

Affirmative Action Plan for the Recruitment, Hiring, Advancement, and Retention of Persons with Disabilities

To capture agencies' affirmative action plan for persons with disabilities (PWD) and persons with targeted disabilities (PWTD), EEOC regulations (29 C.F.R. § 1614.203(e)) and MD-715 require agencies to describe how their affirmative action plan will improve the recruitment, hiring, advancement, and retention of applicants and employees with disabilities.

Section I: Efforts to Reach Regulatory Goals

EEOC regulations (29 CFR §1614.203(d)(7)) require agencies to establish specific numerical goals for increasing the participation of persons with disabilities and persons with targeted disabilities in the federal government

1. Using the goal of 12% as the benchmark, does your agency have a trigger involving PWD by grade level cluster in the permanent workforce? If "yes", describe the trigger(s) in the text box.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|-----|
| a. Cluster GS-1 to GS-10 (PWD) | Answer | Yes |
| b. Cluster GS-11 to SES (PWD) | Answer | Yes |

a. 9.55% b. 6.65%

*For GS employees, please use two clusters: GS-1 to GS-10 and GS-11 to SES, as set forth in 29 C.F.R. § 1614.203(d)(7). For all other pay plans, please use the approximate grade clusters that are above or below GS-11 Step 1 in the Washington, DC metropolitan region.

2. Using the goal of 2% as the benchmark, does your agency have a trigger involving PWTD by grade level cluster in the permanent workforce? If "yes", describe the trigger(s) in the text box.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------|-----|
| a. Cluster GS-1 to GS-10 (PWTD) | Answer | No |
| b. Cluster GS-11 to SES (PWTD) | Answer | Yes |

b. 1.93%

Grade Level Cluster(GS or Alternate Pay Planb)	Total	Reportable Disability		Targeted Disability	
	#	#	%	#	%
Numarical Goal	--	12%		2%	
Grades GS-1 to GS-10	2188	209	9.55	62	2.83
Grades GS-11 to SES	2820	180	6.38	52	1.84

3. Describe how the agency has communicated the numerical goals to the hiring managers and/or recruiters.

ARS holds managers and supervisors accountable for hiring and retaining a diverse workforce through the REE Recruitment Agreement, in particular, Appendix A, which requires that the ARS hiring managers utilize the MD-715 in recruiting. EEO Program Managers review MD-715 identified barriers with hiring managers during the vacancy announcement process to enhance opportunities for recruitment and hire. ARS EEO Program Managers (PM) or designees serve as EEO Observers with the evaluation panel throughout the evaluation and selection process of permanent new hires. A key goal/objective of senior level officials (Area Directors) is to work directly with the ODEO Program Managers to create more effective diversity plans to ensure sufficient opportunities for groups such as PWD and PWTD. By the end of FY22, the ODEO Director and HR Director will review the agency's current recruitment plan/efforts to determine if and to what extent the agency currently considers disability status as a

positive factor in hiring, promotion, or assignment decisions to the extent permitted by law, and provide recommendations for improvements. The ARS Office of Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity (ODEO) hosted a webinar for staff with disabilities and supervisors on September 15, 2022. The webinar covered: 1) hiring authorities and flexibilities for veterans and people with disabilities, 2) career development opportunities via the Graduate School's Leadership Programs, the Office of Personnel Management's Center for Leadership Development, and AgLearn, and 3) how individual development plans (IDPs) can help with career progression.

Section II: Model Disability Program

Pursuant to 29 C.F.R. § 1614.203(d)(1), agencies must ensure sufficient staff, training and resources to recruit and hire persons with disabilities and persons with targeted disabilities, administer the reasonable accommodation program and special emphasis program, and oversee any other disability hiring and advancement program the agency has in place.

A. PLAN TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT & COMPETENT STAFFING FOR THE DISABILITY PROGRAM

1. Has the agency designated sufficient qualified personnel to implement its disability program during the reporting period? If “no”, describe the agency’s plan to improve the staffing for the upcoming year.

Answer Yes

2. Identify all staff responsible for implementing the agency's disability employment program by the office, staff employment status, and responsible official.

Disability Program Task	# of FTE Staff By Employment Status			Responsible Official (Name, Title, Office Email)
	Full Time	Part Time	Collateral Duty	
Processing applications from PWD and PWTD	0	0	5	Keli Martin Supervisory HR Specialist keli.martin@usda.gov
Processing reasonable accommodation requests from applicants and employees	1	0	0	Hillary Clark Supervisory HR Specialist hillary.clark@usda.gov
Answering questions from the public about hiring authorities that take disability into account	0	0	40	Keli Martin Supervisory HR Specialist keli.martin@usda.gov
Special Emphasis Program for PWD and PWTD	1	0	0	Tracey Troutman Director tracey.troutman@usda.gov
Section 508 Compliance	0	0	1	christopher.lowe@usda.gov
Architectural Barriers Act Compliance	0	0	1	Antonino Fleri Division Director, Facilities Division

3. Has the agency provided disability program staff with sufficient training to carry out their responsibilities during the reporting period? If “yes”, describe the training that disability program staff have received. If “no”, describe the training planned for the upcoming year.

