This guide was created by the NRCS special emphasis program managers and follows the guidelines set forth in Title 230, General Manual, Part 403, Subparts A through H.
SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAMS GUIDE

TALENT MANAGEMENT DIVISION

Congratulations on being selected as a special emphasis program manager (SEPM). This guide has been created to assist the national SEPMs and the collateral-duty SEPMs in providing guidance and leadership to their respective groups.

Policy mandates that the national Federal Women’s Program manager, the national Hispanic Emphasis Program manager, and the national Disabled Emphasis Program manager serve in a full-time capacity. The other five NSEPMs are in collateral positions: Blacks, Veterans, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender.

This guide was created to provide a basic understanding of the special emphasis programs and to assist SEPMs in managing the program effectively. Refer to the general manual on eDirectives for NRCS policies and procedures and to get the latest information and updates as these documents may be revised from time to time. The information gathered in this guide was based on policy as of May 2014.

This guide was developed by—

Sharyn Alvarez, National Federal Women’s Program Manager
Bertha T. Venegas, Acting National Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager

The best way to use this guide is to—

- Print a copy and put it in a three-ring binder.
- Add your position description.
- Add NRCS’s organizational chart.
- Create a list of SEPMs in NRCS and add it to your book.
- Add a list of other important contacts.
- When you create your plan of operation (or business plan) and budget, also add it to this book.
- Be sure to share this book or its latest edition with the person who takes your place when you leave the role of SEPM.
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INTRODUCTION

NRCS is committed to the Secretary’s Cultural Transformation Initiative and his vision of creating a more diverse, more inclusive, and higher-performing organization with equity of opportunity for all employees and customers.

Diversity is the mosaic of people who bring a variety of backgrounds, styles, perspectives, values, and beliefs as assets the groups and organizations with which they interact.

The Office of Personnel Management defines workforce diversity as a collection of individual attributes that together help agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively. These include, but are not limited to, characteristics such as national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures. The concept also encompasses differences among people concerning where they are from and where they have lived and their differences of thought and life experiences.

Inclusion is defined as a culture that connects each employee to the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organization so that all individuals are able to participate and contribute to their full potential.

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<tr>
<td>The enforcement of statutes to prevent discrimination.</td>
<td>The effort to achieve parity in the workplace through fair hiring practices.</td>
<td>Leveraging differences in the workforce to achieve better results.</td>
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AGE  
VETERAN STATUS  
SEXUAL ORIENTATION  
LANGUAGE  
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS  
GENDER  
GENDER IDENTITY  
DISABILITY  
RELIGION  
RACE  
COLOR  
NATIONAL ORIGIN  
FAMILY STRUCTURE  
ETHNICITY
PURPOSE

The special emphasis program authority can be found in the General Manual under Title 230, Part 403.

The SEP is authorized and appropriated by law and by Department regulations and policies. In order for any employee to work on any program it has to be authorized and appropriated.

The SEP was created to focus attention on specific groups as a result of a particular law, regulation, or Executive order. It was established to address employment-related concerns of a group where a need for special emphasis or employment concerns of such group has been demonstrated.

SEPs address the unique concerns of members of the following groups in achieving diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity in employment activities:

- People with disabilities
- Women
- Hispanics
- Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders
- American Indians and Alaska Natives
- Black/African Americans
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals
- Veterans
AUTHORITIES

The following laws, rules, Executive orders, and regulations provide authority and guidance in carrying out SEPs:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act amendments of 2008
- Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended
- The Equal Opportunity Act of 1972
- The Fair Labor Standards Act (The Equal Pay Act of 1963) and 1974 amendments
- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, as amended
- The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (requires “fair and equitable” treatment in all aspects of personnel management without regard to political affiliation, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or disabling condition)
- The Architectural Barriers Act of 1987
- The Vietnam Era Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974, as amended (38 U.S.C. Section 4212)
- The Veterans Education and Employment Program Amendments of 1991 (requires expanded job opportunities for veterans and disabled veterans through the (VRA), 38 U.S.C. Section 4314)
- The Farm Bills of 2002 and 2008
- Executive Order 11701, Employment of Veterans by Federal Agencies and Government Contractors and Subcontractors (January 24, 1973)
- Executive Order 13166, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (August 11, 2000)
- Executive Order 13145 (February 8, 2000) (prohibits discrimination in Federal employment based on genetic information)
- Executive Order 13087 (provides that, as a matter of Federal policy, an individual’s sexual orientation may not be the basis for the denial of an employment or promotional opportunity)
- Executive Order 13152 (provides for a uniform policy within the Federal Government to prohibit discrimination based on an individual’s status as a parent)
- Departmental Regulation 4230-002, Special Emphasis Programs (June 4, 2009)
- USDA Civil Rights Policy Statement
- NRCS Civil Rights Policy Statement

NRCS does not retain enforcement authority for all items listed, but they provide guidance on how the agency conducts its employment activities and informs agency actions.
NATIONAL SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAM MANAGERS
INTRODUCTION

As mandated by legislation, 29 CFR Part 1614, the Civil Rights Act of 1968, and stated in NRCS policy, our agency’s National Federal Women’s Program Manager, National Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager (NHEPM), and the Disabled Emphasis Program Manager (DEPM) are full-time positions. Currently, the NFWP has a full-time manager, the NHEP has a full-time acting manager, and the NDEPM is collateral.

