

# CIVIL RIGHTS GUIDELINES

In establishing financial assistance programs, Congress linked the receipt of federal funding to compliance with federal civil rights laws. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) is responsible for ensuring that recipients of financial assistance from the OJP, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), and the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) comply with the applicable federal civil rights laws. We at the OCR are available to help you and your organization meet the civil rights requirements that come with DOJ funding.

## **Ensuring Access to Federally Assisted Programs**

Federal laws that apply to recipients of financial assistance from the DOJ prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, or disability in funded programs or activities, not only in employment but also in the delivery of services or benefits. A federal law also prohibits recipients from discriminating on the basis of age in the delivery of services or benefits.

In March of 2013, President Obama signed the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013. The statute amends the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA) by including a nondiscrimination grant condition that prohibits discrimination based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The new nondiscrimination grant condition applies to certain programs funded after October 1, 2013. The OCR and the OVW have developed answers to some frequently asked questions about this provision to assist recipients of VAWA funds to understand their obligations. The Frequently Asked Questions are available at <https://ojp.gov/about/ocr/vawafaqs.htm>.

## **Enforcing Civil Rights Laws**

All recipients of federal financial assistance, regardless of the particular funding source, the amount of the grant award, or the number of employees in the workforce, are subject to prohibitions against unlawful discrimination. Accordingly, the OCR investigates recipients that are the subject of discrimination complaints from both individuals and groups. In addition, based on regulatory criteria, the OCR selects a number of recipients each year for compliance reviews, audits that require recipients to submit data showing that they are providing services equitably to all segments of their service population and that their employment practices meet equal opportunity standards.

## **Providing Services to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Individuals**

In accordance with DOJ guidance pertaining to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d, recipients of federal financial assistance must take reasonable steps to provide meaningful access to their programs and activities for persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). See U.S. Department of Justice, Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons, 67 Fed. Reg. 41,455 (2002). For more information on the civil rights responsibilities that recipients have in providing language services to LEP individuals, please see the website <https://www.lep.gov>.

## **Ensuring Equal Treatment of Faith-Based Organizations and Safeguarding Constitutional Protections Related to Religion**

The DOJ regulation, Partnerships with Faith-Based and Other Neighborhood Organizations, 28 C.F.R. pt. 38, updated in April 2016, prohibits all recipient organizations, whether they are law enforcement agencies, governmental agencies, educational institutions, houses of worship, or faith-based organizations, from using financial assistance from the DOJ to fund explicitly religious activities. Explicitly religious activities include worship, religious instruction, or proselytization. While funded organizations may engage in non-funded explicitly religious activities (e.g., prayer), they must hold them separately from the activities funded by the DOJ, and recipients cannot compel beneficiaries to participate in them. The regulation also makes clear that organizations participating in programs funded by the DOJ are not permitted to discriminate in the provision of services on the basis of a beneficiary's religion, religious belief, a refusal to hold a religious belief, or a refusal to attend or participate in a religious practice. Funded faith-based organizations must also provide written notice to beneficiaries, advising them that if they should object to the religious character of the funded faith based organization, the funded faith-based organization will take reasonable steps to refer the beneficiary to an alternative service provider. For more information on the regulation, please see the OCR's website at <https://ojp.gov/about/ocr/partnerships.htm>.

SAAAs and faith-based organizations should also note that the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (Safe Streets Act) of 1968, as amended, 34 U.S.C. § 10228(c); the Victims of Crime Act of 1984, as amended, 34 U.S.C. § 20110(e); the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended, 34 U.S.C. § 11182(b); and VAWA, as amended, 34 U.S.C. § 12291(b)(13), contain prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of religion in employment. Despite these nondiscrimination provisions, the DOJ has concluded that it may construe the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) on a case-by-case basis to permit some faith-based organizations to receive DOJ funds while taking into account religion when hiring staff, even if the statute that authorizes the funding program generally forbids recipients from considering religion in employment decisions. Please consult with the OCR if you have any questions about the regulation or the application of RFRA to the statutes that prohibit discrimination in employment.

### **Using Arrest and Conviction Records in Making Employment Decisions**

The OCR issued an advisory document for recipients on the proper use of arrest and conviction records in making hiring decisions. See Advisory for Recipients of Financial Assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice on the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Enforcement Guidance: *Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment Decisions Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* (June 2013), available at [https://ojp.gov/about/ocr/pdfs/UseofConviction\\_Advisory.pdf](https://ojp.gov/about/ocr/pdfs/UseofConviction_Advisory.pdf). Recipients should be mindful that the misuse of arrest or conviction records to screen either applicants for employment or employees for retention or promotion may have a disparate impact based on race or national origin, resulting in unlawful employment discrimination. In light of the Advisory, recipients should consult local counsel in reviewing their employment practices. If warranted, recipients should also incorporate an analysis of the use of arrest and conviction records in their Equal Employment Opportunity Plans (EEOs) (see below).

### **Complying with the Safe Streets Act**

An organization that is a recipient of financial assistance subject to the nondiscrimination provisions of the Safe Streets Act, must meet two obligations: (1) complying with the federal regulation pertaining to the development of an EEO (see 28 C.F.R. pt. 42, subpt. E) and (2)

submitting to the OCR findings of discrimination (see 28 C.F.R. §§ 42.204(c), .205(c)(5)).

### **Meeting the EEO Requirement**

An EEO is a comprehensive document that analyzes a recipient's relevant labor market data, as well as the recipient's employment practices, to identify possible barriers to the participation of women and minorities in all levels of a recipient's workforce. As a recipient of DOJ funding, you may be required to submit an EEO Certification Report or an EEO Utilization Report to the OCR. For more information on whether your organization is subject to the EEO requirements, see <https://ojp.gov/about/ocr/eop.htm>.

Additionally, you may request technical assistance from an EEO specialist at the OCR by telephone at (202) 616-1771 or by e-mail at [EEOPforms@usdoj.gov](mailto:EEOPforms@usdoj.gov).

### **Meeting the Requirement to Submit Findings of Discrimination**

If in the three years prior to the date of the grant award, your organization has received an adverse finding of discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, or sex, after a due-process hearing, from a state or federal court or from a state or federal administrative agency, your organization must send a copy of the finding to the OCR.

### **Ensuring the Compliance of Subrecipients**

SAs must have standard assurances to notify subrecipients of their civil rights obligations, written procedures to address discrimination complaints filed against subrecipients, methods to monitor subrecipients' compliance with civil rights requirements, and a program to train subrecipients on applicable civil rights laws. In addition, SAs must submit to the OCR every three years written Methods of Administration (MOA) that summarize the policies and procedures that they have implemented to ensure the civil rights compliance of subrecipients. For more information on the MOA requirement, see <https://ojp.gov/funding/Explore/StateMethodsAdmin-FY2017update.htm>.

If the OCR can assist you in any way in fulfilling your organization's civil rights responsibilities as a recipient of federal financial assistance, please contact us.