Answer Yes

Training courses directly related to disability employment were taken from during the reporting period including: Section 508: What it is and Why it is Important? Training planned for upcoming year include: Americans with Disabilities Act: An Overview for

Managers; Workplace Accommodation; and Reasonable Accommodation and Personal Assistance Services Training for Employees.

B. PLAN TO ENSURE SUFFICIENT FUNDING FOR THE DISABILITY PROGRAM

Has the agency provided sufficient funding and other resources to successfully implement the disability program during the reporting period? If “no”, describe the agency’s plan to ensure all aspects of the disability program have sufficient funding and other resources.

Answer Yes

Section III: Program Deficiencies In The Disability Program

Section IV: Plan to Recruit and Hire Individuals with Disabilities

Pursuant to 29 C.F.R. §1614.203(d)(1)(i) and (ii), agencies must establish a plan to increase the recruitment and hiring of individuals with disabilities. The questions below are designed to identify outcomes of the agency’s recruitment program plan for PWD and PWTD

A. PLAN TO IDENTIFY JOB APPLICATIONS WITH DISABILITIES

1. Describe the programs and resources the agency uses to identify job applicants with disabilities, including individuals with targeted disabilities.

The agency utilizes the Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP). The Disability Employment Program Manager (DEPM) receives many unsolicited resumes and Schedule A letters from individuals with disabilities. This documentation is maintained in a database for agency hiring managers who may request to review resumes to fill their vacant positions. Additionally, the USA Jobs Agency Talent Portal is used to identify resumes of individuals with disabilities to be considered via the Schedule A hiring authority.

2. Pursuant to 29 C.F.R. §1614.203(a)(3), describe the agency’s use of hiring authorities that take disability into account (e.g., Schedule A) to recruit PWD and PWTD for positions in the permanent workforce

The agency has experienced success utilizing the Schedule A 213.2102(u) authority to recruit individuals with disabilities using various programs.

3. When individuals apply for a position under a hiring authority that takes disability into account (e.g., Schedule A), explain how the agency (1) determines if the individual is eligible for appointment under such authority; and, (2) forwards the individual's application to the relevant hiring officials with an explanation of how and when the individual may be appointed.

If the individual applies via a job opportunity announcement and they are determined to be qualified for the position, their resume is referred by the human resources specialist to the hiring manager on a non-competitive eligible certificate.

4. Has the agency provided training to all hiring managers on the use of hiring authorities that take disability into account (e.g., Schedule A)? If “yes”, describe the type(s) of training and frequency. If “no”, describe the agency’s plan to provide this training.

Answer Yes

Training is available in AgLearn. The Disability Program Manager provided information about WRP in the March 2022 Harvest

newsletter. The Disability Program Manager developed and distributed a procedural statement regarding the process for managing unsolicited resumes received from veterans and people with disabilities. As a result, numerous requests for resumes were received from HR Specialists and hiring managers. New hires have been made utilizing this non-competitive, easy to use and timely resource. Currently, there are approximately 200 resumes available in the portal. The Disability Program Manager also developed documents regarding hiring both veterans and people with disabilities. The documents: Helpful Links for Hiring Managers, Q&A’s for Hiring Managers and Tips for Hiring Managers are valuable information available for hiring managers to reference when considering hiring veterans and people with disabilities. HRD Program Manager hosted a brown bag training session for HR Specialists on the benefits of hiring veterans and people with disabilities. HRD Program Manager hosted “All Things Non-Competitive” training session for ARS and client agencies which addressed non-competitive hiring authorities and non-competitive hiring eligibilities – this included Schedule A.

B. PLAN TO ESTABLISH CONTACTS WITH DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Describe the agency’s efforts to establish and maintain contacts with organizations that assist PWD, including PWTD, in securing and maintaining employment.

In FY 2021, the DEPM prepared numerous forms of communication (AFM “Greenies”) relaying information to hiring managers on the WRP and informing them of upcoming WRP informational webinars. The DEPM completed the formal training required to become a WRP Recruiter. The DEPM received numerous requests from hiring managers for referral of WRP candidates. The DEPM assisted the hiring managers by searching the WRP database various times to assist them in hiring the best qualified individuals to fill their positions.

C. PROGRESSION TOWARDS GOALS (RECRUITMENT AND HIRING)

1. Using the goals of 12% for PWD and 2% for PWTD as the benchmarks, do triggers exist for PWD and/or PWTD among the new hires in the permanent workforce? If “yes”, please describe the triggers below.