The National Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Veterans, and Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender special emphasis program managers are collateral positions. The collateral NSEPMs spend 20 percent of their time managing the program.

Most of the State Collateral SEPMs spend 20 percent of their time in their collateral position, but it is up to their State Conservationist or director to make that determination.
NATIONAL SEPM – DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The national SEPMs provide program leadership and direction for agencywide activities related to the special emphasis programs. Review the duties and responsibilities of your special emphasis group in the 230-GM, Part 403, “Special Emphasis Programs,” but in general the following duties and responsibilities apply:

- Formulates and implements the general direction of the overall NRCS special emphasis program and evaluates the effectiveness of activities and programs toward achieving SEP objectives.
- Provides training, guidance, information, and assistance to National Headquarters, regions, State managers, supervisors, and collateral duty SEPMs concerning their SEP responsibilities. In addition, the national SEPM serves as the principal resource person and staff advisor on legislation, affirmative employment programs, and unique concerns and problems related to equal opportunities for employees in their respective SEP.
- Analyzes and evaluates employment policies, practices, procedures, and workforce profile data to determine if barriers or potential barriers to full participation exist and reports findings to the appropriate officials with recommendations for corrective action. This includes participation in the development and monitoring of the agency’s civil rights program, plans, and reports (e.g., EEOC’s MD-715, EEO Program Status Report, and reports relating to employees within the SEP group in the Federal Government).
- Establishes and strengthens relationships with organizations and groups representing persons in your special emphasis group.
- Maintains relationships with other SEPMs from other agencies and organizations that represent people with disabilities for the mutual exchange of ideas, advice, best practices, and information.
- Serves as the NRCS representative on the Department’s committee for the special emphasis group represented.
- Participates in studies and reviews to identify possible forms of discrimination and barriers to equal opportunity in employment activities (e.g., recruitment, hiring, development, promotion, development, recognition and awards, and retention).
- Serves as the principal resource for the director of the Talent Management Division by providing assistance on national reporting requirements and tasks related to special emphasis programs and provides training, guidance, and assistance to collateral duty national special emphasis program managers.
NATIONAL SEPMs TEAMS

Recognizing that the challenges faced by all special emphasis programs are interrelated, the special emphasis programs will have five teams consisting of eight members each. This will assist in the networking, facilitation, and planning of strategies for all the special emphasis programs. There will be one member from each special emphasis program in each of the teams. The teams will consist of the following:

**Barrier Analysis Team** – The purpose of this team is to identify workforce barriers within the agency as they relate to all special emphasis groups and take the lead on developing and implementing strategies to address this issue. This will include conducting barrier analysis as instructed by national leadership.

**Employee Professional Development and Retention Team** – The purpose of this team is to assist the national HR staff with providing the State SEPMs with guidance and resources needed to address the action items identified in the NSEPM Business Plan at both the national and State levels.

**Historical Employment Research Team** – The purpose of this team is to capture the historical data of special emphasis groups within the agency at both national and State levels. Team members will work in conjunction with agency historian, and with various other identified contacts resources in order to capture the history of the special emphasis programs within the agency. Working with the national historian, a database will be developed to store the information.

**Information and Education Team (Internal and External)** – The purpose of this team is to assist with creating special emphasis program educational material for employees and partners to use. This team would work in conjunction with the Talent Management Division staff as well as the national PAS staff. Examples of materials include but not limited to newsletters, annual celebration posters, and special emphasis program materials to be shared with employees and partners.

**Intern Recruitment and Retention Team** – The purpose of this team is to develop strategies for the recruitment and retention of students. The team will work with SEPMs to implement these strategies and evaluate the outcome.
HOW TO WORK WITH YOUR NSEPM

The NSEPM provides guidance, support training and information to the State SEPM. The NSEPM schedules quarterly telephone conferences to engage the State collateral SEPMs in information exchange, networking, addressing barriers and reviewing accomplishments.

The NSEPM is there to provide guidance on any questions you may have that you are not sure how to address. Always contact your NSEPM and visit with them about any concerns you may have on your involvement in any issues that are brought to your attention.

The NSEPM also provides training in areas like roles and responsibilities, barrier analysis, recruitment, career development, retention and other areas. Do not hesitate to ask for a particular training. The NSEPM will assist in either providing the training or scheduling with other agency personnel to provide the training depending on the topic.

Participate in all the quarterly telephone conferences. It is important to keep abreast of what is happening in the agency pertaining to your special emphasis group.

