

Diversity in action

CNA Corp has diverse work for diverse pros

The company researches and analyzes complex, meaningful issues for its clients. It's rated one of the best places to work in the DC area

"The main point I keep in mind is that diversity goes beyond race and gender," says Alice Brown, diversity coordinator at The CNA Corp (CNAC). CNAC, formerly called the Center for Naval Analyses, is a federally funded, not-for-profit R&D corporation that helps the Navy and Marine Corps and several other government clients work more efficiently.

"Our clients look to us to provide scientific, operational and policy analyses in national security, transportation, healthcare, education and human resources. That's a kind of diversity, too," Brown says with a smile.

So, when new hires come in, the company wants to be sure its atmosphere is welcoming. "We have people here with a variety of skill sets and education levels. We can all learn from sharing our different experiences. By having a more diverse staff we can get a broader perspective of issues," Brown explains.

Diversity training, currently being done workshop-style, "helps to heighten our awareness of diversity and how it is tied to our business base."

Most of CNAC's work is for the Navy. For example, analysts might be asked to study a submarine going through deep water and determine ways to make it quieter, faster or more efficient.



Bringing complex subjects down to earth: Alice Brown, diversity coordinator, left, crunches numbers with employment manager Carolyn Williams.

Employment manager Carolyn Williams says she looks for research analyst candidates with masters and PhD degrees in physics and biological sciences, math, engineering and even economics – plus the ability to bring their complex subjects down to earth.

"One of the key parts of the job is expert briefings, often with high-level military personnel. Our analysts need to be comfortable talking about high-level physics or any other type of research in a way that clients who may not be experts can understand. So we look for people who can

translate between the two worlds," Williams says.

CNAC field analysts work in four major categories: systems performance, tactical development and evaluation, assessment of fleet effectiveness, and development and evaluation of concepts of operations.



www.cna.org

Headquarters: Washington, DC

Employees: 635

Business: Research and analysis for DOD and other government clients

After an initial three- to five-year stint in the DC offices, analysts are sent out to conduct field research for as long as two years. "We relocate them with their families to a place where they can gain the experience they need in our field program," Williams explains. "It's one of the things that sets us apart from other companies." About two-thirds of CNAC's 635 employees are research staff members, and about fifty of them are in the field at any one time.

After completing field assignments, analysts take their hands-on experience back to DC and continue working on research projects. "We don't pigeonhole them," says Williams. "It's easy for analysts to move between our various divisions."

The company is looking for more ways to promote work/life balance for its staffers. "We do offer flexible work arrangements, including a compressed workweek, telecommuting options and flexible hours," says Brown. "Classified matters have to be locked up in the office, of course, but there's a lot of unclassified work that can be done from home."

CNAC also manages flexible spending accounts that employees can use for any kind of dependent care.

The company hopes to hire about thirty technical people in the next few months. They won't all be analysts with graduate degrees, of course. On the IT side, Williams has spots for data modeling experts, systems analysts, senior desktop and database admins.

For its college and grad-school recruiting, CNAC visits schools that include historically black colleges and universities and other minority-serving colleges. In fact, the company is glad to talk to graduates of any school. "We're doing a lot of campus recruiting now to increase the diversity of the company," says Williams.

CNAC was recently cited by Washingtonian magazine as one of the fifty best companies to work for in the DC area. "Our goal is to make sure our employees know how much we value their contributions to the corporation," says Brown.



Jazz Martin, front, and other technical staffers at work at the Center for Naval Analysis in Washington, DC.