



The following interview with Dr. Patricia Taylor, Chief of Intelligence Community Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity, was conducted by “Diversity Careers in Engineering & Information Technology” magazine and published in the April/May 2010 edition.

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By Diversity Careers in Engineering & Information Technology

ODNI, the U.S. intelligence hub, makes diversity a priority

At this intel organization, the work of the entire U.S. intelligence enterprise is coordinated. Each component organization needs diverse techies.

You could think of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI, Washington, DC) as an intelligence roundtable. It's the point where the work of sixteen U.S. government intelligence organizations is coordinated to strengthen national security and inform policymakers on national intel strategy.

ODNI was officially created in 2004 in response to the 9/11 Commission's recommendation for sweeping changes to the intelligence community (IC). The office formally opened for business in 2005.

“The old industrial way of doing intelligence is gone,” said Dennis Blair, director of national intelligence, at a 2009 press conference about intelligence strategy. “Now we do our best work when we form teams of collectors in various disciplines: signals intelligence, human intelligence and geospatial intelligence.”

Evidence of this shift is seen in a one-stop-shop employment site for the entire IC, joint recruiting efforts, and interagency employment referrals.

Diversity is considered essential for a mission that requires collaboration across organizations and interaction with many different cultures. “For us to be successful we need a diverse workforce that mirrors the nation and also the world we're operating in,” says Patricia Taylor, chief of intelligence community equal employment opportunity and diversity (EEOD).

“Our definition of diversity is very broad,” she adds. “It goes way beyond race, gender and persons with disabilities and includes people with different cultural backgrounds and foreign language capabilities, people who feel comfortable with foreign travel, different ideas and different perspectives. Diverse teams make better decisions and come out with better solutions to hard problems.”

Taylor oversees diversity activities for all sixteen organizations under the ODNI umbrella, including the FBI (Washington, DC), the CIA (Langley, VA) and the intel units of the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security. She also chairs the Intelligence Community Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Council, which consists of directors of EEOD across the IC.

“This group existed before the ODNI stand-up, but since then we've become more strategic, with much more senior-level attention and involvement. The people who sit on our council are all senior leaders,” she explains.

Diversity has gone to a new level through a five-year plan that every agency contributes to. “Diversity efforts must be visible, persistent, specific, intentional and personal, even when people like me aren't in the room,” Taylor says with a smile. “We must look at it as often as we look at other things we're measuring, like our budget and operations performance. The heads of the organizations have to be committed to it, and we ask them to share their personal experiences with diversity. Everybody's got a story.”

Her office recently created the first IC affinity network organization: ten IC-wide affinity groups, including ones for Middle Eastern and North African employees, new employees, and veterans.

Recently ODNI has consolidated IC efforts to reach out to disabled vets. The National Reconnaissance Office (Chantilly, VA), National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (Bethesda, MD), CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency (Arlington, VA) all participate in the DoD's Wounded Warriors and Operation Warfighter programs to connect convalescing service members with flexible internships in the federal government. At least 150 wounded veterans have had internships in the IC and, as of last fall, more than two dozen had found permanent positions.

“There's a lot of patriotism in the IC, so that's an important commitment for us,” Taylor says.

Technical folks can be found in both support and operations all across the IC. Taylor reports that members of minority groups make up about 23 percent of the IC workforce. Women comprise about 40 percent and six percent are people with disabilities. There's also an emphasis on hiring first- and second-generation Americans. Citizenship is required and every prospective hire must pass a polygraph test and be able to get a security clearance.

“We particularly want students to get the message early to keep their noses clean: drug free and alcohol free, because you need to pass that security clearance,” Taylor stresses.

ODNI recruits at many colleges and universities that have large minority populations. And through its Centers of Academic Excellence program, the office works with twenty-one institutions to create curriculum in technical areas that prepare new grads for jobs in the IC.

Bonuses are offered for foreign language proficiency, and team awards are given to employees who successfully tackle some of the toughest intelligence problems.

With roughly 100,000 folks working across the IC, it's critical to create a productive, collaborative and conflict-free environment. In an independent 2009 survey, the IC was ranked the fourth best place to work in the federal government.

Most IC agencies have formal mentoring programs. Taylor is a sponsor of the IC mentoring consortium and a longtime mentor herself. She works with her mentees to create specific goals, and connects with each mentee every month for a year. Mentors can come from any agency in the IC.

All these efforts work toward recruiting new public servants and keeping them happy. "We really work hard to stay competitive and be a place where people can make a contribution and enjoy it," Taylor says. **D/C**