MINORITY RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
ROUNDTABLE ASSOCIATES
National Forum and Training Institute
April 2001

INTRODUCTION

The information provided in this handout was compiled from a variety of resources and 20 years of experience in the field of parks, outdoor recreation and experiential education. Much of the information can be applied to recruitment pertaining to either participants or staff/employees, or both. The material is mixed up a bit, yet the primary focus is on staff recruitment.

Many organizations and agencies are still rationalizing about the “lack of people of color” with few plans to significantly alter the situation. At times I like to believe life is really pretty simple ~ we, as individuals and through institutional norms, make it a lot more difficult than it has to be (you know: “life is easy, people make it hard”). I also realize there are tough issues and challenges we face as a profession. Recruitment and retention efforts must work together to create a “win-win” situation for both employees and institutions alike.

Generally, the term minority implies something “less than” and often has a negative connotation. This document mostly uses minority as the vernacular found in the literature to be the standard terminology of previous decades. While in most instances this is nebulous and becoming obsolete, it is still used today. More contemporary and accepted language relates to use of ethnic minority—for greater specificity—or people of color as more inclusive and appropriate. As a result, all three terms are analogous throughout this handout.

The information in this packet is not exhaustive, nor is it meant to be. I hope these ideas generate new ideas. This is no longer an issue that can be “discussed” year after year. Seems the time to do something and improve our systems is now. If not, when? If not you, then who?

Good Luck!

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Common Barriers / Constraints / Challenges (call it what you wish!)
(From the literature and national networks)

Fewer college graduates: Higher education enrollment of Blacks and Hispanics has increased over the years, yet continues to lag behind Whites and Asians; graduation rates from 4-year institutions also lower (13% and 11%, respectively, Census 2000).

Economic and social changes: As higher paying occupations that were traditionally reserved for White males have opened to women and ethnic minorities, fewer people of color have looked to parks, outdoor recreation, natural and cultural resources and related jobs as a career.

Recent trends of corporations providing stock options, generous starting salaries, financial support for relocation of residence, and numerous other “perks” have reduced the attraction of public service and the human dimensions aspect of our work among people of color who are graduating seniors. We need to rekindle the allure and appeal of parks, recreation, and conservation.

Insufficient, scant supply, lacking, inadequate, scarce in number, dearth of people of color in the field. No matter how we “label” it, this is a common assertion that permeates the air coast to coast. Result: Lack of role models and mentors from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Cultural deprivation: Does your agency/organization promote/institutionalize or at least recognize the myriad of cultural events, holidays, etc. that appear on the 12-month calendar?

Ideological differences of managers/directors and field/line staff results in polarized efforts. Behaviors of senior staff who profess to support such minority recruitment programs but are unwilling to translate their beliefs into action create too many unintentional problems. “Inconsistent behavior” = disparity between word and deed.

The characteristic “after the fact” support contributes to inflated expectations of the potential for recruitment programs and sometimes leads to a reduction of critical resources (e.g., consultation, money, human power/person resources).

“But we’re too busy and it takes too much effort. . .” – perhaps you’ve heard this within your own organization? Assumption that verbally committed people will automatically contribute their time and expertise to recruitment activities is frequently false.

Alienation or isolation of people of color when in a predominantly White environment (whether program participants or staff) must be taken seriously as either current issue to be relieved and/or potential situation to be avoided.

Poorly planned recruitment programs create negative impression of the agency or organization. A negative image can result from ineffectual preparations.
Recruitment goals to meet diversity initiatives cannot simply be met by placing ads in mainstream newspapers.

As once read in the opinion & comments section of a magazine: “One wonders if a strong procedural commitment is made to actively seek out potentially qualified candidates from minority groups, or if recruitment is a ritual to validate the goals of a federal [or private] grant.”

Issue of cost benefit: **Perception 1** - Time spent on such activities substantially reduce the time available for other scholarly/programmatic pursuits. Because minority recruitment and retention are seldom an institutionalized aspect of the agencies overall mission and are not criteria used to measure staff productivity, such efforts by management may be regarded as professionally insignificant. **Perception 2** - “The potential costs of staff involvement in minority recruitment and retention may outweigh the benefits.” Bottom line: If these perceptions exist among managers/directors or any staff for that matter, they most likely will have a negative impact on the organizational culture, particularly on its receptivity to minority participants and applicants for position openings.

