



## Cultivating the Public Service Workforce of the Future: Lessons from Federal Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plans

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Lessons from Federal Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plans

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*By law, the Federal Government's recruitment policies should "endeavor to achieve a workforce from all segments of society," while avoiding discrimination for or against any employee or applicant on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy or gender identity), national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation or any other prohibited basis. (5 U.S.C. 2301(b)(1), 2302(b)). As the Nation's largest employer, the Federal Government has an obligation to lead by example. Seeking to attain a diverse, qualified workforce is a cornerstone of the merit-based civil service.*

U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2016

## **Introduction**

In March 2018, it was reported that then-Secretary of the Interior, Ryan Zinke, repeatedly said that workforce diversity was not a valued goal. Agency sources said that Zinke told them “diversity isn’t important,” or “I don’t care about diversity,” or “I don’t think that’s really important anymore.” These comments were publicized following Zinke’s decision to reassign 33 senior executive staffers, approximately half of which were reported to be minorities, in an agency that has struggled to recruit and retain a diverse workforce (Ganim, 2018).

Zinke’s comments do not reflect the broader discussion on the value of diversity in the public workforce. For example, the National Urban Fellows (2012) reminded readers that the United States is a democracy where we must strive for “full participation and equality for all citizens.” Unfortunately, the Fellows’ report notes that goal is not realized in the leadership of the public sector where there is “a troubling reality” of underrepresentation of all segments of society. The public service “must become more inclusive and representative if we are to develop fair and effective structures to fulfill the intention of our democracy” (p. 2).

Our democracy is in a state of demographic transition. It is expected that by 2050, there will be no racial or ethnic majority in the United States (Cardenas, Ajinkya, and Gibbs Leger, 2011). As society becomes more diverse, so too should the public workforce. The theory of representative bureaucracy reminds us that a workforce that looks like the citizenry it serves should be more effective in meeting changing needs. The case for public workforce diversity rests on the potential for improved efficiency, effectiveness, and innovation, in addition to the need to reflect the society it serves (Kohli, Gans, and Hairston, 2011).

However, there is a current and growing leadership gap that presents cause for concern. The public sector fails to mirror today's society, especially in the senior leadership ranks of the federal government. Ginsberg and Durak (2019) note that minorities comprise nearly 40% of the U.S. population but only 22% of top senior leadership jobs in government. And this gap is expected to persist. By 2030, projections indicate that minorities including Hispanics, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans will be significantly underrepresented in senior federal government positions while Whites will remain overrepresented and women will remain underrepresented (Kohli, Gans, and Hairston, 2011).

Workforce scholars and practitioners forecasted today's era of diversity. For example, in 1999, Fullerton predicted that by 2015, the civilian workforce would be comprised of 48% women and 32% minorities. That prediction is today's reality. According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, in 2016, the federal workforce included 43% women and 36% people of color. While these statistics may suggest progress toward a more diverse workforce, the pursuit of a more representative workforce

is complicated by several factors, including evolving elements of differentness, evidence of occupational segregation, and systemic cultural barriers to equity and inclusion. First, race and gender are typically the most common elements considered in diversity initiatives, but they are only two elements of differentness; and often, they are treated separately, without respect for intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Acker, 2006). This gap means that diversity, when it is addressed, is done so in only an incomplete manner.

Second, aggregate federal workforce statistics may paint a picture of a more representative workforce over time, but studies reveal marked differences in the organizational distribution of women and people of color, especially in leadership roles (Ricucci, 2009). According to the Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton (2017), diversity diminishes up the career ladder. “Racial and gender diversity decrease in senior positions, with a continual downward trend from the GS-8 level to the Senior Executive Service.” While a greater percentage of women and minority members of the workforce might be seen as progress, it is important to consider their place in the organization as well as their prospects for future development and promotion.

Third, there must be attention to the systemic and cultural barriers to workforce equity and inclusion. For example, based on their study of strategic workforce management planning at the local level, Goodman, French, and Battaglio (2015) concluded that managers “who realize the importance of a diverse workforce and manage their workforce to reflect that importance see the need for comprehensive workforce planning.” (p.148). This finding assumes the presence of managers who value a diverse public service workforce. The question is how to address this issue more broadly, especially when some may not embrace this same viewpoint.

One mechanism for change was President Obama's 2011 Executive Order 13583, which was a catalyst for a coordinated government-wide initiative to promote diversity and inclusion in the federal workforce. This order noted the importance of reflecting the government's commitment to equal employment opportunity by "using the talents of all segments of society," achieved by recruiting, hiring, promoting, and retaining a more diverse workforce. The order mandated the creation of a government-wide diversity and inclusion strategic plan and indicated the importance of providing guidance on agency-specific diversity and inclusion plans.

