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Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for USGS SPCMSC and WARC

This is what was found by USGS SPCMSC at US Geological Survey St. Petersburg Coastal and Marine Science Center and Wetland and Aquatic Research Center on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve.

We chose to focus on improvements that we can make at the Center-wide level (SP, WARC).

1. Has your university or company implemented or considered strategies like cohort hiring, mentoring, dual career support and partner hires, re-visioning your work culture, or other considerations outlined in “Leveraging Promising Practices”?

- Since federal hiring processes and policies are so different from those at academic institutions and private companies, our pod sought to find a framework that would allow us to interrogate existing processes and brainstorm ways to make them more inclusive. We decided that the SP and WARC centers could benefit from comparing the USGS hiring process to the four frames for equitable organizations (Griffin, Bennett, & York, 2020), which are: 1) equipping the individual, 2) creating equal opportunities, 3) valuing difference, and 4) managing culture. By using these four frames as a lens through which we view the hiring process, we can better account for the humanity and diversity of the applicants as well as filling the scientific/technical needs of a position.
 - ***Equipping the individual***
 - We can better equip individuals entering federal service by mentoring of new hires after they are hired and before they start the position. This could include providing information on advancement/promotion or tools to navigate the USAJobs/Mendenhall Postdoctoral applications.
 - We recognize we need to build relationships with more diverse groups of people; if people don't know what the USGS is, they will be less likely to apply to work here. Recruitment all the time, by everyone, before job openings is required to do this. Recruitment includes outreach, forming and maintaining relationships with minority serving institutions, networking with a variety of [affinity groups](#) at conferences, and any other activities that increase diversity in the Center's/PI's network, that they can then reach out to when it comes time to advertise a position. “Institutions wishing to move beyond the well-worn networks already in place may want to expand their potential pools of candidates by developing programs that cultivate relationships with

¹ R. Kelley, 10 Samples of an Effective EEO Statement, blog.ongig.com/diversity-and-inclusion/eeo-statement-samples, (2017).

² <https://careers.who.edu/opportunities/diversity-inclusion/>

³ K. Cobb, #GRExit Resources, <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.13215461.v1>, (2020).

⁴ J. Posselt, Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvjghw8s>, (2016).

⁵ <https://www.brandeis.edu/diversity/dei-recruitment-hiring/rubric-for-evaluating-diversity-statements.html>

⁶ K. Griffin, J. Bennett, T. York, Leveraging Promising Practices, Washington DC: Aspire Alliance, (2020).



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graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and faculty at other institutions.” (Griffin, Bennet, & York, 2020).

- Sharing existing job advertisements with the whole center during All Hands meetings, on our employment opportunity web page (<https://www.usgs.gov/centers/spcmssc/st-petersburg-coastal-and-marine-science-center-employment-opportunities>), and center-wide emails will likely improve the reach of advertisements beyond the network of the hiring manager, subject-matter experts that may review applications, and/or the PI that initiated the hiring action. Further, this will ensure that a broad range of recruitment activities are using the same and updated information.
- **Creating equal opportunities**
 - We recommend including a statement on the value of diversity on the center job websites. This should probably be preceded by discussions within the Center about how personnel value diversity with other position qualities (e.g., scientific focus, technical capabilities, etc.) “When search committees include a clear and explicit statement about the importance of diversity and its value to the institution... it increases the number of applications from and the likelihood of hiring women and men of color.” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Griffin, Bennet, & York, 2020).
 - We discovered that sometimes, for certain positions, the hiring manager makes the final decision on filling a position (often based on discussion with interested parties). Because this can introduce bias into the decision-making process, we recommend that the Center form diverse hiring committees (Subject Matter Expert panels, SME). Ideally, in the future all committees within USGS will be diverse; however, this item focuses specifically on the evaluation of the individuals applying for open positions (the SME and hiring managers). “Women and men of color bring unique perspectives to the search process, which can be beneficial when trying to break out of the common paradigms of ‘merit’ and reliance on traditional strategies and networks” (Smith, 2000; Griffin, Bennet, & York, 2020).
 - With a lack of Black, Indigenous or People of Color (BIPOC) at both Centers, we recognize that hiring panels may not be able to be racially diverse. Therefore, we recommend two things:
 - 1) that centers could try to harness the diversity that IS present (e.g., gender, LGBTQIA, experience level, generational) to ensure that the broadest possible range of experiences is represented. Alternatively, one person from an external science center could be asked to serve on hiring committees.
 - 2) that objective decision-making tools (e.g., rubrics) that have periodic bias checks are used by the panel to decide on a final candidate.



