

EMAB SUBCOMMITTEE ON RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

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Charge provided by EM-1 to the EMAB and scope of our task:

The future of work will continue to be full of opportunities and challenges. Based on the diverse and extensive backgrounds of the EMAB members, EM is requesting actionable recommendations on how the program can demonstrate modern human capital practices that make EM an employer of choice.

1. Recruitment and Retention

- a. *How can EM increase its participation in STEM partnerships that prepare students for a career in EM?*
- b. *What innovative recruitment practices could be adopted for the federal workforce and contractor partners that align with DOE's Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) goals?*
- c. *How should EM recruit top non-STEM (i.e. HR, Budget, Project Management) professionals and students?*
- d. *What retention practices make the largest impact for EM federal employees and contractors?*

Introduction:

The subcommittee was established by the full EMAB to consider means, methods, and opportunities to enhance EM's ability to recruit, retain and develop employees at all levels, both STEM and non-STEM. Additionally, during the subcommittee's discussions, we determined to also add considerations that could be considered by EM contractors.

This report discusses the three broad aspects in turn. There are three recommendations to EM on recruitment, three recommendations on retention, and three on development of employees. Additionally, there are two recommendations on further activities that EM could undertake to take

advantage of, and contribute to, best practices across Federal agencies, and one for consideration by EM contractors.

Subcommittee Topics of Discussion

Past methods that DOE EM has used to recruit, as well as current methods being used by EM, include several as shown:

1. Both DOE, and EM have had a similar method to attract and recruit employees in the past. Neither of these is being currently utilized, however were discussed by the EMAB members as well as by two employees who joined EM through these methods in past years. Those were Kelly Snyder, who joined DOE in a DOE-wide recruitment and career development program in the early 2000s, and Aaron White, who joined through an EM-specific program in the 2006 timeframe. These two prior programs share similarities, in that they involved direct recruitment at universities, and offered an automatic-advancement career track. The EM-specific program offered automatic advancement in a stepped approach involving minimum time in grade, to the target grade of GS-13. This program, according to both current EM employees, was generally successful, with the caveat that not all employees who joined EM stayed as Federal employees for a long-term period.
2. The EM-specific program, entitled the EM Professional Development Corps (EMPDC) included a centralized one-month orientation at the Forrestal Building, during which the new employees were housed in a local hotel for the duration. We were informed that the EM employee so recruited had the impression that the orientation was well planned, well delivered, with the exception that he did not know his target location and assignment until sometime during the orientation.
3. It was also discussed that when each employee was hired, it was the intent that the employee be hired to a mutually understood target position at a specific site, and that there were to be several rotations to other site(s) and headquarters, to give the new employee a sampling of the types of activities available at those sites, as well as at headquarters.
4. There was no recollection that either program (DOE-wide or EM-specific) included a mentor. It was the general view of the subcommittee that inclusion of a mentor would be a value-added component, with the mentor preferably in the same GS series or a similar one, to the employee being hired.
5. There was discussion of the competitiveness of the entry grade, in that the entry grade was determined, in the past, by things such as degree field, level of degree, GPA, etc. and could be at the GS-5 or GS-7 level. Given the current competitive hiring environment, the subcommittee was concerned about the pay level of these entry grades. Mary Kruger informed the subcommittee that EM has, or could attain, authorities to hire into the "Excepted Service" or specifically the "EK" series. This series provides more latitude on entry pay, but still could provide career progression, and additionally, the EK series is considered a career (not term or temporary employee) series. Although the subcommittee also discussed the option of initial hire as through a support contractor, the advantage of immediate commencement of Federal employee benefits, such as leave accrual, entry into the Federal retirement system, and other

benefits such as health insurance, would render the Federal employee option as probably more attractive.

6. There was discussion on recruitment that would enhance diversity within the EM workforce. To that end, the subcommittee was provided a list of minority-serving universities that is a broader than recruitment only at HBCUs. The subcommittee expressed appreciation to EM's Dameone Ferguson for providing this list of universities. The subcommittee believes that an aggressive recruitment campaign of a sustained multi-year duration should be considered; in other words, not a one time or one year event.
7. The disincentive of long duration hiring times was discussed. The subcommittee recognizes that in the current competitive hiring environment, the ideal would be to offer a position to the recruited individual "on the spot," that is, for example, at the hiring event where the EM recruitment team interviews the candidate at their university. Mark Kruger pointed out that an advantage of hiring into the EK excepted service, is the ability to do this.
8. The subcommittee also discussed the potential of attracting mid-grade and senior employees from other Federal agencies, as well as from elsewhere in DOE. There is an obvious benefit to having an organized and focused program to periodically outreach to employees in critical areas, who could be sourced from elsewhere.
9. There was significant discussion and consideration of the "post COVID" work model. It is recognized that much has been learned about the ability to perform duties from a non-office location in many, but not all, situations. For example, a former EMPDC employee pointed out that work at a field site is rewarding because the employee can actually see work being performed. Obviously, the specific performance of duties situation (work from home, or on site) will vary depending on the location and duties of each employee. Thus, EM should open its vantage viewpoint to what other Federal agencies are doing in this regard – the "new normal." We heard from the Director of the National Academies' Federal Facilities Council (FFC) about the activities of the FFC and several of its standing subcommittees, such as the Subcommittee on Workforce and Organizational Performance, and a subcommittee evaluating new norms for the office environment. (The FFC is comprised of about 25 Federal agencies who are formal members, including the Department of Energy.) The subcommittee believes that EM would benefit from active engagement with the FFC, which is available to any and all interested management employees since DOE is already a full member of the FFC.
10. Additionally, the FFC Director pointed out that specific activities could be undertaken for EM, such as surveys, evaluation of training programs, creation of a leadership development program, and possible arrangements with specific universities to establish a pipeline for accessions.

