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naturejobs

Out in the cold

If the representation of women in science is bad, then that for ethnic minorities in research can only be called abysmal. Women, long outnumbered by men in physics and engineering, have at least been making some inroads in the life sciences. And although the 'glass ceiling' that keeps many from top positions still exists, some cracks are beginning to form. In the United States, progress for African-Americans and Hispanics is much less clear-cut, despite some programmes meant to address the problem.

Figures from the US National Science Foundation bear this out. African-Americans, Hispanics and other ethnic groups make up 24% of the US population, but they hold only 7% of scientific jobs. The numbers are even more skewed at the PhD level. In 1999, 381,600 white PhD scientists held jobs in the United States compared with 11,600 African-Americans and 12,900 Hispanics.

This summer, a grant from the National Institutes of Health was renewed to address this imbalance. The programme provides \$6.1 million to the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology to support a variety of student, postdoctoral and faculty

development initiatives, including mentoring projects and travel grants.

Although this grant is better than nothing, it seems a pittance compared with the size of the problem. Fortunately, some grass-roots organizations have sprung up to fill the gap. One of these is the African-American Male Achievers Network at the University of California, Los Angeles. This programme sends scientists to primary-school and high-school classrooms, then brings minority students into university laboratories (see *Nature* **434**, 418; 2005).

Other universities might want to consider instituting similar programmes, and send scientists of various ethnicities and nationalities into schools. Such outreach should be a part of every scientist's job description.



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