

Example of Strategic Review Summary

Strategic Goal 3: Excel as a federal science agency.

Strategic Objective 1: Build an increasingly diverse, engaged, high performing workforce by fostering excellence in recruitment, training, leadership, and human capital management.

Program Directors (PDs), including permanent and rotator staff, are the largest and highest-turnover segment of NSF's workforce. The Strategic Review of this Goal and Objective considered the changes in the PD job and workforce over the last 15 years and examined factors impacting recruitment, selection, and retention of PDs.

Key questions, findings, and recommendations:

What qualities does NSF seek in Program Directors?

Although each directorate seeks a slightly different combination of skills when recruiting Program Directors, most include skillsets that fall into three categories: 1) technical expertise, 2) management skills (the ability to get things done), and 3) a collaborative mindset. The team noted the increasing importance of non-technical skills in the timeframe considered.

How has the Program Director job changed over the past 15 years?

Recruitment and retention of Program Directors is correlated to the changes in the Program Director job over the past 15 years. These changes include increasingly large and complex workloads without proportional staffing changes (proposals up 65 percent, staffing up only 20 percent), use of increasingly complex electronic systems and communications, travel restrictions, salary and performance award constraints, multi-directorate solicitations, and reduced participation in the Independent Research Development (IR/D) program. In addition, the interrelationship between the delays in receiving appropriations, GPRA dwell time goals, time-consuming compliance checking, and end-of-year close-out pressures add to workload concerns.

What are the factors impacting recruitment, selection, and retention of a high-performing Program Director workforce?

Nineteen percent of NSF's STEM workforce was eligible to retire at the end of FY 2014, with eligibility projected to grow to 32 percent by FY 2018. It is expected that a significant fraction of these people will choose to retire at the time of or prior to NSF's move to Alexandria. In the 2014 FEVS results, the STEM workforce reported having unreasonable workload levels more often than any other NSF job family. The team identified a range of professional, personal, and environmental/logistical factors that affect recruitment and retention in both positive and negative ways. The time it takes to recruit Program Directors, particularly rotators, has increased significantly in recent years, making it particularly important to prioritize actions NSF can take to strengthen our ability to recruit and retain staff.

Final Recommendations:

- Develop mechanisms to better manage individual workload and minimize disparities in workload.
- Implement exit and stay interviews as necessary to identify trends.