This paper explores what impact these plans had on cultivating a more diverse and inclusive federal workforce in three federal agencies. Using a mixed-methods approach, this paper examines federal diversity and inclusion strategic plans using qualitative content analysis to explore variation of plans across agencies and quantitative agency demographic data to determine the impact of diversity plan adoption. The aim of the study is to determine how diversity and inclusion plans define workforce diversity and inclusion indicators and its impact on agency level diversity and inclusion outcomes.

### **Strategic Diversity and Inclusion Plans**

This study builds upon existing studies of strategic diversity and inclusion plans in the federal context. Applying critical discourse analysis to the language of a series of Executive Orders to expand and promote more representative public agencies, Elias (2013) found that the Orders aimed to more closely align the population demographic distribution of agency employees with the U.S. population. The Executive Orders (13078, 13163, 13171, 13518, and 13548) explicitly highlighted specific demographic groups, including individuals of Hispanic descent, persons with disabilities, and Veterans.

Executive Order 13583 revealed a shift in the articulation of diversity as a collection of individual traits that may reflect the following “such as nation origin, language, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, veteran status, or family structures.” Elias concludes that E.O. 13583 demonstrates a strong break in the trend of identifying, valuing, and promoting difference in the form of underrepresented group identities found in the previous five executive orders (Elias, 2013 p. 348). This shift in articulating diversity as more than just representative bureaucracy is reinforced by Box (2007) and Alkadry (2006) who argue for diversity to mean multiculturalism, or intersectionality of individual identities or experiences.

Recent studies also point to the importance of distinguishing between measuring the degree of diverse of groups represented overall within public agencies and the distribution or stratification of people within the bureaucracy (i.e., hierarchical representation) and across agencies or departments (i.e., functional representation). The studies confirm that women and people of color are overrepresented in lower-level positions in public organizations and segregated in agencies that were deemed traditionally female or minority (e.g., housing, welfare, and education; see, e.g., Cayer and Sigelman, 1980; Dometrius, 1984; Saltzstein, 1983; Sigelman, 1976). The 2011 Executive Order 13583 issued by President Obama on “Establishing a Coordinated Government-Wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce” in part directed federal agencies and departments to develop and implement strategic efforts to hire, recruit, promote, and retain women and people of color (White House, 2011). This is in direct recognition of the need to advance diversity at all levels of federal agencies and within the varied professional categories.

The rationale for diversity in public administration has evolved over the years. The normative arguments reflect a transition from passive representative bureaucracy to more active interpretations of diversity that includes the need to manage diversity because public administrators work in diverse environments and enable governance in the public domain through the “interactions and engagement of administrators with multiple constituents within varied environments.” (Blessett, Alkadry, & Rubaii, 2013, p. 302).

The operationalization of the concept of inclusion, however, is less well defined in public administration literature. There is no one single definition of inclusion but various disciplines have framed inclusion as a felt acceptance on the part of employees (feeling part of the organization) and being able to fully participate in the organization. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2011) defines inclusion 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.” When an inclusive work climate or environment encompasses individual cultural dimensions, this inclusion allows individuals to feel that they are a part of the organization, but that their particular individual differences are also respected (Edwards, Holmes, & Sowa 2019).

### **Research Approach**

Nearly two decades ago, there was evidence that progress was being made in federal diversity efforts (Naff and Kellough, 2001). When surveyed, federal agency respondents noted that race, ethnicity/national origin, and gender were the top three focus areas for diversity initiatives (NPR Task Force Diversity Survey, as cited by Naff and Kellough, 2001). However, at that time, there had been little effort to assess the effectiveness of



federal diversity programs. This research serves as an opportunity to address that gap. Specifically, this study explores whether there is alignment between the *goal of enhanced diversity* and the *composition of the workforce*. We ask: is there evidence of a tangible diversity impact following Executive Order 13583?

Our study focuses on selected early adopters of federal diversity plans. The following agencies adopted plans as early as 2012: Agriculture, Archives, Defense, Energy, FERC, FLRA, and National Science Foundation. This study examines the diversity plans and workforce data of three of these agencies: U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Treasury, and U.S. Department of Energy. These agencies were selected based on their relative comparability as non-military executive departments.

### **Analysis, Part I: Qualitative Assessment of Diversity and Inclusion Plans**

The Executive Order language outlines the goal of “using the talents of all segments of society, the Federal Government must continue to challenge itself to enhance its ability to recruit, hire, promote, and retain a more diverse workforce. Further, the Federal Government must create a culture that encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness to enable individuals to participate to their full potential.” The Order aims “to establish a coordinated Government-wide initiative to promote diversity and inclusion in the Federal workforce.” The E.O. specifically mandates that all federal agencies implement an agency-specific diversity and inclusion strategic plan. The Strategic Plans must include “appropriate practices to improve the effectiveness of each agency's efforts to recruit, hire, promote, retain, develop, and train a diverse and inclusive workforce, consistent with merit system principles and applicable law” and “establish a

system for reporting regularly on agencies' progress in implementing their agency-specific Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plans and in meeting the objectives of this order.”

