

NASA Policies, Merit System Principles, and Prohibited Personnel Practices

Conscientious and principled decision making is a must for NASA managers and others who exercise personnel authority. Those who take, direct others to take, recommend, or approve any personnel action should be familiar with NASA policies on Diversity and Inclusion, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Anti-Harassment, and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), and laws governing Merit System Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices.

NASA Policy on Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are integral to mission success at NASA. Commitment to these principles helps to ensure fairness and equity in hiring and decision making. Diversity and inclusion engage and utilize the talents, backgrounds, and capabilities of individuals and teams to create and maintain a work environment where diverse ideas are highly valued. NASA strives to build and maintain an environment in which employees are encouraged to offer their viewpoints and perspectives before critical decisions are made. To do so, NASA must cast the widest net possible on all hiring actions and be an organization where the expression of ideas and opinions is welcomed and encouraged.

The NASA Policy Statement on Diversity and Inclusion is accessible at:

https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/diversity_inclusion_policy_statement_2020_tagged.pdf.

NASA Policy on EEO

Equal opportunity in employment means opportunity not just for some, but for all. NASA provides equal opportunity in Federal employment regardless of race, color, sex (including pregnancy, sexual harassment, sex stereotyping, caregiving responsibilities, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, religion, age, disability (physical or mental), or genetic information (including family medical history). (Note: Although discrimination based on caregiving responsibilities may be a form of sex-based discrimination, it may also be a form of discrimination under other bases, such as disability, race, or national origin.) EEO covers all human capital and employment programs, management practices, and decisions including, but not limited to, recruitment, hiring, merit promotion, transfer, reassignment, training and career development, benefits, and separation. NASA supports employee rights under EEO law, and reprisal against individuals who exercise their rights will not be tolerated. NASA will continue to strive for a workplace that is free from all forms of illegal discrimination, including harassment and retaliation. NASA will also continue to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities, as appropriate.

The NASA Policy Statement on EEO is accessible at:

https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/eoo_policy_statement_2020_tagged_v2.pdf.

To discuss an EEO concern or initiate a complaint, contact an EEO Counselor at your Center. The NASA EEO Complaints process is accessible at:

<https://www.nasa.gov/offices/odeo/complaint-process>.

NASA Policy on Anti-Harassment

NASA remains committed to providing a work environment free from harassment and to addressing harassing conduct as early as possible, before it becomes pervasive or severe. Therefore, it is NASA policy to take immediate and appropriate action when the Agency is made aware of

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allegations of harassment or determines that harassing conduct has occurred. Harassment is defined as any unwelcome verbal or physical conduct, based on an individual's race, color, gender, national origin, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, status as a parent, or gender identity, which can reasonably be considered to adversely affect the work environment or an employment decision based upon the individual's acceptance or rejection of such conduct. NASA strictly prohibits retaliation for raising allegations of harassment or providing information related to such allegations. The Agency further prohibits employees from engaging in harassing conduct for any reasons, regardless of whether the conduct was related to one of the legally protected bases identified above. It is the responsibility of all employees to immediately report possible incidents of harassment. Employees who make a good faith report of harassing conduct or who assist in any inquiry regarding such a report are protected from retaliation.

The [NASA Policy Statement on Anti-Harassment](https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/anti-harassment_policy_statement_2020_tagged_v4.pdf) is accessible at: https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/anti-harassment_policy_statement_2020_tagged_v4.pdf.

The NASA Anti-Harassment Procedures are accessible at: <https://nodis3.gsfc.nasa.gov/>. Click the **3000-3999, Human Resources and Personnel** link, then scroll down and click the **NPR 3713.3** link.

NASA Policy on ADR

It is NASA policy to maintain a productive work environment in which disputes can be settled quickly by voluntary use of ADR. Utilization of ADR, when practicable and appropriate, help to resolve disputes at the earliest stage feasible, by the fastest and least expensive method possible, and at the lowest organizational level. ADR procedures, and an increased understanding of the most effective use of such procedures, are intended to enhance the operation of NASA's ADR Program and better serve the workplace. For additional information, please visit: <https://www.nasa.gov/offices/odeo/policy-and-publications>.

The NASA ADR Procedures are accessible at: <https://nodis3.gsfc.nasa.gov/>. Click the **3000-3999, Human Resources and Personnel** link, then scroll down and click the **NPR 3713.2B** link.

Merit System Principles (5 USC 2301)

The Merit System Principles are basic standards governing the management of the executive branch workforce. The Principles state that supervisors and managers shall:

- Recruit qualified individuals from all segments of society and select and advance employees on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skill after fair and open competition.
- Treat employees and applicants fairly and equitably, without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, handicapping condition, marital status, or political affiliation, and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights.
- Provide equal pay for equal work and appropriate recognition for excellent performance.
- Maintain, and ensure that employees maintain, high standards of integrity, conduct, and concern for the public interest.
- Manage employees efficiently and effectively.
- Retain or separate employees on the basis of their performance; inadequate performance should be corrected, and employees who do not meet required standards should be separated.

