

**FACT SHEET: LEAN IN CIRCLES**  
**September 21, 2015**

The Department of Defense is committed to recruiting and retaining the very best of the Nation's talent and values the strengths inherent in its diverse workforce. To better leverage those strengths, the Department should offer support structures to encourage diverse leadership. To that end, the DoD is partnering with LeanIn.Org to launch Lean In Circles throughout the department and all military branches as of September 21, 2015. LeanIn.Org is the nonprofit organization founded by Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg to empower all women to achieve their ambitions.

Lean In Circles are small peer groups who meet regularly to learn and grow together. Female service members who participate in Lean In Circles feel more connected to the women and men in their units and are more comfortable talking openly about gender issues in the military. Lean In Circles will enable both female and male service members and DoD civilians to come together to share experiences and advice on overcoming challenges in the military and the Department, and create a safe and confidential place to discuss gender issues. Thirty years of social science research has shown that people learn and accomplish more in groups, making Lean In Circles a fit for our military model of teamwork.

Lean In Circles are allowed to meet monthly, for a reasonable duration before, after or during work hours, and to make reasonable use of DoD spaces such as conference rooms, meeting areas, and break rooms. I encourage service members and civilian employees to participate in these peer mentoring relationships and believe that doing so will improve the retention of women and support them in their career development and growth.

To start or join a Circle, service members and civilians can visit [leanin.org/military](http://leanin.org/military).

**How DoD can benefit from Lean In Circles**

***Lean In Circles can – and Have Been - Happening All Over the Services***

Circles can take place anywhere, like in the mess decks, a library, a conference room, or the corner of an airplane hangar. Circles can also happen in an online community, offering personnel the ability to remain connected with their support groups during and after changes to duty station locations.

Many DoD circles, in every military component, have already organically grown in grass-roots forms and should serve as models across the military services. These support groups cut across traditional gender, age, location and rank structures. Many of those groups can be seen online at [leanin.org/military](http://leanin.org/military).

**Lean in Circles are for all our Personnel**

***Everyone is part of our military culture***

Lean In Circles and other peer mentorship small groups are a great way for men and women to gain insights and help change the military culture. Participation in a Circle is free and training and resources are available online at [leanin.org/military](http://leanin.org/military) and other similar organization websites. These support groups welcome all services, ages, ranks, men, women, civilians and service members. Circles can be single or mixed gender.

### **How This Resource can be Implemented in DoD**

#### ***Dedicated systems are already in place***

Secretary Carter has seen first-hand the benefits of peer-to-peer mentorship throughout the services. Lean in Circles have created invaluable networks to share information across services and locations. Takeaways from the groups can be articulated with a direct line to DoD Personnel & Readiness (P&R) leaders who have the ability to implement positive workforce changes.

It is free to host and join a Lean In Circle or other peer mentorship group. Materials are available as suggestions for how to structure conversations in regular Circle meetings.

With this support from Secretary Carter, Lean In Circles and other peer mentorship groups should be allowed to meet monthly, for a reasonable duration before, after or during work hours, to address issues, policies, practices, and other concerns that may inhibit career progression in the Department. Reasonable time spent participating in Lean In Circles is considered part of normal working hours.

### **This is Part of Something Larger**

#### ***Lean In Circles and other peer mentorship groups are a proven for fostering a sense of organizational community and peer mentorship which is consistent with the goals to of DoD***

Peer mentoring programs, like Lean In, are a powerful way for women to discuss how they can achieve their ambitions. This is a great way for men to gain insights and support DoD making better use of the talents of their female colleagues help change the military culture, which is vital to our future strength as an organization.

Currently, the Department does not have perfect visibility into potential barriers that may restrict some populations of the workforce, nor does it offer a formal support structure to encourage diverse leadership.

#### ***This is one step of many in comprehensive personnel reform.***

This is a first step in a range of personnel reforms DoD will see. We want to make sure DoD remains the best in the future, and that we're a competitive employer for our fair share of American talent. We have to support our service members and civilian professionals to do that.

We cannot change military career structures overnight. But DoD can support service members to have conversations to discuss the workforce. This is one of a number of mechanisms that will be

implemented to help DoD become more inclusive as DoD opens up more positions for women within the ranks.

Everyone is looking for a better way to balance work and outside life. It's not just women. It's not just parents. Lean In Circles and other peer mentorship opportunities are one way DoD sets forth our people as a priority. Secretary Carter has offered his guarantee we will work together as an organization to be a better workforce.

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