business reasons for addressing cultural diversity:

Environmental issues are affecting the lives of our culturally diverse communities.

Our National and increasingly global, mission requires an appreciation for the various cultures with which we interact.

Our interactions with a more diverse National and global community requires the qualified, diverse, staff expertise necessary in developing environmental programs best-suited to addressing the needs of these communities.

In carrying out our mission, EPA's decision-making process ought to reflect society's concern with environmental pollution by acknowledging the existing "culture consciousness."

Indeed, heightened interest in environmental equity underscores the need for representation on our staff of diverse cultures. A major challenge for EPA toward the year 2000 is to provide strong leadership in managing and developing our increasingly diverse workforce.
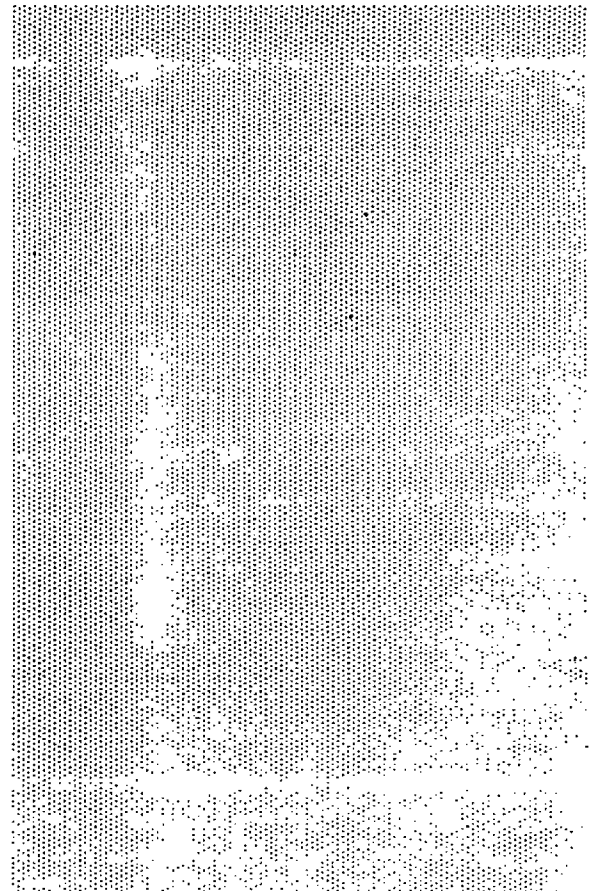
Findings

Through our benchmarking efforts, we have drawn a number of pertinent conclusions on how best to incorporate cultural diversity into a comprehensive organizational effectiveness strategy at EPA:

To effectively implement the Diversity Initiative, a high degree of involvement and commitment is necessary from our senior managers. Through example, they can set the new course toward promoting cultural change within the Agency. By example they should ensure that their hiring reflects the work force demographics, and that promotions, awards and other human resource decisions are based on performance.

> To accomplish this change, we will need new skills and an enhanced level of awareness. This learninprocdevelopment at all organizational levels for all employees.

> The change process will require an extended period of time to implement and maintain, contingent on the size of the organization and the availability of resources.

> Successful implementation will necessitate the integration of cultural diversity factors into the overall review, revamping and utilization of agency human resources policies and practices.

The Diversity Initiative needs to be clearly articulated in written policies, practices and procedures. A management strategy that outlines specific programs, goals, expectations, and methods of accountability is necessary.

In addition, organizations that are effectively addressing diversity in the workplace have identified two guiding principles. First, it is important to recognize that management plays a significant role in setting and reinforcing the organization's culture. Second, employee participation and involvement is crucial for the successful implementation of an organization's management agenda.

Private and public organizations have used a variety of techniques to help implement the Diversity Initiative within their organizations. The following is a brief summary of some of these techniques.

Recruitment

A number of the organizations interviewed are using recruiting as a major means to manage cultural diversity. The emphasis on recruitment ties organizational staffing needs and a goal of attracting the best with a particular focus on hiring minorities and women. Intense recruitment of minorities and women will help an organization achieve better representation in the workplace. But, it in and of itself, will not create or nurture a culture that values diversity.

A dilemma often faced by some of the organizations visited is a "revolving door" phenomenon. This occurs when "high- caliber" folks get frustrated with the organization due to the lack of developmental or promotion opportunities, and leave for other jobs. As a result, the recruitment process becomes repetitive.

Our recruitment strategy must continue to have a focus on attracting talented minorities and women for jobs at EPA. Retention of a high-caliber staff can be greatly enhanced by ensuring that we pay attention to their development. We need to provide challenging work assignments and opportunities that provide for the development of both technical and managerial competence. This will help facilitate successful upward movement within the organization.

