



NATIONAL CONFERENCE
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The Forum for America's Ideas

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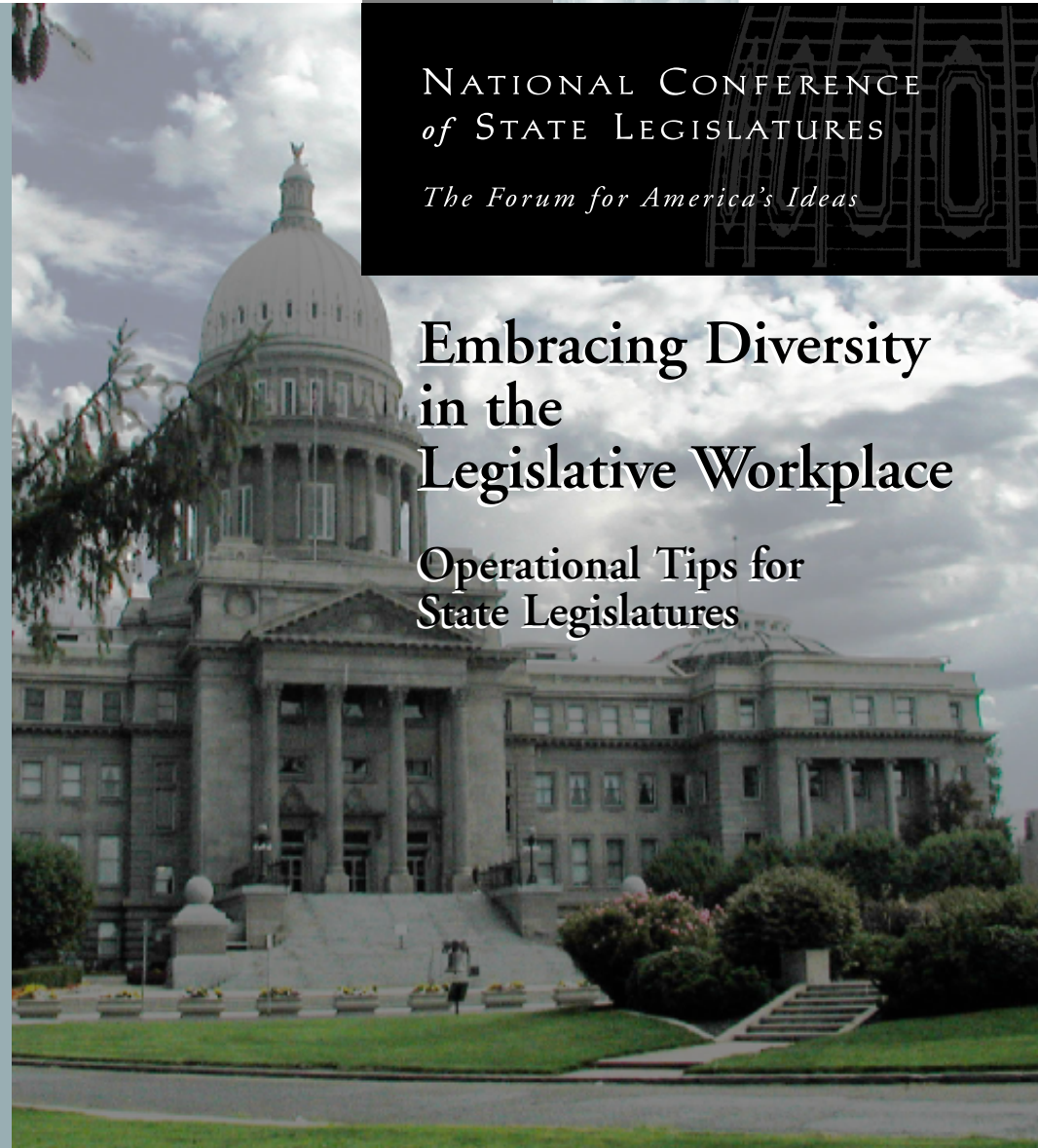


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**Embracing Diversity
in the
Legislative Workplace**

**Operational Tips for
State Legislatures**



July 1, 2003

2002-2003 NCSL Legislative Staff
Coordinating Committee

Dear State Legislators and Legislative Staff:

Legislative Staff Management Task Force Members

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America's 50 state legislatures employ more than 33,000 people. As our nation's racial and ethnic mosaic becomes increasingly diverse, it is important that the state legislative workplace continue to attract the best and brightest candidates from all walks of American life. In a recent report titled *Diversity in the Congressional Research Service*, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) made the following points that apply as well to state legislatures:

As an agency charged with assisting the United States Congress in the formulation and evaluation of legislative proposals, CRS has sought to ensure that its research and analysis are reflective of the diversity within the Congress itself and among the many constituencies that it represents ... CRS also recognizes the organizational benefits ... that flow from incorporating diverse views, multiple disciplines, and a variety of research approaches into its work activities and culture.

This booklet, *Embracing Diversity in the Legislative Workplace*, provides tips that you can use right now to begin or enhance programs that promote and support a diverse state legislative workplace. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), through the work and guidance of its Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee, stands ready to support your efforts. Please contact NCSL with specific questions about addressing diversity in your legislature.

Sincerely,

Members, Legislative Staff Management Task Force
Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee
National Conference of State Legislatures

The National Conference of State Legislatures is the bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the states, commonwealths and territories.

NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues and is an effective and respected advocate for the interests of the states in the American federal system.

NCSL's mission is:

- To improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures
- To promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures
- To ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system

Cover Photo: Idaho State Capitol.



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Values



In addition to being valued as a core American objective in terms of equal opportunity, diversity should be valued as an organizational strength. A diverse governmental workforce simply offers a deeper and wider perspective, that, in turn, creates more ideas and accelerates innovation.

- ✓ Develop a strong agency position statement supporting diversity in all agency operational publications: personnel manuals, strategic plans, mission statements, Web pages and office intranet.
- ✓ Provide cultural awareness and diversity training regularly to all employees, not only to managers.
- ✓ Soon after a diversity awareness training effort, assess your own organization and target small, short-term steps, focusing limited resources in one or two areas such as recruitment and retention.
- ✓ Never lower standards or create the impression that standards have been lowered to facilitate diversity. A successful diversity program is all about quality, innovation and success.
- ✓ Don’t make the mistake of excluding so-called majority employees from diversity programs. The whole point of diversity is inclusiveness, and it should benefit the entire organization.



Recruitment

A commitment to seeking out qualified minority applicants is a key block upon which to build a successful diversity program.

- ✓ Build relationships with local universities at several levels, specifically with the placement or career opportunity office.
- ✓ Assign a minority “role model” from your staff to represent your agency at career fairs and graduate school and professional school recruiting visits.
- ✓ Offer minority internships with local universities, and encourage the school to waive tuition for the participating student.
- ✓ Reevaluate and review job descriptions from time to time and assess their effectiveness in the context of removing barriers.
- ✓ Target regional and national diversity organizations in your Internet recruitment efforts.
- ✓ When using an interview panel, make sure that it is culturally diverse to minimize potential bias.
- ✓ Target minority organizations on campus with job announcements and brochures about your workplace.
- ✓ Make personal contacts with department heads, offering to guest lecture in graduate school classes in order to spot and recruit minority talent yourself.
- ✓ Use NCSL resources in diversity recruitment efforts.



Retention

Develop a workplace environment that supports staff retention and institutional knowledge through programs that encourage professional development and career advancement and that are family friendly.

- ✓ Plan for succession. Nationally, every public and private organization will be significantly affected as baby boomers reach retirement. Visualize what you want your agency to look like and develop a plan that includes diversity goals.
- ✓ Successful programs are ongoing, measurable and accountable. Include self-assessment efforts with a review committee as part of your performance reporting or strategic planning efforts.
- ✓ Assign a senior mentor to new employees.
- ✓ Decentralize diversity programs. Encourage employee involvement at the grassroots level, establishing ownership from the bottom up.
- ✓ With tight budgets and scarce salary resources, using flexible, family-friendly work policies can be a valuable tool in retaining employees.
- ✓ Use employee surveys to gauge perceptions and solicit ideas for diversity improvements.
- ✓ Subscribe to publications that emphasize diversity.