Given that each federal agency was mandated to create an agency-specific Strategic Plan, there is an opportunity to compare and contrast the approaches adopted by agencies. The following qualitative analysis provides a glimpse into the variations and emphases expressed by three federal agencies. Table 1 compares how Department of Energy (DOE), Department of Treasury (Treasury), and Department of Agriculture (USDA) articulate the accountability structures for promoting and supporting diversity and inclusion, the rationale for increasing diversity, the broad strategic goals in operationalizing diversity and inclusion, and the specific activities and practices to achieve the goals.

[Insert Table 1 here.]

The analysis of the Strategic Plans suggests some consistencies and distinctions among how the Departments framed their diversity and inclusion efforts.

***Accountability structures*** are critical for how diversity and inclusion efforts are supported and operationalized within large federal Departments. The complexity of multiple offices, regions, bureaus, and sub-agencies embedded within each Department defining the accountability structure reflects the unique context of each Department. DOE applies a more centralized accountability structure with the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) broadly and Office of Economic Impact & Diversity specifically are tasked with coordinating the policies, recruitment and retention strategies, training and leadership development activities. DOE’s Diversity and Inclusion Council is

responsible for monitoring the progress on the goals outlined in the strategic plan. At USDA the accountability structures are more decentralized. The strategic plan repeatedly emphasizes that USDA Agencies and Staff Offices develop and implement activities to recruit, retain, and support individuals from underrepresented groups. The Office of Human Resource Management focuses on tracking and monitoring progress, activities towards improving diversity at USDA through coordination with the Agencies and Staff Offices. The Executive Resources Division under the USDA Secretary is responsible for strengthening the diversity efforts with the Senior Executive Service. The locus of the accountability structure within the Treasury falls squarely with each Bureau. This represents the most decentralized approach of the three Cabinet Departments. The extent of this devolution to the bureaus is noted in the strategic plan overview: “Within 60 days of the issuance of this plan, each Treasury bureau [there are 7 bureaus] shall establish an implementation plan for carrying out the strategic objectives identified in this plan. The bureau plan shall be sent to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources/Chief Human Capital Officer for review and approval” (Treasury p. 3).

***The rationales for promoting diversity and inclusion*** within the Departments underscore that federal agencies operate within the broad context of diverse and evolving political and economic environment. Federal agencies compete for qualified staff, emphasizing diversity and inclusion enhances recruitment and retention. Additionally, promoting a more diverse and inclusive culture internally ensures Departments meet their stated missions. The analysis of the rationales for promoting diversity and inclusion revealed distinct language. Treasury framed the rationale for the Strategic Diversity and Inclusion

plan as a “business imperative” (Treasury). DOE embedded its rationale in the “vision for diversity and inclusion” (DOE). The rationales articulated three distinct perspectives:

USDA reflected an internal HR focus that acknowledged the variety and geographic dispersion of USDA agencies. *The rationale for promoting diversity and inclusion emphasized equal opportunity.* “Through the implementation of the Diversity and Inclusion plan, USDA will include all employees – from the Undersecretaries, to employees at every grade level, in every location – to work to ensure USDA is a place where there’s equal opportunity for all employees and everyone who works here is empowered to reach their full potential” (USDA).

*DOE emphasized a competitive advantage through diversity and inclusion in being an employer of choice.* DOE with its collection of program offices, labs and technology centers, agencies, and field sites employs highly technical personnel. A key way to make DOE an employer of choice is to focus on creating a culture which values the contributions of all DOE employees through an ethos of collaboration, flexibility, and fairness. “DOE will capitalize on the diverse attributes of the Nation today to build an inclusive DOE for tomorrow. DOE will be the Federal government’s model employer by leveraging diversity and inclusion to deliver the best public service on behalf of the Nation” (DOE).

*Treasury’s rationale for diversity and inclusion reflected the most overt connection to representative bureaucracy.* Citing the mission of Treasury to maintain a strong economy and create economic and job opportunities by promoting the conditions that enable economic growth and stability, acknowledging and incorporating individuals that represent a broad range of interests for economic development. “A commitment to

equal opportunity, and to diversity and inclusion, is critical to accomplishing the mission of the Department....[which] brings us in touch with the lives of all who reside in this country...To be a leader, Treasury need to understand, work with, and value all individuals who constitute our national economy....to effectively serve this diverse nation, our workforce must also be diverse . To maintain our status as a high performing organization, we must value and respect the people we employ” (Treasury).