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- Center administration, to the extent allowable, should ensure that members of search/hiring committees have implicit bias trainings, which can increase the number of women, Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), applicants with different gender identities, and applicants with differing ability levels, in hiring pools, finalist lists, and hires (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010; Devine et al., 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).
- It is beneficial to redact names and pronouns from resumes, transcripts, and other materials associated with an application in order to reduce sexism and racism in the application process (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012); nevertheless, we acknowledge that this may place burdens on HR manager's time (Jones and Urban, 2013).
 - To alleviate this burden, we suggest that the USAJobs advertisement could request flexible application materials, where the applicant uses only their initials and gender-neutral pronouns to expedite this process for HR.
- We support the broader (e.g., outside of Center purview) evaluation of application-filtering protocols used by HR for bias and undue expectation, one example of which might be matching position roles to resume verbatim.
- We support the broader (e.g., outside of Center purview) revision of criteria for promotion within the USGS to include DEI activities explicitly and especially encourage mechanisms by which we can: "recognize the ways in which women and men of color make unique contributions to the academy." (O'Meara, 2010; Rice et al., 2000).
- **Valuing difference**
 - Hold dialogue/speaker series that promote and celebrate diversity within the USGS centers. These can be based on topics that deal with scientific experiences, professional experiences, or personal experiences. Talks that focus on the experiences of minorities (including women, transgender, and nonbinary people) when acquiring geoscience skills or applying them, experiences of minorities working in academia, governmental, or NGO entities related to geosciences, and personal experiences of minorities in everyday life outside of geoscience (and how a scientific background may shape those experiences).
 - For internal (to USGS) RFPs, prioritize proposals where the science focuses on underserved populations, environmental justice, or other areas where inequity in science has a profound impact, such as in the [Earth-Science Working Group Risk Community of Practice RFPs](#).
 - When considering applicants for internships, criteria for selection could include bringing diverse perspectives and who has the most to gain from the internship.

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- **Managing culture**
 - Make mandatory Center-wide trainings and workshops that will increase awareness and allyship amongst Center personnel and provide them the tools to speak out against marginalizing behaviors. Consult with [Peer Support Worker Network](#) to arrange events. 1-2 mandatory trainings per year is a good starting point.
 - Rethink criteria for advancing GS grades/ attaining Permanent status, as “the expectations for tenure and promotion are written in a way that... devalues meaningful labor that is either taken up by or shifted in inequitable ways to women and men of color.” (Griffin, Bennet, & York, 2020).
 - The most qualified candidate may not always be the individual with the most impressive publication record or experience. The selection criteria may include contributing to the cultural diversity and adding to the range of research and interests.
 - Publish or link [published](#) criteria on internal and public SP and WARC websites to increase transparency in the process.
 - Encouraging all employees (regardless of gender) to use available family-friendly policies; these policies may be “underutilized because women and men feel that taking advantage of them would hurt them professionally (Finkel et al., 1994; Gardner, 2012).”
 - Ensure all employees are provided and know how to access information on the various types of available leave as well as the qualifications/requirements for leave use.
 - Expand on office events (post-COVID) to *encourage and promote* socialization, such as creating an outdoor/indoor lunch space for staff to eat in (reduces feelings of isolation), plan lunch hour and after-hours activities like Center picnics, showing of environmentally focused documentaries, sports teams, etc.

2. What EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement? Are there other inclusion statements and resources publicly available?

- At the bottom of each job posting in USAJobs, the following EEO statement is provided.
 - *The Federal hiring process is setup to be fair and transparent. Please read the following guidance. Equal Employment Opportunity Policy: The United States Government does not discriminate in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, political affiliation, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, genetic information, age, membership in an employee organization, retaliation, parental status, military service, or other non-merit factor.*
- Every USAJobs posting also provides a Reasonable Accommodation Statement:
 - *Federal agencies must provide reasonable accommodation to applicants with disabilities where appropriate. Applicants requiring reasonable accommodation for any part of the*



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application process should follow the instructions in the job opportunity announcement. For any part of the remaining hiring process, applicants should contact the hiring agency directly. Determinations on requests for reasonable accommodation will be made on a case-by-case basis.

- [Link to the USGS EEO statement](#)
- [SPCMSC's website](#) posts available jobs. There is no EEO statement at this website. WARC does not have a website that posts available jobs.
 - We recommend amending our St. Pete jobs website to include more information on EEO/DEI/JEDI.
 - Note: In URGE-SPCMSC/SP leadership meeting, interest was expressed by leadership in including statements about welcoming diverse applicants and valuing diversity on the SP available jobs website and on USAJobs applications.

3. Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for hiring and/or admissions, e.g. job fairs, showcases?

