

Affirmative Action Plan (MD-715 – Part J)

Special Program 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), Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulations (29 C.F.R. § 1614.203(e)) and MD-715 require agencies to describe how their plans will improve the recruitment, hiring, advancement, and retention of applicants and employees with disabilities. All agencies, regardless of size, must complete this part of the MD-715 report.

Section I: Efforts to Reach Regulatory Goals

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

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) currently has an annual goal of hiring 27 PWD and/or PWTD (three per region). In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 FWS continued to exceed this goal by hiring 156 PWD, including 35 PWTD, from outside the organization.

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) | Yes 0 | No X |
| b. Cluster GS-11 to SES (PWD) | Yes X | No 0 |

The percentage of PWD in FY 2023 for the GS-1 to GS-10 cluster is 14.8%. The percentage has increased by 0.1% from FY 2022.

The percentage of PWD in FY 2023 for the GS-11 to Senior Executive Service (SES) cluster is 10.1%. The percentage has increased by 0.6% since FY 2022.

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) | Yes 0 | No X |
| b. Cluster GS-11 to SES (PWTD) | Yes 0 | No X |

The percentage of PWTD in FY 2023 for the GS-1 to GS-10 cluster is 3.9%. The percentage is unchanged from FY 2022.

The percentage of PWTD in FY 2023 for the GS-11 to SES cluster is 2.2%. The percentage has increased by 0.1% from FY 2022.

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

FWS Directorate members and their respective leadership teams received monthly progress reports on the changes in workforce participation rates. The Office of Diversity and Inclusive Workforce Management (ODIWM) is working to ensure that agency leadership remains aware of goals and objectives for the advancement of PWD and PWTD outlined under the MD-715 and the FWS Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan (DIIP).

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 PWD and PWTD, 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

- 3. 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.**

Yes No

- 4. 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		36		Human Resources Specialists, Division of Human Resources Phone: (703) 358-1743
Answering questions from the public about hiring authorities that take disability into account		45	1	Erin Pilitowski, Deputy Chief, Talent and Acquisition Officer/Human Resources Specialist, Erin_Pilitowski@fws.gov
Processing reasonable accommodation requests from applicants and employees			13	Rick Greenblat, Employee- Management Relations Chief, Joint Administrative Operations (JAO), Rick_Greenblat@fws.gov
Section 508 Compliance	1		12	Keon Sheffield, National Section 508 Program Manager, Keon_Sheffield@fws.gov
Architectural Barriers Act Compliance	9			Bobbea Burnette Cadena, Public Civil Rights Manager, Office of Diversity and Inclusive Workforce Management (ODIWM), Bobbea_Cadena@fws.gov
Special Emphasis Program for PWD and PWTD		5		Bobbea Burnette Cadena, Disability Program Manager, ODIWM, Bobbea_Cadena@fws.gov

5. 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.

Yes X No 0

- In FY 2023, FWS delivered live required training to the entire workforce that focused on reasonable accommodations and DEIA. In addition to meeting annual DEIA and EEO training requirements, employees gained foundational knowledge about the DIIP, DEIA and EEO best practices, and other information to support inclusion in the workplace.
- Members of ODIWM completed the DOI Special Emphasis Training coordinated by the DOI, Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights (ODICR).
- In FY 2023, FWS hosted a virtual panel discussion for all employees during National Disability Employment Awareness Month titled ‘Flipping the Script on Disability.’ The live event emphasized the importance of ensuring that PWD - seen and unseen - have full access to employment, FWS facilities, and services. The event highlighted employee experiences, allyship, and the establishment of the FWS People with Disabilities Employee Resource Group (ERG).
- In FY 2023, employees had access to training on retention and mentoring for federal employees with disabilities through the FWS People with Disabilities ERG, ODIWM and Division of Human Resources (HR). The trainings explored successful practices for retaining diverse talent and mentoring as a disability inclusion strategy. HR provided training on reasonable accommodations. The training reviewed a framework for adopting a mentoring culture, tips for successful implementation of a mentoring program and resources for partnering with disability mentoring initiatives. In FWS annual DEIA training, there was an emphasis on the importance of retention for people with disabilities and invisible disabilities.
- There was a strong focus on reasonable accommodation and safety within the workplace during the mandatory DEIA training and trainings/discussions within the People with Disabilities ERG, which meets monthly with presentations geared towards people with disabilities. Additionally, the ERG has grown from eight members to 193 during FY 2023.
- In FY 2023, FWS hosted a workshop for Employee Management Relations (EMR) Specialists to discuss the Reasonable Accommodation Policy and procedures. EMR Specialists were provided an opportunity to gain valuable insight on types of accommodations that have been provided, what is and is not reasonable, and discuss current requests for reasonable accommodations.
- FWS provided training on the Reasonable Accommodation Policy, including Personal Assistance Services (PAS), to the Region 2 managers and supervisors. The training provided a step-by-step process on roles and responsibilities throughout the reasonable accommodation process. Managers and supervisors were provided an opportunity to explore their knowledge using scenarios.

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*.