- a. New Hires for Permanent Workforce (PWD) Answer Yes
- b. New Hires for Permanent Workforce (PWTD) Answer No

a. 8.09%

New Hires	Total (#)	Reportable Disability		Targeted Disability	
		Permanent Workforce (%)	Temporary Workforce (%)	Permanent Workforce (%)	Temporary Workforce (%)
% of Total Applicants	10578	4.08	0.02	3.92	0.00
% of Qualified Applicants	5878	4.37	0.00	2.53	0.00
% of New Hires	165	7.27	0.00	2.42	0.00

2. Using the qualified applicant pool as the benchmark, do triggers exist for PWD and/or PWTD among the new hires for any of the mission- critical occupations (MCO)? If “yes”, please describe the triggers below. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.

- a. New Hires for MCO (PWD) Answer Yes
- b. New Hires for MCO (PWTD) Answer Yes

a. PWD qualified applicants not selected (0440, 1320, and 2210) b. PWTD qualified applicants not selected (0401, 0403, 0440, 1101, 1102, 1320, and 2210)

New Hires to Mission-Critical Occupations	Total (#)	Reportable Disability	Targetable Disability
		New Hires (%)	New Hires (%)
Numerical Goal	--	12%	2%
0201 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT	9	33.33	0.00
0401 GENERAL BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE	16	0.00	0.00
0403 MICROBIOLOGY	9	11.11	0.00
0404 BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE TECHNICIAN	90	5.56	4.44
0440 GENETICS	8	0.00	0.00
1101 GENERAL BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY	1	0.00	0.00
1102 CONTRACTING	14	7.14	0.00
1320 CHEMISTRY	7	0.00	0.00
2210 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT	10	20.00	0.00

3. Using the relevant applicant pool as the benchmark, do triggers exist for PWD and/or PWTD among the qualified internal applicants for any of the mission-critical occupations (MCO)? If “yes”, please describe the triggers below. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.

- a. Qualified Applicants for MCO (PWD) Answer Yes
- b. Qualified Applicants for MCO (PWTD) Answer Yes

a. PWD qualified applicants not selected (1101 and 1102) b. PWTD qualified applicants not selected (0201, 0401, 1101, 1102, and 2210)

4. Using the qualified applicant pool as the benchmark, do triggers exist for PWD and/or PWTD among employees promoted to any of the mission-critical occupations (MCO)? If “yes”, please describe the triggers below. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.

- a. Promotions for MCO (PWD) Answer No
- b. Promotions for MCO (PWTD) Answer Yes

Triggers exist for PWTD. PWTD in MCO 0201, 0401, and 2210 promoted at lower rate than PWD.

Section V: Plan to Ensure Advancement Opportunities for Employees with Disabilities

Pursuant to 29 C.F.R. §1614.203(d)(1)(iii), agencies are required to provide sufficient advancement opportunities for employees with disabilities. Such activities might include specialized training and mentoring programs, career development opportunities, awards programs, promotions, and similar programs that address advancement. In this section, agencies should identify, and provide data on programs designed to ensure advancement opportunities for employees with disabilities.

A. ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM PLAN

Describe the agency’s plan to ensure PWD, including PWTD, have sufficient opportunities for advancement.

To demonstrate the Agency’s commitment to diversity and EEO, the Administrator established a group that was comprised of staff from Administrative and Financial Management (including Human Resources Division) and the Office of Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity to develop a Diversity Recruitment Plan to increase diversity in underrepresented populations throughout the Agency. The plan contains several goals with several corresponding objectives which are accompanied by action/improvement strategies. In 2017, the Office of Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity (ODEO) reassigned its ODEO Program Managers directly to Area Directors who oversee a majority of the workforce at ARS. A key goal/objective of these senior level officials (Area Directors) is to work directly with the reassigned ODEO Program Managers to create more effective diversity plans to ensure sufficient opportunities for groups such as PWD and PWTD. Strategies are being developed to attract and promote PWD and PWTD within each geographical area in the country. As the Agency is divided into five (5) geographical regions, each Area faces different challenges based upon the unique populations which inhabit those regions. By directly assigning ODEO Program Managers to the Area Directors, ARS is better equipping those senior officials with subject matter experts to identify local sources of PWD and PWTD perspective employees. In addition, the ODEO Program Managers will enhance local outreach activities and develop diversity plans specifically designed to attract the potential PWD and PWTD talent sought to serve in a research organization such as ARS. Disability program manager developed documents regarding hiring both veterans and people with disabilities. The documents: Helpful Links for Hiring Managers, Q&A’s for Hiring Managers and Tips for Hiring Managers provide valuable information for hiring managers to reference when considering hiring veterans and people with disabilities.