Message! Staff members from ethnically diverse backgrounds are of vital importance to people of color in our programs. This is NOT to argue that “only minorities should teach minorities”; on the contrary. All our youth need the opportunity to experience a realistic and culturally pluralistic representation of America among the leaders/instructors who educate and socialize them. First, accessibility to minority leaders and cultural support can provide for important needs for minority participants (e.g., “can comfortably relate…”) that White leaders sometimes cannot. The concept of shared identity and similar learning styles between people from different socio-cultural backgrounds is tenuous at best. Second, many organizations continue to lack effective training to prepare White leaders to work with minority youth. Reasons why diversifying our staff are too numerous to mention here. A key first step is typically ensuring the staff on your team understands why this continues to be important.
Recommendations for Recruitment Principles, Guidelines, and General Great Ideas!

This list was designed to serve as a source of ideas that can be adapted to fit an organization’s (or agencies) particular circumstance. Success has been documented in the literature – from a variety of professional disciplines – yet will vary for you based on effort and resources to accomplish these. The recommendations on this list have been modified to better match initiatives within the parks, recreation & conservation field. And in general, the list should be tailored to a specific organization’s circumstances, resources, and staff needs and provide you with successful ways to enhance the quality of opportunity within your programs. (Note: organization and agency may be used interchangeably depending on the context).

1. Minority institutions of higher education: Align your organization with Historically Black Colleges, Hispanic serving institutions, and American Indian Tribal Colleges.
   - Establish a liaison with faculty within parks, recreation/leisure studies, conservation, environmental-based curricula (and related fields or whatever is essential for your agency).
   - Offer to be a guest speaker in specific classes to talk about a specific subject and include information about your agency, potential for employment, and application procedures.
   - Post job announcements on visible bulletin boards monitored by various departments.

2. Student organizations on college/university campuses are a prime recruiting mechanism. Students within a variety of majors and career interests are involved so it’s also a way to get young people/potential candidates to spread the word about position openings.
   - Organizations genuinely concerned and seriously committed about diversity among their staff should become acquainted with the college/university-based student organizations on local campuses that represent minority students/cultural groups (e.g., Black Student Alliance, Native American Student Services).

3. Participate on campus career days especially at HBCU’s, HACU’s, and Tribal Colleges.
   - Familiarize potential candidates/degree seeking students with your organization, explain the application process, and provide information on the programs and services available.

4. Financial assistance: Offer paid internships for ethnically diverse college students (or any students). Research demonstrates that availability of financial aid/assistance plays a major role in recruitment and retention.
   - This support sends a message to populations that have not been represented in certain employment ranks that efforts are being made to seek out and support them in this professional, educational setting.
   - Money is not always available; this is true. (If your will is strong enough, your institution will find a way!)
5. Efforts should be designed to develop and facilitate linkages within and between the social networks of various ethnic minority groups.
   “Networks” represent a way to supplement minority students (or candidates for employment) possible resource deficits, providing necessary emotional support, and new social contacts.
   Organizations tend not to fix things they do not perceive as broken or in some way defective. Consequently, incompatibles between organizational structure and practice, and minority needs are frequently seen as “their problem.”

6. Recruitment activities must involve the organization’s majority population. For instance, if predominantly White, these managers, directors, field staff, and administrators must assume visible and active roles in as many aspects of the recruitment efforts as possible.
   Shows acceptance and active support by the control structure of the agency.
   The agency mission, goals, operating procedures, and strategic plan that determines the acceptable means for attaining desirable outcomes fall within a framework designed to serve the vested interests of Whites.

7. Recruitment should not be disproportionately dependent nor solely based on activity participation of ethnic minorities currently on staff.
   Continued assumption they are most interested in and more knowledgeable about minority issues.
   This leads to betrayal and perceived loss by minorities as a result of becoming involved in the “minority work” of predominantly White organizations.

8. Post job descriptions/position announcements on electronic listservs and available jobnet websites that bring together the particular groups you may be seeking (e.g., professional women, people of color, specific ethnic group, people with disabilities)
   These lists and websites can be specific to an area of interest/network or general professional support.
   Posting available positions to electronic lists is a simple means to get an announcement to a large network of specific groups of people. (And, people are happy to spread the word!).
   Meeting the market ½ way: Make it easy for candidates to apply.

9. Recruitment campaign materials should have photographs of minority leaders – and/or participants (at any level)
   This can be a subtle (or not so subtle!) yet very effective way to reach minority candidates.
   If your position announcements don’t typically include pictures at all, be creative and consider this as a “special effort.”

10. Produce a film or video on the services and programs available, and be sure to include as many minority staff/employees currently on staff as possible.
    In general, be sure individuals on the video represent a variety of cultures whenever possible!
11. Utilize print and broadcast media geared toward minority audiences (e.g., newspapers, magazines, radio spots [etc] that may cater to specific groups).