Recommendations on Recruitment:

1. EM should consider establishment of a program similar to the prior EMPDC. This would include establishment of target positions at the target level (whether it be a GS-13 or similar EK pay level), at specific locations in specific career areas. This should include both STEM positions, and non-STEM positions as required at each site (field site, or HQ).
2. As part of this program, a dedicated team of recruiters, preferably from professional fields being similar to those being recruited (i.e. not necessarily human resources professionals) should be formed. This would be the EM team that would identify recruitment opportunities at

universities, including minority-serving universities, and universities who graduate appropriate specialties suitable for hire into the EM program. (See Appendix A for a list of minority serving institutions.)

3. Recruits should be offered a career track in either the appropriate GS series (i.e. career field) or the suitable EK designation, as applicable.
4. There should be a well-planned, central orientation program of significant duration, such as the four-week orientation that was used in the past; this should be conducted at HQ in the Forrestal Building and include sessions on the mission of EM as well as the role of specific professional fields within the EM program.
5. A mentor, preferably in the same, or similar GS series, or EK professional / technical field, should be assigned. Mentors ideally would be volunteers who are motivated to actively assist and guide the new employees and continue on as a mentor.

Recommendations on Employee Development:

1. In consultation with the mentor for each new employee, as well as with the employee themselves, and potential developmental rotation positions at various sites, a rotational development plan should be implemented. The objective would be to provide each employee with a solid foundation in both the site level, and HQ level functions that a person in their career field would attain as they progress.
2. The mentor, in consultation with the employee's supervisor at the target location (and ultimate employment location) should establish a development plan to include course work to be engaged, both within DOE as well as from other professional developmental sources. Within DOE, for example, courses are offered during work hours in the Project Management Career Development Program, and these courses would be suitable not only for potential project managers, but also other target positions that would involve interaction with contractors at the site level.
3. The subcommittee discussed the potential value of a leadership development program, similar to the very competitive development program for potential SES candidates. Recognizing the value of the framework of that SES development program, EM could have a similar program wherein potential leaders are identified and offered a planned two or three year program involving courses in leadership, EM-specific technical challenges, and project/contract management. Such a program could be available not only to EMPDC – recruited employees, but to the full range of EM Federal employees.

Recommendations on Retention:

1. The subcommittee Suggest a survey be done of all employees currently still in DOE (not just EM) who were accessed through the original EMPDC. It would be important to identify both the positive attributes that should be incorporated, as well as the negative aspects that could cause employees to leave DOE and look for other opportunities either in, or outside, government.
2. The recommendations above regarding employee development are incentives for retention as well. By providing both STEM and non-STEM employees the vision of what could be attained in their career would serve as a positive retention incentive.

3. Additionally, all EM employees should be provided periodic updates on the benefits of Federal employment, such as full portability of their leave and benefits, to include health plans, vacation accrual, training and developmental opportunities, and opportunities to advance both within EM and DOE, but also in other Federal agencies.

Additional Recommendations:

1. EM should seek appropriate management level employees to volunteer to actively engage in the National Academies' Federal Facilities Council activities and standing subcommittees. These activities include all the aspects discussed above, including initiatives various Federal agencies are taking in the areas of recruitment, retention, and development of employees. There is great potential for gleaning the best practices of other Federal agencies, as well as contributing to the overall improvement of Federal agency methods involving employee recruitment, development, retention, and working arrangements. This will assist EM to attain a competitive position regarding development and retention, given the importance of retaining a work force of highly performing employees.
2. Once engaged with the FFC and its activities, EM should explore other methods previously used by other agencies to enhance its position as an employer of choice in the Federal government.
3. The EM-1 charge to the EMAB, specific to this subcommittee, includes: *What innovative recruitment practices could be adopted for the federal workforce and contractor partners that align with DOE's Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) goals?*
To address the aspect regarding contractor partners, the subcommittee recommends that the contractor community evaluate the recommendations on recruitment shown above, consider them and modify them as appropriate for their particular use. It is recognized that larger contractors likely already have sophisticated recruitment, development, and retention programs in place; however, the list of recommendations may be useful for consideration by those contractors who are considering such initiatives. (Note that FFC participation is not, however, available to non-Federal employees.)