

Part 404 – Civil Rights Advisory Committee

404.0 Purpose and Scope

- A. The Chief of NRCS serves as the Equal Opportunity Officer (EEO) for the Natural Resources Conservation Service and delegates the overall responsibility of administering its civil rights program to the Director of Civil Rights Division (CRD). The NRCS civil rights program encompasses all equal employment opportunity and program delivery-related matters. The Deputy Chiefs, State Conservationists, and Directors of the Caribbean and Pacific Basin areas, in coordination with the Director, CRD, will serve as the Deputy Equal Opportunity Officer (DEEO) for their respective jurisdictional areas.
- B. Each DEEO will establish a Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) which advises them on all matters related to equal employment opportunity and program delivery by ensuring equity and participation in all NRCS programs, activities, and initiatives in their respective jurisdictional areas.
- C. The CRAC is designed to provide management officials and employees with a vehicle that enhances and fulfills their equal employment opportunity and program delivery responsibilities. Members of the CRAC will carry out their responsibilities consistent with USDA policies, procedures, and practices regarding employment and program delivery, which are nondiscriminatory with regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital or familial status, political beliefs, parental status, protected genetic information, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. The CRAC provides assistance in the areas of policy formulation, program direction and administration.

404.1 Composition of Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC)

- A. Civil Rights Advisory Committees are established by DEEOs to assist and advise on all matters related to civil rights.
- B. The CRAC's membership will be representative of the unit's workforce by occupations, grade levels, race, sex, national origin, disability status, sexual orientation, and geographical location. Members can either be selected or appointed at the discretion of the DEEO.
- C. Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs) will serve as members of the CRAC and provide leadership in their areas of responsibility.
- D. Human Resources Managers and Outreach Coordinators will serve as advisors to the CRAC. Members of the unit's leadership team may also serve as advisors.
- E. CRAC appointments are made for a minimum of three (3) years and may be extended/reappointed at the discretion of the DEEO so that no more than one-third to one-half of the membership is replaced each year.
- F. The CRAC Chairperson may be selected or appointed by the DEEO.

404.2 Role of Civil Rights Advisory Committee

The Committee serves as an advisory body to the DEEO by:

- A. Identifying and bringing to management's attention any trends, problems, issues, or concerns.
- B. Monitoring recruitment practices and making recommendations for ensuring that under-represented groups are made aware of employment opportunities for career positions, temporary summer employment, or special appointment.
- C. Focusing the attention of management on specific personnel practices or problems of an EEO nature that are producing or could produce dissension and dissatisfaction among employees (e.g., merit promotion procedures; selection for training and assignments; criteria, nomination, and distribution of awards; etc.).
- D. Monitoring the policies and overall effectiveness of the Affirmative employment Plan (AEP) with regard to recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention.
- E. Providing training resources for various civil rights workshops, seminars, and meetings.
- F. Acting as a forum for an exchange of ideas and action proposals on sensitive issues, matters, or concerns of a civil rights nature.
- G. Encouraging, supporting, or assisting in the development of projects or activities associated with

civil rights needs or opportunities.

H. Contributing to the development and implementation of strategies designed to improve and increase awareness of and participation in NRCS programs and activities by under-served groups, individuals, and communities.

I. Promoting and communicating the efforts of management to achieve and operate a realistic and ongoing civil rights program.

J. Participating and taking an active role in the development and implementation of the Affirmative Employment Plan.

K. Participating in civil rights compliance reviews.

404.3 Responsibility of Civil Rights Advisory Committee

A. In addition to serving as advisor to the DEOO, the CRAC establishes lines of communication between employees and management through which employees' views on civil rights issues may be brought to the attention of management, providing management with feedback on the performance of the civil rights program, identifying weaknesses, and recommending ways in which the program can be improved. All recommendations are to be reported in writing to the DEOO for appropriate consideration and follow-up action.

B. The CRAC does not receive, investigate, and/or in any way adjudicate individual or class complaints of discrimination.

C. The CRAC will maintain copies of the minutes of each meeting and forward a copy to the DEOO.

D. The CRAC will meet as often as necessary, and at least, quarterly.

404.4 Documenting and Evaluating Collateral Assignments

A. The CRAC membership should be documented in each member's official position description. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) must be signed by the employee, the employee's immediate supervisor, and the DEOO (refer to sample in GM 230, Part 403, Subpart H (Exhibits)). Employee's contributions to the CRAC will be noted in their individual performance appraisals and rated by the DEOO.

B. Each CRAC Chairperson's performance appraisal must contain a stand alone critical element addressing his or her committee responsibilities. Their civil rights responsibilities will be evaluated and rated by the DEOO.

404.5 CRAC Guidelines

A. The CRAC members must receive training within six (6) months of their initial selection in order to become familiar with the various aspects of equal employment opportunity, personnel policies and procedures, and civil rights compliance in program delivery. For a list of training courses that will enhance the effectiveness and performance of the committee members' duties and responsibilities, refer to GM 230, Part 403, Subpart A (General).

B. CRAC members must have complete access to all regulations governing equal employment opportunity and program delivery policies and practices, including Government-wide regulations and internal Agency rules and procedures, and the Agency's Statistical Data Report. Members should jointly establish the CRAC bylaws, operating procedures, and strategic guidelines deemed appropriate.

C. The CRAC is required to develop business plans which include long term goals, objectives, and actions.

404.6 National Civil Rights Committee (NCRC)

The National Civil rights Committee (NCRC) is responsible to the Chief of NRCS. The Committee performs the following functions:

A. Serves as an advisory body to the NRCS Chief to promote and assist in meaningful and effective affirmative action consistent with the goals and objectives set forth by management.

B. Provides feedback on the performance in equal opportunity and civil rights compliance, by identifying areas of weakness, and making recommendations for improvement.

C. Identifies emerging areas needing special attention by the Chief and NRCS top management.

D. Makes recommendations to the Chief regarding policies, practices, and procedures as they affect equal opportunity NRCS-wide.

404.7 Composition of the National Civil Rights Committee (NCRC)

A. The NCRC Chairperson is appointed by the Chief of NRCS and serves at his or her discretion. The NCRC members are to be representative of all Agency employees in various occupations, grade levels, race, sex, national origin, disability status, sexual orientation, and geographical locations within the organizational unit. Members can either be selected or appointed at the discretion of the Chief of NRCS, keeping in mind the above factors, and the diversity of the Agency's workforce.

B. The NCRC Chairperson shall consist of a State Conservationist, a Director of a National Technology Support Center (NTSC), a Director of the Pacific Basin or Caribbean Area, a Deputy Chief, a Regional Assistant Chief, or a National Headquarters Division Director. The NCRC membership shall consist of a male and female from each of the following groups: White, Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American/Pacific Islanders, and Persons with Disabilities.

C. The NCRC will distribute a list of their current membership annually and announce any vacancies that may occur.

404.8 Role of the National Civil Rights Committee

The NCRC is appointed by the NRCS Chief to:

A. Assess and advise top management on the effectiveness of the NRCS civil rights program.

B. Establish and maintain contact with NRCS employees in order to receive and address concerns.

C. Identify civil rights issues, develop solutions, and make recommendations to NRCS management for appropriate courses of action.

D. Interact with NRCS employee organizations and other Federal agency representatives.