

Employment Outreach: A Quality Approach to Workforce Diversity

With over three-fourths of Santa Ana, California's nearly 300,000 population identified as ethnic minorities, the diversity challenge for the city government is daunting. Santa Ana's Hispanic community comprises 65.2 percent of its residents—the second-highest of U.S. cities with populations over 50,000. Motivated to increase the ethnic and gender diversity of its workforce in a proactive way, the city has developed a quality approach to affirmative action with its new Employment Outreach Program.

Committed to quality service, the city focused on the needs and expectations of its customers. This principle forms the basis of its outreach philosophy: It is good business to have a workforce that is representative of the ethnic and gender diversity existing in our community. Hence, the city-wide goal to recruit and retain a diverse and highly skilled workforce is grounded in the commitment to excellence with diversity.

The Employment Outreach Program is designed around the needs of each department in the city. For each classification, every department knows if a job opening has outreach priority by referring to its departmental employment outreach plan. This plan is created by a team of department employees with assistance from the personnel department. The team determines outreach priority for selected job areas based on the diversity within the overall department, divisions within the department, job classifications, and/or categories of employment as compared to the diversity in the community.

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David Ream

It is up to the department head to decide if any job opening identified with outreach priority will receive special recruitment efforts targeting a specific ethnic and/or gender group. This system avoids numerical quotas and allows only qualified applicants to be considered for selection. Thus, an aggressive and creative approach to recruitment is necessary.

The burden of the special action is on obtaining a qualified pool of applicants. Accountability of the results from successful outreach efforts lies directly with the department head. Progress on each department's employment outreach plan is a key element in the department head's annual performance evaluation prepared by the city manager.

We believe that the Employment Outreach Program helps maintain democracy in a diverse society, helps provide quality service to the community, and enhances the community's positive identification with its city government.

The Challenge of Diversity

Because of dramatic demographic changes, many local governments need to be seen as communities comprised of communities. The latest census places Santa Ana's 293,742 residents as one of the more diverse communities in California: 65.2 percent Hispanic, 23.1 percent white, 9.1 percent Asian, 2.2 percent black, and 0.3 percent American Indian. Santa Ana's diversity is even greater among school-age children, as reflected in the ethnic breakdown of school enrollment figures.

Local governments facing this level of diversity are critically challenged to see and understand the special needs of their residents and to provide quality service through employees that understand how best to meet those needs. All areas of local government services are affected; some more than others. A representative, ethnically diverse

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workforce is most beneficial and responsive in police work, code enforcement, recreation, and community services. A diverse community also places special demands on areas such as library services, firefighting, community development, and economic development.

To understand the needs of a diverse community, the Santa Ana

workforce must have a high level of cultural sensitivity. In hiring employees, it became important to move toward a workforce that is reflective of the community's ethnic breakdown. Though being of the same ethnicity does not guarantee understanding, it does increase its probability. We value Hispanic police officers, for example, because of their insight and ability to communicate effectively with the Hispanic residents and business community. Another special need caused by diversity, which has been recognized and recruited in Santa Ana, is people with bilingual abilities. Whether the city is investigating a crime or helping a patron use the library, city employees with bilingual skills are essential in providing quality services.

Society's challenge of diversity calls for a special commitment from local governments. Cities and counties must ensure that their workforces become diverse without compromising the principles of quality selection. Success in these efforts is not measured exclusively by labor market diversity, but rather on the employer's aggressive and creative efforts to attract quality minority applicants. No matter how limited the applicant pool of a target ethnic group for a specific job opening, Santa Ana's experience is that special outreach efforts can successfully yield the desired result.

Improved service due to increased workforce diversity has been only one of the desired benefits. Another has been the ability to instill harmony in the community. An ethnically diverse local government workforce helps residents to feel that their unique needs are understood and served in a professional manner.

The Employment Outreach Plan

After envisioning proactive goals that reaffirm Santa Ana's outreach philosophy, the challenge was to develop a

process that would deliver the results. The cornerstone of that process is department-specific employment outreach plans. These plans are independent guides for each department to use to identify the diversity needs of their workforce. In preparing to recruit for a job opening, the department uses the employment outreach plan as a ready reference to determine what level of outreach priority may be needed. This priority includes special aggressive and creative recruitment efforts and targeting previously identified, underrepresented minority or gender groups. It also serves as a plan of action that is respectful of the unique needs of each department.

The force responsible for developing these plans is a group of employees organized as a planning team. Each team member is selected by the department head working with the personnel department. The planning team conducts a utilization study by ethnic and gender groups, which analyzes the department workforce by divisions, sections, and often by selected classifications, and/or categories of employment. The results of each study establish a recruitment approach to meet each department's diversity expectations. This approach is a significant method of planning, implementing, and measuring progress to achieve the goal of having a city workforce that is representative at all levels of the diversity in the community it serves by the year 2000.

Employment outreach plans also provide for a system of accountability. The plan calls for semiannual progress reports, to be reviewed by the city manager when evaluating the performance of each department head. The department-specific employment outreach plan, therefore, is a performance contract for management. The significance of this process is that the staff has facilitated important institutional learning by developing a new language of change. The

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process assists in consensus building because it clarifies values, establishes the approach, and articulates a plan of action. This is significant because it reinforces the fact—from top management on down—that the city is committed to workplace diversity. With the city manager taking a practice position, a corporate language is established that is common to all departments, that language being workplace diversity.

The employment outreach plan goes beyond the exclusive focus on selection by diversity, and instead focuses on a variety of efforts needed to advance diversity in the workforce without compromising high-skill criteria for selection. As stated in each department-specific employment outreach plan, "the success of this goal is a matter of good public service."

Desired Outcomes

The Employment Outreach Program was developed by applying principles of quality service to affirmative action. Santa Ana's approach thrusts our organization in a forward-looking direction with regard to the city's human resource needs, and at the same time encourages open communication.

The Employment Outreach Program delivers well-balanced results by both gender and ethnicity without compromising high-quality standards. A seven-month preliminary progress report of all the new hires in the city for fiscal 1992 shows that over 72 percent of those hired are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

A strong effort also has been made toward early employment outreach programs where young people from target groups are located, directed, and motivated toward careers in public service. Such efforts as internships and partnerships with schools aimed at enhancing civic awareness are becoming an integral part of outreach planning in Santa Ana.

The Employment Outreach Program is a result-oriented and modified approach to affirmative action. The successes are clearly obtainable by this approach, and their impact is expected to help brighten Santa Ana's entrance into the twenty-first century. **PM**

David Ream is city manager of Santa Ana, California.