



U.S. Office of  
Personnel Management



U.S. Department  
of Labor



U.S. Equal Employment  
Opportunity Commission

Wednesday, October 12, 2016

**MEMORANDUM FOR: HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES**

**FROM:** BETH F. COBERT, ACTING DIRECTOR, U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT, CHAIR, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IN GOVERNMENT COUNCIL (DIG)  
CHRIS LU, DEPUTY SECRETARY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, CO-CHAIR, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IN GOVERNMENT COUNCIL (DIG)  
JENNY YANG, CHAIRMAN, U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION, CO-CHAIR, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IN GOVERNMENT COUNCIL (DIG)

**Subject:** Responding to Incidents of Societal Tension and Unrest

This memorandum identifies important actions recommended by the Diversity and Inclusion in Government Council (DIG) that Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies can take to help employees positively cope with stress that can occur as a result of incidents of societal tension that have a racial, or other identity consideration. During a July 2016 Convening on Racial Justice following the incidents of summer 2016 surfacing racial unrest, participants shared important actions taken by members of the Cabinet and Agency Heads to quickly address the needs of employees. Furthermore, DIG decided it was important to provide a short guide for all senior leaders to consider. Please find recommendations below:

**When** is it appropriate to take action?

- As a general rule, use your best judgment on the appropriate time to offer an informal forum for employees in your agency to process social unrest. This may be especially important if large numbers of your team are in an area directly impacted by an incident. Members of our teams do not leave their personal lives at the door, and providing safe spaces in the workplace results in deeper employee engagement.
- If the President has issued remarks about a particular incident or series of incidents, it is likely heavily impacting members of your team. A best practice is to use the President's statements as the context for communicating with your employees. Sharing guidance for your senior leadership team around engaging employees, particularly those in the field, is also advised.

**What** constructive steps you might take include, but are not limited to:

- Upon making the decision to take action, quickly assemble key decision-makers to develop parameters. Make sure everyone is clear about goals for next steps – i.e., Agency head, General Counsel, Assistant Secretary/Director of Communications.
- Consider sending an agency-wide communication acknowledging there are events happening across the country surfacing tensions that may be causing team members pain or stress. Provide resources or places they may go within your agency for consolation or support – i.e., Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or Employee Resource/Affinity Groups.
- Host a town hall meeting or listening session, building in some informal social time or structured icebreakers before "getting down to business" of hearing team member sentiments. Be sure to include a method for employees working remotely or in the field to engage. Do not feel compelled to share your personal opinions. Most people want a space to be heard.
- Sponsor regular cultural activities and dialogue sessions, beyond required special emphasis programs, to educate employees about conditions and forces that help shape a group's identity. The purpose of these activities is to afford spaces that help employees understand the history that forms the basis for why groups of people perceive matters differently.
- Engage all members of your senior leadership team in this enterprise-wide activity. Be sure to use your Diversity & Inclusion and/or EEO officers as a source of relevant expertise.
- Engage with your Employee Resource Groups for ideas about additional actions that may be taken.

The DIG Council is here to help. If you have any questions, or would like to obtain more information you may contact Zina Sutch, Director of OPM's Office of Diversity and Inclusion at [Zina.Sutch@opm.gov](mailto:Zina.Sutch@opm.gov) or on (202) 606-2433.

cc: President's Management Council, Chief Human Capital Officers, Chief Diversity & Inclusion and Equal Employment Opportunity Officers