

**FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2002**

REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

Working for America

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes in detail. The flag is the background for the bottom half of the cover.

**UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Kay Coles James, Director
June 2003**

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

I am pleased to present the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) report to Congress on the agencies' use of the Federal student loan repayment program in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002. Agencies have significantly increased their use of the student loan repayment program in FY 2002. Sixteen Federal agencies provided more than \$3.1 million in student loan repayments on behalf of 690 Federal employees. In addition, several agencies reported that use of the program has helped them achieve their recruitment and retention goals.

The first Governmentwide initiative in the President's Management Agenda is the "Strategic Management of Human Capital." OPM is proud of its leadership role in assisting Federal agencies to recruit, retain, and develop the employees they need to meet their specific missions. OPM has led the way to encourage agencies to implement effective human capital strategies to build successful, high-performing organizations.

This report was prepared in response to the statutory requirement that OPM prepare, and annually submit to Congress, information on the agencies' use of the student loan repayment program. Section 5379 of title 5, United States Code, authorizes agencies to establish a program under which they may repay certain types of Federally insured student loans as a recruitment or retention incentive for highly qualified candidates or current employees.

Notably, more than half of the 57 reporting agencies either made payments during FY 2002, have an agency loan repayment program in place, or are in the process of establishing a student loan repayment plan. We are encouraged by the agencies' increased use of the student loan repayment program in FY 2002. We will continue to work closely with agencies to assist them in taking full advantage of this program, as well as other existing recruitment and retention incentives, to attract and retain well-qualified, high-performing employees.

The report can be found on the OPM Web site at www.opm.gov/oca.

Kay Coles James
Director

I. Executive Summary

Under 5 U.S.C. 5379, agencies may authorize a student loan repayment of up to \$6,000 for an employee in any calendar year, up to a lifetime limit of \$40,000. The law requires agencies to report annually to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on their use of the student loan repayment program for the previous fiscal year. In FY 2002, 16 Federal agencies provided more than \$3.1 million in student loan repayments for 690 Federal employees. In addition, eight other agencies reported that they have established an agency loan repayment plan and expect to make use of the program in the near future. Five additional agencies reported that they are in the process of establishing a program. In total, more than half (29) of the reporting agencies (57) reported that they either made student loan repayments in FY 2002, have an agency loan repayment plan in place, or are in the process of establishing a student loan repayment plan.

Several agencies reported that use of the program has helped them achieve their recruitment and retention goals. Agencies also are making a concerted effort to make applicants and current employees aware of the availability of student loan repayments. The most common barrier to using the student loan repayment program reported by the agencies was a lack of funding caused by limited budgets. The agencies also recommended several changes in the student loan repayment program, such as eliminating the tax liability and reducing the statutory 3-year service requirement in exchange for a student loan repayment, as well as increasing the annual payment limitation and the lifetime maximum payment limitation on student loan repayments. These proposed changes would require legislation and are under review.

Overall, the agencies commented that they found the guidance provided on OPM's Web site to be very helpful. The agencies noted that they found the sample agency plans provided on OPM's Web site to be particularly helpful when creating and implementing their agency programs. The agencies urged OPM to keep its Web site updated and to add information on agencies' experiences in administering their student loan repayment programs and any new trends.

We are encouraged by the agencies' increased use of the student loan repayment program in FY 2002. We are committed to promoting the value of the student loan repayment program, as well as other existing recruitment and retention incentives, as effective tools for attracting and retaining well-qualified, high-performing employees. Finally, we will continue to work with agencies to assist them in establishing a budget plan to target the use of student loan repayments, as well as other recruitment and retention flexibilities, to meet their human capital management needs.

II. Background

Section 5379 of title 5, United States Code, authorizes agencies to establish a program under which they may repay certain types of Federally insured student loans as a recruitment or retention incentive for highly qualified candidates or current employees. Under the Federal student loan repayment program, agencies may authorize a loan repayment of up to \$6,000 for an employee in any calendar year, up to a lifetime limit of \$40,000. An employee for whom a student loan repayment benefit is paid must sign a service agreement to remain in the service of

the paying agency for a period of at least 3 years. The employee must reimburse the paying agency for all benefits paid if he or she separates voluntarily or is separated involuntarily for cause or poor performance before fulfilling the service agreement.

Section 5379(h) requires agencies to report annually to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on their use of the student loan repayment program. The law also directs OPM to prepare, and annually submit to Congress, a report containing the following information with respect to agencies that have provided student loan repayment benefits:

- (1) the number of Federal employees for whom benefits were paid;
- (2) the job classifications for the recipients; and
- (3) the cost to the Federal Government of providing the benefits.