Mentoring

While emphasis on recruitment is a means with which many of the organization promote diversity in the workplace, some organizations believe that special attention also has to be given to enhancing employee retention and development. In several organizations, mentoring is a crucial element in this effort.

Mentoring is grounded on the principle that a network of experienced managers can advise/ counsel employees to better prepare them for greater responsibilities. It provides assistance in the emotional as well as the cognitive transition that takes place when acquiring additional levels of responsibility. This principle can be an effective tool to assist diverse employees to develop skills; it provides them experiences with which to develop professionally.

Interviews with managers and human resources professionals acknowledged the existence of informal mentoring networks for some employees in the organization. If we acknowledge that mentoring is valuable under informal conditions, formalizing it for the entire organization would offer the opportunity to all those who would be interested in participating.

One organization surveyed is implementing a formal mentoring program that requires most of their experienced managers to participate as a mentor. The mentors in this case are to select several employees with the intention of helping them to better understand the organization and its business. In addition, it will help employees integrate into work-related networks for the purpose of enhancing their administrative, technical and management skills.

Core Groups

In an effort to help employees relate to one another and gain interpersonal skills, the practice of setting up "Core Groups" has been implemented by one of the organizations surveyed. Several core groups meet routinely to discuss information, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that are of concern to the individual members. This vehicle allows employees to experience feelings, express attitudes, and demonstrate behaviors without repercussions from the other members of the group. In essence, the group is a laboratory for individual growth.

Participation in the groups is voluntary. However, participation in such groups is perceived to be illustrative of an employee's interest in developing stronger interpersonal skills. All members of the organization have an understanding that building interpersonal skills is a signal to management of the person's interest and investment in building a capacity for managerial responsibilities.

Performance Management

Core groups are comprised of either employees or managers but are not mixed. This is done to maximize confidentiality. The company did state, however, that there could be exceptions if all of the participants agreed.

In all of our discussions with the organization representatives, the question of how to induce managers to take the diversity issue seriously was raised. Two of the private sector organizations that we visited hold their managers accountable for managing or addressing diversity. Management bonuses are contingent on positive performance in this area. The major inducement, however, is the expectation of the management peer group to make progress in this area.

In one particular organization, managers are provided with yearly "health assessment" data feedback to determine the manager's progress in implementing diversity in his or her organization.


Training

We found that training is a major tool for addressing diversity at a large number of the organizations surveyed. In our discussions, however, we were cautioned not to rely on training as the sole vehicle driving the change effort.

In the Federal agencies that we surveyed, recruitment and training are the main strategies to deal with diversity. Given the complexity of diversity, they are aware of the shortcoming of this narrow strategy. For example, in one of the agencies, training is focused on the managerial corps' and no training is occurring for other employees. The focus of change in this case is the manager. In the interim, management is being trained on the diversity issues for the ultimate purpose of developing a knowledge and skills base upon which to build a broader initiative.

Of the four private sector corporations visited, three of them focus on management training as the vehicle to manage diversity. While the management and human resources professionals acknowledge that training is necessary for the change process, they agree that training, in and of itself, is not sufficient to make the transition.
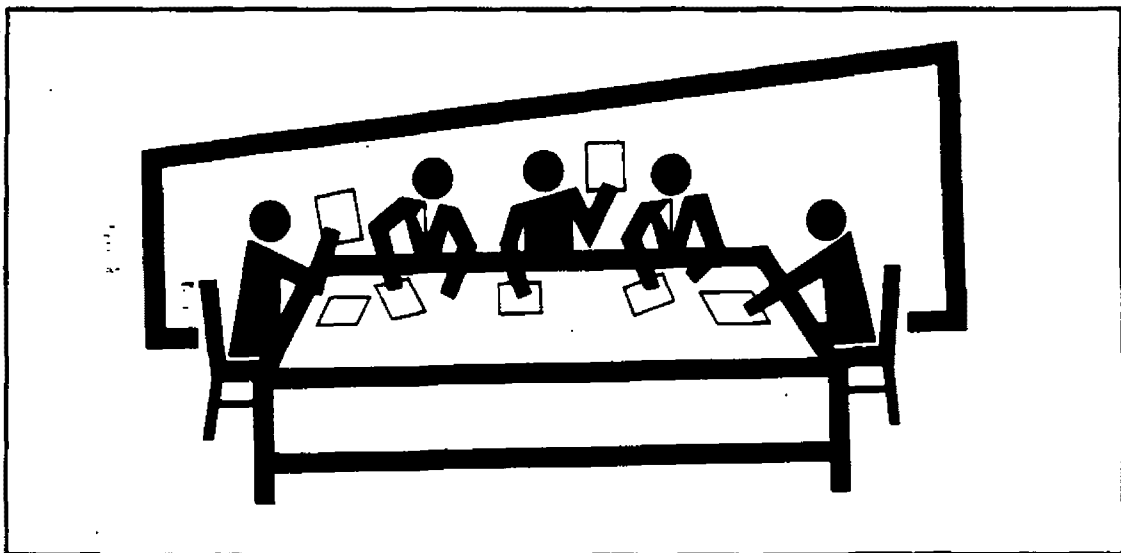
Cultural Diversity and Affirmative Action