B. CAREER DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITES

1. Please describe the career development opportunities that the agency provides to its employees.

Agency career development opportunities are: OPM Center for Leadership Development, OPM FEI Leadership for a Democratic Society, Congressional Briefing Conference (ARS Employees), Graduate School Leadership Development Programs, American Management Associate Leadership & Team Development for Managerial Success, ARS Supervisory Training, Location and Headquarters Service Employees Team (SET) Details, and Aglearn. As long as employees meet the requirements (grade, within their discipline, supervisors’ approval, funding, etc.) interested employees may apply for career development opportunities. Employees interested in serving on a detail coordinate with their supervisors and submit resumes to the SET Program Coordinator who works with the requestor to fill their needs. Once a year within 30 days of annual performance evaluations, employees and supervisors must meet to discuss goals and accomplishments and develop an IDP. This meeting gives both the opportunity to set objectives and plan learning experiences that will support them. The Agency currently has a Mentoring Program for new Supervisors.

2. In the table below, please provide the data for career development opportunities that require competition and/or supervisory recommendation/ approval to participate.

Career Development Opportunities	Total Participants		PWD		PWTD	
	Applicants (#)	Selectees (#)	Applicants (%)	Selectees (%)	Applicants (%)	Selectees (%)
Detail Programs						
Fellowship Programs						
Coaching Programs						
Mentoring Programs						
Internship Programs						
Other Career Development Programs						
Training Programs	17	17	0	0	0	0

3. Do triggers exist for PWD among the applicants and/or selectees for any of the career development programs? (The appropriate benchmarks are the relevant applicant pool for the applicants and the applicant pool for selectees.) If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.

a. Applicants (PWD)

Answer Yes

b. Selections (PWD)

Answer No

a. No applicants for career development programs

4. Do triggers exist for PWTB among the applicants and/or selectees for any of the career development programs? (The appropriate benchmarks are the relevant applicant pool for the applicants and the applicant pool for selectees.) If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.

a. Applicants (PWTB)

Answer Yes

b. Selections (PWTB)

Answer No

a. No applicants for career development programs

C. AWARDS

1. Using the inclusion rate as the benchmark, does your agency have a trigger involving PWD and/or PWTB for any level of the time-off awards, bonuses, or other incentives? If “yes”, please describe the trigger(s) in the text box.

a. Awards, Bonuses, & Incentives (PWD)

Answer No

b. Awards, Bonuses, & Incentives (PWTB)

Answer Yes

b. PWTB less than PWD (time off and cash awards)

Time-Off Awards	Total (#)	Reportable Disability %	Without Reportable Disability %	Targeted Disability %	Without Targeted Disability %
Time-Off Awards 1 - 10 hours: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 1 - 10 Hours: Total Hours	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 1 - 10 Hours: Average Hours	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 11 - 20 hours: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 11 - 20 Hours: Total Hours	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 11 - 20 Hours: Average Hours	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 21 - 30 hours: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 21 - 30 Hours: Total Hours	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 21 - 30 Hours: Average Hours	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 31 - 40 hours: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 31 - 40 Hours: Total Hours	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 31 - 40 Hours: Average Hours	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 41 or more Hours: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Time-Off Awards 41 or more Hours: Total Hours	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Time-Off Awards	Total (#)	Reportable Disability %	Without Reportable Disability %	Targeted Disability %	Without Targeted Disability %
Time-Off Awards 41 or more Hours: Average Hours	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Cash Awards	Total (#)	Reportable Disability %	Without Reportable Disability %	Targeted Disability %	Without Targeted Disability %
Cash Awards: \$501 - \$999: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$501 - \$999: Total Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$501 - \$999: Average Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$1000 - \$1999: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$1000 - \$1999: Total Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$1000 - \$1999: Average Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$2000 - \$2999: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$2000 - \$2999: Total Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$2000 - \$2999: Average Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$3000 - \$3999: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$3000 - \$3999: Total Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$3000 - \$3999: Average Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$4000 - \$4999: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$4000 - \$4999: Total Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$4000 - \$4999: Average Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$5000 or more: Awards Given	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$5000 or more: Total Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash Awards: \$5000 or more: Average Amount	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

2. Using the inclusion rate as the benchmark, does your agency have a trigger involving PWD and/or PWTD for quality step increases or performance- based pay increases? If “yes”, please describe the trigger(s) in the text box.

a. Pay Increases (PWD) Answer No

b. Pay Increases (PWTD) Answer No

Other Awards	Total (#)	Reportable Disability %	Without Reportable Disability %	Targeted Disability %	Without Targeted Disability %
Total Performance Based Pay Increases Awarded	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

3.

If the agency has other types of employee recognition programs, are PWD and/or PWTD recognized disproportionately less than employees without disabilities? (The appropriate benchmark is the inclusion rate.) If “yes”, describe the employee recognition program and relevant data in the text box.

- a. Other Types of Recognition (PWD) Answer N/A
- b. Other Types of Recognition (PWTD) Answer N/A

D. PROMOTIONS

1. Does your agency have a trigger involving PWD among the qualified internal applicants and/or selectees for promotions to the senior grade levels? (The appropriate benchmarks are the relevant applicant pool for qualified internal applicants and the qualified applicant pool for selectees.) For non-GS pay plans, please use the approximate senior grade levels. If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.