Get involved in teams and offer feedback and topics of interest to you and your State employees.
STATE COLLATERAL SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAM MANAGERS
STATE COLLATERAL SEPMs DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

State collateral-duty SEPMs provide program leadership and support the national SEPM in implementing a viable SEP agency wide. The national SEPM provides technical guidance, and the collateral-duty SEPM ensures that SEP activities are integrated into the overall equal opportunity program in their State. The State collateral duty SEPMs—

- Advise the directors and State Conservationists on matters affecting the employment and advancement of the special emphasis group.
- Serve as members to the civil rights committee in their organizational units to ensure that all NRCS activities are free from discrimination and that barriers to the recruitment, employment, and advancement of special emphasis group members are addressed. SEPMs assist in evaluating the effectiveness of the overall equal opportunity program in their organizational units and assist in identifying new and changing program needs.
- Coordinate or conduct educational programs (e.g., workshops, seminars, or other types of programs, such as SEP observances).
- Maintain close contact with community organizations for possible job referrals of special emphasis group applicants and stay attuned to concerns of the special emphasis group population.
- Attend job fairs or other functions at local high schools, colleges, and universities to provide information on job opportunities; send recruitment literature to schools and community groups; sponsor workshops and speakers, information booths at conferences, career days, and other training programs.
- Keep the national SEPM informed of field activities affecting the special emphasis group.
- Serve as local representative at national, regional, and State meetings concerning issues of the special emphasis group.
- Serve as a communication link between employees and the national SEPM, keeping State employees aware of SEP activities and developmental opportunities through electronic messages, memos, bulletins, newsletters, and other appropriate means.
- Perform other duties related to the SEP as identified by the deputy equal opportunity officer (DEOO), national SEPM, and SEP committees, as appropriate.
DOCUMENTING SEPM COLLATERAL POSITIONS

The SEPM’s collateral duty will be described in writing as part of his or her position description and show—

- Scope of responsibility.
- Supervisory roles of DEOO, equal opportunity liaison officer, and the immediate supervisor.
- Percentage of official time to be spent on the SEP.
- Specific duties and responsibilities of the collateral assignment.

In addition, the DEOO, equal opportunity liaison officer, and the immediate supervisor will prepare a memorandum of understanding (see Title 230, General Manual, Part 403, Subpart J, for a sample TEMPLATE) that responds to the following questions regarding working conditions:

- How and when will the appointee receive SEP assignments?
- What percentage of official time will be spent on the SEP, and how will adjustments be made to meet SEP objectives?
- Who will appraise the appointee’s performance, and how will the appraisals be completed?
- Who will provide clerical support and office facilities, if needed?
TRAINING NEEDS

The following courses are offered by the vendors listed below. This is an example of the type of courses that would benefit you. Take into consideration that the wording may differ but the overall concept of what you are learning is the same. There is not one vendor we recommend over another. You will find similar courses from other vendors as well. There will be opportunities for training within the department or agency that will be offered as well.

**Special Emphasis Program Manager Course** – Offered by the Office Human Resources Management (OHRM), in collaboration with the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI). This course develops knowledge and skills that allow course graduates to serve as effective collateral-duty or full-time SEPMs (Federal Women’s; Black Employment; Hispanic Employment; Asian-Pacific Islander Employment; American Indian/Alaskan Native Employment; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT); Veterans; and People with Disabilities Programs). It focuses on the interpersonal and intrapersonal and organizational aspects of equal employment opportunity (EEO) and program management skills. Training introduces the causes and effects of discrimination, EEO programs for Federal employees and applicants for employment, civilian personnel and human resource management, and valuing diversity. It concentrates on the roles and responsibilities of SEPMs, communication skills, staff coordination, briefing skills, analyzing EEO data, and planning and managing effective special emphasis programs.

**EEOP8115D - Special Emphasis Program Management (Classroom-Day)** – Obtain the guidance you need to perform successfully as an SEP manager. Learn about EEO and affirmative employment principles and how to develop strategies for managing and implementing SEP programs. Learn to identify employment barriers that impact your target group, allocate resources, conduct meetings, and sponsor appropriate.

**EEOP7001D - Managing Workforce Diversity (Classroom-Day)** – Create an inclusive environment that capitalizes on today’s complex and dynamic workplace. Come to understand, appreciate, and account for the impact and value of differences in backgrounds, generations, cultural experiences, perspectives, personality and heritage. Examine your interpersonal behavior in the workplace.

