



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Washington, DC 20415

The Director

Tuesday, August 14, 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief Human Capital Officers

FROM: John Berry, Director

Subject: Participation in STEM Activities and Initiatives

President Obama believes every student should have an opportunity to excel in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The President has challenged us to promote creative ways to engage young people in the STEM fields including through science festivals, robotics competitions, job shadowing, and mentoring to encourage young people to create, build, and invent -- to be makers of things, not just consumers of things. See the President's remarks at whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-National-Academy-of-Sciences-Annual-Meeting/.

Specifically, the President has called on the more than 200,000 Federal scientists and engineers to identify and pursue STEM-related volunteer activities in their communities, with an emphasis on broadly inclusive activities that draw from all segments of society, including women and girls.

Through direct involvement in their local communities, Federal employees help build a STEM talent pipeline for future recruitment into Federal service. I encourage and support continuing this proud tradition.

STEM is a functional area included in the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) skills gap closure initiative, one of the Federal Government's Cross Agency Priority Goals identified on www.performance.gov. All Federal agencies are responsible for participating in Governmentwide strategies to close skills gaps. OPM is partnering with the White House, Office of Science Technology and Policy (OSTP), and the Chief Human Capital Officers Council to develop a strategy to address STEM skills gaps in the Federal workforce.

As part of the OPM's continuing efforts to recruit top talent across all workforce populations, we are encouraging Federal agencies to permit employees who work in STEM careers to use existing human resources (HR) workplace flexibilities to participate in STEM related activities. Each agency should review the extent to which alternative work schedules are authorized and used as well as the policies and practices for granting employees annual leave, leave without pay, credit hours under flexible work schedules, and compensatory time off, as appropriate, to perform STEM-related volunteer service. Agencies may also wish to consider granting a limited amount of excused absence, when not prohibited by law, for STEM initiatives. OPM recommends that the exercise of such discretion be limited to those situations where –

- (1) the absence is directly related to the department's or agency's mission;

- (2) the absence is officially sponsored or sanctioned by the head of the department or agency;
- (3) the absence will clearly enhance the professional development or skills of the employee in his or her current position; or
- (4) the absence is brief and is determined to be in the interest of the agency.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of each agency head to balance support for employees' STEM-related volunteer activities with the need to ensure employees' work requirements are fulfilled and agency operations are conducted efficiently and effectively.

Federal agencies already participate in a variety of activities in support of ongoing STEM recruitment and outreach efforts. With the goal of achieving the greatest impact Nationwide and abroad, especially in fields where gaps in the talent pipeline exist, OPM is able to provide assistance to interested Federal agencies in an effort to share best practices and leverage resources. These efforts will be informed by the ongoing work of the National Science and Technology Council's Committee on STEM Education (COSTEM) to identify evidence-based practices relevant to volunteer activity that will advance the STEM priorities outlined in the 2012 progress report issued by this interagency body.

For questions or assistance with how to coordinate such STEM outreach efforts, please contact Carmen Andujar at carmen.andujar@opm.gov or Carly Coleman at carly.coleman@opm.gov. For information on the Educate to Innovate initiative, please see whitehouse.gov/issues/education/educate-innovate and whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/president-obama-expands-educate-innovate-campaign-excellence-science-technology-eng.

For additional guidance, agency Chief Human Capital Officers and Human Resources Directors may contact their assigned OPM Human Capital Officers. Employees should contact their agency human resources offices for assistance.

cc: Human Resources Directors