



# Functional Bureau Strategy

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## The Secretary's Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR)

**FOR PUBLIC RELEASE**

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## 1. Executive Statement

The mission of the Secretary's Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR) is to propagate fairness, equity, and inclusion at the Department of State. In support of this mission, S/OCR manages the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) administrative process for the Department which provides employees and applicants for employment with avenues of redress for discrimination and/or harassment, in accordance with EEO laws and regulations. S/OCR also promotes equity and inclusion through training and outreach to build awareness and analyzes Department programs, policies, and practices to identify triggers and barriers to equal employment opportunity. Essentially, our core business is conflict resolution, employee and supervisor assistance, and diversity management.

We will continue to operate in a challenging environment. While the number of harassment cases has increased substantially, the size of our office has not grown commensurate with this increased "demand," which has contributed to a backlog of cases. While we strive to ensure all employees and applicants for employment receive prompt and effective responses to all inquiries, we also must simultaneously endeavor toward a better future where there is decreasing harassment and discrimination within the Department. In pursuit of this end, we will continue to promote diversity, advocate for a workplace of civility and respect, and leverage all opportunities to improve our staff's collective capabilities through training and development.

Based on standing legal requirements, Administration and Department priorities, and our current operating environment, S/OCR developed three goals for this strategy which are 1) responsive and efficient case processing; 2) proactive prevention; and 3) diversity and inclusion. These goals support the priorities expressed in the Secretary's Policy Statement on Diversity and Equal Employment Opportunity. The goals also align to the Department of State – U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Joint Strategic Plan (JSP). Additionally, when developing the objectives within each goal, we also took into account the risk to achieving our objectives by considering the question, "what is at risk for the Department and our mission if we do not achieve this objective?"

Finally, we recognize that publishing this strategy is only the first step in a continual process. In order to advance the Department's priorities and achieve our objectives, we also need to commit to effective implementation of our strategy. Therefore, we intend to actively use this strategy as our road map on the way forward, measure our progress, and update our strategy periodically as we continue to advocate for a work environment that is respectful of all people, their knowledge, skills, backgrounds, and abilities.

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## 2. Bureau Strategic Framework

### Strategy Outline

#### Goal 1: Responsive and Efficient Case Processing

Objective 1.1: Improve quality of investigations, inquiries and alternative dispute resolution by increased responsiveness through improved collaboration on claims and cases

Objective 1.2: Increase informal stage timeliness by improving complaint monitoring and/or using other resolution techniques in addition to mediation

#### Goal 2: Proactive Prevention

Objective 2.1: Improve management awareness of EEO/harassment trends and findings by educating Department bureaus, offices and missions through periodic briefings and training

Objective 2.2: Improve EEO Counselor quality by providing incentives for collateral duty service through awards, recognition and visibility

#### Goal 3: Diversity and Inclusion

Objective 3.1: Maximize commitment and support for fairness, equity and inclusion by engaging agency leadership in initiatives and activities to emphasize the value of diversity

Objective 3.2: Promote greater diversity and inclusion by advocating for EEO principles in the Department's human resources strategies and by supporting bureau, office, and mission efforts to increase accountability

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### **3. Goals, Objectives and Sub-Objectives**

#### **Bureau Goal 1: Responsive and Efficient Case Processing**

##### **a. Description and Linkages**

Responsive and efficient case processing improves processes and instills greater confidence in the protections afforded by EEO laws and regulations. There are a variety of means to achieve this goal to include EEO counselor training, database tracking systems and reports, trend analysis, and the use of contractors, as well as formal and informal communications such as 462 and No FEAR reports, Diversity Notes, briefings, consultations, and surveys. Through these means, S/OCR strives to comply with all legal and regulatory guidelines and timelines while also providing high-quality customer service to assist management in resolving issues as quickly as possible and at the earliest possible level. This goal supports fulfillment of 29 CFR Part 1614 (Federal Sector Equal Employment Opportunity) and aligns to the JSP Objective 4.3 (Enhance workforce performance, leadership, engagement, and accountability to execute our mission efficiently and effectively).