**EEOP8101D - EEO for Supervisors and Managers (Classroom-Day)** – Enhance your performance as a Federal supervisor by understanding your role, responsibilities, and obligations in recruiting and maintaining a diverse workforce and in addressing and preventing discrimination, retaliation and all forms of harassment. Enhance your performance as a federal supervisor by understanding your role, and responsibilities.
**SEPM Training Vendors**

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<tr>
<td>Graduate School USA (formerly known as the USDA Grad School) is a leader in meeting public sector education, development, and training needs.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.graduateschool.edu">www.graduateschool.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute offers equal opportunity and EEO education and training for military active duty and reservists as well as civilians in both resident and nonresident courses.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.deomi.org">www.deomi.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rushford &amp; Associates is a cadre of nationally recognized trainers, consultants and subject matter experts that are ready to provide training, problem solving, project management and temporary services.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rushfordtraining.com">www.rushfordtraining.com</a></td>
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IN YOUR ROLE AS SEPM

Ethics

As an SEPM you are a professional and a leader in NRCS. You need to know the rules, guidelines, and policies of NRCS and must follow them. Whenever you are not sure about information you want to share with employees or activities you want to participate in, contact your national SEPM for direction.

Confidential, Controversial, and Sensitive Information

As an SEPM in NRCS, at times you will have access to information or conversations that need to be kept confidential. You must remember that employees or agency leaders will give you information that you need to have but due to a variety of circumstances is not to be shared. There are exceptions, you may hear information you need to report to management, such as threats made against individuals or the agency or knowledge of discrimination. Follow the procedures set by NRCS for reporting these incidents.

As an SEPM you will also have to deal with controversial issues. Be discrete and professional. Your effective handling of controversial situations will enhance your reputation as a professional.

Working Effectively With Others

Emotional intelligence is the ability to express and control your own emotions and also understand, interpret and respond effectively to the emotions of others. If this does not come natural to you, you can learn to improve your emotional intelligence.

You will need to know how to work effectively with many types of people and groups. You will need to be able to manage yourself, your thoughts and your comments. You will need to think things through and plan your responses. You will need to develop partnerships, learn to lead, listen to other points of view and have an open mind. You will need to recognize your biases and manage them. You will need to know that your work is a marathon, not a sprint, so patience and diligence are necessary personality traits.

Here are some suggestions for working well with—

- **Agency Leadership** – You need to know who NRCS leaders are. Who has the power to assist you in accomplishing your goals? Who has the ability to provide you the tools you need, the budget, the equipment, the staff? Who has the power to impact your ability to be a SEPM? This is the person or persons you need to have an open and honest relationship with. You need to ensure that this person is kept informed and is never caught off guard or blindsided. Give them the good news, give them the bad news, and always keep them in the loop. When working with leaders it is important to keep their goals in mind. When you want something, always think how your need will benefit agency leadership. You will always want to convince them to see things your way by presenting a positive business case the can wrap their arms around. Never bring leadership a problem without suggestions for solving the problem. This way they have something to review and it will be easier to get a response. Always show appreciation for the support you receive from agency leadership.

- **Partners** – With immense workloads, small staff, and firm deadlines, you can get a lot done if you work in partnership with others. However, it is a two-way street. For all the assistance you get from working with others, you need to be prepared to assist your partners when they need help. Be a strategic thinker.

- **Difficult People** – As SEPM, you will have your share to deal with. If you have not done so, take a course on dealing effectively with difficult people. They are several personality traits of difficult people. You can learn what they are and effective ways to interact with them. If you have a limited training budget, there are plenty of resources on this subject available. You can also check AgLearn for agency
free online training on the subject.
WORKING WITH YOUR STATE CONSERVATIONIST OR DIRECTOR

In your role as HEPM you report directly to your State Conservationist. He or she is your supervisor in this role. Things you can do:

- Set up a meeting or phone call with your STC to introduce yourself and learn what his or her expectations are for the program.
- Learn how he or she wants to communicate with you.
- Find out what goals the STC wants you to accomplish.
- Review your duties with the STC.
- Provide feedback on the goals agreed upon.
- Adjust goals as needed.
- Keep him or her informed of any matters pertaining to the SEP.
TITLE VI AND VII

Every agency has a title VI component to their agency structure. Title VI is the program delivery to the customers that NRCS serves. Your role is to assist NRCS in ensuring that the special emphasis group you represent is receiving the benefits the programs NRCS delivers in a fair and equitable manner.

Tips to assist you in outreach:

- Know NRCS programs and their requirements.
- Ensure that the special emphasis group you represent in your States is aware of NRCS programs and services and how to participate in them.
- Work with outreach, other SEPMs, civil rights, and other NRCS staff to accomplish this.
- Host community meetings; develop information sheets about NRCS programs.
- Use the Internet, YouTube, radio, and newspaper articles and create mailing lists to spread the message to your special emphasis group.

If there is a complaint based on a program issue you can either refer them to your Outreach Division or your Civil Rights Division and to the following link:
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/about/civilrights/?cid=nrcs143_022456

Every agency has a title VII, http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm, component to their agency structure. Title VII prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. The Civil Rights Act of 1991 (Public Law 102-166) (CRA) and the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-2) amends several sections of title VII. In addition, section 102 of the CRA (which is printed elsewhere in this publication) amends the Revised Statutes by adding a new section following section 1977 (42 U.S.C. Section 1981), to provide for the recovery of compensatory and punitive damages in cases of intentional violations of title VII, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Title VII is employment and your role is to assist NRCS in ensuring that the special emphasis group members you represent are recruited, hired, promoted, career developed, retained, recognized, and awarded in a fair and equitable manner.

