

History of the ILGs

In the early 1980s, in anticipation of new regulations for Executive Order 11246, Ellen Shong (now Shong-Bergman), then Director of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, Department of Labor, encouraged open communications between industry and the OFCCP through "Industry Liaison Groups" (ILGs) in a memo dated January 29, 1982 (see complete memo below).

Representatives from government contractors began forming ILGs in the DOL (Department of Labor) regions around the country and asked for technical assistance from OFCCP regarding compliance issues. The concept initially took hold in Region X (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington), but through encouragement from the OFCCP director's office, ILGs began popping up all around the country.

Both the OFCCP and industry were eager to put aside the confrontational relationship they had formed over time. Both sides wanted to develop more positive partnerships to achieve their mutual affirmative action and equal opportunity goals.

In 1983 in New Orleans, the first annual National Industry Liaison Group (NILG) Conference was held. Each year since, the nation's foremost affirmative action officers from business, industry, and education gather together with OFCCP officials to discuss mutual goals and objectives and to focus on continuing cooperative efforts.

ILGs have formed voluntarily to create a unique partnership of public and private sector cooperation to deal proactively with important social issues and reaching mutual goals. ILGs are models of cooperation which are wide-reaching.

Memo from Ellen M. Shong
U.S. Department of Labor
Employment Standards Administration
Office of Federal Contract
Washington, D.C. 20210
FROM: ELLEN M. SHONG, Director
SUBJECT: OFCCP Liaison Groups

OFCCP has recently become concerned that an atmosphere of distrust and confrontation has grown up between members of the public (including contractors, unions, employees, public interest groups and trade associations) and OFCCP. Some of the barriers take the form of distrust of OFCCP personnel by constituency groups representing employees and an attitude of confrontation on the part of contractors and OFCCP personnel. Accordingly, OFCCP feels that the time has come to foster a spirit of cooperation and trust between OFCCP and the public through increased OFCCP outreach efforts. We expect that by working more closely with the public that greater voluntary compliance and expanded equal employment opportunity can result. To assist in achieving these objectives, I have taken the initiative to suggest the formation of liaison groups with OFCCP.

What are they?

The lack of frank and open communication has deprived both OFCCP, industry and constituency groups of a professional and business relationship essential to more rapid and solid progress in the equal employment area. We expect these liaison groups to provide a forum for communication between OFCCP and the public in each of the ten regions and in Washington, D.C. We believe that

members of the public will gain the opportunity to obtain technical assistance without confrontation and to gain understanding of OFCCP's regulations directly from responsible OFCCP enforcement officials.

Why have them?

We believe that improved and expanded communications between OFCCP and contractor, constituency and other groups will result in greater equal employment opportunity through affirmative action for a greater number of contractors and employees in a spirit of cooperation.

Who should be involved?

OFCCP officials and representatives of contractors, trade associations (or other industry groups), and constituency groups will make up the groups. In addition, our experience has been that liaison groups formed along industry lines have been most successful because of common problems and concerns.

The ground rules are simple. The groups are independent of OFCCP and include only those contractors, constituency and other groups who wish to participate in the effort. OFCCP does not form the groups or control who will participate. Rather, OFCCP serves in an informational and technical assistance capacity only. OFCCP officials will not address themselves to questions pertaining to open compliance reviews but will be available to discuss established policy objectives and technical compliance information.

How will they get started?

Members of the public should take the initiative to form the groups. Trade associations, given their representation of broad numbers of contractors along industry lines, might be particularly well suited to take the initiative in getting the groups organized.

Where will the groups operate?

It is possible that groups will form wherever OFCCP has offices. However, the original objective is to get them started in all ten OFCCP regional office cities plus Washington, D.C.

When will they start?

OFCCP is ready to participate and is participating now.

The success of the "liaison groups" initiative rests on the abilities of the parties to establish and maintain open lines of communication and openmindedness to new and innovative ideas and approaches. The process cannot be laid out in a mechanical fashion but must evolve through mutual commitment, understanding, and cooperation.