



THE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL FOR WOMEN IN NATIONAL SECURITY

MANAGING DIVERSITY AS A POLITICAL APPOINTEE

The demographics of U.S. federal government employees do not reflect what the country looks like. Our government has a diversity, equity and inclusion (“DEI”) problem, particularly in the national security setting where the disparity is even larger. To make matters worse, the current pipeline entering into the national security sector and government leadership continues to lack diverse candidates.

The leaders of tomorrow will be those who learn to manage diversity and support the next generation of diverse leaders. The summary below outlines strategies for political appointees on how to build diverse teams in the federal government and offers practical advice for current and future appointees.

HOW TO BUILD A DIVERSE TEAM

1. **Create an inclusive workplace.** Consider the following steps: (1) encourage people to speak up (*i.e.*, ask each person in the room his or her thoughts and opinions on the issue at hand); (2) practice active listening (*i.e.*, ask clarifying questions); (3) create safe zones to promote open communication (*i.e.*, maintain an ‘open door policy’); (4) track progress in DEI efforts by collecting data; and (5) create policies and procedures for DEI action to continue even after you may depart your role.

Tip #1: Hold yourself accountable to the standards and practices that you expect to change.

2. **Widen the DEI candidate pipeline.** Consider the following actions: (1) help build holistic teams by moving away from ‘standard’ qualifications for a position; (2) understand the value of having DEI in leadership positions; (3) broaden the sources of DEI candidates and political appointees; and (4) model the hiring practices you want so your team will follow by your example.
3. **Acknowledge diversity in meaningful ways.** Think about the following: (1) celebrate affinity months; (2) continuously brainstorm and track DEI goals with your team; and (3) recognize and understand the existence of historic discrimination.

Tip #2: When creating DEI goals, be careful about messaging and over-promising. Managing under federal bureaucracy is difficult even in the best of times, so keeping yourself honest will be beneficial for you and your team.

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE DIVERSE CANDIDATES IN THE PIPELINE

1. **Find allies from different backgrounds.** Allies can be of the same gender, race, or background as you, but those similarities are not necessarily required for a successful allyship. For example, white male allies can help you to strategize ways to face particular challenges in a white male-dominated environment. Overall, creating allyships among various communities is important for your career development.

This information summarizes LCWINS’ Session 3: Managing Diversity as a Political Appointee, moderated by Reta Jo Lewis and featuring panelists Heather Hurlburt, Chris Lu and Cecilia Muñoz. For more information, visit us at <https://www.lcwins.org/>.

2. ***Seek feedback.*** Be open to constructive criticism and ask for consistent feedback from your team. Seeking honest feedback from someone willing to review your work product and performance can help you increase your value to the team.
3. ***Be strategic.*** Choose your battles wisely. Figure out what is essential to push on, and avoid raising a matter for the sake of raising it. Consider the manner in which you are presenting information, and practice and prepare your position and counterarguments.

Tip #3: Remember that it is not your job to make people feel comfortable. Quite often, DEI issues can be uncomfortable. By releasing this burden, you will open up more mental space to focus on additional subjects.