



**Sandia
National
Laboratories**

Illuminating the Role of Women at the Department of Energy National Laboratories

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THE PROBLEM

The early contributions of female researchers such as Marie Curie and Lisa Meitner to physics—and ultimately to the Manhattan Project—have been widely recognized and documented. In addition, numerous historical accounts have revealed the significant impacts of other female scientists, engineers, and technologists during the Manhattan Project. Despite the strong role of women in the Manhattan Project, the momentum has not continued into the present day, as reflected by the current demographics of the Department of Energy (DOE) National Laboratories.

Although the overall U.S. workforce is about 50% female, the workforce at the DOE National Labs is only about 30% female. The statistics for technical management and research staff at the DOE National Labs are even more dire; women make up only about 18% of these ranks in contrast to the percentages of women in computer science (25%) and physical science (39%) in the U.S. workforce.

These current statistics are not the desired state for the DOE National Labs and contrast sharply with the long history of accomplishments by women at the Labs. We believe the DOE National Labs should lead the charge on diversity and inclusion (D&I) and serve as a model enterprise for bringing women into our scientific and technical workforce.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Of the fifteen Oppenheimer Science and Energy Leadership Program (OSELN) Cohort 3 members, two-thirds are women, leading our group to experience a significantly different gender balance in our OSELN interactions than typically encountered day-to-day at our home Labs. This unusual female majority in Cohort 3 may have resulted in differences—as compared to other OSELN cohorts—in how our group was perceived during site visits to the DOE National Labs, what issues or observations piqued our interest, and the type of questions we asked the leadership at each Lab. Several examples follow with opportunities that were identified along the way.

During our OSELN site visits, we saw that the history of women who continued their service to the DOE National Labs after World War II, during the Cold War, and into the present has not been well documented, shared, or celebrated. There is a need to fill historical gaps and tell stories of great women at the DOE National Labs. Women like Mary Tsingou, Angela Gonzales, Joanna Fowler, Lianne Russell, Betty Korber, and Susan Seestrom can serve as inspiration, just as *Hidden Figures* brought some of the previously overlooked women of NASA to the attention of the world.

Some stories about women at the DOE National Labs have been documented and posted to Lab or DOE websites (e.g., NationalLabs.org, Women @ Energy, and Los Alamos National Laboratory's 75-year anniversary). However, these stories tend to focus on individuals, rather than describing the collective arc of DOE National Labs women. We believe there is an opportunity to build upon existing products in a thematic way, drawing upon the deep history of women both past and present at the Labs to create a stronger sense of community across the system of DOE National Labs.

During our exchanges with Labs leadership in the areas of workforce and diversity, we discovered that while all of the Labs struggle with attracting and retaining women, some Labs are further down the path of achieving a diverse workforce and inclusive environment. We learned about many individual Lab initiatives to develop networks for those already at the Labs or to encourage young women to pursue science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) careers. However, we yearned for more evidence of targeted recruiting initiatives, communication products, and actions to attract and retain women to careers at the DOE National Labs. We believe there is an opportunity for

more sharply targeted recruiting so that we can attract a new generation of females to join the National Labs, retain the current workforce, and improve the representation of women at the Labs.

Finally, in our personal interactions within Cohort 3, we identified that despite a popular belief that women interested in DOE National Labs careers are seeking work/life balance, our own motivations have been driven largely by the opportunity to work with outstanding people and contribute to important and big challenges—as only the DOE National Labs can offer. We believe that highlighting the opportunity for women to perform impactful work and team with extraordinary people would be a compelling message to relay for attraction and retention purposes, in addition to sharing the message of work/life balance.

Collectively, the women of Cohort 3 have many decades of DOE National Labs service spanning student, postdoc, and full-time employee appointments. As a result, we bring both passion and perspective regarding the role and experience of women at the DOE National Labs. This innate passion was fueled through our collective OSELP encounter and has resulted in a desire to reveal the stories of those women who came before us, broadly share our personal journeys, and inspire current and future generations of women at the Labs. Our ultimate goal is to improve the overall representation and create equitable opportunities for women at the DOE National Labs.

In summary, we believe there are opportunities for the DOE National Labs to illuminate the stories of women at the DOE National Labs, better understand the female workforce, and further the Labs' visible commitment to attracting a diverse workforce and fostering an environment of inclusion. The women of Cohort 3 want to be a part of realizing these opportunities.

OUR RECOMMENDATION/PLANNED ACTION

OSELP Cohort 3 plans to coordinate with OSELP members; the Labs' chief diversity officers, communications officers, human resource (HR) directors, and historians; and the National Museum of Nuclear Science & History to illuminate the role of women at the DOE National Labs.

Leveraging the willingness of these entities to apply their talents, we plan to support and align with an overarching D&I or recruiting effort to showcase the current roles and women of the DOE National Labs through the following methods:

- Providing input to populate the “History of Women at the Energy Department” timeline
- Creating a permanent museum exhibit with a scalable travel option that can be used across the system of DOE National Labs and that can contribute to D&I conversations, celebrations, and education
- Developing a recruiting video to attract women to the DOE National Labs by aligning with a recruiting strategy that echoes the “Bigger Than Me” video
- Participating in regional National Lab Days
- Contributing to new gender partnership programs, additional material for DOE's Women@Energy bios, new-hire onboarding materials, DOE-sponsored podcasts, and audio stories

We also propose a Labs-wide workshop to illuminate the role of women at the DOE National Labs. This workshop, which would include HR and D&I Labs leadership, as well as OSELP alumni, would showcase and recognize the accomplishments of women, be a forum for HR and D&I officers to vet strategy and receive feedback, and serve to address findings from the Summit on Diversity & Inclusion for Technical Leaders in the DOE Laboratories (COACH initiative).