Yes X No 0

Section III: 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 Applicants with Disabilities

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

The FWS National Recruitment Team continuously works to develop:

- Contacts at the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services, Non-Paid Work Experience Program, to provide experience and potential job opportunities to PWTD.
- Recruiting partnerships with community, academic, and governmental groups that reach PWTD to maximize recruiting from all sources when filling positions at grade GS-11 and above, including managerial and supervisory positions at grades GS-13 to GS-15 and SES.
- Contacts at more than 455 organizations representing military/Veteran, women, minority, and disability affinity interests at institutions of higher education, American Job Centers, state vocational rehabilitation agencies, Centers for Independent Living, and employment network service providers.
- Contacts through the Workforce Recruitment Program annual online recruitment list to identify and contact students and graduates with targeted disabilities about potential opportunities for positions before they are advertised.
- The FWS National Recruitment Team utilized the *HireVeteran.com* website to post position vacancies targeting Veterans eligible for noncompetitive hiring authority (e.g., 30% Veteran, Veterans Readjustment Appointment or VRA).
- Upon inquiry from hiring officials, the Recruitment Team reaches out to sources identified above for potential candidates eligible for noncompetitive special hiring (e.g., 30% Veterans, VRA, Schedule A) to be considered for an identified vacancy.

- 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 Directorate's Deputies group (Deputies) continued to take steps to increase use of special hiring authorities (SHA), including Schedule A, for all permanent, entry-level professional 400 Series jobs (GS 5/7/9). FWS a hiring manager toolkit including a hiring authorities' at-a-glance guide, as well as other educational material on the hiring process and hiring pathways.

The Division of Human Resources (HR) and ODIWM use the Schedule A and eligible 30%-or-more disabled Veterans hiring authorities to identify and hire qualified PWD and PWTD professionals for positions in the permanent workforce.

FWS recruited PWD and PWTD under the 30%-or-more disabled Veterans hiring authority at Veteran career fairs sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Administration at several venues across the country. Vacancy announcements included statements indicating that FWS encourages and will accept applications from Veterans with compensable disabilities or 30%-or-more disabled Veterans.

- 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.**

HR specialists determine if applicants are eligible for appointment under SHAs in 5 CFR §213.31.02(u). They ensure that the application packages from PWD or PWTD applicants include the following:

For Schedule A eligible candidates:

- Current resume with places and dates of employment, including month/year to month/year, and number of hours worked per week (e.g., 40 hours, 32 hours, etc.)
- Schedule A letter from a licensed medical professional (e.g., a physician or other medical professional duly certified by U.S. State, District of Columbia, or a U.S. territory, to practice medicine); a licensed vocational rehabilitation specialist (state or private); or any federal agency, state agency, or an agency of the District of Columbia or a U.S. territory that issues or provides disability benefits as described in 5 CFR §213.3102 (3) (ii)

For eligible disabled Veteran candidates:

- Current resume with places and dates of employment, including month/year to month/year, and number of hours worked per week (e.g., 40 hours, 32 hours, etc.)
- Copy of DD-214, Record of Military Service (member copy 4) to determine eligibility for Veterans' preference and honorable discharge
- Copy of SF-15 stating candidate has a 30%-or-more disability rating and can perform the duties of the position for which they are applying
- Department of Veterans Affairs rating letter that identifies the disability percentage for the applicant

HR forwards applications to hiring officials and meets with them to explain the hiring flexibilities and how and when an applicant can be non-competitively appointed. PWD and PWTD can apply for vacancies advertised on USAJobs.gov even after they have closed. In these cases, HR specialists provide applicants' information to the hiring officials and meet with them to provide guidance on the hiring authorities.

- 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.**

Yes X No 0 N/A

FWS developed a hiring manager toolkit including a hiring authorities' at-a-glance guide, as well as other educational material on the hiring process and hiring pathways. The Deputies took steps to increase use of SHAs, including Schedule A, for all permanent, entry-level professional 400 series jobs (GS 5/7/9). The rate at which employees first onboarded through a Schedule A appointment are in career ladder positions is similar to that of employees in the overall permanent workforce. Both HR and workforce recruiters provided guidance to managers and hiring officials on the use of SHAs to directly appoint PWD and PWTD.

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.

FWS recruited at career fairs at institutions of higher education, as well as professional and military sponsored events to reach out to qualified PWD and PWTD for employment. FWS maintains a database of contacts representing U.S. military installations, Veterans Employment Service offices, state job offices, and Veterans' assistance centers. Contacts include various disabled Veterans' organizations, centralized Veterans' applicant referral services on military bases, and the Disabled American Veterans National Service offices.

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) Yes X No 0

b. New Hires for Permanent Workforce (PWTD) Yes 0 No X

The percentage of PWD in FY 2023 among the new hires in the permanent workforce was 11.6%.

The percentage of PWTD in FY 2023 among the new hires in the permanent workforce was 2.4%.

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.**

a. New Hires for MCO (PWD) Yes 0 No X

b. New Hires for MCO (PWTD) Yes 0 No X

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.**

a. Qualified Applicants for MCO (PWD) Yes 0 No X

b. Qualified Applicants for MCO (PWTD) Yes 0 No X

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.**

a. Promotions for MCO (PWD) Yes 0 No X

b. Promotions for MCO (PWTD) Yes 0 No X

Section IV: 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.