As a SEPM, you will be working with many people, mostly employees. Once they know who you are, you will be approached with a variety of complaints, issues, and concerns. You will hear some stories that are troubling if not outright shocking. You are human and will want to react. However, you must take your time. Listen to the employee, take notes as they talk and make sure that you understand what they are saying. Say that you will discuss this with the appropriate staff person. If you know who that is, refer the employee to them immediately, supply them with the contact information. If you don’t know who to refer them to, promise to look into the situation and will get back to them soon. Most likely the people you would have to consult are either NRCS’s Civil Rights Division or Human Resources Division.

To ensure that you get the correct information and guidance, it is important to reach out to the appropriate office. Do not overstep your role. As SEPM, you do not manage discrimination complaints, but can refer the employee to the Civil Rights Division. You can give tips or suggestions on how to handle situations and you can empower them to take action to defend themselves. They are responsible to take action.

You can provide assistance by learning how the complaint process is managed in NRCS. Know the civil rights policies and procedures or know where to direct them to. Read you agency’s civil rights policy statements that have been created by the Chief of NRCS or the Secretary of Agriculture.
Know the roles of staff members of these divisions and ask for assistance.

**EEO COMPLAINT INFORMATION:**

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/civilrights/?cid=nrcs143_022478

**CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION WEBSITE:**

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/about/civilrights/?cid=nrcsdev11_001042

**OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR CIVIL RIGHTS – Frequently Asked Questions**

http://www.ascr.usda.gov/faq/faq_eeofiling_cr.html
MANAGING A SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAM

The bulk of your role as a special emphasis program manager will be spent on the following tasks:

Determining barriers will help you understand why your special emphasis group is not being recruited to NRCS, why they are not being hired, why they are not making progress in their career, why their morale is poor, and why they are leaving NRCS. There are three types of barriers:

- Institutional
- Attitudinal
- Physical

Institutional barriers are traditions or agency cultures that inhibit the ability for the target group to be hired, career developed, recognized, and/or retained. Attitudinal barriers are the beliefs and views that people feel and often use when they make decisions. Decisions based on those beliefs negatively impact those they work with. Physical barriers are actual objects or building structures that inhibit a person’s ability to access a building, a parking lot, or participate in an event.

When determining barriers, you will need to do several things: do a workforce analysis of the target group in to determine if there are discrepancies between what is and what should be as it relates to recruitment, hiring, career development, recognition, and retention. Then investigate to pinpoint any problems and devise a measurable plan to address the issues. Lastly, track your progress and evaluate the success of your plans.

The Management Directives (MD) – 715 Reports contain useful data to determine barriers and can be found at this link:
http://prod.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/about/civilrights/?cid=nrcs143_022461

Career development of the special emphasis group is important to the retention of the group in NRCS. If members of the special emphasis group are not moving forward in their careers, they start thinking of leaving. Encourage the target group to understand and appreciate the value of mentoring, networking, great writing skills, and never underestimating themselves (just to name a few). You can partner with others to create workshops, net meetings, and teleconferences. Collect articles from professional periodicals and share them. Share appropriate Web sites. Work closely with employee organizations and other SEPMs to determine what career development interest they have. Take the initiative and look for training to meet your goals through AgLearn, http://www.aglearn.usda.gov/, and the National Employee Development Center (NEDC), at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/nedc/. The majority of this training is free of charge to NRCS.

Retention of employees requires well-thought-out strategies. Studies have shown that employees who don’t feel valued or engaged start looking for other opportunities. Chances are NRCS has not reached parity with the special emphasis group so you don’t want to lose them. You will need to determine what works for your special emphasis group in NRCS. Do they feel valued, are they receiving training, do they have opportunities for developmental stretch assignments. Is the NRCS office where they work providing the latest workplace benefits such as telework, lactation support, or mentor programs? Does their office have an on-boarding process for new employees to help them begin their careers in a positive manner? You will need to become very familiar with all the options available to employees so you can speak to the target group about them. The Federal Handbook for Employees is a great resource for employees that have
questions pertaining to personnel issues and can be found at http://www.federalhandbooks.com/fedbooks/Personnel.pdf.

Administrative duties make up a large portion of your duties as SEPM. You will need to carve out time to stay on top of them. You will need to be organized and strategic. You will need to communicate, meet, plan, and research. Managing emails will be your biggest challenge.

Communication is important. Try not to accumulate too many unread emails because requests and questions won’t get answered in a timely manner and your accessibility to the customers you serve is important. Create email distribution lists so you can ensure you don’t miss sending emails to someone. Hosting regular teleconferences is a value to those you serve as well as a way for you to receive information and build teamwork. Establish quarterly teleconference with dates shared in advance so the participants can post them on their calendars. You should also receive quarterly reports from the SEPMs you lead and prepare a consolidated report to send to your leadership.