- Most USGS positions are posted to USAJobs.
- At SPCMSC, available positions are also shared internally via Center All Hands meetings, on the [Center employment opportunity web page](#), and center-wide emails.
- However, many jobs are advertised by PIs outside of USAJobs via their own professional networks. At present, how a PI chooses to advertise a position is not standardized; nevertheless, the Center could provide a guide to PIs for advertising to organizations that serve underrepresented communities and in an equitable way.
 - PIs need to step up to increase their efforts to recruit and hire diverse applicants. Presentations/Readings/Training might be necessary to make PIs understand why this is important and what (Center/USGS) resources are available to them.
- Some jobs (e.g., student internships) are not advertised on USAJobs. At present, these job ads are sent to schools in the vicinity of the USGS SP that we have relationships with. These schools are historically white institutions with low racial diversity (e.g., 77.1% white, 8.7% Hispanic/LatinX, 2.6% Black [at Eckerd College](#); 48.8% white, 18.8% Hispanic/LatinX, and 9.1% Black [at USF](#)).
 - The SP and WARC centers should create standards for advertising to underrepresented groups and in an equitable way.
 - Furthermore, the SP and WARC centers should perform outreach with Minority Serving Institutions and build relationships with them before internships are advertised.
 - Additionally, the centers should consider students for internships who attend community colleges or may live in the vicinity of the center, not just students who attend colleges in the vicinity of the center (e.g., FSU or UF students who may be from Tampa Bay).
 - Expanding pools of applicants to reach more diverse populations will undoubtedly increase the workload for HR. To the extent possible, Center leadership should advocate at the Bureau-level for more HR support if there are increases in application volumes.



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4. What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores/grades? Is providing any of these a potential barrier that could be further lowered or removed? Are there any problematic questions asked?

- Official transcript (Grades, courses taken), and letters of recommendation are required.
- Recommendations for removing potential barriers:
 - Provide information to the applicant for navigating USAJobs (posted on the SP and WARC hiring websites and sent to every applicant by Admin).
 - Everyone can compete at the same level
 - Note: USAJobs is notoriously difficult to navigate. Some organizations have employed strategies to make this easier.
 - For example: graduate programs and science associations host workshops for students to help them with navigating USAJobs. A recent USGS job posting hosted a webinar to unlock difficulties of USAJobs applications.
 - Share USAJobs postings on wide-ranging job search websites (e.g., Indeed, Monster, etc...) to create awareness around USAJobs as the source for federal employment opportunities
 - Allow candidates to explicitly state which courses on their transcript fit course requirement for position types. Smaller schools and community college transcripts may not list courses in an expected or standard format, which may cause these candidates to be disqualified from USGS HR's initial selection process.
 - Applications windows for jobs, such as the internship positions, should be open for longer than 5 days; a good suggestion could be 14 days, since this provides the applicant two weekends over which to upload the required documents to USAJobs. This longer time frame would better accommodate students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who work jobs or serve as caretakers for a relative.
 - The SP Jobs website could recommend that students interested in jobs could set up notifications within USAJobs.
 - USAJobs advertisements or center websites could include a disclaimer that informs applicants to 'match' language in their resume/CV to that of the advertisement.
 - Redact names/pronouns (if applicable) from resumes, transcripts, and other materials associated with an application. SP Center leadership expressed interest in attempting to redact names and pronouns from internship applications.

5. How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?

- Application rubric for appraisal is specifically developed for each individual job posting.
- At SP, there is a rubric for prioritizing which federal positions are advertised; it is shared within Workforce Planning Meetings. This document is accessible to employees within the center but not to the public.

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- When a candidate is considered for research positions, the SME panel creates a rubric by incorporating job requirements listed in the advertisement. The panel rates each applicant for each of the categories then ranks applicants.
 - We suggest that this rubric and all advertisements on USAJobs for SP and WARC should include an assessment of how the candidate will contribute to increasing diversity and inclusion at the center.
 - We also suggest that the rubric should define and clarify highly subjective criteria such as “general fit”.

6. Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?

- The first step is a tiered selection process conducted by USGS HR (outside of the center).
- Once HR has selected an applicant pool, they provide application materials to the center that advertised the job posting.
- For some positions (technical, operations, or IT), the referred application materials are reviewed only by the person who advertised the position. That person may seek expertise from others; however, there is no standard.
- For research grade positions, applicant materials are evaluated by an SME Panel. The members of the SME panel and whether they exhibit diverse perspectives is not advertised publicly.
- We recommend that SP and WARC uses SME panels to evaluate applicants to fill technical, operations, IT, and RGE positions.
 - When selecting members of the SME panels, SP and WARC should establish criteria, such as requiring committees to represent gender and racial diversity, and internally sharing the names of the SME panel before candidates are evaluated.
 - We recommend that the Workforce Planning group selects the SME panel through a voting process when positions are prioritized at that meeting.
- In instances where the SME panel does not exhibit diverse perspectives, additional feedback from the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity should be sought.

7. Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?

- Dictated by U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

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Disclaimer: Any opinions or recommendations are those of the URGE pod members only and do not necessarily represent the view of the USGS or the United States Government. Deliverables and any recommendations therein will be presented to USGS leadership for consideration.

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