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Better Management of Federal Women's/Special Emphasis Programs

The Law

Under the auspices of Management Directive 715 (MD-715), agencies must submit reports to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on the progress they are making in ensuring all employment decisions are free from discrimination. Further, OPM has stated that the Federal Women's Program (FWP) and Special Emphasis Program (SEP) plans should be an integral part of the agencies' overall affirmative action plans.

The Problem

In fiscal year 2008, 80.7% of agencies submitted timely MD-715 reports. This was a drastic and positive increase from only 50% in fiscal year 2007 and followed a media effort by FEW to alert agencies and decision makers to these dismal compliance numbers. Formal FWP or SEP plans seldom exist.

The Solution

The EEO Director of each federal agency must develop, in cooperation with the Federal Women's Program Managers (FWPMs), Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs) and others, an FWP and SEP strategic plan. The plans should be agreed to by both management and program managers and should include program goals, activities, time frames and resource requirements. The plans should also clearly state what the problems are and agency management officials must participate in setting goals to overcome these problems and in allocating sufficient resources to achieve these goals. Finally, the FWP and SEPs should be required to be an integral part of the agencies' overall affirmative action plans.

OPM and agencies need to develop criteria to evaluate the FWP and SEP and conduct periodic evaluations of these programs. There is also a need for accountability so that progress can be assessed and corrections made. Upper management should be briefed at least quarterly on the progress of the goals outlined in the FWPMs and SEPMs in their agencies.

At a minimum, each plan should contain:

- A statement detailing an assessment of the problem;
- A statement of the program goals;
- A statement of activities or action items that are to be undertaken to meet the goals;
- Long-range and interim target dates or timetables to accomplish activities or action items;
- Statement of accountability for program activities on the part of agency management officials and coordinators; and
- Criteria for evaluating the agency's progress in meeting their goals.

Every federal agency must submit these plans to OPM and EEOC, as well as comply with the MD-715 reporting requirements each year. These reports should specifically discuss the agency's achievements during the past year in reaching its FWP and SEP goals laid out in the plans. OPM should include in its annual report to the Congress a comprehensive review of each agency's compliance with these regulations.

Further, compliance with these regulations must become a component of every agency head's Government Performance Results Act goals. The EEO measures to be included should be:

- Timely submission of annual MD 715 reports;
- Detailed barrier analysis of gender and other EEO issues (such as glass ceilings);
- Annual proactive training for all managers and supervisors on managing an inclusive workforce; and
- Annual agency head address to the workforce explaining her/his commitment to EEO principles and her/his initiatives for the current year.