Use the technology available in NRCS to conduct business. Make sure you have access to a teleconference phone line and pass code, conference room, and video teleconference room to host meetings.

Reports and Other Documents. You will be asked to produce reports or contribute to them in your role as NSEPM. Both the MD-715 and the Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program FEORP (by OPM) reports are done yearly but updated every quarter, and you will be asked to input information pertaining to your SEP.

You will be required to compile State collateral-duty SEPMs’ quarterly reports and develop one report for your SEP. This report is submitted to staff of the TMD and is utilized to compile one overall SEPM report that is presented to NRCS leadership and departmental leadership if needed.

Policy states that the State collateral-duty SEPMs must develop a business plan or plan of operation and a budget on an annual basis. Annual business plans of operation are important management tools that are effective in gauging progress in meeting short- and long-term goals and in scheduling annual program activities. They also provide the basis for determining the performance of managers in specific areas of responsibility. The annual plan should contain realistic and achievable action items.

A SAMPLE annual business plan that can be modified to fit your special emphasis program is included in the RESOURCES section of this handbook to help you assist State collateral-duty SEPMs. Additional sample plans may be found in the Talent Management Division SharePoint. Contact TMD staff if you cannot access the following link: https://ems-team.usda.gov/sites/NRCS_DeputyChief/crd/SitePages/Home.aspx.
RESOURCES
AT A GLANCE

DUTIES

- Publicize your designation as the SEPM
- Assess the status of special emphasis group in your workforce. Review workforce statistics
- Identify employment barriers
- Address barriers with goals and action items
- Develop budget, annual work plan, and resource allocation plan
- Become an expert on matters that relate to the special emphasis group in your workplace. Establish contacts with key agency officials.
- Become familiar with agency policy for the special emphasis program
- Serve as the liaison between staff employees and management; and represent program, not individuals

SKILLS REQUIRED

- Knowledge of personnel practices
- Communication (verbal and nonverbal)
- Self-development
- Analytical skills

RESOURCES

- Regulations, policies, and procedures
- Advisory committees
- Other SEPMs
- Organizations promoting equal opportunity for special emphasis groups
- Internet and multiple search engines

MARKETING THE PROGRAM

- Know your managers
- Gain managers’ support
- Write articles for employee newspaper
- Conduct awareness events
- Create a brochure and fact sheet
- Seek talents and skills of other employees

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Similar groups
- Current news events, legislative updates
- Other training seminars
- Books, articles, electronic sources
AN SEPM

- Wears many hats
- Sticks to the facts
- Appreciates diversity
- Encourages others to excel
- Is a leader among many
CHECKLIST

✓ Schedule a meeting with the outgoing SEPM to gather information that may assist you
✓ Determine your State communication methods
✓ Visit the State SEPM SharePoint site
✓ Visit the national SEPM SharePoint to familiarize yourself with materials, references, and Web sites
✓ Visit with your State Conservationist to get direction and guidance in your new role
✓ Introduce yourself as the SEPM for your State
✓ Ask for feedback from employees
✓ Develop an action plan or include your action items in the civil rights action plan
BARRIER ANALYSIS

Barrier analysis can be defined as a policy, procedure, practice, or condition. Barriers limit employment opportunities for members of a particular group. Some barriers may be easy to identify. Other barriers are embedded in the day-to-day procedures and practices of an agency and may appear neutral. A barrier analysis should be focused, methodical, and involve the participation of all relevant agency officials.

Types of Employment Barriers

Institutional

Example: NRCS will promote employees to the senior-level positions (GS-14 and above) only from within the organization.

Attitudinal

Example: Individuals with targeted disabilities can only perform marginal tasks and are harder to place in higher senior-level positions.

Physical

Example: Your office building is not accessible for a person with a disability.

Process to Address Barriers

- Identify where possible barriers may exist using a variety of sources like workforce data tables, complaints, and surveys
- Investigate to pinpoint actual barriers and causes
- Ask the question why until you can answer the question without any further whys

Sources of Information to Identify Potential Barriers

- Analyze workforce statistics
- Review EEO complaints and exit interviews
- Talk to EEO and human resources staff
- Talk to unions and advocacy groups
- Conduct surveys and establish focus groups
- Review studies by outside organizations and Federal agencies
- Review employment policies, procedures, and practices pertaining to—
  - Hiring
  - Promotions and other internal selections
  - Attainment of supervisory ad management positions
  - Training and career development opportunities
  - Performance incentives and awards
  - Disciplinary actions
  - Separations
Strategies to Eliminate Barriers

- Design a corrective action plan to address the identified causes of barriers
- Even if a barrier is job-related, explore alternatives that serve the same purpose but have less impact on a particular group of employees
- Progress should be measurable and agency officials held accountable
- Periodic assessment of agency official’s progress should be done
## SAMPLE ANNUAL PLAN OF WORK

### USDA – [Your State Name] NRCS [SEPM] EMPHASIS PROGRAM BUSINESS PLAN

**Main Goal:** To create a diverse [Your State] NRCS workforce which provides equal opportunities for all employees and supports and promotes nondiscrimination both in the workplace and in program delivery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION ITEM</th>
<th>Estimated Completion Date</th>
<th>Cost of Action</th>
<th>SEPM Staff Days</th>
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#### Recruitment

**Objective 1 -**

a.  

b.  