- a. SES
 - i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Answer No
 - ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Answer No
- b. Grade GS-15
 - i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Answer No
 - ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Answer No
- c. Grade GS-14
 - i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Answer Yes
 - ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Answer No
- d. Grade GS-13
 - i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Answer Yes
 - ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Answer No

a. Department OHRM maintains SES data. Agency working with POC to obtain data. d. GS-13: qualified applicants selected at lesser rate

2. Does your agency have a trigger involving PWTD among the qualified internal applicants and/or selectees for promotions to the senior grade levels? (The appropriate benchmarks are the relevant applicant pool for qualified internal applicants and the qualified applicant pool for selectees.) For non-GS pay plans, please use the approximate senior grade levels. If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.

- a. SES
 - i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWTD) Answer No
 - ii. Internal Selections (PWTD) Answer No
- b. Grade GS-15
 - i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWTD) Answer No

- ii. Internal Selections (PWTD) Answer No
- c. Grade GS-14
 - i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWTD) Answer No
 - ii. Internal Selections (PWTD) Answer Yes
- d. Grade GS-13
 - i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWTD) Answer No
 - ii. Internal Selections (PWTD) Answer Yes

a. Department OHRM maintains SES data. Agency working with POC to obtain data. c. GS-14: qualified applicants, no selections
d. GS-13: qualified, no selections

3. Using the qualified applicant pool as the benchmark, does your agency have a trigger involving PWD among the new hires to the senior grade levels? For non-GS pay plans, please use the approximate senior grade levels. If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.
- a. New Hires to SES (PWD) Answer No
 - b. New Hires to GS-15 (PWD) Answer Yes
 - c. New Hires to GS-14 (PWD) Answer No
 - d. New Hires to GS-13 (PWD) Answer No

a. Department OHRM maintains SES data. Agency working with POC to obtain data. b. No qualified GS-15 hires

4. Using the qualified applicant pool as the benchmark, does your agency have a trigger involving PWTD among the new hires to the senior grade levels? For non-GS pay plans, please use the approximate senior grade levels. If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.
- a. New Hires to SES (PWTD) Answer No
 - b. New Hires to GS-15 (PWTD) Answer Yes
 - c. New Hires to GS-14 (PWTD) Answer No
 - d. New Hires to GS-13 (PWTD) Answer No

a. Department OHRM maintains SES data. Agency working with POC to obtain data. b. No GS-15 qualified applicants hired

5. Does your agency have a trigger involving PWD among the qualified internal applicants and/or selectees for promotions to supervisory positions? (The appropriate benchmarks are the relevant applicant pool for qualified internal applicants and the qualified applicant pool for selectees.) If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.
- a. Executives
 - i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Answer No
 - ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Answer Yes

b. Managers

- i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Answer No
- ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Answer Yes

c. Supervisors

- i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Answer No
- ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Answer Yes

a. qualified applicants, no selections b. qualified applicants, no selections c. qualified applicants, no selections

6. Does your agency have a trigger involving PWTB among the qualified internal applicants and/or selectees for promotions to supervisory positions? (The appropriate benchmarks are the relevant applicant pool for qualified internal applicants and the qualified applicant pool for selectees.) If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.

a. Executives

- i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWTB) Answer No
- ii. Internal Selections (PWTB) Answer No

b. Managers

- i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWTB) Answer No
- ii. Internal Selections (PWTB) Answer Yes

c. Supervisors

- i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWTB) Answer No
- ii. Internal Selections (PWTB) Answer Yes

b. qualified applicants, no selections c. qualified applicants, no selections

7. Using the qualified applicant pool as the benchmark, does your agency have a trigger involving PWD among the selectees for new hires to supervisory positions? If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.

- a. New Hires for Executives (PWD) Answer Yes
- b. New Hires for Managers (PWD) Answer No
- c. New Hires for Supervisors (PWD) Answer Yes

a. qualified applicants, no selections c. qualified applicants, no selections

8. Using the qualified applicant pool as the benchmark, does your agency have a trigger involving PWTB among the selectees for new hires to supervisory positions? If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box. Select “n/a” if the applicant data is not available for your agency, and describe your plan to provide the data in the text box.

- a. New Hires for Executives (PWTB) Answer Yes
- b. New Hires for Managers (PWTB) Answer No

c. New Hires for Supervisors (PWTD)

Answer Yes

b. qualified applicant, no selections c. qualified applicant, no selection

Section VI: Plan to Improve Retention of Persons with Disabilities

To be model employer for persons with disabilities, agencies must have policies and programs in place to retain employees with disabilities. In this section, agencies should: (1) analyze workforce separation data to identify barriers retaining employees with disabilities; (2) describe efforts to ensure accessibility of technology and facilities; and (3) provide information on the reasonable accommodation program and workplace assistance services.

A. VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY SEPARATIONS

1. In this reporting period, did the agency convert all eligible Schedule A employees with a disability into the competitive service after two years of satisfactory service (5 C.F.R. § 213.3102(u)(6)(i))? If “no”, please explain why the agency did not convert all eligible Schedule A employees.

Answer N/A

None of Schedule A employees were eligible for conversion at this time.

2. Using the inclusion rate as the benchmark, did the percentage of PWD among voluntary and involuntary separations exceed that of persons without disabilities? If “yes”, describe the trigger below.

a. Voluntary Separations (PWD)

Answer Yes

b. Involuntary Separations (PWD)

Answer Yes

a. Rate of voluntary separations for PWD 10.16% compared to 8.90% for PWOD b. Rate of involuntary separations for PWD 0.34% compared to 0.90% for PWOD

Separations	Total #	Reportable Disabilities %	Without Reportable Disabilities %
Permanent Workforce: Reduction in Force	0	0.00	0.00
Permanent Workforce: Removal	21	0.73	0.26
Permanent Workforce: Resignation	178	1.65	2.59
Permanent Workforce: Retirement	235	4.76	3.20
Permanent Workforce: Other Separations	80	1.83	1.07
Permanent Workforce: Total Separations	514	8.97	7.12

3. Using the inclusion rate as the benchmark, did the percentage of PWTD among voluntary and involuntary separations exceed that of persons without targeted disabilities? If “yes”, describe the trigger below.

a. Voluntary Separations (PWTD)

Answer Yes

b. Involuntary Separations (PWTD)

Answer No

a. Rate of voluntary separations for PWTD 11.36% compared to 8.94% for PWOTD b. Rate of involuntary separations for PWTD 0.76% compared to 0.34% for PWOTD

Separations	Total #	Targeted Disabilities %	Without Targeted Disabilities %
Permanent Workforce: Reduction in Force	0	0.00	0.00
Permanent Workforce: Removal	21	0.64	0.29

Separations	Total #	Targeted Disabilities %	Without Targeted Disabilities %
Permanent Workforce: Resignation	178	1.27	2.54
Permanent Workforce: Retirement	235	7.01	3.24
Permanent Workforce: Other Separations	80	1.27	1.13
Permanent Workforce: Total Separations	514	10.19	7.20

4. If a trigger exists involving the separation rate of PWD and/or PWTD, please explain why they left the agency using exit interview results and other data sources.

In FY 2021, the REE/ARS Exit Survey was amended to include related questions. As indicated below, the exit survey results were limited due to a lack of respondent input. 1) Provide feedback about your experiences regarding the processes or practices within your REE agency for providing Reasonable Accommodation or Personal Assistance Services. Out of 23 responses 14 responded N/A, 1 did not seek accommodation and 7 gave positive feedback. 2) Provide feedback about your experiences regarding accessibility related to one or more of the following: Electronic documents, Software applications, Technology hardware, and Physical structure. Out of 37 respondents most selected Very Accessible and 1 selected Not Accessible 3) While you were employed at the REE agency, did you ever have an experience where you did not feel included in the agency's activity or program because of your disability? 61.76% answered Never and 38.24% Do Not Know 4) Describe what your REE agency is doing well regarding the recruitment, hiring, inclusion, career development, and/or retention of people with disabilities. Out of 116 exit interviews 94 skipped answering this question other responses included 11 N/A, 3 I don't know, and 8 positive responses. 5) Provide any suggestions you have to improve the recruitment, hiring, inclusion, career development, and/or retention of people with disabilities at your REE agency. Of 19 respondents, the majority gave no suggestions. Additionally, the Agency has implemented an Agencywide strategy to increase the utilization of exit surveys as part of its new MD-715 Action Plan. ARS set a goal of having exit surveys completed and returned by 100 percent of employees leaving the Agency, beginning the 3rd quarter of FY 2021. ARS will submit accomplishments at the end of FY 2022.

B. ACCESSIBILITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND FACILITIES

Pursuant to 29 CFR §1614.203(d)(4), federal agencies are required to inform applicants and employees of their rights under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794(b), concerning the accessibility of agency technology, and the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. § 4151-4157), concerning the accessibility of agency facilities. In addition, agencies are required to inform individuals where to file complaints if other agencies are responsible for a violation.

1. Please provide the internet address on the agency's public website for its notice explaining employees' and applicants' rights under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, including a description of how to file a complaint.

<https://www.usda.gov/accessibility-statement>

2. Please provide the internet address on the agency's public website for its notice explaining employees' and applicants' rights under the Architectural Barriers Act, including a description of how to file a complaint.

The USDA Accessibility public webpage must be revised to include information on the Architectural Barriers Act.

3. Describe any programs, policies, or practices that the agency has undertaken, or plans on undertaking over the next fiscal year, designed to improve accessibility of agency facilities and/or technology.