#### **Bureau Objective 1.1: Improve quality of investigations, inquiries and alternative dispute resolution by increased responsiveness through improved collaboration on claims and cases**

##### **a. Justification**

Laws and regulations set guidelines for EEO counseling, processing of complaints and carrying out inquiries into reports of harassment. For example, 29 CFR part 1614 sets strict timeframes for EEO case processing. Since EEO and harassment workloads have increased without comparable staff increases, our overall customer service and regulatory compliance have suffered. To mitigate this issue, S/OCR intends to institute better cross-sectional communication, collaboration, and data sharing on workload issues. Failure to achieve this objective may result in a negative impact on productivity and morale, as well as negate the deterrent that an effective harassment reporting program can have in limiting future harassment. Another risk associated with this objective includes default judgments, fines or other penalties which may increase the Department's potential liability, even in cases where the Department would otherwise not be found at fault.

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**Bureau Objective 1.2: Increase informal stage timeliness by improving complaint monitoring and/or using other resolution techniques in addition to mediation**

**a. Justification**

Timely informal resolution saves the Department time and money. Resolving a case through counseling or ADR is a “win-win” in that both the aggrieved and management are empowered to shape outcomes they perceive as reasonable, the Department limits liability and admission of wrong doing, and the participants return to an environment that allows them to be heard so they can then begin restoring their relationship and productivity sooner than through a formal resolution process. Increased caseloads without commensurate staffing increases have contributed to an extensive backlog of informal cases. Therefore, S/OCR will seek improve complaint monitoring and expand the methods and sources of resolution to address this issue. Risks associated with not achieving this objective include non-compliance with regulatory timeliness and increased costs associated with the formal process.

**Bureau Goal 2: Proactive Prevention**

**a. Description and Linkages**

S/OCR seeks to enable proactive prevention by raising awareness and increasing understanding across the Department regarding rights and responsibilities with respect to EEO and harassment. Some of the methods for achieving this goal include conducting internal and external training, presenting briefings, providing consultations and advice, disseminating information such as through Diversity Notes and the EEO Counselor Newsletter, and incentivizing strong performance through EEO awards. By these means, S/OCR will continually emphasize the importance of respecting EEO laws and enable a workplace free of discrimination or sexual harassment. S/OCR will also ensure Department employees are aware of how to seek redress for alleged discrimination and how to report discrimination and sexual harassment. This goal also supports fulfillment of 29 CFR Part 1614 and aligns to the JSP Objective 4.3.

**Bureau Objective 2.1: Improve awareness of EEO/harassment trends and findings by educating Department employees, bureaus, offices and missions through training and periodic briefings**

**a. Justification**

S/OCR recognizes that maintaining or increasing EEO and harassment awareness can prevent conflict and improve morale across the workforce which will contribute to the building of a model workplace that values fairness, equity, and inclusion. Greater understanding and continual commitment at all levels is required to enable this more positive and effective culture. Therefore, S/OCR will pursue this objective by ensuring Department employees, with a particular emphasis on managers and leaders, are made aware of EEO and harassment trends, challenges, and issues so that we may collectively set and achieve higher expectations for the promotion of fairness, equity, and inclusion. Risks associated with not achieving this objective include an increasing trend in EEO or harassment issues through a lack of awareness, leadership emphasis, or understanding.

**Bureau Objective 2.2: Improve EEO Counselor quality by providing incentives for collateral duty service through awards, recognition, and visibility**

**a. Justification**

S/OCR recognizes that EEO Counselors, which number nearly 600 throughout the Department, serve as the main source of information and the “first line of defense” in terms of responding to employee questions, training LE Staff EEO Liaisons, providing insight into EEO and harassment-related issues and challenges, reporting possible incidents of harassment, and resolving cases as early as possible in the EEO process. Despite this important role, serving as an EEO Counselor is a collateral duty and therefore, may be regarded as a lower priority compared with other Department work. To mitigate this issue, S/OCR will seek to continually and publicly promote the contributions of EEO Counselors. Risks associated with not achieving this objective include an inability to attract and retain talented employees to serve as EEO Counselors and a decline in the quality of effort put forth by EEO Counselors in the performance of their EEO-related collateral duties.