The following activities are part of efforts to ensure sufficient opportunities for advancement:

- Managers and supervisors are required to adhere to the policy on the development and establishment of individual development plans (IDP) for each employee, supervisor, and manager.
- The National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) and the Division of Human Resources send periodic reminders and resources to all employees regarding their IDPs.
- IDPs at FWS include formal and informal training and mentoring programs, career development opportunities, details to promotions, and similar programs that address advancement.
- FWS develops one-year training plans for eligible Veterans with a 30%-or-more disability rating who were hired under the VRA.

B. Career Development Opportunities

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

FWS promotes two formal career development programs nationwide to develop its next cadre of leaders: (1) Stepping Up to Leadership Program (SUTL) for GS-11/12, and (2) Advanced Leadership Development Program (ALDP) for GS/GM 13/14. The employees participating in these programs compete through a merit selection process.

In addition, FWS provides opportunities for employees to participate in various mentoring and training programs. The Department of the Interior (DOI) also solicited applications for a DOI-level SES candidate development program.

The following activities are part of efforts to ensure career development opportunities:

- An intranet page is a comprehensive resource promoting temporary job details within FWS to enhance career paths.
- Employees are encouraged to participate in available training, coaching, and mentoring opportunities in their regions and programs.
- Managers and supervisors are required to adhere to the policy on the development and establishment of IDPs for each employee, supervisor, and manager.
- NCTC offers a comprehensive course catalog that offers both technical and leadership training aimed at increasing employee competency in accomplishing the mission under the agency's Leadership Competency Model. This approach enhances employee readiness for positions of greater responsibility, complementing the scientific and natural resources management knowledge and skills that remain critical to employee performance and success in conservation leadership.

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
	(#)	(#)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Advanced Leadership Development Program (ALDP)	37	24	3	0	2	0
Stepping Up to Leadership Program (SUTL)	191	48	23	3	5	0

2. 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.

- a. Applicants (PWD) Yes X No 0
- b. Selections (PWD) Yes X No 0

3. Do triggers exist for **PWTD** among the applicants and/or selectees for any of the career development programs identified? (The appropriate benchmarks are the relevant applicant pool for applicants and the applicant pool for selectees.) If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box.

- a. ALDP Applicants (PWTD) Yes 0 No X
- b. ALDP Selections (PWTD) Yes X No 0
- c. SUTL Applicants (PWTD) Yes 0 No X
- d. SUTL Selections (PWTD) Yes X No 0

C. Awards

1. Using the inclusion rate as the benchmark, does your agency have a trigger involving PWD and/or PWTD 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) Yes 0 No X
- b. Awards, Bonuses, & Incentives (PWTD) Yes 0 No X

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) Yes 0 No X
- b. Pay Increases (PWTD) Yes 0 No X

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) Yes 0 No 0 N/A X
- b. Other Types of Recognition (PWTD) Yes 0 No 0 N/A X

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.

a. SES

i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Yes 0 No X

ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Yes 0 No X

b. Grade GS-15

i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Yes 0 No X

ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Yes 0 No X

c. Grade GS-14

i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Yes 0 No X

ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Yes 0 No X

d. Grade GS-13

i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) Yes 0 No X

ii. Internal Selections (PWD) Yes 0 No X

2. 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.

a. New Hires to SES (PWTD) Yes 0 No X

b. New Hires to GS-15 (PWTD) Yes 0 No X

c. New Hires to GS-14 (PWTD) Yes 0 No X

d. New Hires to GS-13 (PWTD) Yes 0 No X

3. 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

a. Executives

- | | | |
|---|-------|------|
| i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) | Yes 0 | No X |
| ii. Internal Selections (PWD) | Yes 0 | No X |

b. Managers

- | | | |
|--|-------|------|
| i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) | Yes 0 | No X |
| ii. Internal Selections (PWD) | Yes 0 | No X |

c. Supervisors

- | | | |
|--|-------|------|
| i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWD) | Yes 0 | No X |
| ii. Internal Selections (PWD) | Yes 0 | No X |

4. Does your agency have a trigger involving PWTD 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.

a. Executives

- | | | |
|---|-------|------|
| i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWTD) | Yes 0 | No X |
| ii. Internal Selections (PWTD) | Yes 0 | No X |

b. Managers

- | | | |
|---|-------|------|
| i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWTD) | Yes 0 | No X |
| ii. Internal Selections (PWTD) | Yes 0 | No X |

c. Supervisors

- | | | |
|---|-------|------|
| i. Qualified Internal Applicants (PWTD) | Yes 0 | No X |
| ii. Internal Selections (PWTD) | Yes 0 | No X |

5. 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.

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|------|
| a. New Hires for Executives (PWD) | Yes 0 | No X |
| b. New Hires for Managers (PWD) | Yes 0 | No X |
| c. New Hires for Supervisors (PWD) | Yes 0 | No X |

6. Using the qualified applicant pool as the benchmark, does your agency have a trigger involving PWTD among the selectees for new hires to supervisory positions? If “yes”, describe the trigger(s) in the text box.

a. New Hires for Executives (PWTD)	Yes 0	No X
b. New Hires for Managers (PWTD)	Yes 0	No X
c. New Hires for Supervisors (PWTD)	Yes 0	No X

Section V: Plan to Improve Retention of Persons with Disabilities

To be a model employer for PWD, agencies must have policies and programs in place to retain these employees. 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 personal assistance services (PAS).