On March 29, 2002, OPM submitted a report to Congress on the agencies' use of the student loan repayment program in FY 2001. We reported that only one agency authorized a student loan repayment in FY 2001 and that three additional agencies authorized payments in early FY 2002. Although we were disappointed with the results, we anticipated a significant increase in the use of the student loan repayment authority in FY 2002, as agencies had more time to implement their loan repayment plans and as interest in the program increased.

III. Agency Reports

OPM's regulations at 5 CFR 537.110(b) require agencies to submit a written report to OPM before January 1 of each year on their use of the student loan repayment program for the previous fiscal year. On November 14, 2002, OPM issued a memorandum for human resources directors requesting their report on the use of the student loan repayment program in FY 2002. We received responses from 57 agencies. (See Attachment 1 for a list of the reporting agencies.) In FY 2002, 16 Federal agencies provided more than \$3.1 million in student loan repayments for 690 Federal employees. (See Attachment 2 for a summary of the agencies' reports.) In addition, eight other agencies reported that they have established an agency loan repayment plan and expect to make use of the program in the near future. Five additional agencies reported that they are in the process of establishing a program. In total, more than half (29) of the reporting agencies (57) reported that they either made student loan repayments in FY 2002 (16), have an agency loan repayment plan in place (8), or are in the process of establishing a student loan repayment plan (5).

The Department of State made the majority of loan repayments in FY 2002, providing \$2 million in benefits for 407 employees. The benefits were spread across many different job classifications, with the largest number of repayments being provided for employees serving in political affairs (57), economics (46), public diplomacy (41), and consular (38) positions.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) also made extensive use of the program during FY 2002, providing 169 employees with \$602,662 in repayment benefits. At GAO the program was focused on fewer positions, with the majority of repayments (143) being provided on behalf of analysts.

In addition, several other agencies have incorporated student loan repayments into their collection of recruitment and retention incentives. Beneficiaries of student loan repayments in FY 2002 also included 35 employees at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 17 at the Department of Energy, 13 at the Department of the Interior, 9 at the Department of the Treasury, 8 at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 8 at the Department of Health and Human Services, 7 at the General Services Administration, 6 at the Department of Defense, 3 at the Export-Import Bank, 3 at the Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, 2 at the Department of Agriculture, and 1 employee each at the Department of Justice, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, and the Inter-American Foundation.

Two of the eight agencies reporting that they had established a loan repayment plan in FY 2002 have already made use of the program. The Department of Labor reported that it had provided student loan repayments for 10 employees after the end of FY 2002 and that these repayments will be reflected in the report for FY 2003. Also, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved student loan repayments for seven employees shortly after the beginning of FY 2003, which also will be included in next year's report.

We are encouraged that 13 additional agencies have established or are in the process of establishing their student loan repayment plans. As a result, we anticipate another increase in FY 2003 in the agencies' use of the student loan repayment authority.

IV. Agency Comments

In our November 14, 2002, memorandum to human resources directors, we asked agencies to provide information on their experiences in administering the student loan repayment program and to make recommendations for improving the program. We received comments from all 16 agencies that made student loan repayments FY 2002, as well as 10 additional agencies, 6 of which have established student loan repayment plans.

The great majority of the responding agencies who have implemented a student loan repayment program stated that the focus of their loan repayment program is aimed at accomplishing both recruitment and retention goals. An example of how agencies are using the program was reported by the Department of State, which used the program differently for its Foreign Service employees than for its civil service employees. The State Department noted that because Foreign Service employees are required to bid for ongoing assignments approximately 1 year in advance of the date of departure from their current assignments, the agency structured the program as an internal recruitment tool to attract the employees to bid on positions that have traditionally been difficult to fill. In contrast, because civil service employees are expected to remain in their positions for longer periods of time, the Department structured the program primarily as a retention tool for those employees.

Several agencies reported that they believe the student loan repayment incentive helped them achieve their recruitment or retention goals. One agency commented that it has established metrics for determining the effectiveness of the program for a group of the agency's employees. On the other hand, one agency reported that it has chosen not to use the student loan repayment incentive because the agency attracts mid-career applicants who are no longer faced with the

repayment of student loans. Another agency reported that it chose to use other available human resources flexibilities that better fit its goals as it works to build and maintain a high quality workforce.

The reporting agencies used many different methods to publicize the student loan repayment program, depending on the agency's purpose in using the incentive. For example, some agencies that are interested in using the program as a recruitment tool publicize the program in vacancy announcements, recruitment materials, job fairs, and college outreach sessions. In agencies where the program is focused more on retaining highly qualified employees, the agencies tend to publicize the program internally in notices to staff through internal e-mail announcements, employee bulletins, agency newsletters, agency discussions, and intranet postings. Agencies also noted that many employees came to them with questions about the incentive after hearing reports in the media regarding the program.