*The strategic goals that framed departmental plans* were consistent with the themes identified in the U.S. Office of Personnel Management’s guide for agency-specific plans (U.S. OPM, 2011). These themes are: 1) Workforce Diversity, 2) Workplace/Workforce Inclusion, and 3) Sustainability/Accountability. Workforce diversity encompassed goals to recruit diverse, well-qualified applicants drawn from all segments of U.S. society through greater outreach, partnerships, and targeted hiring initiatives. Workplace or workforce inclusion reflected two distinct approaches. DOE articulated workplace inclusion as cultivating a culture that encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness through dialogue and feedback, leadership development, and involving managers and employees as active participants and agents of diversity, mutual respect and inclusion. USDA articulated workforce inclusion goals as promoting employee retention and promotion through supervisory training, recognition programs, and career development opportunities that ensured improved participation rates of underrepresented groups. Treasury articulated workplace inclusion to include cultivating leadership development, succession planning, work-life flexibilities, accommodations for individuals with disabilities, and acknowledgement of underrepresented groups by supporting affinity groups. Sustainability/Accountability goals within the plans highlighted the leadership

accountability structures within Departments, compliance with existing Federal laws, regulations, Executive Orders promoting diversity and inclusion in the federal workforce.

The most substantive area of the strategic plans is the sections that *identify specific actions and activities to meet the goals*. An analysis of the strategic plans reveals some nuanced, context specific actions and activities to achieve the strategic goals. Table 1 summarizes the signature actions and activities expressed in the distinct strategic plans. There are some consistent activities across the Departments including to 1) identify accountability and responsibility structures, 2) establish baseline demographic data through workforce analysis, 3) create dashboards to track progress on metrics, 4) ensure participants in leadership development opportunities are appropriately representative, and 5) use Employee Viewpoint Survey results to assess employee perceptions about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Departments also adopted distinct actions and activities that reflected their particular context, mission, and needs. For example, DOE was unique in its emphasis on activities and practices that aimed to create a culture of collaboration, flexibility, and fairness. Of the three Strategic Plans reviewed, it was the only one to identify town hall meetings and listening sessions to encourage dialogue and feedback. USDA emphasized strategic partnerships with external organizations such as minority-serving universities and associations that support underrepresented groups to generate a more demographically diverse applicant pool. Additionally, USDA recognized that recognition programs, and rewards for promoting diversity and inclusion are critical to achieving an inclusive culture. Treasury emphasized activities that supported work-life flexibilities, full utilization of accommodations tools for individuals with disabilities, support in

participation in employee affinity groups, and representative participation in leadership development opportunities. Treasury also recognized that supervisors and personnel that hire employees are on the front line of achieving diversity in the workforce. Therefore, training these individuals in unconscious bias and adjusting interview and hiring procedures are critical to removing barriers for creating a more diverse workforce in Treasury.

The strategic plans vary greatly in how inclusion is addressed. Treasury and USDA do not include any mention of inclusion or practices to promote a more inclusive agency. The emerging concepts of inclusion reflect more than just addressing demographic disparities. Public organizations must create a culture that embraces individual cultural dimensions, in that individuals feel that they are a part of the organization and their particular individual differences are also respected. This means that public organizations can instill strategies and practices that generate a high sense of belongingness and value the uniqueness of individuals (Shore, et al., 2008).

## **Analysis, Part II: Agency Demographic Data**

To examine the impact of the agency strategic plans mandated by EO 13583 on demographic diversity, we analyzed workforce data for the Departments of Agriculture, Energy, and Treasury at three points in time: 2006, 2011, and 2017. The years 2006 and 2011 were chosen because they provide insight into demographic workplace changes in those agencies before the adoption of the EO-ordered strategic plan; changes from 2011 to 2017 occur in the midst of and in response to strategy plan creation and implementation.

Data were obtained from the United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM). We contacted the OPM, which was able to provide us with a report containing data from the Enterprise Human Resources Integration Statistical Data Mart (EHRI-SDM), formerly known as the Central Personnel Data File. This report included demographic data about the workforce of each of the three agencies under investigation for each of the three years. It includes the breakdown of the workplace according to supervisory status, occupational status, race, and sex. Race categories include White, Black/African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Other. Given the emphasis on overall racial diversification, this present study considers all racial minorities together in a “nonwhite” variable. Sex includes male and female. These data were cross tabulated so that we could determine the number of female, nonwhite supervisors, for instance. When any such category included a frequency lower than 10, the data point was redacted. Thus, numbers in our analysis are underestimated. Categories that tended to have fewer than 10 persons included female and nonwhite employees, thus underreporting the number of employees identifying with those characteristics.

These data allow us to compare demographic shares of an agency’s workforce over time. We were interested in changes in the female, nonwhite, and nonwhite female share of the workforce from 2006 to 2011, and 2011 to 2017. In addition, we were interested changes for those demographic groups at the supervisory level and among professional occupations. Below, we outline the changes in demographic compositions.