ARS addresses handicap accessibility in a few ways. While buildings are old and are grandfathered to meet the standard at the time they are built, ARS does have locations on an ad hoc, occasional basis that will execute projects to provide or improve accessibility at their facilities year in and year out. ARS addresses ADA accessibility issues when performing major renovation or renewal of any existing buildings. The current design guide, P&P 242.1, requires that ARS meet current handicap accessibilities standards. ARS is in the process of undergoing a 5 year complete facility assessment of all active ARS owned facilities. During the assessment visit, accessibility requirements are noted with other system deficiencies. The location can prioritize all deficient items/systems throughout their facility within their three years Capital Projects and Repair Plan (CPRP). They will then execute prioritized

projects throughout the year. While all accessibility items identified are not accomplished immediately, the ones associated with a safety issue will get prioritized first and funded within the same fiscal year by the location/area. ARS Capital Investment Strategy, projects that are funded by Congress under the Building and Facility Program are required to meet all current ADA Accessibility standards as well as all Federal, State and Local building/code compliant standards. Preliminary conversations around ABA compliance identified the following practices from the Facilities Division: During a building or modernization project, the agency follows the most current state and local guidelines to include ABA requirements on all ARS projects. Until such time as a facility undergoes a modernization project, all grandfathered rules at the time of construction still apply. Currently, building and modernization projects are under the oversight of the Facilities Director. ODEO will continue to work with Facilities Division to better understand the current practices. ARS currently does not have a 508 Compliance Officer. During FY 2021, the ODEO Director worked with the Assistant Chief Information Officer (ACIO) and Office of Communications Director to submit a justification for a 508 Compliance Officer for the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area. ARS is one of four REE agencies, and OCIO/IT functions for ARS are centralized at the REE mission area. This FTE would have the skills to review and remediate 508 issues. The ACIO is working to move forward with establishing an agreement to hire a compliance officer.

C. REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION PROGRAM

Pursuant to 29 C.F.R. § 1614.203(d)(3), agencies must adopt, post on their public website, and make available to all job applicants and employees, reasonable accommodation procedures.

1. Please provide the average time frame for processing initial requests for reasonable accommodations during the reporting period. (Please do not include previously approved requests with repetitive accommodations, such as interpreting services.)

Background: The DR states, “The supervisor must approve or deny requests for RA and PAS within 30 business days of the initial request, absent extenuating circumstances, such as a delay in returning requested medical information or an unscheduled office closure.” The entire FY 2021 the Agency was experiencing extenuating circumstances. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Agency was also tasked with implementing executive order 14043 Requiring Coronavirus Vaccination for all Federal employees. This created many requests asking for exemption to the requirement. Given this background, most non-vaccine related requests were decided in far less than the 30 business days required by the DR. In FY21 ARS had 294 RA requests. 186 were vaccine related requests and 108 were non vaccine related requests.

2. Describe the effectiveness of the policies, procedures, or practices to implement the agency’s reasonable accommodation program. Some examples of an effective program include timely processing requests, timely providing approved accommodations, conducting training for managers and supervisors, and monitoring accommodation requests for trends.

The following efforts are ongoing by the REE Reasonable Accommodation Program Manager to ensure program efficiency and effectiveness. • Participates in Agency-wide meetings, trainings, and webinars as the subject-matter expert to promote RA program awareness. • Modified policies, hard copy materials, and web site information to ensure persons with disabilities understand their rights and responsibilities. • Strategizes with supervisors to develop alternative accommodation options that are equally effective when preferred accommodation imposes an undue hardship. This mitigates denials which reduce or eliminate EEO complaints. • Provided webinars to educate the workforce • Informs both persons with disabilities and their supervisors of proper record keeping of medical documentation to reduce or eliminate HIPPA and Privacy Act violations. • Partners with HR professionals when program overlaps occur to ensure a collaborative and consistent approach exists when conveying information to employees and their supervisors.

D. PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES ALLOWING EMPLOYEES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WORKPLACE

Pursuant to 29 CFR §1614.203(d)(5), federal agencies, as an aspect of affirmative action, are required to provide personal assistance services (PAS) to employees who need them because of a targeted disability, unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the agency.

Describe the effectiveness of the policies, procedures, or practices to implement the PAS requirement. Some examples of an effective program include timely processing requests for PAS, timely providing approved services, conducting training for managers and supervisors, and monitoring PAS requests for trends.

• The RA Program Manager provided training to managers and employees to make them aware of the existence of PAS services. • The Agency established a contract to provide PAS services • We have one employee using PAS services. PAS services were not provided in a timely manner as outlined in the DR because we didn't have a contract vehicle in place to provide the services. Now that we have a contract in place, services are provided.

Section VII: EEO Complaint and Findings Data

A. EEO COMPLAINT DATA INVOLVING HARASSMENT

1. During the last fiscal year, did a higher percentage of PWD file a formal EEO complaint alleging harassment, as compared to the governmentwide average?

