

1. Equal Opportunity in Employment

Equal Employment Opportunity

Equal employment opportunity is the right of all people to be protected from workplace and hiring discrimination. EEO laws protect all employees and applicants from illegal discrimination by employers.

Specifically, you cannot discriminate based on race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. EEO laws make it illegal to use any of those factors as a basis for denying employment or as a basis for unequal treatment during employment.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, prohibits employers from discriminating because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The act did not apply to federal employment. In 1965, President Johnson amended Title VII to bar discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin in federal employment. Two years later, President Johnson amended the order to bar sex discrimination in federal employment also.

Discrimination Complaint Process

Employees and applicants who feel they have been discriminated against may file a complaint against the agency. Formal and informal complaint procedures are established as policy in all federal agencies to settle grievances.

Affirmative Action

The goal of affirmative action is to achieve a workforce that represents our diverse population. Affirmative action programs try to correct the persisting effects of past discrimination against certain groups. These programs are “affirmative” which means they involve positive, pro-active steps designed to assist targeted groups.

Affirmative Employment Plan

Each federal department and agency must have an Affirmative Employment Plan. This document specifies the goals, timetables, and strategies the agency will use to improve employment and advancement opportunities for targeted groups.

Affirmative Employment Programs

Several affirmative employment programs have been established to eliminate lingering inequities.

- Federal Women’s Program
- Hispanic Emphasis Program
- Disability Emphasis Program
- Black Emphasis Program
- Native American Emphasis Program
- Veterans Emphasis Program
- Asian & Pacific Islander Emphasis

Special emphasis programs address under-representation and employment concerns of these groups. In addition, Equal Opportunity Committees within agencies address equal employment and civil rights issues on a continuing basis.

2. Equal Opportunity in Program Delivery

Equal opportunity in program delivery, or civil rights, means everyone has equal access to USDA programs. Minorities, women and groups who have not fully participated in federal programs have equal opportunity to benefit from USDA services.

Equal opportunity in program delivery is based on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other laws.

Some things, NRCS does to ensure equal access to our programs are:

- Make sure offices are accessible to the handicapped.
- Conduct special outreach activities to help inform on-traditional audiences of our programs.
- Promote programs through media commonly used by minorities and accessible to the handicapped.
- Include the non-discrimination statement on all program announcements and publications;
- Monitor program participation by sex and racial groups.
- Work with committees and county boards to achieve representation of the community and equal access to programs.
- Zero tolerance policy on sexual harassment.
- Actively recruit a diversity of summer students.

All employees are responsible for upholding civil rights in program delivery and are accountable for non compliance with NRCS policy. NRCS will not participate in meetings held by groups or in facilities which discriminate.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.