*Overall Demographic Changes: 2006, 2011, and 2017*



Table 2 displays changes in the female, nonwhite, and nonwhite female share of the department workforce as a whole. In the USDA in 2017, female employees made up 42.39 percent of the workforce, a decrease from 2011, and 2006. The nonwhite share of the workforce increased slightly from 2006 to 2011 (0.67 points), but almost four points from 2011 to 2017. The nonwhite female share showed more modest increases at 0.38 points and 1.46 points, respectively.

[Insert Table 2 here.]

A similar pattern exists for Treasury: the female share of the workforce decreased over the three time points, while nonwhite and nonwhite female shares increased. DOE's female share increased from 2006 to 2011, but decreased from 2011 to 2017, resulting in an overall decrease for the 11-year period. The nonwhite share showed modest increases, while the nonwhite female share remained relatively stable (0.02 decrease over 11 years).

#### *Demographic Changes among Supervisors: 2006, 2011, and 2017*

Diversity initiatives do not solely focus on overall demographic composition of a workforce. Diversity must also occur vertically: women and people of color should also fill positions of authority. The data includes a variable on supervisory status, which includes leader, management official (CSRA), supervisor (CSRA), supervisor or manager, team leader, and all other positions. To analyze the changes in composition among supervisors, all categories of supervisory status were combined into a single "supervisor" variable, leaving "all other" out.

Table 3 displays the changes in supervisor demographics over the three time points. USDA saw increases in all categories. The largest increases for nonwhite and nonwhite female supervisors occurred between 2011 and 2017, but female supervisor share increased 5.53 points from 2006 to 2011, and only 1.39 points from 2011 to 2017. DOE’s supervisor ranks became more female and nonwhite across all time periods with one exception: nonwhite female supervisor share decreased a half point from 2011 to 2017, though that decrease is mitigated some by an increase that first time period. Similarly, with one exception, Treasury saw increases in shares of nonwhite and nonwhite female supervisors, but the initial increase and subsequent decrease of female share of supervisors leads to a negligible change overall (0.05 points).

[Insert Table 3 here.]

*Demographic Changes among Professionals: 2006, 2011, and 2017*

More women and people of color in professional positions also indicates a commitment beyond descriptive diversity. The data included an occupational status variable, referred to as PATCO, which include professional, administrative, technical, clerical, other, and blue collar (B) (OPM, 2006). For this analysis, we compared those in “professional” positions to those in all other positions. As Table 4 shows, all three departments saw increases in female, nonwhite, and nonwhite female shares of the professional workforce across all time periods. These increases were as low as 1.03 points (DOE, 2011 to 2017, nonwhite female) to as high as 3.85 points (USDA, 2006 to 2011, female).

[Insert Table 4 here.]

*Overall Changes: 2006 to 2017*

Stories can also be found in recognizing the changes across the entire 11-year period. Table 5 displays the 11-year changes for all three departments. The female share of the workforce in all three agencies decreased a modest amount: from 0.77 points to 1.50 points. Both USDA and Treasury saw increases in all other categories, though the female share of supervisors in Treasury increased a near negligible amount (0.05 points).

[Insert Table 5 here.]

Notably, the shares of female supervisors and professionals in the USDA increased by about seven points each. Increases in USDA overall ranged from as low as 1.84 (nonwhite female) to as high as 7.22 (female professional). This is consistent with the nonwhite increases in Treasury: overall nonwhite share of the workforce increased 6.5 points, nonwhite supervisors increased 7.64, and nonwhite professionals increased 6.14. Nonwhite female shares also increased from in amounts ranging from 3.85 to 5.19 points.

DOE's story is more mixed. As noted, overall female share decreased, as did nonwhite supervisor (0.83) and nonwhite female (0.02, which is negligible). Nonwhite female supervisors and professionals increased 0.49 and 2.31 points, respectively. The largest increases were among female supervisor (4.48) and professional (5.48) shares.

**Discussion**

Overall, the story is a positive one. Minority and female employees generally make up more of the agency workforce, supervisors, and professionals. Is that positive story attributable to the strategic plans mandated by EO 13583? Yes and no. When it comes to

the overall share of the workforce in these three agencies, we would expect larger increases to happen between the 2011 and 2017 period, when the plans were created and implemented, but this was not typically the case. For some, as shown in Table 2, shares decreased during this time, for others, the increases were modest and not much more than the previous time period. These patterns also hold for supervisors and professionals in these agencies. Some increases were larger between 2011 and 2017, but others were similar.

The changes across the 11-year period present an overall positive picture: women and people of color are making up more of the workforce and more status-carrying positions, either as supervisors or professionals. These increases though, may or may not be attributed directly to the agency strategic plans. Instead, the data seem to show that the plans helped continue already-existing increases in demographic changes, at least for minorities. According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2018), minorities comprised 36.4% of the federal workforce in 2016 (up from 33.8% in 2010). While minorities demonstrated modest positive gains over time, women's representation in the federal workforce remained unchanged at 43.9 % of the workforce in 2010 to 43.2% in 2016.

