

## Federal employees meet at NIEHS to elevate their careers

By Ian Thomas

Dozens of attendees gathered Nov. 21 at NIEHS for the first-ever Elevate Your Career event, a new program designed to further employees' understanding of the federal job search and promotions processes, while also providing them a casual setting in which to network and explore career ideas with colleagues, mentors, and peers.

"Even those of us who've been in government for years still have questions about career development," said Kim Kirkpatrick, disability program manager in the NIH Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management, who sponsored the program along with the NIEHS Diversity Council and the NIH Office of Human Resources. "The goal of this event was really to create a relaxed environment, so that our attendees could learn more about the options available to them in their current jobs, and also discover new careers, by speaking with those already in them."

Held in honor of [National Hispanic Heritage Month](http://hispanicheritagemonth.gov/)  
(<http://hispanicheritagemonth.gov/>)  
and [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/),  
(<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/ndeam/>)  
the event welcomed participants from several government organizations including NIEHS, NIH, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

### Careers in a flash

The Elevate Your Career schedule was comprised of two major components, the first of which was Flash Networking. Conducted in a similar manner as speed dating, Flash Networking sought to pair attendees with volunteer mentors from a wide range of career paths for a 10-minute sprint of questions about each mentor's background and field. At the conclusion of each session, participants shifted to a different mentor and career path to restart the process.

"Learning how to be positive and surround yourself with quality mentors can really go a long way in furthering your career," said Melissa Gentry, a supervisory contract specialist with the NIEHS Office of Acquisitions and a volunteer mentor for the day. "That's why events like these are great, because they allow you to network with a lot of different people from a lot of different areas, and you never know where those connections could one day lead."

"Right now, I'm working on the bench and, while I like it, I'm not sure that's what I want to do for my entire career," added Deacquinta Diggs, Ph.D., a postdoctoral biologist at EPA with a budding interest in science writing. "I came here looking for some fresh ideas on things I could do differently someday down the line."

After Flash Networking, participants then shifted to Landing Jobs and Promotions, an interactive workshop from the NIH Office of Human Resources designed to give attendees a better understanding of the vacancy announcement, questionnaire, and classification processes, along with tips on resume formatting, cover letter writing, and interview preparation.

The workshop also provided information on a number of government initiatives designed to foster the hiring of persons with disabilities, such as [Schedule A](http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/disability-employment/hiring/)  
(<http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/disability-employment/hiring/>)  
and the [Workforce Recruitment Program](https://wrp.gov/LoginPre.do?method=login).  
(<https://wrp.gov/LoginPre.do?method=login>)

### Learning on the job

"These kinds of interactive activities are of unlimited benefit to the individual and the organization," said NIH Hispanic Employment Program Manager Gerard Roman, who partnered with Kirkpatrick and others to



*Kirkpatrick explains the rules of Flash Networking. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



*Roman fields a question on diversity in the workplace. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



*NIEHS Administrative Officer Charletta Fowler caught the spirit of Flash Networking, as she engaged with others during the exercise. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*

coordinate the event. "We often see each other in the hallways, elevators, and cafeteria, sometimes taking for granted the opportunities that we have to learn from each other. Programs like Elevate Your Career are built to change that and, by doing so, allow us all to reap the rewards of those experiences."

(Ian Thomas is a public affairs specialist with the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison, and a regular contributor to the Environmental Factor.)



*Melissa Gentry, left, and Brad Collins, right, join dozens of their peers for a session of Flash Networking. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



*Tina Jones, left, and Annette Rice, right, discussed the value of contact networking. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*

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