### **Bureau Goal 3: Diversity and Inclusion**

#### **a. Description and Linkages**

S/OCR promotes diversity and inclusion at all levels in the Department through a variety of methods to include commemorative events, special emphasis programs, Congressional reports, barrier and trend analysis, Employee Affinity Group engagements, quarterly diversity forums, and the Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. By these means, S/OCR enables employees and leaders to better understand their role in promoting fairness, equity, and inclusion in their individual workplaces and throughout the Department. This goal supports the equal opportunity policy expressed in 29 CFR Part 1614 and aligns to the Department's JSP Objective 4.3 by contributing to the enhancement of workforce performance.

### **Bureau Objective 3.1: Maximize commitment and support for fairness, equity, and inclusion by engaging agency leadership in initiatives and activities to emphasize the value of diversity.**

#### **a. Justification**

Diversity is not only a worthy cause to pursue, it is a necessity for the Department to accurately reflect the diversity of American society as a whole and to project the strength that is inherent within our diversity to the world. S/OCR supports the Department in this regard by sponsoring programs and events, managing the Department's special emphasis programs, and supporting employee affinity groups, as well as other activities designed to enhance appreciation for how a diverse workforce better reflects our Nation and improves the Department. Promoting leadership and management engagement in these activities likely will increase participation and interest across the wider Department. The risks associated with not achieving this objective include a potential lack of emphasis or effectiveness if leadership and management do not appear to prioritize these activities.

### **Bureau Objective 3.2: Promote greater diversity and inclusion by advocating for EEO principles in the Department's human resources strategies and by supporting bureau, office, and mission efforts to increase accountability**

#### **a. Justification**

Laws and executive orders prohibiting discrimination in the federal civilian workplace mandate that personnel decisions be made free from discrimination on protected bases.

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Additionally, Management Directive 715 requires all agencies to conduct self-assessments of their policies and procedures to identify any barriers to a discrimination-free and open workplace. In pursuit of this objective, S/OCR will work closely with the Bureau of Human Resources as well as the individual bureaus, offices, and missions to achieve this objective. In support of this effort, S/OCR will promote diversity and inclusion by leveraging data and statistics to identify areas for improvement however, S/OCR also intends work toward an even broader impact by informing changes or refinements to human resources policies and strategies and by encouraging and supporting diversity and inclusion initiatives developed organically by the individual bureaus, offices, and missions. Risks associated with not achieving this objective include less than full compliance with the laws and executive orders that prohibit discrimination in the workplace.

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#### **4. Cross-cutting Management Objectives or Management Goal**

**Management Objective: Promote work-life balance and improve morale through internal professional development opportunities and alternative work schedules**

**a. Justification**

To achieve our mission of propagating fairness, equity, and inclusion within the Department, S/OCR recognizes that we must continually invest in our own staff. Two ways in which we can demonstrate that we value our staff are through the pursuit of professional development opportunities and the application of alternative work schedules. Participating in professional development opportunities will enable our staff to progress professionally while our office also will benefit collectively as we develop more depth in talent. Additionally, the application of alternative work schedules will allow our staff to pursue greater work-life balance which will result in a more content and productive workforce. Risks associated with not achieving this objective include a decline in morale, a lack of depth in our workforce, and decreasing productivity.

**Management Objective: Improve office-wide and cross-sectional learning and communication through collaborative working groups, off-sites, and other events**

**a. Justification**

As the number of harassment cases within the Department continue to increase without appropriate increases in our staffing levels, we must develop greater flexibility and cross-communication within the office to help mitigate this capacity challenge. While we work in parallel to fill our vacancies, we will also work internally with the resources we already have in order to maximize our existing capabilities. This approach will enable S/OCR to build trust and greater understanding within the office while also allowing us to deliver our services as efficiently as possible. The risks associated with not achieving this objective include a lack of cohesion and efficiency as well as a lack of progress in reducing our case backlog.

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