The most common barrier to using the student loan repayment incentive effectively noted by the agencies was a lack of funding for the program. One agency commented that because agencies have such limited budgets, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find the money to fund the program. OPM will continue to work with agencies to assist them in establishing a budget plan to target the use of student loan repayments, as well as other recruitment and retention flexibilities, to meet their human capital management needs. A few agencies commented that a perception of inequity among employees is a barrier to using the program effectively. Some managers are reluctant to use the program because it forces them to single out an employee.

The agencies also recommended several changes in the Federal student loan repayment program, such as eliminating the tax liability and reducing the statutory 3-year service requirement in exchange for a student loan repayment and increasing the annual payment limitation and the lifetime maximum payment limitation on student loan repayments. These proposed changes would require legislation and are under review.

V. OPM Assistance to Agencies

To assist agencies in making better use of the student loan repayment authority, we have made numerous reference materials available on OPM's Web site. We posted a fact sheet on the student loan repayment program, questions and answers on administering student loan repayments, questions and answers on the tax implications relating to student loan repayments, and two sample loan repayment plans to help agencies develop their own programs. These documents are available on OPM's Web site at www.opm.gov/oca/PAY/StudentLoan/index.asp. In addition, we have responded to numerous telephone calls and e-mail messages from agencies requesting assistance as they develop their student loan repayment plans.

In our November 14, 2002, memorandum, we asked agencies whether they found the information provided on OPM's Web site to be useful. Overall, the agencies indicated that they found the guidance on OPM's Web site to be very helpful. The agencies found certain information contained on our Web site, such as the sample agency plans, to be especially helpful when creating and implementing their internal programs. They urged us to keep the Web site updated and to add information on agencies' experiences in administering student loan

repayments and any new trends. We also received some recommendations for changes in our Web guidance, which we will take into consideration when making future edits.

At OPM's 2002 Strategic Compensation Conference, we provided agencies with an opportunity to learn from other agencies that have successfully implemented their student loan repayment programs. In two well-attended sessions, entitled "The 4th R: Student Loan Repayments and Other Pay Flexibilities," OPM human resources specialists and representatives from the Departments of Energy and Health and Human Services provided information about their experiences in developing their student loan repayment plans and administering the program.

VI. Conclusion

One of the biggest challenges of Federal agencies is to attract and retain well-qualified, high-performing employees. The student loan repayment authority is a valuable tool that enables agencies to entice potential candidates into Federal service and keep talented employees in the Federal workforce. Using this authority, agencies can tailor loan repayment programs to meet their specific needs.

We are pleased that agencies are using the student loan repayment program successfully to build and maintain a highly qualified workforce. However, many agencies believe a lack of funding caused by limited budgets constitutes a major barrier to effectively using the student loan repayment program. In addition, several agencies recommended changes in the Federal student loan repayment program, such as eliminating the tax liability and reducing the statutory 3-year service requirement that is attached to a student loan repayment and increasing the annual payment limitation and the lifetime maximum payment limitation on student loan repayments. These proposed changes would require legislation and are under review.

OPM will continue to work closely with agencies to encourage them to take full advantage of the student loan repayment program, as well as other existing recruitment and retention incentives, to attract and retain well-qualified, high-performing employees. We will continue to advise agencies to establish a budget plan for using these strategic recruitment and retention incentives, including student loan repayments. We are committed to providing agencies with the most up-to-date and useful information on using the student loan repayment program and other recruitment and retention incentives. Based on the significant increase in the use of the student loan repayment program in FY 2002 and reports that additional agencies have established or will be establishing agency loan repayment plans, we anticipate another increase in the use of this incentive in FY 2003.

LIST OF REPORTING AGENCIES

DEPARTMENTS:

Agriculture	Interior
Commerce	Justice
Defense	Labor
Education	State
Energy	Transportation
Health and Human Services	Treasury
Housing and Urban Development	Veterans Affairs

AGENCIES:

Agency for International Development	Merit Systems Protection Board
Armed Forces Retirement Home	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Commission on Civil Rights	National Credit Union Administration
Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled	National Endowment for the Arts
Commodity Futures Trading Commission	National Endowment for the Humanities and the Institute for Museum and Library Sciences
Consumer Product Safety Commission	National Labor Relations Board
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board	National Mediation Board
Defense Security Service	National Science Foundation
Environmental Protection Agency	National Security Agency
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission	Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Export-Import Bank	Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission
Farm Credit Administration	Office of Government Ethics
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation
Federal Emergency Management Agency	Office of Personnel Management
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission	Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation
Federal Labor Relations Authority	Postal Rate Commission
Federal Maritime Commission	Railroad Retirement Board
Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service	Securities and Exchange Commission
General Accounting Office	Selective Service System
General Services Administration	Small Business Administration
Holocaust Memorial Museum	Social Security Administration
Inter-American Foundation	