However, there is another issue to consider: cuts to the workforce overall. As shown in table 6, USDA and Treasury saw large decreases to their overall workforce between 2006 and 2017. Both agencies lost a few hundred employees between 2006 and 2011, but they lost over 12,000 and 18,000 respectively come 2017. Over the 11-year period, USDA's workforce decreased by almost 11.5 percent, while Treasury's decreased almost 18 percent. Despite these cuts, both agencies were able to increase the diversity of

their workforce, supervisors, and professionals, increases which might be made possible because of a commitment to strategic plans.

[Insert Table 6 here.]

There is a caveat to note. While diversity and inclusion strategic plans can be seen as valuable steps forward in formalizing the government's commitment to a workforce that looks like the citizenry it serves, we must use caution in interpreting demographic changes. A lesson from the world of business is instructive here. Ferguson and Koning (2017) examined every large private sector workplace in the United States and found that while there are more people of color employed overall, workplace segregation is greater today than it was a generation ago. The authors blame *perceptions of diversity* as one potential explanation. That is to say, it is possible to perceive that progress has been made as the workforce as a whole become more diverse. However, such progress is hollow when there is a disparate distribution of women and minorities which is created by entrenched occupational segregation and employment inequities.

## **Recommendations**

*For scholars:* We need more research on the ways in which public organizations are translating diversity and inclusion goals into action. In addition to studying the connection between planning and workforce composition, we need to consider the ways in which organizations embrace diversity and inclusion and how they fund this commitment. For example, Hur, Strickland, and Stefanovic (2010) created a diversity index to capture additional organizational efforts such as: diversity training, mentoring of

minority employees, and the presence of diversity advocates. In their study of municipalities in North Carolina, they found that having a diversity plan was one of the top adopted strategies (45% of respondents reported one) although only a small minority (9% of respondents) reported devoting a pool of resources to support diversity efforts. It would be valuable to apply this same methodology to other governmental contexts.

Also, scholars must consider the unexpected impacts of diversity efforts. For example, Dover, Kaiser, and Major (2016) report that when diversity policies are in place, it may actually lead to discounting claims of unfair treatment, especially among members of dominant groups. Also, in an experimental study, these authors found that when white men “interviewed” with a fictitious pro-diversity company, the subjects expected unfair treatment, performed poorly on the interview, and also experienced cardiovascular stress: they responded as if they were under threat. Further, the authors found that minorities “interviewees” did not expect pro-diversity companies to treat them more fairly. These and other unexpected consequences should be explored further in the context of public service.

*For public managers:* In their 2017 study, Deloitte and the Senior Executives Association found that only 50% of senior career leaders believe their agency considers how future workforce trends affect their work. The report recommends that agencies should improve the strength of the leadership pipeline and “take a proactive stance in understanding how work will be done in the future and how that shift impacts what the workforce should look like” (p. 5). The Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton similarly recommend that agencies strive to “recruit, retain, and grow diverse workforces to increase organizational performance and foster innovation in the

workplace.” One method they suggest is to learn from women and minorities in the workforce about what attracts them to public service and what these members need to stay and advance. While these conversations have the potential to be quite meaningful, it is important that public managers also consider the broader forces contributing to occupational segregation and unequal opportunity in the public workforce.

Further, creating organizational cultures that value diversity and inclusion cannot be a task owned by human resource management alone. Rather, it must be embraced throughout the organization. A key to moving this ideal forward is through developing cultural competence. As demonstrated by Getha-Taylor, Holmes, and Moen (2018), to meaningfully enhance cultural competency, it is important to offer multi-faceted developmental activities that address the varied cultural competence elements including skills, behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes.

*For policy-makers:* The Obama Administration’s Executive Order to promote diversity and inclusion had the ambitious goal of helping the nation “fulfill the promise of equal employment opportunity, in every workplace, beginning with the federal government.” (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2011). Are diversity and inclusion strategic plans post-hoc solutions that ignore the underlying reasons for these disparities? Should we also consider the ways in which public agencies’ leadership pipelines are built upon inequitable educational and economic foundations? How can these gaps be bridged to ensure true equal employment opportunity?

## **Conclusion**

In a 2018 editorial, Perry responded to then-Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke's comments about diversity in the federal workforce. Zinke noted that he cared more about having the right person for the job than he cared about diversity. Perry responded: "Statements like this reinforce the dated and bigoted thinking that diversity threatens quality. The truth is, you can't have quality without diversity."

As we move forward with a goal of enhanced diversity and inclusion in our public workplaces, it is important to consider the broad range of qualities that make each public servant different and valuable. Williams and Lagan (2015) note that our ideas about diversity have evolved little since the beginning of our efforts to enhance equal employment opportunity. It is important, they say, to move beyond just gender and racial diversity to also consider elements of identity and differentness including "military status, language, sexual identity, age, work style, personality, marital status, education, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, and where we grew up."