Answer No

2. During the last fiscal year, did any complaints alleging harassment based on disability status result in a finding of discrimination or a settlement agreement?

Answer No

3. If the agency had one or more findings of discrimination alleging harassment based on disability status during the last fiscal year, please describe the corrective measures taken by the agency.

N/A

B. EEO COMPLAINT DATA INVOLVING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

1. During the last fiscal year, did a higher percentage of PWD file a formal EEO complaint alleging failure to provide a reasonable accommodation, as compared to the government-wide average?

Answer No

2. During the last fiscal year, did any complaints alleging failure to provide reasonable accommodation result in a finding of discrimination or a settlement agreement?

Answer No

3. If the agency had one or more findings of discrimination involving the failure to provide a reasonable accommodation during the last fiscal year, please describe the corrective measures taken by the agency.

Section VIII: Identification and Removal of Barriers

Element D of MD-715 requires agencies to conduct a barrier analysis when a trigger suggests that a policy, procedure, or practice may be impeding the employment opportunities of a protected EEO group.

1. Has the agency identified any barriers (policies, procedures, and/or practices) that affect employment opportunities for PWD and/or PWTD?

Answer Yes

2. Has the agency established a plan to correct the barrier(s) involving PWD and/or PWTD?

Answer Yes

3. Identify each trigger and plan to remove the barrier(s), including the identified barrier(s), objective(s), responsible official(s), planned activities, and, where applicable, accomplishments

Source of the Trigger:	Workforce Data (if so identify the table)					
Specific Workforce Data Table:	Workforce Data Table - B1					
STATEMENT OF CONDITION THAT WAS A TRIGGER FOR A POTENTIAL BARRIER: Provide a brief narrative describing the condition at issue. How was the condition recognized as a potential barrier?	The low participation rate of PWD (8.09%) in the agency’s total permanent workforce as compared to the EEOC goal of 12%.					
STATEMENT OF BARRIER GROUPS:	<i>Barrier Group</i> People with Disabilities					
Barrier Analysis Process Completed?:	N					
Barrier(s) Identified?:	Y					
STATEMENT OF IDENTIFIED BARRIER: Provide a succinct statement of the agency policy, procedure or practice that has been determined to be the barrier of the undesired condition.	Barrier Name		Description of Policy, Procedure, or Practice			
	The low participation rate of PWD		There may be a “glass wall” and/or “blocked pipeline” for persons with disabilities in the workforce.			
Objective(s) and Dates for EEO Plan						
Date Initiated	Target Date	Sufficient Funding / Staffing?	Date Modified	Date Completed	Objective Description	
09/01/2018	12/31/2018	Yes	12/31/2022		Conduct further analysis of the MCO and applicant flow data to determine if either exist.	
Responsible Official(s)						
Title		Name		Standards Address The Plan?		
HR Director		Willis Collie		Yes		
ODEO Director		Tracey Troutman		Yes		
Planned Activities Toward Completion of Objective						
Target Date	Planned Activities			Sufficient Staffing & Funding?	Modified Date	Completion Date
12/31/2022	HR and ODEO in further conversation to address deficiencies and analyze workforce data to see if there are any barriers for PWD employees progressing and being promoted at the same rate as other employees or use what we have in the past.			Yes		

Report of Accomplishments	
Fiscal Year	Accomplishment
2022	<p>The ARS Office of Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity (ODEO) hosted a webinar for staff with disabilities and supervisors on September 15, 2022. The webinar covered: 1) hiring authorities and flexibilities for veterans and people with disabilities, 2) career development opportunities via the Graduate School's Leadership Programs, the Office of Personnel Management's Center for Leadership Development, and AgLearn, and 3) how individual development plans (IDPs) can help with career progression. Agency employees completed mandatory Unconscious Bias training.</p> <p>Persons with TD represent 2.41% of the permanent workforce.</p> <p>Persons with TD represent 2.82% of the permanent workforce new hires.</p> <p>Agency hired 26 Schedule A employees.</p> <p>Persons with TD are above 2% in grades GS-14.</p> <p>Persons with TD are above 2% in the major occupations for series 0201 (2.50%), 0404 (2.03%), 0440 (3.44%), 1101(3.45%), 1320 (2.86%).</p> <p>PWD are above 12% in major occupation series 0201(18.75%)</p> <p>17 employees with disabilities and targeted disabilities participated/are participating in career development/ leadership training and/or details.</p>

4. Please explain the factor(s) that prevented the agency from timely completing any of the planned activities.

N/A

5. For the planned activities that were completed, please describe the actual impact of those activities toward eliminating the barrier(s).

See accomplishments

6. If the planned activities did not correct the trigger(s) and/or barrier(s), please describe how the agency intends to improve the plan for the next fiscal year.

The agency will need to further analyze workforce data to see if there are any barriers for PWD employees.