#### Development, Retention, and Promotions

**Objective 2 -**

a.  

b.  

#### Trainings

**Objective 3 -** Participate in a minimum of two training sessions annually to increase the overall awareness and proficiency of [STATE SEPM] Emphasis Program.

a.  

b.  

#### SEPM Program Awareness

**Objective 4 -**

a.  

b.  

**SUBTOTAL for Cost of Action and SEPM Staff Days**: $0.00

**Based on 20% of the time to accomplish the collateral duty**: 

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<th>3/31</th>
<th>6/30</th>
<th>9/30</th>
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QUARTERLY REPORT TEMPLATE

____Quarter – ______(DATE) __________

SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAM: _______________________

Name: State:

Share the accomplishments you made this quarter to overcome the barriers that impact the recruitment, retention, or career development of the group you represent. (Fill in either in bullet format or paragraph)

You may write in bullet format or paragraph

1. Recruitment

2. Retention

3. Career Development

Efforts have you made in outreaching to:

1. Producers/Landowners

2. Youth, Middle school, High School, or College

Provide an update on:

1. Your collaboration with leadership or teams or subcommittees

2. Ways you communicate with employees in your State

3. Heritage month activities you were involved in

4. On-the-job training (you conducted or attended)

5. Please provide any comments, issues, concerns, or recommendations you would like to make regarding your program.
6. QUARTERLY REPORT DESCRIPTION

1. Barriers or Potential Barriers
   - Identify and list any barriers or potential barriers to recruitment and hiring, career development, and promotions in your State.

2. Recruitment
   - What career fair or recruitment activities did you participate in this quarter?
   - What is your State doing to recruit?
   - List any recruitment materials developed
   - List unique employment opportunities your State provides
   - Does your State have current or upcoming student career positions or internships available?

3. Career Development
   - What type of leadership development efforts are being made for your special emphasis group in your State?
   - Is diversity training being given to the leadership and employees in your State?
   - Are employees being recommended for and accepting details, taskforce, and committee assignments on a State or national level?
   - What kind of employee development efforts are (in spite of budget constraints) being implemented in your State?
   - Are employees being asked to “act” in positions when the opportunity arises?

   Examples:
   - Conducted or coordinated workshops (e.g., interviewing skills, group and one-on-one mock interviews)
   - Provided information and encouraged employee participation in NRCS developmental programs and developmental opportunities
   - KSA writing assistance
   - Handbooks
   - Detail assignments
   - Workshops, conferences
   - Mentoring program

4. Promotions
   - Are employees in your State knowledgeable on how to apply for positions, are they willing to be mobile? What are you (and others) doing to help?
   - Ways you encourage employees in the special emphasis group you are managing to take the next step by applying for higher graded positions.
   - Are employees being promoted? If not, do you know why?

5. Community Outreach
   - Are you working to provide information to members of the special emphasis group who are producers or landowners in your State?
   - Are you in contact with professional organizations and advocacy groups for the special emphasis group in your State?
Do you have success stories to share? (Internal or external outreach efforts)

Examples: Agricultural Networks
Beginning farmer programs and school-to-farm programs
Assisting SWCD boards with diversity in board membership Outreach materials developed
Conferences, special events, program delivery activities

6. Communications

- Are you working with the public affairs specialist (PAS) to develop media material aimed specifically at recruiting the special emphasis group to work for NRCS?
- Does this type of material already exist in your State?
- Do you network with other SEPMs in your State?
- Are you in contact with your State Conservationist?
- Methods used by SEPM to improve communication efforts.

Examples: Networking
State reports Videos
Web page Success stories Newsletters
Fact Sheets

7. Collaborating with NRCS Leadership

Work with regional leaders; State leaders like the outreach coordinator, public affairs specialist, and human resources officer; Talent Management Division; national Civil Rights Division; and others to accomplish the goals of your special emphasis program.

Examples: Serving on national SEP committees
Working with a State Conservationist on an activity pertaining to the program
MENTOR PROGRAM

What is a Mentoring Relationship?

- A relationship is structured and trusting.
- It can be requested by a supervisor or an employee (prospective mentee).
- It provides support and encouragement for career enhancement.
- It provides a safe environment.

What is a Mentor?

- A person who is genuinely interested in the development of others
- A person who is a good listener
- A person who is comfortable addressing all aspects of career, including soft skills
- A person who enjoys helping others reach their full potential
- A person who has the ability to create a safe and confidential environment

Formal Mentoring Programs

- A formal mentoring program, which includes written agreements, takes a lot of time and effort to develop.
- A formal mentoring program should not be attempted unless you have the time and commitment it takes for success.
- Unless you have been trained, a formal program may not be the best approach.