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.

Yes X No 0 N/A 0

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)	Yes X	No 0
b. Involuntary Separations (PWD)	Yes 0	No X

Voluntary resignations were higher than expected: 25% of employees who resigned from the permanent workforce during FY 2023 had reportable disabilities. This was high in comparison to the percentage of employees with disabilities in the permanent workforce (11.1%).

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)	Yes X	No 0
b. Involuntary Separations (PWTD)	Yes 0	No X

Voluntary resignations were higher than expected: 8.3% of employees who resigned from the permanent workforce during FY 2023 had targeted disabilities. This was high in comparison to the percentage of employees with targeted disabilities in the permanent workforce (2.75%).

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

There were 493 exit survey responses in FY 2023, of which 83 were from PWD. According to FWS employee exit responses:

- 39% of PWD indicated that a lack of promotion/career advancement opportunity was a primary reason for separating. 26% of PWD indicated lack of recognition was a primary reason for separating, and 25% indicated dissatisfaction with their supervisor as a reason for separating.
- 43% of PWD felt executives/senior leaders were effective in motivating and leading the workforce.
- 73% of PWD felt they were provided adequate technology, tools, and equipment to effectively perform their job.

B. Accessibility of Technology and Facilities

Pursuant to 29 C.F.R. § 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.

Link to DOI's Section 508 policies and guidelines: <https://www.doi.gov/ocio/section508>

If an individual with a disability believes that a bureau or office has failed to procure Electronic and Information Technology (EIT) conforming to Section 508, that individual has the right to file a complaint with the DOI Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights (ODICR). ODICR shall apply the complaint procedures outlined in 43 CFR Part 17, Subpart E, which are established to implement Section 504 for resolving allegations of discrimination in a federally conducted program or activity.

Complaints must be submitted in writing to ODICR at the following address:

U.S. Department of the Interior
Attn: Director, Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

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.

Link to DOI's Public Civil Rights (PCR) website: <https://www.doi.gov/pmb/eeo/Public-Civil-Rights>

How to file a PCR complaint:

- *Within 180 days of the date of the alleged discrimination, a signed, written complaint should be filed with the Director, Office of Civil Rights, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW Washington, DC, 20240.*
- *The complaint should include your name, address, zip code, and telephone number; the name and address of the alleged discriminatory official(s) and/or public entity; the nature of the complaint, the basis of the complaint (race, color, national origin, gender, age, sex and/or disability), and the date the alleged discrimination occurred.*

- *If the alleged discrimination occurred outside DOI jurisdiction, we would forward your complaint to the state or federal agency that has jurisdiction. You can read more about the PCR complaint process in [Civil Rights Directive 2011-01](#).*

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.

In FY 2023, the PCR Team:

- Conducted and completed a total of 12 (six on-site and six remote) Federally Assisted Program (FAP) civil rights compliance reviews. The team worked with state recipients of federal funding to complete 100% of the scheduled reviews and issue Reports of Findings before the close of the fiscal year.
- Coordinated and collaborated with Deputies group to Develop four options to conduct self-evaluations of all Service occupied facilities (954) on a recurring schedule. Conducted and completed a total of 26 Federally Conducted Program (FCP) self-evaluations. The team worked with regional leadership to complete 100% of scheduled self-evaluations.
- Conducted two pilot FCP self-evaluations for Service leadership at the Lower Suwannee/Cedar Keys NWR and the San Luis NWR Complex.
- Developed a process to highlight FWS facilities that are increasing access. An article was written on the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and featured on intranet news feeds and shared in FWS all-employee email digest (FWS Wild Weekly).

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 period 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.)

FWS abides by the DOI Reasonable Accommodations/Personal Assistance Services Policy that establishes a 15-business day limit to provide a decision memo to a requester (when no medical documents are required) and a 20-business day limit, from the date of the decision memo, for providing an approved accommodation (unless notification of delayed implementation is issued to extend that period by 10 days). In FY 2023, there were 61 reasonable accommodation requests. The average period for approving a request was below the 15-business day limit and the average period for processing an accommodation was estimated at 15-20 days.

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.

- FWS is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to our employees and to applicants for employment to assure that PWD enjoy equal employment opportunity, unless to do so would cause undue hardship.
- The EMR team provides advisory services for employees and managers in the implementation of the reasonable accommodations policy. Each FWS region and program has been assigned a servicing EMR specialist to ensure prompt response to inquiries.
- FWS follows the DOI policies that direct bureaus and offices: (1) Personnel Bulletin 14-01, Reasonable Accommodation for Individuals with Disabilities; (2) Personnel Bulletin 08-09, Procedures for Conducting a DOI-wide Search and Position Reassignment for Cases Involving Reasonable Accommodations; and (3) Personnel Bulletin 17-18, PAS Procedures.