12. Ensure minority representation on your Board of Directors and Advisory Committees.

13. Recruitment programs could include diverse activities.
   Designing recruitment in ways that both expand the recruitment support base and contribute to institutionalizing the philosophy, goals and activities of such efforts is essential.
   In a “political” sense, activities should provide a foundation for uniting with potential allies in the community and developing effective coalitions. Examples: Include sponsoring an open house, organize ethnically-based entertainment event, community service event, invite program partners, potential/current funders, etc. to a year-end banquet.

14. Various community organizations that work largely with minority constituents can help identify potential candidates. Cultivate local partnerships!

15. Several models recommend that recruitment efforts begin at the junior high and high school levels.
   Goals: Make students aware of the positive aspects of a career in parks and recreation and whenever possible, provide them with opportunities to work within a leadership capacity (e.g., usually high school level) in your programs or organization as a whole.

**RETENTION**

1. If your organization does not already have one, issue a strong policy statement supporting Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Affirmative Action, etc.
   Require the policy be disseminated and discussed at staff meetings (when necessary) and new employee orientations (and any other area believed appropriate).

2. Minority students may evaluate program staff to the extent which staff members are involved in issues that have a direct impact on their lives. This can apply to minority employees evaluating supervisors (directors/managers).
   Given this evaluative paradigm, verbal support by the leadership about minority recruitment, when devoid of action, may result in feelings by minority students (or staff) of betrayal, loss of trust, and suspicion.

3. Training opportunities such as leadership development, specific skill building, and management strategies should be offered and encouraged to minority employees (as much as for any other staff).
   Whether internal or external opportunities, this is dependent on commitment, resources, and schedules (make sure training is in the budget!).
4. Conduct periodic workshops/training sessions for program staff, directors, administrators, etc. on ethnic and cultural awareness and sensitivity.
   These should be experiential in nature and developed with progression in mind, depending on needs.
   Facilitator can be current staff or contracted externally.

5. Exit interviews should be conducted with all employees. Be sure to include other questions specific to people of color on your staff in order to identify unique problem areas potentially related to race/cultural issues.

6. Ensure minority representation on senior level management teams within the operating structure of your organization.

7. Develop a system to monitor the overall retention program, gather data on employee attrition (who’s leaving/why?), evaluate effectiveness of each aspect of the retention program, and allow for modifications, as needed.

8. Establish a team of professionals on your staff to participate on a “Think Tank” (not everything has to be a task force!).
   A tip of the hat to anyone who has or is ready to create an opportunity within your organization to critically look at the issues impacting people of color (or whatever group/cohort seeks interest).
   Such discussions – with potential action items – positively affect retention by lifting consciousness, awareness, motivation, and spirits.

“Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.”

~ Malcolm X
A few critical questions about your diversity recruitment and retention efforts:

1. Is there an organizational definition of diversity?
2. What role are people of color playing in your organization?
3. Who controls the discussions at meetings? What is their agenda?
4. What does diversity without financial commitment imply for diversity efforts? (Are we “putting our money where our mouth is?”)
5. Is it impossible to have a conversation with people speaking different languages?
6. Is there an organization-wide diversity plan? (e.g., this may be part of a larger, overall strategic or program plan). Short and long term goals? Benchmarks and measures of accountability to know whether efforts are successful? Who is responsible if the desired results are not attained?
7. Do people understand that diversity is everybody’s job?
8. Does staff at every level reflect “diversity” (e.g., administrative/support, field/program, directors/managers, CEO’s/Presidents).
9. Do all staff play an active role? If yes, how? If no, why not?

LET’S GET RID OF MANAGEMENT

People don’t want to be managed.
They want to be led.
Whoever heard of a world manager?
World leader, yes.
Educational leader.
Political leader.
Religious leader.
Scout leader.
Community leader.
Labor leader.
Business leader.
They lead.
They don’t manage.
The carrot always wins over the stick.
Ask your horse.
You can lead a horse to water,
but you can’t manage him to drink.
If you want to manage somebody,
manage yourself.
Do that well and you’ll be ready
to stop managing.
And start leading.

Leadership requires creating and sharing a vision, motivating key players to embrace and uphold that vision, evaluating results connected to making that vision a reality, and finally, making changes when you are not getting the desired results. ~ NSR

A message as published in the Wall Street Journal (by United Technologies Corporation, Hartford, CT, 1994)
REFERENCES