The U.S. OPM (2011b) notes that diversity is the key to performance and innovation. "This is more than a legal or moral imperative, it is a business imperative for public service" (p. 3). There have been considerable strides in making the economic case for diversity in private sector organizational settings. In their study of over 1,000 companies in 12 countries, Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle, and Yee (2018) found that diversity, especially leadership diversity, contributes to "financial outperformance," which includes measures of profitability and value creation. Absent the financial bottom line, the public sector may face a more challenging path for making the "business case" for diversity. In the OPM's 2011 report, the business case for diversity rests on the following rationale: a difficult budget environment and demands for increased efficiency in the public sector



means “casting a broad net in the search for top talent, wherever it may be found” (p.3). While appealing on the surface, this “business case” may be seen as tone deaf to the experience of women and minorities who exist in that potential broad net and whose persistent wage inequities may simply offer more “cost-efficient” leadership.

A more robust commitment to diversity should include a commitment to assessing the full spectrum of employment policies, actions, and impacts. The Society for Human Resource Management (2017) offers step-by-step instructions for creating, implementing, and assessing diversity initiatives. It would be valuable to consider how federal diversity and inclusion strategic plans illustrate those steps, including the ways in which goals are communicated, how buy-in is achieved, the ways in which results are disseminated, and how outcomes are reviewed and plans are adjusted over time. Without attention to this full feedback loop, diversity plans may serve as vehicles of mixed messages to potential hires and current employees.

In her 2018 John Gaus Award Lecture for the American Political Science Association, Norma Riccucci stated that in the quest to achieve social equity, “we have a long way to go” (p. 131). This study supports that assertion. Yet, diversity and inclusion in our public workforce are social equity issues that are connected to our highest democratic ideals. While we might tend to think of social equity in terms of the “haves and have nots” when it comes to housing, transportation, or health care, it is as important to think about this divide when it comes to equal employment opportunity in the public sector. While Executive Orders can help bring attention to this issue, Frederickson (2005) reminds us that implementing such directives is the work of bureaucrats. In a time when “diversity” has been now been banned from some federal agency documents (Sun and

Eilperin, 2017), it seems that the enduring impact of diversity and inclusion plans will rest on the shoulders of the perhaps overlooked but critically important agents of democracy: public administrators.

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**Table 1: Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plans**

	<b>Department of Energy</b>	<b>Department of Agriculture</b>	<b>Department of Treasury</b>
<b>Accountability Structure</b>	Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) Office of Economic Impact & Diversity DOE Diversity and Inclusion Council	Office of Human Resource Management Diversity and Inclusion Officers Senior Executive Service members Executive Resources Board	Bureaus Special Emphasis Program Managers EEO Diversity Offices Diversity Council
<b>Rationale for increasing diversity</b>	“DOE will capitalize on the diverse attributes of the Nation today to build an inclusive DOE for tomorrow. DOE will be the Federal government’s model employer by leveraging diversity and inclusion to deliver the best public service on behalf of the Nation.” (MHH outward focus)	“Through the implementation of the Diversity and Inclusion plan, USDA will include all employees – from the Undersecretaries, to employees at every grade level, in every location – to work to ensure USDA is a place where there’s equal opportunity for all employees and everyone who works here is empowered to reach their full potential” (MHH inward focus)	“A commitment to equal opportunity, and to diversity and inclusion, is critical to accomplishing the mission of the Department...[which] brings us in touch with the lives of all who reside in this country...To be a leader, Treasury need to understand, work with, and value all individuals who constitute our national economy....to effectively serve this diverse nation, our workforce must also be diverse . To maintain our status as a high performing organization, we must value and respect the people we employ.” (MHH outward focus)
<b>Strategic goals</b>	Workforce Diversity Workplace Inclusion Sustainability and Accountability	Workforce Diversity Workplace Inclusion Sustainability	Workforce Diversity Workplace Inclusion Sustainability
<b>Activities/Practices</b>	Assign responsibilities to accountability structures to identify and eliminate barriers for recruitment and selection practices	Establish oversight responsibility to accountability structures  Provide monthly	Establish workforce analysis baseline data  Provide training for diversity recruiting, interviewing techniques