- FWS Director and Directorate members are responsible for implementing DOI policy and procedures for reasonable accommodations and PAS within their respective regions/programs and for ensuring that sufficient resources are available for providing reasonable accommodations to PWD and PAS for PWTDD.
- The DOI's reasonable accommodations/PAS policy establishes a 15-business day limit to provide a decision memo to a requester (when no medical documents are required) and a 20-business day limit from date of decision for providing an approved accommodation (unless notification of delayed implementation is issued to extend that period by 10 days).
- In FY 2023, ODIWM hosted a workshop for EMR specialists to discuss the reasonable accommodations policy and procedures in effect at that time. EMR specialists were provided an opportunity to gain valuable insight on types of reasonable accommodations that have been provided, what is and is not reasonable, and discuss pending requests for reasonable accommodations.
- FWS provided training on the policy, including PAS, to managers and supervisors in the FWS Southwest Region. The training provided a step-by-step process on roles and responsibilities throughout the reasonable accommodation process. Managers and supervisors were provided an opportunity to explore their knowledge using training scenarios.

D. Personal Assistance Services Allowing Employees to Participate in the Workplace

Pursuant to 29 C.F.R. § 1614.203(d)(5), federal agencies, as an aspect of affirmative action, are required to provide 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.

Requests for PAS follow the same process as requests for reasonable accommodations and include timely processing of approved services, conducting training for managers and supervisors, and monitoring requests to identify trends. FWS is regulated by the DOI Reasonable Accommodations/Personal Assistance Services Policy, which has been sent to the EEOC. The policy is posted on the DOI website and a link to it is provided on the FWS website. The fact sheet for PAS procedures has been posted on the FWS website as well as on its intranet site.

Section VI: 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 government-wide average?

Yes 0 No X N/A

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?

Yes 0 No X N/A

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.

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?
 Yes 0 No X N/A

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?
 Yes 0 No X N/A

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 VII: 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?
 Yes X No 0

2. Has the agency established a plan to correct the barrier(s) involving PWD and/or PWTD?
 Yes X No 0 N/A

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.

Triggers Workforce Data	<p>Inclusion rate in the GS-11 to SES cluster: The percentage of PWD in FY 2023 for the GS-11 to Senior Executive Service (SES) cluster is 10.1%.</p> <p>Low participation of PWD in the Professional Biology series: PWD make up 8.0% of permanent professional biologists versus the EEOC goal of 12%.</p> <p>Voluntary separations: Voluntary resignations were higher than expected: 25% of employees who resigned from the permanent workforce during FY 2023 had reportable disabilities, while only 16.7% of the permanent workforce had reportable disabilities. Voluntary resignations were higher than expected: 8.3% of employees who resigned from the permanent workforce during FY 2023 had targeted disabilities, while only 4.17% of the permanent workforce had targeted disabilities.</p> <p>Career development applicants and selections based on FY 2023 data for SUTL and ALDP: 0% of SUTL selectees were PWTD compared to the applicant benchmark of 2.6% 6.8% of SUTL selectees were PWD compared to the applicant pool of 9.4% No employees with disabilities were selected for ALDP</p>
Barrier(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion of non-inclusive and restrictive language on job vacancies is prohibitive for PWD and fails to account for possible accommodations. Lack of supervisor awareness about reasonable accommodations resources and options prevents employees from fully accessing accommodations.
Objective(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct focus group to identify any potential barriers faced by PWD and PWTD in applying and being selected for leadership programs. Adopt inclusive language for physical requirements, and remove driver’s license requirements when applicable, in job vacancy announcements

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop additional training resources for managers and supervisors to increase awareness of reasonable accommodations rights and responsibilities, including information on funding sources • Develop focused reasonable accommodation training and engagement sessions for managers, supervisors, and employees that is in addition to the annual mandatory EEO/Diversity Training. • Develop templates for reasonable accommodation related documents that will help to provide consistency and expedite communications. • Add the request for reasonable accommodation higher up in FWS job announcements to make it easier for applicants to find. 	
Responsible Official(s)	Performance Standards Address the Plan? (Yes or No)	
FWS Director FWS Deputy Director DEIA Committee Chairperson EEO Director Diversity Program Manager Employee Relations Manager Assistant Director, Management and Administration	Yes	
Barrier Analysis Process Completed? (Yes or No)	Barrier(s) Identified? (Yes or No)	
Yes	Yes	
Statement of Identified Barrier: Description of Policy, Procedure, or Practice		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of non-inclusive and restrictive language on job vacancies is prohibitive for PWD and fails to account for possible accommodations. • Lack of supervisor awareness for reasonable accommodations resources and options prevents employees from fully accessing accommodations. 		
Sources of Data	Sources Reviewed? (Yes or No)	Identify Information Collected
Workforce Data Tables	Yes	FY 2023 MD-715 B Tables. See triggers outlined above.
Complaint Data (Trends)	Yes	<p>Informal and Formal Complaints data and trends from <i>iComplaints</i> platform, internal tracking systems, and Annual Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Statistical Report of Discrimination Complaints - 462 Report (EEOC Form 462). Disability was the second most common basis of discrimination reported during FY 2023 (reprisal was first with 16 complaints). There were 12 disability-based complaints in FY2023.</p> <p>Disability Mental - 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appt/Hire - 2 • Disciplinary action - 2 • Perf. Eval/appraisal - 1 • Harassment-non-sexual - 4 • Reasonable accommodation disability - 1 • Other terms/conditions of employment - 1 <p>Disability Physical - 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perf. Eval/appraisal - 1 • Harassment-non-sexual - 5 • Promotion/non-selection - 1 • Reasonable accommodation disability - 3 • Termination - 1