Most of the organizations make a distinction between Managing Diversity and Affirmative Action. It is important, they believe, for the difference to be apparent to those involved in the diversity effort. Although there is no doubt in their minds that Affirmative Action and Managing Diversity are related issues.

The general feeling is that Affirmative Action requirements are legally-mandated employment criteria. Affirmative Action is also seen as a way to redress discriminatory practices. Cultural diversity is understood to be a resource utilization issue. Diversity is seen as a strategy to ensure maximum utilization of all employees. The focus is on:

valuing and developing individual capabilities,

the employee's ability to work with groups,

the organization providing the resources, work

procedures, and management style to support this effort.

Affirmative Action and Diversity, working together, form a major portion of the organization's employment strategy for workforce planning and utilization. The outcome will impact the organization's overall performance.

Cultural Diversity and Total Quality Management

The Cultural Diversity and Total Quality initiatives have been combined by several major corporations and a Federal agency. Their rationale is that continuous review and improvement of work processes can be significantly enhanced by inclusion of employees with diverse backgrounds and capabilities. Diverse employees are apt to provide a range of different perspectives that would have a positive impact on the work processes.

This way of thinking is very much in line with Mr. Habicht's vision regarding the two processes. "This process should also assist in the implementation of total quality management principles, which are based, in part, on creating an institutional culture that will draw upon the unique contribution of each person in the workforce."

Resources to Implement a Diversity Initiative

Several of the organizations surveyed have provided for a senior manager and staff to carry out the Diversity Initiative. The organizations have also ensured that the Diversity Manager has the necessary support and endorsement of the CEO or Senior Executive. Though the roles of the Diversity managers vary, their focus is on managing a staff and strategy to launch and nurture the initiative.

Necessary funding for Diversity varied from organization to organization. In most cases, the initiative had the necessary funds to provide for contractor support, required travel, reference materials (books, videos, etc.), and necessary training programs.

Communications

Organizations that are recognized as leaders in the Diversity Initiative have incorporated a comprehensive communications strategy as part of their effort. They are careful to use every opportunity to advance the concepts of diversity in the workplace. They recommend that organizations launching a Diversity Initiative consider that:

Communications from the CEO or Senior Executive support and provide reinforcement for the initiative in speeches, staff meetings, written communications, and by participating in program activities (meetings, training etc.).

Periodic informational issuances be provided to all employees to inform them and encourage their involvement and participation in program activities.

Issues/concepts on valuing diversity be integrated into other programs in the organization (supervisory and managerial training, in-house technical training/seminars, program reviews, etc).

The organization develop a Diversity Statement or Definition that is reflective of its mission, culture and commitment to the diversity objectives.

The organization have an understanding that diversity programs can take shape at different organizational levels. For example, each EPA Region could take the initiative to develop and implement pertinent diversity projects. The Agency should support a policy whereby diversity programming will flow up, across and down organizational levels.

Agency senior management can and should set broad parameters within which different parts of the organization will take ownership of workforce diversity.

Involvement/Inclusion

The Best practices work group has identified the principle of involvement/inclusion as salient in managing cultural diversity. This principle is further defined by four underlying attributes. These attributes include: Knowledge and Skills, Information, Influence, and Incentives. From the management perspective, involvement entails having the organization provide programs or management initiatives that increase the level of these factors among the Agency's employees.

In our assessment of other organizational approaches to managing diversity, we identified the involvement/inclusion principle operating at varying degrees. As a point of reference, the Best Practices Work Group conducted an illustrative appraisal of EPA practices to demonstrate this factor in operation here at the Agency.

Knowledge and Skills

The EPA Institute and Superfund Academy are illustrative of current operations whose purpose is to enhance our employees work-related knowledge base and to increase work performance skills. Improving the knowledge and skills level has positive effects on work performance and effectiveness.

GLO (Greater Leadership Opportunities) is another program that demonstrates the enhancement of EPA employee knowledge and skills levels. It provides visibility for women and minorities and opportunities to enhance their leadership and management skills through formal classroom training and developmental/rotational assignments, thereby enabling them to compete more successfully for supervisory positions. One of the fundamental activities used to raise this knowledge and skill level is the mentoring process. One salient outcome of this mentoring process is a higher degree of understanding of the Agency's mission and goals.