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Establish corporate recruiting strategy, Alma Mater Recruitment Program, and student internship/fellowship program to attract and grow diverse pool of top talent	reports, meet monthly to review metrics.	to increase diversity of hires.
Establish baseline assessments using MD 715 report, EFVS and focus group data.	Strengthen narrative of Civil Rights performance element, and incorporate diversity goals in performance standards.	Revise job announcement practices to extend time position is publicly open.
Hold town halls, listening sessions, affinity group meetings, to address employee satisfaction, diversity and inclusion issues.	Establish working groups to serve as advisory council and identify professional development initiatives for underrepresented groups.	Maximize internship program to encourage conversion of diverse applicants.
Brief managers on EFVS survey results and results of diversity and inclusion practices	Provide leadership development, mentoring, and coaching programs, and succession planning training to foster a diverse and inclusive workforce.	Maximize use of worklife flexibilities, accommodations programs.
Develop mandatory diversity and inclusion training for all employees	Create diversity and inclusion dashboards on diversity and demographic agency data, EFVS results, hiring and promotion, and retention of employees, participation in development and networking experiences.	Support participation in affinity groups
Develop flexible workplace tools, such as telework, flextime, wellness programs, Develop onboarding process to introduce new employees to DOE culture and dispute resolution training.	Establish partnerships with minority serving institutions and associations	Survey and report results on safe work environments, accessibility, workforce satisfaction.
Create web-based library for employees to access diversity and inclusion material	Update referral bonus award program, marketing tools, and internship program to recruit underrepresented populations, Veterans,	Conduct pulse checks, focus groups, and exit surveys to identify areas that need to be addressed.
Leaders will commit to two diversity and inclusion outreach		

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events per year, with a particular focus on STEM recruiting.

individuals with disabilities.

Implement a staggered onboarding process for new hires to reflect multiple touch points in a year.

Implement a more accessible exit survey

Create a new category of awards and events that focus on diversity and multiculturalism.

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**Table 2: Overall share of Department Workforce**

	Department of Agriculture			Department of Energy			Department of Treasury		
	2006	2011	2017	2006	2011	2017	2006	2011	2017
<b>Female</b>	43.16	42.89	42.39	37.73	38.02	36.61	62.44	61.98	60.94
<i>% point change</i>	–	- 0.27	-0.50	–	0.30	-1.41	–	-0.46	-1.04
<b>Nonwhite</b>	22.11	22.78	26.76	21.48	22.17	23.83	37.18	39.50	44.09
<i>% point change</i>	–	0.67	3.97	–	0.69	1.66	–	2.32	4.59
<b>Nonwhite Female</b>	11.56	11.94	13.40	12.01	11.96	11.99	26.99	28.30	30.84
<i>% point change</i>	–	0.38	1.46	–	-0.05	0.03	–	1.31	2.54

Note: Numbers are in percent.

**Table 3: Share among supervisors**

	Department of Agriculture			Department of Energy			Department of Treasury		
	2006	2011	2017	2006	2011	2017	2006	2011	2017
<b>Female</b>	26.64	32.18	33.57	24.79	28.55	29.28	57.61	58.81	57.66
<i>% point change</i>	–	5.53	1.39	–	3.75	0.73	–	1.20	-1.15
<b>Nonwhite</b>	17.12	17.84	20.60	14.94	15.91	14.11	30.33	33.89	37.97
<i>% point change</i>	–	0.72	2.76	–	0.97	1.80	–	3.56	4.08
<b>Nonwhite Female</b>	5.36	6.28	7.83	5.36	6.41	5.86	20.54	23.45	25.73
<i>% point change</i>	–	0.92	1.55	–	1.04	-0.55	–	2.91	2.28

Note: Numbers are in percent.

**Table 4: Share among Professional occupations**

	Department of Agriculture			Department of Energy			Department of Treasury		
	2006	2011	2017	2006	2011	2017	2006	2011	2017
<b>Female</b>	30.66	34.51	37.88	26.82	30.07	32.30	45.87	49.26	50.73
<i>% point change</i>	–	3.85	3.37	–	3.24	2.23	–	3.39	1.47
<b>Nonwhite</b>	15.64	17.12	19.57	19.83	20.93	23.70	27.18	30.72	33.32
<i>% point change</i>	–	1.48	2.45	–	1.11	2.76	–	3.53	2.61
<b>Nonwhite Female</b>	5.46	6.50	8.09	6.77	8.06	9.09	16.23	18.70	20.40
<i>% point change</i>	–	1.04	1.59	–	1.29	1.03	–	2.47	1.70

Note: Numbers are in percent.

**Table 5: change from 2006 to 2017**

	Department of Agriculture			Department of Energy			Department of Treasury		
	Overall	Super.	Prof.	Overall	Super.	Prof.	Overall	Super.	Prof.
<b>Female</b>	-0.77	6.92	7.22	-1.11	4.48	5.48	-1.50	0.05	4.86
<b>Nonwhite</b>	4.65	3.47	3.93	2.36	-0.83	3.87	6.50	7.64	6.14
<b>Nonwhite female</b>	1.84	2.47	2.63	-0.02	0.49	2.31	3.85	5.19	4.17

Note: Numbers are percent point change

**Table 6: Total Number of Employees**

	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Total Change</b>	<b>% change</b>
<b>USDA</b>	105,426	105,018	93,303	-12,123	-11.499
<b>DOE</b>	14,587	16,269	14,658	+71	+0.005
<b>Treasury</b>	106,552	106,331	87,587	-18,965	-17.799