Informal Mentoring Programs

- An informal mentoring program can work as well as a formal program and sometimes better.
- An informal program often happens so naturally that people often don’t realize that they are already in a mentoring situation.
- It can be easier for a mentee to obtain the mentor they are most comfortable with.

Before You Agree to Serve as a Mentor

- Determine what the prospective mentee is looking for.
- Determine how often and how long the mentoring relationship should last and make sure you can meet the commitment (i.e., how often and the duration of your meetings, time to review applications and KSAs, availability to provide advice and counsel as needed).

The Mentor’s Commitment

The mentor should utilize the initial discussion to—

- Set the ground rules (i.e., when, where, and duration of the meetings).
- Identify how the mentor will provide feedback.
- Identify the mentee’s goals and objectives.
- Identify how progress will be measured.
- Discuss the confidentiality of your meetings and the exchange of information.
The Mentee’s Commitment

The mentee should utilize the initial discussion to identify their expectations of guidance and advice regarding—

- Applications and KSAs.
- How to develop an individual development plan (IDP).
- Career advancement, interview techniques, and training.
The Mentor/Mentee Agreement

- Always work on the goals identified by the mentee.
- Meet all commitments.
- Always be sensitive and honest in your interaction.
- Always keep the discussions and documents confidential.

Mentoring is Rewarding

- Serving as a mentor is a great way to give back. Most of us have had supervisors that have seen potential in us and provided great guidance, opportunities, and advice regarding career moves.
- We all have the ability to serve as a mentor.
- We have learned a lot in our career and have a lot to share.
PROMOTING DIVERSITY

- Lead employees by example, respect people and differences in the workplace.
- Create a welcoming, inclusive environment in which to conduct business.
- Incorporate diversity in policies, strategic plans, operational procedures.
- Learn and practice early conflict resolution strategies.
- Practice regular, effective, and open communication, empower your employees, requires trust.
- Demonstrate executive commitment to diversity on an ongoing and regular basis.
- Walk the talk.

Diversity Best Practices

- Career development
- Coaching and mentoring
- Recruitment and hiring
- Flexible work arrangements

Career Development

- Definition: aligning the needs of the organization with the professional development of its employees.
- Diversity should be considered in career development, especially in the following areas:
  - Succession planning
  - Internal mobility systems
  - Training and development opportunities
  - Performance management – ensure evaluations don’t include subtle biases against diverse groups of people

Coaching and Mentoring

- Helpful in retaining and developing diverse talent.
- Provide organizational support and followup.
- Provide training in mentoring across cultural differences.
- Colleagues can recommend possible mentors and mentees.
- Recruitment efforts should target the most talented and qualified persons from diverse groups within academic, professional and community organizations.
- Contact your Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management’s (OEODM) Outreach and Recruitment Team for more information on scientific and medical organizations supporting diverse communities.

Flexible Work Assignments

- Can be a key for the retention and advancement for employees balancing family needs or those with disabilities.
- The challenge is to change organizational culture to reflect a commitment to balance and truly support flexible work assignments.
Promoting Diversity Amongst Employees

- Practice positive, constructive work habits in the workplace, work cooperatively towards a common goal
- Live up to the social contract, contribute to our fullest potential, strive for excellence
- Recognize and respect others and their individuality
- Be sensitive to others and think before you speak
- Talk about your differences and ask tactful questions about how people want to be treated
- Eliminate stereotypes and generalities
## PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Website</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Fed Week</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fedweek.com">www.fedweek.com</a></td>
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<td>Gov Exec</td>
<td><a href="http://www.govexec.com">www.govexec.com</a></td>
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<td>Federal Times</td>
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<td>Diveristy, Inc</td>
<td><a href="http://www.diversityinc.com">www.diversityinc.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Telling Ain’t Training</td>
<td>Harold D. Stolovitch &amp; Erica J. Keeps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emily Post’s Etiquette</td>
<td>Elizabeth L. Post</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership 101</td>
<td>John C. Maxwell</td>
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<td>Mentoring 101</td>
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<td>Relationships 101</td>
<td>John C. Maxwell</td>
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<td>How to Say it for Women</td>
<td>Phyllis Mindell, Ed.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to Say it With Your Voice</td>
<td>Jeffrey Jacobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>Daniel Dana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crucial Conversations</td>
<td>Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillian and Al Switzler</td>
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SPECIAL OBSERVANCES

The following observances fall within the scope of, and support the objectives of, the Department’s (DR 4230-002 Appendix D) current SEPs:

- Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration (January)
- Black History Month (February)
- Women’s History Month (March)
- Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month (May)
- Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Pride Month (June)
- Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 – October 15)
- Disability Employment Awareness Month (October)
- Native American Heritage Month (November)
- Veterans Day (November 11)