The Minority Academic Institutions Task Force has provided a framework and action plan for the Agency to have a more proactive relationship with a number of Colleges and Universities. Through this initiative Agency employees will have the opportunity to work with these institutions to teach, help develop curriculum and to promote environmental careers. The Agency will also benefit by employing faculty and students for a variety of positions.

Information

The EPA library currently houses a myriad of management and scientific materials and books to support the activities of our employees. The availability of this information provides opportunities for managers and scientists to maintain knowledge in their professions. Openness encourages the exchange of information and ideas and enhances the principle of inclusion. EPA's culture places a high premium on the use and management of information.

Influence

Total Quality Management (TQM) affords EPA staff the opportunity to be actively involved and influence how work is done and how delivery of services can be improved. Continuous improvement, a concept embodied in TQM, is dependent on the initiative of individuals to bring about change. This same initiative, from each employee, will be the force that transforms cultural diversity into a way of doing business at EPA.

The Human Resources Council (HRC) is an advisory body to OHRM and to the Administrator regarding Agencywide human resources issues, including innovative ideas and potential problem areas. It provides a national forum for Agency employees to express their ideas and carry out activities to improve the work life at EPA.

The Mini Council concept also embodies the factor of influence. It provides employees with the opportunity to have input into the management problem-solving and decision-making process. Employees are increasingly involved in the operation of their respective work group. The Mini Councils serve as conduits for raising issues to the national HRC.

The Scientific-Technical (Sci-Tech) Advisory Committee and Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) endeavor to make EPA attractive to talented, creative scientific and technical people and to support them once they are on board.

At Headquarters, such groups as the Federal Women's Advisory Council, Blacks in Government, the Hispanic Advisory Council, the Handicap Advisory Council, and the Asian Pacific American Community are further examples of vehicles available for employees to influence the decision making process within EPA.

The Secretarial Advisory Committee (SAC), a subgroup of the Federal Women's Program, advises OHRM and the HRC regarding ways to improve morale and productivity of secretarial/clerical and other support employees, and to improve career growth and mobility for employees in these positions.

Incentives

EPA has developed an expansive incentives portfolio for its employees. These incentives range from flexible work schedules, wellness programs, day-care centers, a leave-transfer program, a multitude of training opportunities and a variety of awards and recognitions.
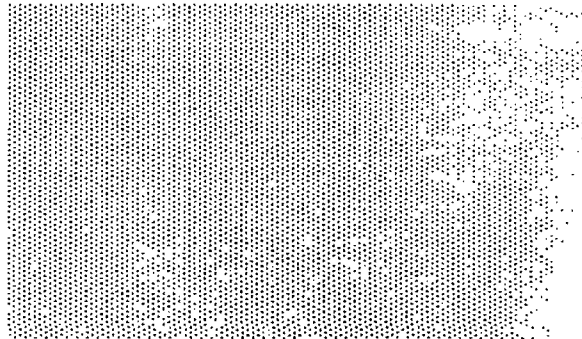
Recommendations

Based on the information gathered through our survey, a number of factors will be critical for success in our diversity initiative at EPA:

Continued involvement and commitment from our senior managers. Through example, they can set the new course toward promoting cultural change within the Agency. By example they should ensure that their hiring reflects the work force demographics, and that promotions, awards and other human resource decisions are based on performance.

Increased inclusion/involvement by our employees.

Recognition and understanding, up front, that a quality effort will require time to implement and carry out as part of the Strategic Planning effort.

Appropriate level of resources need to be devoted to the initiative. Should provided for a senior manager and staff to carry out the Diversity Initiative. Should also ensure that the Diversity manager has the necessary support and endorsement from top management.

Adoption of a comprehensive strategy to implement diversity by ensuring continuous assessment and improvement of how we use our human resources programs and policies.

Develop the necessary training and incentive programs to meet the needs of both managers and employees in the Agency.

All facets of organizational training and development should include a cultural diversity component.

Establish the mechanisms to develop formal mentoring and core group programs for employees that are interested in getting additional support.

The Diversity Initiative needs to be clearly articulated in written policies, practices, and procedures. A management strategy that outlines specific programs, goals, expectations, and methods of accountability is necessary.

Need to continue with an aggressive recruitment program coupled with programs to increase retention and development of our diverse staff.

The Agency include managing diversity criteria in supervisory and managerial performance standards. As reinforcement, bonus decisions should consider positive-performance in this area.

Communications on the Agency's Change Management Triad (TQM, Strategic Planning, Cultural Diversity), needs to take place at all levels of the organization and should be integrated as a common theme to facilitate the organizational change process.

Need to foster a decentralized approach to promote cultural diversity creativity and innovation across EPA.