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and Attendance - 1 • Training - 2 • Other terms/conditions of employment - 3
Grievance Data (Trends)	Yes	<p>There were 58 harassment allegations in FY 23 for the following protected categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex (Including Pregnancy & Gender Identity) – 20 • Race - 9 • Sexual Orientation - 3 • Nation Origin – 3 • Age – 2 • Disability – 8 • Retaliation - 13 <p>Fourteen percent of the allegations in FY 2023 were related to Disability. From 2017-2023 there were 184 total grievances which highlights the need to continue efforts directed towards workplace inclusion.</p>
Findings from Decisions (e.g., EEO, Grievance, MSPB, Anti-Harassment Processes)	Yes	No findings of discrimination
Climate Assessment Survey (e.g., FEVS)	Yes	Analyzed the FY 2022 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) and FY 2022 FWS Diversity & Inclusion Workplace Assessment Survey
Exit Interview Data	Yes	<p>According to FY 2023 FWS employee exit responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39% of PWD indicated that a lack of promotion/career advancement opportunities was the primary reason for separating • 73% of PWD felt they were provided adequate technology, tools, and equipment to effectively perform their job • 43% of PWD felt executives/senior leaders were effective in motivating and leading the workforce
SEP Observance Survey – Barrier Analysis Question	Yes	<p>Scope of qualitative analysis was for survey data collected after these events: Hispanic Heritage Month 2022, National Disability Employment Awareness Month 2022, Native American Heritage Month 2022, Veterans Day 2022, Martin Luther King Day 2023, and Black and African American History Month 2023.</p> <p>The following key topics were identified as areas of concern by employees when answering the question: “In your opinion, what at the Service (e.g. policy, practice, or procedure) needs to change in order to provide more access to employment and development opportunities for the celebrated group of this event?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Cultural Competence/Training</u> Increase understanding and awareness about the target groups and increase related training. Provide more DEIA training specifically cultural competencies for supervisors and managers.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Recruitment/Outreach</u> Increase outreach for recruitment resources and support available to the target groups. • <u>Hiring</u> Increase career ladder positions to help employees from underrepresented or systematically excluded groups to move up in their career without having to relocate.
Focus Groups	Yes	<p>FWS engaged 35% of the workforce through listening sessions and online surveys for the Values Project to create a shared vision and core values. This included 100 listening sessions and over 1,500 surveys and open houses. The information gathered across these engagement efforts led to the creation of shared purpose, core values, behaviors that embody the values, components of the agency's voice, and guided the focus of the Service's systems assessment.</p> <p>The FWS PWD ERG meets on a monthly basis as a forum for employees who identify as PWD. Participants discussed numerous factors that contribute to their success and wellbeing within the agency including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arbitrary physical requirements preventing PWD from applying for jobs • Pervasive stigma creating an unwelcome environment • Lack of awareness and resources available for reasonable accommodations • Safety within the workplace • Ensuring full access to employment and community involvement.
Interviews	Yes	<p>In FY 2023, met with Disability ERG to discuss potential barriers faced by PWD in applying and being selected for leadership programs.</p> <p>A Request for Information on hiring practices and procedures in FY 2022 was sent to all hiring managers to collect information for a barrier analysis at the point of selection. Interviews will be conducted with hiring managers in FY 2024.</p>
Reports (e.g., Congress, EEOC, MSPB, GAO, OPM)	Yes	<p>EEOC Report - <i>The EEO Status of Workers with Disabilities in the Federal Sector</i></p> <p>EEOC Root Cause Barrier Analysis Tool for Hiring</p> <p>FWS Values Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Engagement Report - November 2023 • Systems Assessment Results and Recommendations to Support Values Implementation - November 2023
Other (Please Describe)	Yes	<p>A five-year trend analysis was conducted as part of outcome measures related to DOI's barrier analysis efforts to increase workforce diversity. The analysis</p>

		<p>showed an increase in the FWS permanent workforce for PWD (+1.18%) and PWT (+0.57%) from FY 2019 to FY 2023.</p> <p>Analyzed Directorate Resource Assistant Fellows Program (DRFP): 17.7% (11) of FY 2023 DRFP hires were individuals with a disability. Two had targeted disabilities.</p> <p>The Barrier Analysis Team identified these key barriers for PWD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of supervisory knowledge on reasonable accommodations • Lack of professional development • Ability to remote work • A specific barrier was the driver's license requirement for positions. 		
Target Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Planned Activities	Sufficient Staffing & Funding (Yes or No)	Modified Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Completion Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
12/31/2021	1. Recommend NCTC clarify selection process (e.g., requirements, evaluation criteria, timelines, deciding officials) for SUTL and ALDP to employees during the launch of the two programs in FY 2021.	Yes	12/31/2022	09/30/2022
12/31/2022	2. ODIWM will brief the DEIA Committee and Directorate on the results of the 2021 FWS Diversity and Inclusion Workplace Assessment.	Yes		04/27/2022
12/31/2022	3. ODIWM will conduct equity training for entire FWS workforce on disabilities in the workplace and reasonable accommodations.	Yes		09/30/2022
12/31/2022	4. ODIWM will establish a central process to track and fulfill regional and program requests for facilitation of conversations related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.	Yes		12/01/2022
12/31/2022	5. ODIWM will recommend the JAO develop a project plan to conduct full review of driver's license requirements to determine business need and develop a process for determining the necessity for each announcement.	Yes		12/31/2022
12/31/2022	6. ODIWM will evaluate previous FY quarter's hiring success and brief the DEIA Committee on needed adjustments.	Yes		09/21/2022