- Educate and train employees when it will result in better organizational or individual performance.
- Protect employees from improper political influence and prohibit abuse of authority in partisan matters.
- Protect employees against reprisal for the lawful disclosure of information in “whistleblower” situations (e.g., protecting people who report things like illegal and/or wasteful activities).

More information on Merit System Principles is available at:

<https://www.mspb.gov/msp/meritsystemsprinciples.htm>.

Prohibited Personnel Practices (5 USC 2302)

Prohibited Personnel Practices are those things a Federal employee with personnel authority may not do. Federal employees have personnel authority if they can take, direct others to take, recommend, or approve any personnel action.

Personnel actions include appointments, promotions, discipline, details, transfers, reassignments, reinstatements, performance evaluations, significant changes in duties or working conditions, orders for psychiatric testing or examination, and any decisions concerning pay, benefits, awards, or training.

The Code states that Federal employees shall not:

- Discriminate
- Solicit or consider employment recommendations based on factors other than personal knowledge or records of job related abilities or characteristics
- Coerce the political activity of any person
- Deceive or willfully obstruct any person from competing for employment
- Influence any person to withdraw from job competition
- Give an unauthorized preference or advantage to improve or injure the prospects of any particular person for employment
- Engage in nepotism
- Take or threaten to take a personnel action because of whistleblowing
- Take or threaten to take a personnel action because of the exercise of a lawful appeal, complaint, or grievance right
- Discriminate based on personal conduct which does not adversely affect the performance of the employee or other employees
- Knowingly take or fail to take personnel action in the violation of veteran's preference laws
- Violate any law, rule, or regulation implementing or directly concerning merit system principles
- Implement or enforce a nondisclosure agreement or policy lacking notification of whistleblower rights
- Access the medical record of an employee or applicant, as part of, or in furtherance of any of the above-listed prohibitions

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More information on Prohibited Personnel Practices is available at:
<https://osc.gov/Services/Pages/PPP.aspx>.

For more information, please refer to the attached file titled “Your Rights as a Federal Employee Enforced by the U.S. Office of Special Counsel.” Failure to follow the law or Agency policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including removal from Federal service.

To report a violation of the Prohibited Personnel Practices, you may contact the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) either by visiting its Web site at: <https://osc.gov/>, and filing a complaint by clicking the **File A Complaint** tab at the top of the page, or by clicking the **About OSC** tab at the top, scrolling the resulting drop-down menu to Contact OSC, and contacting the Point of Contact (POC) listed for your specific area of complaint. You may also contact NASA’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) at: <https://oig.nasa.gov>. Click the HOTLINE button at the top of the page to view its address, phone numbers, and e-mail link, or the red Whistleblower Protection Coordinator link at the bottom of the page for more information on illegal retaliation.

If you have questions related to disclosures of wrongdoing, whistleblowing, or retaliation, you may directly contact the NASA Whistleblower Protection Coordinator at 1-281-244-6122 or e-mail: HQ-OIG-Counsel@mail.nasa.gov.

For questions concerning this notice, contact:
NASA Shared Services Center (NSSC) Customer Contact Center
1-877-677-2123 (1-877-NSSC123) or nssc-contactcenter@nasa.gov

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YOUR RIGHTS AS A FEDERAL EMPLOYEE ENFORCED BY THE U.S. OFFICE OF SPECIAL COUNSEL

- I. The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) is an independent agency that investigates and prosecutes allegations of prohibited personnel practices.

WHAT IS A PROHIBITED PERSONNEL PRACTICE (PPP)?

Under 5 U.S.C. §§ 2302(b)(1)-(b)(14) a federal employee authorized to take, direct others to take, recommend or approve any personnel action may not:

- **Discriminate (including discrimination based on marital status and political affiliation).** *EXAMPLE: Supervisor Joe refuses to promote Employee Jane because Jane is a registered Republican; or his refusal is because she is a single mother. (OSC will generally defer Title VII discrimination allegations to the EEO process, rather than duplicating already existing procedures.)*
- **Solicit or consider employment recommendations based on factors other than personal knowledge or records of job-related abilities or characteristics.** *EXAMPLE: Selecting Official Joe hires Applicant Jack based on Senator Smith's recommendation that Jack be hired because Jack is a constituent; or fails to hire Applicant Jane because of Congressman Smith's recommendation based on the Congressman's friendship with Jane's parents.*
- **Coerce the political activity of any person, or take action against any employee as reprisal for refusing to engage in political activity.** *EXAMPLE: Supervisor Jane takes away significant job duties of Employee Jack because Jack will not make a contribution to Jane's favorite candidate.*
- **Deceive or willfully obstruct any person from competing for employment.** *EXAMPLE: Supervisor Joe, located in Headquarters, orders that no vacancy announcements be posted in the field office where Employee Jack works because he does not want Jack to get a new job; or falsely states that there will be extensive travel in the position when he knows that there is no travel.*
- **Engage in nepotism.** *EXAMPLE: Second-level Supervisor Jane asks First-level Supervisor Joe to hire her son; or to promote her daughter.*
- **Take a personnel action against an employee because of whistleblowing.** *EXAMPLE: Supervisor Joe directs the geographic reassignment of Employee Jack because Jack reported safety violations to the agency's Inspector General; or because employee Jill reported a gross waste of funds to the Office of Internal Affairs.*
- **Take a personnel action against any employee because of the exercise of an appeal, complaint, or grievance right.** *EXAMPLE: Supervisor Jane places Employee Jack on an undesirable detail because Employee Jack filed an administrative grievance about his performance rating.*
- **Discriminate against an employee on the basis of conduct, which does not adversely affect the performance of the employee, including discrimination based on sexual orientation.** *EXAMPLE: Jack's employment is terminated because he attended a "Gay Pride" march; or he attended a "Pro-Life" event; or he attended an animal rights rally; or he attended a gun-owners' rights meeting.*
- **Take or fail to take a personnel action, if such action would violate a veterans' preference requirement.** *Example: Supervisor Jane hired Employee Jack, without considering Veteran Jennifer, who was included on the list of eligible employees. (OSC's jurisdiction is for disciplinary actions only; the Dept. of Labor has jurisdiction to investigate for corrective actions.).*
- **Influence any person to withdraw from competition for a position to improve or injure the employment prospects of any other person.** *EXAMPLE: Supervisor Jane, in an effort to hire Employee Joe, tells Employee Jack that he should not apply for a position because he is not qualified and will never be selected. Employee Jack is qualified.*

- **Give an unauthorized preference to a person to improve or injure the employment prospects of any particular employee or applicant.** *EXAMPLE: Supervisor Jane specifies that Spanish-speaking skills are necessary for a vacant position, for the purpose of selecting Employee Jack, who speaks fluent Spanish. The position, however, does not require Spanish-speaking skills.*
- **Take a personnel action against an employee which violates a law, rule, or regulation which implements a merit systems principle.** *EXAMPLE: Supervisor Joe terminates the probationary appointment of Employee Jack because of Jack's letter to the editor criticizing affirmative action - a valid exercise of First amendment rights, a law implementing a merit system principle.*
- **Implement or enforce a nondisclosure agreement or policy lacking notification of whistleblower rights.** *EXAMPLE: A manager requires all employees in his program to sign a non-disclosure agreement that prohibits the employees from discussing the program in any way and fails to notify employees of protected channels for making disclosures.*
- **Access the medical record of an employee or applicant, as part of, or in furtherance of any of the above-listed prohibitions.** *EXAMPLE: An employee expresses interest in an open position to the hiring official, who wants to hire another applicant. The hiring official accesses the employee's medical record and attempts to influence the employee to withdraw from competition by telling her that the stress of the new position will worsen a condition found in her medical record.*

What can you do if you believe a PPP has been committed?

Current and former federal employees, including probationary employees, and applicants for federal employment can file a written complaint with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel. Complaint forms are available on the Web at www.osc.gov. Employees do not need attorneys to file a complaint. OSC is an independent and prosecutorial agency. It will investigate allegations of prohibited personnel practices and seek the appropriate corrective and/or disciplinary action.

II. OSC also receives confidential disclosures and enforces the Hatch Act.

RECEIVING CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURES (5 U.S.C. § 1213):

Current and former federal employees and applicants can confidentially report information evidencing a violation of any law, rule, or regulation, gross mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety. OSC has the authority to require the head of the agency concerned to investigate the matter if OSC determines that a disclosure has been made.

ENFORCING THE HATCH ACT (5 U.S.C. §§ 7321-26):

OSC is authorized to issue advisory opinions that respond to federal employee questions about whether or not they may engage in specific political activities under the Act. OSC also prosecutes violations of the Hatch Act before the Merit Systems Protection Board. These violations include: using official authority to interfere with an election result; soliciting, accepting or receiving political contributions; soliciting or discouraging political activity of persons before the employing agency; and running for public office in a partisan political election.

Need additional information?

- Information on filing a complaint or making a disclosure: 202-804-7000, 800-872-9855, or info@osc.gov.
- Updated and detailed information on OSC and its procedures: www.osc.gov.
- Information about training and certification: 202-804-7163 or certification@osc.gov.