May 6, 2022

Re: Following up on Agency Efforts to Diversify Federal Advisory Committees

One year ago, the undersigned scientific and academic organizations wrote a letter in support of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in federal science advice, as laid out in the Biden Administration’s January 27th Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking. The memo kickstarted a government-wide process that involved agency analysis of their own committee policies and practices, including membership. These reports have so far not been made available to the public, with the exception of EPA [1,2].

Since our original letter, we have received formal responses from just a quarter of the agencies we contacted and have met with just two agencies. While these responses were supportive of the effort and alluded to forthcoming agency actions, we have not yet heard about any specific plans to formalize internal policies or practices that would make committees more inclusive. Further, there was a lack of information about efforts to encourage equity on advisory committees in the Equity Action Plans issued by agencies this month [3].

We are writing today to ask agencies for more information on their internal progress to increase diversity, experience, and expertise of scientists serving on these committees. In particular, we are interested in the following:

- Whether agencies have begun collecting internal data on these efforts that would allow for an honest look at their own strengths and shortcomings and would help external researchers and the public to understand whether committees are becoming more inclusive.
- Whether agencies have updated committee charters to include more explicit and inclusive language on qualifications for members. These qualifications should not necessarily be limited to individuals with terminal degrees in a particular field, tenured academics, or individuals solely within STEM fields. Scientific expertise could include individuals with experience living, working, and conducting community science in environmental justice communities, and/or holders of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), for example.
- If and how agencies have changed committee membership selection processes to include a range of backgrounds and experiences within the committee’s definition of
“balance” and explicitly ask for demographic information on committee nomination forms.

- If and how agencies have defined “diversity” as they have worked on making committees more representative of a wider group of individuals.
- If and how agencies have changed incentive structures, such as compensation for committee meeting time, to recruit a broader pool of the best candidates, including qualified early-career scientists, and reduce barriers to participation for open committee positions.
- If and how agencies have included in efforts to solicit committee nominations outreach to:
  - Academic institutions that serve historically underrepresented communities, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Asian American and Native Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions and their consortia (i.e. American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AJHEC), Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities), and institutions that serve higher rates of Pell Grant recipients, rural, first-generation, and other similarly underrepresented communities [4].
  - Administrators and principal investigators of existing agency programs, and their networks, which fund and support the advancement of underrepresented scientists, for example: the National Institute of General Medical Sciences Institutional Training Grants and Research Education Programs, the National Science Foundation’s Centres of Research Excellence in Science and Technology (CREST) and HBCU Research Infrastructure for Science and Engineering (HBCU-RISE), the US Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education Federal TRIO Programs, and other relevant programs [5].

Finally, we hope that your agencies will consider collaborating with some of the signatory organizations, including the National Society of Black Engineers Public Policy SIG, on educational webinars, workshops, trainings, or conference sessions that will provide scientists and experts with the information and tools they need to understand why federal advisory committee service is a valuable professional experience and how they can apply to openings on relevant committees.

We look forward to hearing more from you about the progress that has been made to advance scientific integrity through diversity, equity, and inclusion at your agencies and advisory committees. You may contact Genna Reed at the Union of Concerned Scientists at GReed@ucsusa.org to discuss the contents of this letter or to schedule a meeting with representatives from the signatory organizations.

Sincerely,

Union of Concerned Scientists
500 Women Scientists
American Association of University Professors (AAUP)
American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering (AIMBE)
American Public Health Association (APHA)
Association for Environmental Studies and Sciences
Global Council for Science and the Environment
Human Impact Partners
National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) Public Policy SIG
Society of Women Engineers

Cc:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Director Rochelle Walensky
Census Bureau, Director Robert Santos
Department of Commerce, Secretary Gina Raimondo
Department of Energy, Secretary Jennifer Granholm
Department of Human Health Services, Secretary Xavier Becerra
Department of Interior, Secretary Deb Haaland
Department of Labor, Secretary Marty Walsh
Department of Transportation, Secretary Pete Buttigieg
Environmental Protection Agency, Administrator Michael Regan
Health Resources and Services Administration, Deputy Administrator Diana Espinosa
National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Administrator Bill Nelson
National Institutes of Health, Director Lawrence Tabak
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Director John Howard
National Institute of Standards and Technology,
Director Laurie Locascio
National Marine Fisheries Service, Assistant Administrator Janet Coit
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,
Assistant Administrator Richard Spinrad
Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Chairman Christopher Hanson
National Science Foundation Director, Sethuraman Panchanathan
Occupational Safety and Hazard Administration,
Assistant Secretary Doug Parker
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration,
Assistant Secretary Miriam Delphin-Rittmon
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Secretary Thomas Vilsack
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Director Martha Williams
U.S. Food & Drug Administration, Commissioner Robert Califf
U.S. Geological Survey, Acting Director Dave Applegate