12/31/2022	7. ODIWM will create an action plan to increase communication on Schedule A hiring authority to managers and employees.	Yes		09/30/2022
12/31/2022	8. ODIWM will recommend Regional Directors employ employee engagement and leadership (EELD) coordinators and include them on their regional leadership teams.	Yes		10/29/2021
09/30/2023	9. JAO will add the request for reasonable accommodation higher up in FWS job announcements to make it easier for applicants to find.	Yes		09/30/2023
09/30/2023	10. EMR will develop templates for reasonable accommodation related documents that will help to provide consistency and expedite communications.	Yes		09/30/2023
03/15/2023	11.FWS will develop focused reasonable accommodation training and engagement sessions for managers, supervisors, and employees that is in addition to the mandatory EEO/Diversity Training for FY 2023.	Yes		03/15/2023
10/01/2023	12. Initiate meetings with ODIWM, NCTC, and interviews with employees to identify next steps for analysis based on the triggers that exist for PWD applicants and selectees for leadership programs.	Yes		10/01/2023
04/30/2024	13. Conduct a listening session with a focus group to identify any barriers that exist for PWD applicants and/or selectees for the SUTL and ALDP career development programs.	Yes		
12/01/2023	14. EMR and ODIWM meet to coordinate on automating tracking of the RA timelines.	Yes		12/01/2023
03/29/2023	15. EMR develop automated tracker to improve current process for tracking RA timelines.	Yes		
Fiscal Year 2023	Accomplishments			
	<p>9. JAO added the request for reasonable accommodation higher up in FWS job announcements to make it easier for applicants to find.</p> <p>10. EMR developed templates for reasonable accommodation related documents that provide consistency and expedite communications.</p> <p>11. FWS developed focused reasonable accommodation training and engagement sessions for managers, supervisors, and employees that was in addition to the mandatory EEO/Diversity Training for FY 2023.</p>			

12. Meetings were initiated with ODIWM, NCTC, and interviews with employees to identify next steps for analysis based on the triggers that exist for PWD applicants and selectees for leadership programs and resulted in a plan for a focus group to be conducted in FY 2024.

14. EMR and ODIWM met to coordinate on improving the tracking of RA timelines. The specific steps in the RA process to track were identified and an automated tracker is in the process of being developed.

Additional accomplishments in FY 2023 related to PWD and PWTD:

- FWS transitioned to a new process for entry-level positions to require non-competitive candidate solicitation and consideration to (1) expedite the hiring process at the entry level, (2) to ensure hiring managers are considering the candidates in whom FWS has already invested, including our internal employees, interns, fellows, temps, and terms, and (3) to increase the diversity of the workforce through authorities that allow us to more effectively recruit veterans, individuals with disabilities, and candidates from other underrepresented groups.
- ODIWM continued to regularly brief leadership on workforce participation and recruitment numbers for PWD and PWTD. A workforce demographics dashboard was developed to provide a visual presentation of workforce demographic data available in the FWS MD-715 report. Statisticians showcased the dashboard to leadership and did a demonstration and Q&A during a session open to all employees in February 2023.
- FWS conducted reasonable accommodations training for employees and supervisors. The training focused on DOI's *Personnel Bulletin 21-03, Processing Requests for Reasonable Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities* and provided an opportunity for participants to learn about their role in the reasonable accommodation process and to be aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- FWS developed and launched the 2023 DEIA and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) training course that builds on content from previous years' courses, fulfills training requirements, and addresses identified attitudinal barriers.
- In FY 2023, the FWS Unconscious Bias Team delivered over 45 training sessions, primarily with Hiring Panels.
- FWS provided information on mentoring programs and trainings to all new employees during the onboarding process. In addition, the Mentoring SharePoint was integrated into various onboarding communication tools.
- FWS provided leadership messages to report progress on DIIP actions to all employees. The objective of these regular reports is to bolster and coalesce the DEIA message and engage employees at all levels to take specific actions.
- To support communicators in the FWS who ensure that news, digital content, and stories are inclusive, welcoming, and accessible to diverse audiences, a cross-programmatic team led *Transforming Change!* a webinar in a series focusing on the FWS Digital Communications Standards of Excellence. Subject matter experts presented on culturally sensitive, values-based, and 508-compliant communication.
- FWS enhanced its online internal presence by launching the New Welcoming Workplace standalone SharePoint site that houses DEIA and DIIP resources, policies, guidance, FWS work culture information, and progress in a one-stop shop that is

accessible to all employees.

- FWS hosted a live event for National Disability Employment Awareness Month titled *'Flipping the Script on Disability'*, that focused on FWS' commitment to accessible opportunities, facilities, and services for employees and those it partners with and serves.
- FWS hosted three live events for the IDEA Conversation series *It Starts with Us: An IDEA Conversation Series for Building an Inclusive Workplace*, which focused on the "I" in IDEA – Inclusion. These conversations focused on areas that helped us recognize and dismantle barriers to inclusion, build relationships and trust with one another, and turn our good intent into best practices.

