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Improving Workforce Diversity
Leaders of large organizations—including private corporations, the U.S. Armed Forces, and police and other first-responder agencies—are increasingly seeking to improve the diversity of their workforces.
Demographic diversity is one aspect of this: Leaders want their workforces to reflect the evolving racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, ideological, and generational makeup of society. At a minimum, organizations need to comply with federal equal employment opportunity and affirmative action standards.

But successful organizations are increasingly adopting a broader definition of diversity, one that includes differences in areas such as experience, skills, and educational background. The leaders of these organizations have made improving diversity a strategic goal, reasoning that increasing the skill base and range of talent among employees will improve the organization’s overall performance.
CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

Focus on the Long Term
Cultivating a diverse workforce—and especially a diverse leadership—takes time. This is most apparent in RAND’s work for the U.S. Armed Forces, which, by their nature, must promote from within. Women and minorities are currently underrepresented at the most senior ranks, and for this to change, efforts to create a diverse pool of potential future leaders must make significant progress today.

Conduct a Barrier Analysis
A first step toward developing a more diverse workforce is identifying the factors that are making minorities less likely to enter or succeed within the organization. A barrier analysis is a methodical examination of the recruitment, hiring, and promotion processes in an organization to determine where members of specific groups may face obstacles.

Look Outside the Organization for Potential Best Practices
For example, a major component of RAND’s 2010 assessment of DoD’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy was a review of the experiences of other institutions, including foreign militaries and U.S. police and fire departments, that allow gay individuals to serve without restriction.

Recruiting Is Just the First Step
Creating a more diverse workforce begins with attracting a diverse pool of qualified applicants, but once they are part of the workforce, the organization should ensure that minorities are actively supported and developed. For example, while promotion within an organization should be based on merit, steps can be taken to ensure that members of underrepresented groups are given opportunities to excel.
Diversity Is More Than Demographics

Diversity refers to an array of attributes—including not just race and ethnicity, gender, age, religion, disability, and national origin, but also language, talent, educational background, experience, sexual orientation, and even attitude and personality.

Emphasize Accountability and Monitor Progress

For lasting change to occur, leaders must be held accountable, and hold others accountable, for moving the organization toward its diversity vision. A key part of this is the use of metrics that link goals and strategies to actual execution.
ANALYSIS CAN HELP

Strategic Planning and Implementation

RAND has helped organizations with strategic planning and implementation: establishing a clear definition of diversity, developing rigorous metrics to support that definition, and designing and applying comprehensive systems to hold individuals accountable for progress toward diversity goals.

Trend and Barrier Analyses

RAND has supported diversity efforts with rigorous trend and barrier analyses. This research has helped the military services and police organizations to improve their initiatives to attract, recruit, develop, and retain a diverse workforce.

Objective Assessments

RAND has provided objective assessments of specific issues and policies, including “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and the assignment of women to combat units.
RECENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

**ASSISTANCE with Strategic Planning and Implementation**

- Planning for Diversity  
  www.rand.org/t/MG743
- Implementing a Framework for Change Through Accountability  
  www.rand.org/t/RR333
- Helping Police Departments Achieve Their Diversity Goals  
  www.rand.org/t/OP370  
  www.rand.org/t/OP385  
  www.rand.org/t/MG724
- Developing Cross-Cultural Skills in the Air Force  
  www.rand.org/t/MG811

**Trend and Barrier ANALYSES**

- Reviewing Diversity Best Practices in the Private Sector  
  www.rand.org/t/OP206
- Explaining Why Minorities Are Underrepresented Among Air Force Officers  
  www.rand.org/t/RR495
- Understanding the Factors That Affect Enlistment Rates Among Hispanics  
  www.rand.org/t/MG773
- Examining the Promotion and Retention Rates of Women and Minority Military Officers  
  www.rand.org/t/TR1159
- Identifying Barriers to Minority Participation in Special Operations Forces (SOF)  
  www.rand.org/t/MR1042

**ASSESSMENT of Specific Issues and Policies**

- Assessing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT)  
  www.rand.org/t/MG1056
- Reviewing the Assignment of Female Soldiers to Combat Units in Iraq  
  www.rand.org/t/MG590-1
RAND web resources at

IMPROVING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

www.rand.org/improving-workforce-diversity

For more information on workforce diversity research and expertise at RAND, email diversity@rand.org.