AGENCY REPORTS – FISCAL YEAR 2002

Agency	No. Of Employees	Job Classifications	Cost
Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled	3	GS-343, Management and Program Analysis GS-1035, Public Affairs GS-1712, Training Instruction	\$18,000
Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board	1	DN-1, General Engineer	\$6,000
Department of Agriculture	2	GS-401, Nutrition Studies Coordinator GS-404, Biological Science Laboratory Technician	\$8,524
Department of Defense	6	GS-399, Administrative Trainee GS-510, Accountant GS-560, Budget Analyst (3) GS-1102, Contract Specialist	\$11,839
Department of Energy	17	GS-301, Policy Analyst GS-801, General Engineer (4) GS-850, Electrical Engineer GS-1102, Contract Specialist (2) GS-1130, Public Utility Specialist (2) GS-1130, Financial Analyst (3) GS-1301, Physical Scientist (1) GS-2003, Supply System Analyst GS-2210, IT Specialist (2)	\$50,592
Department of Health and Human Services	8	Presidential Management Intern AD-110 GS-110, Economist GS-301, Miscellaneous Administration and Program Series GS-303, Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series GS-326, Office Automation Clerical and Assistance Series GS-343, Management and Program Analysis	\$35,000

Department of Justice	1	GS-343, Program Analyst	\$4,000
Department of State	407	GS-080, Security Administration (2) GS-101, Area Studies Specialist GS-110, Economist GS-130, Foreign Affairs Officer (24) GS-132, Intelligence Specialist (7) GS-170, Historian (4) GS-201, Human Resources Specialist (4) GS-301, General Management (24) GS-303, Administrative Support (2) GS-318, Secretary (3) GS-334, Computer Specialist (2) GS-343, Management Analyst (3) GS-391, Telecommunications Specialist GS-510, Accounting (3) GS-511, Auditor (3) GS-560, Budget Analyst (3) GS-804, Fire Protection Engineer GS-808, Architect GS-905, Attorney (13) GS-967, Passport/Visa Examiner (24) GS-1035, Public Affairs GS-1101, Defense Controls Analyst (2) GS-1102, Contract or Procurement Specialist (3) GS-1370, Cartographer GS-1801, Compliance Specialist GS-2010, Administrative Management (31) GS-2015, Ex. Assistant to Dep. U/S GS-2101, Financial Management (3) GS-2210, Computer Specialist (3) GS-2301, General Services (4) GS-2501, Security (18) GS-2550, Security Engineering (4) GS-2560, Security Engineering – Technical GS-2880, Information Management (14) GS-3001, Consular Officer (38) GS-4400, Public Diplomacy Officer (41) GS-5005, Economic Officer (3) GS-5015, Economics (46) GS-5505, Political Affairs (57) GS-9017, Office Management (9)	\$2,000,000
Department of the Interior	13	GS-201, Human Resources Specialist (ER/LR) GS-301, Administrative Specialist GS-391, Telecommunications Specialist GS-510, Accountant GS-810, Civil Engineer	\$74,625

Department of the Interior (continued)		GS-880, Mining Engineer GS-1071, Audio Visual Production Specialist GS-1170, Realty Officer (2) GS-1301, Physical Scientist GS-1350, Geologist GS-1801, AVA Investigations Specialist GS-2210, Computer Specialist	
Department of the Treasury	9	GS-343, Program Analyst GS-501, Financial Program Specialist (6) GS-905, Attorney Advisor (2)	\$14,829
Export-Import Bank	3	GS-303, Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series GS-505, Financial Management GS-1165, Loan Specialist	\$18,000
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission	35	GS-023, Outdoor Recreation Planner (3) GS-110, Economist GS-193, Archeology GS-201, Personnel Management GS-482, Fishery Biologist (4) GS-511, Auditor (2) GS-560, Budget Analysis GS-810, Civil Engineering (4) GS-905, Attorney Advisor (15) GS-1101, General Business and Industry (2) GS-2210, Information Technology	\$226,435
General Accounting Office	169	GS-101, Social Science (2) GS-110, Economist (9) GS-334, Information Technology GS-347, Analyst (143) GS-511, Auditor (8) GS-905, Attorney (2) GS-1550, Computer Science (4)	\$602,662
General Services Administration	7	GS-201, Human Resources Management GS-301, Miscellaneous Administration and Program Series GS-560, Budget Analysis GS-1101, General Business and Industry Series GS-2210, Information Technology Management	\$39,484
Inter-American Foundation	1	GS-101, Social Science Analyst	\$6,000
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	8	GS-301, International Program Specialist GS-301, Presidential Management Intern (3) GS-1102, Contract Specialist (4)	\$48,000
16 Agencies	690		\$3,163,990



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