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).

Based on a five-year trend analysis there was an increase in the FWS permanent workforce for PWD (+1.18%) and PWTD (+0.57%) from FY 2019 to FY 2023. In FY 2023, FWS also exceeded the hiring of goal of 27 PWD and/or PWTD by hiring 156 PWD, including 35 PWTD, from outside the organization.

In FY 2023, 121 requests for noncompetitive candidates (including those eligible for Schedule A and 30% or more disabled Veterans) were processed with over 379 noncompetitive applicants. This was a result of FWS nationally encouraging the use of direct hiring authorities and providing tools to set this practice as an expectation for hiring managers through the Deputies Entry Level Hiring Rules (ELHR).

The ELHR are a result of selection data analysis showing that the use of Special Hiring Authorities (SHAs) for Veterans, Schedule A for individuals with disabilities, Pathways Conversions, and Public Land Corps Authority Conversions were resulting in higher representation of selections of people of color than the use of DEU. Through a yearlong process development, the ELHR were developed and launched in April 2023. The purpose of the Deputies Entry Level Hiring process is to:

- Expedite the hiring process at the entry level
- Ensure consideration of candidates in whom FWS has already invested, including internal employees, interns, fellows, temporary, and terms
- Increase the diversity of the workforce through authorities that allow us to more effectively recruit veterans, individuals with disabilities, and candidates from other underrepresented groups.

Hiring Managers must consult with HR about the rules and consider noncompetitive candidates with Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA), 30% or more disabled Veterans, Individuals with Schedule A Disability letters, former Pathways candidates eligible for conversion, and former Public Land Corps candidates before an entry-level (i.e., starting at GS-9 or below in most professional and administrative job series) position will post on USAJobs. Since the launch of the rules, 43 candidates have been selected using the rules.

FWS uses the following sources to identify candidates who are eligible for the special hiring authorities:

- Sourcing candidates (including former FWS interns with Pathways appointment eligibility & Public Land Corps hiring authority; Veterans; Schedule A candidates with a disability) with a searchable resume on USAJobs who have relevant skills or experience and who currently live near the duty station or have expressed a desire to relocate there

- Sourcing candidates from Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) for students and recent graduates with disabilities
- Sourcing LinkedIn Recruiter for Veterans near the duty station with relevant skills or experience
- Sending the position description to local Veterans Affairs (VA) and Vocational Rehabilitation contacts for any candidates they are working with to find employment.

In FY 2023, leadership also received more support for reasonable accommodations through the onboarding of a specialist that works as a consultant to leadership on the process of providing reasonable accommodations for employees.

The planned activity for meetings with ODIWM, NCTC, and interviews with employees to discuss the triggers that exist for PWD applicants or selectees for leadership programs, resulted in the decision to conduct a focus group in FY 2024 to collect more information on potential barriers.

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.

In FY 2024, FWS will take the following actions to continue to address the barriers outlined above for PWD and PWTD: 1) ODIWM will continue to work with the Deputies Team to encourage the use of the special hiring authorities, 2) ODIWM and NCTC will conduct listening session with a focus group to identify any barriers that exist for PWD applicants and/or selectees for the SUTL and ALDP career development program 3) FWS will implement a tracker to automate monitoring timelines for reasonable accommodations requests.

Additionally, the Regions and Headquarters will continue to provide capacity to coordinate programs and special hiring authorities to attract current students, recent graduates, and other eligible talent to careers within government service. The FWS Unconscious Bias Team will also continue to deliver training sessions with Hiring Panels.

In FY 2024, FWS is conducting a comprehensive needs assessment that includes DEIA-related training which will assist in identifying what training already exists within the bureau and how to leverage existing knowledge and communities, including identifying current skill gaps for competencies to advance DEIA. All employees will be asked to voluntarily participate in focus groups for this effort.

FWS will continue to encourage the use of the Stay Interview Guide, a new tool for managers and supervisors to help foster relationships and build trust with employees. The tool is intended to serve as an adaptable and optional resource to support inclusive and welcoming workplaces and encourage employee retention.

FWS will continue to provide increased coordination and resources to support employee groups and grassroots activities that advance welcoming workplaces. FWS leaders are actively engaging leaders from employee groups in assessing and addressing their needs. Each ERG has an executive sponsor who advocates for their goals and objectives. Groups include the People with Disabilities ERG; Pride ERG; Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) ERG; Veterans ERG; and the Women's+ ERG.

FWS will continue to provide leadership messages to report progress on DIIP actions to all employees. The objective of these regular reports is to bolster and coalesce the DEIA message and engage employees at all levels to take specific actions. Under the DIIP, FWS annually commits to a consistent set

of expectations across the organization for messaging, coordinated action, adaptive management, and accountability. Leadership will continue to listen to employee feedback through surveys, exit interviews, and focus groups to refine the DIIP annual action plan.

FWS will conduct a third Diversity and Inclusion Workplace Assessment in partnership with OPM. The survey results will be shared with all employees and assessment results will be paired with those from FEVS and Gallup surveys to provide essential employee feedback to inform the annual DIIP work plan action to advance DEIA.