

Q&A: Special Observance Program

Since the late 90's, the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) has created a wide variety of special observance-related materials to help reinforce and support local unit commanders as they generate awareness within their own organizations.

In this Q&A, DEOMI shares insights into the Special Observance Program and outlines the behind-the-scenes work that goes into developing, creating, approving, and publishing special observance material.

Q: Why is it important to recognize special observances?

A: Many concerns and issues begin with a basic misunderstanding between members when a member from one culture, group, or sex may act or behave differently than the expectations from those from another culture, group, or sex. Holding observances allows members from different groups to learn about each other. This allows for greater understanding and opens communication among different members.

Q: When did DEOMI start producing special observance materials?

A: DEOMI began developing observance information in the early 90's. By the late 90's, DEOMI recognized that units were having to purchase and develop their own awareness materials to support their local programs. Thus, DEOMI began to develop and make new items available to assist field users. This concept has continued to expand and we now offer a wide-variety of products that units can use to strengthen and support their own internally developed awareness items.

Q: Is DEOMI a DoD appointed organization to produce special observance materials?

A: Yes, DEOMI is designated in DODI 1350.02 as a clearinghouse for development, support, and release for special observance products and other items.

Q: Who or what organization(s) dictates which special observances DEOMI can or will recognize?

A: The Diversity Management Operations Center (DMOC), as part of the Defense Human Resources Activity (DHRA) under the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness (USD P&R), provides DEOMI an approved list of observances to support. DEOMI then develops a product line to support the designated observances.

Q: What is the process for producing special observance material?

A: The process begins when DMOC provides DEOMI with a list of observances and designated affinity groups, which provide the observance themes. These themes are announced yearly on the affinity group websites and can be found by any users if they check the public websites. Once a theme is released by the affinity group, usually 5 to 6-months prior to the event, a select group of

developers reviews the theme and any quantifying items explaining its meaning. Sometimes a theme is released late, which could impact the development time for all subsequent steps.

Next, DEOMI developers begin brainstorming ideas that would support the theme from an aligned DoD perspective. After developing draft concepts, DEOMI developers research content components and individuals which could embody the theme or be used as topical material. Once a draft content is deemed viable and appropriate, it is turned over to DEOMI graphic designers, who begin developing artwork that supports the overall design, intent, and theme. Finished drafts are then staffed through the Multimedia & Technology Development (MTD) department head for internal review prior to being packaged for external review and approval.

Q: Why do materials produced by DEOMI require external review and approval?

A: The USD P&R approves all special observance material developed by DEOMI to ensure organizations throughout the DoD have a unified plan for each special observance.

Q: What goes into the external review and approval process?

A: Once the MTD department head approves the drafted special observance material, an external approval packet is created. This packet includes staffing documents and a detailed description of the material, which describes the material's visual components for a visually impaired individual. The packet is subsequently sent to the director of DEOMI's Research and Development (R&D) directorate; as well as, the Public Affairs Office (PAO), who develop and add a press release to the packet. Then, the packet is submitted to the DEOMI commandant for approval.

After the DEOMI commandant approves the material, it is submitted to the DHRA Office of General Counsel (DHRA OGC) for legal review. Upon DHRA OGC review the approval packet is then submitted to DMOC. Once there, it is submitted to the P&R OGC and DoD PAO for legal review. After completion of those reviews, the approval packet is then staffed to the DMOC Director, DHRA Director, and finally the USD P&R for approval. Once the packet is approved by USD P&R, DEOMI posts the material and all other supporting products to the DEOMI website, www.DefenseCulture.mil.

Q: When are the approved special observance materials published to the DEOMI website?

A: Only after USD P&R approval are items published to the DEOMI website for public use.

Q: Who can use these products?

A: All products on the DEOMI website are in the public domain and are free for use and can be downloaded by anyone. The only thing DEOMI requests is that items used are attributed to DEOMI and that they are not used in any manner that would reflect negatively on the DoD; degrade the name, reputation, or public goodwill of the DoD components; or be contrary to DoD community relations objectives. Furthermore, use by non-federal entities may not create the appearance of DoD endorsement, affiliation, or sponsorship. With the right software, many of items listed on the DEOMI website can be tailored by field units who can add their own

unit/service-specific seals, emblems, and information.

Q: What is the process for requesting products that are not shown on DEOMI's Cultural Observances and Awareness Events listing?

A: Recommendations for adding new observances can be submitted to the Diversity Management Operations Center (DMOC) at victoria.l.bowens.civ@mail.mil. New product ideas and concepts can be submitted via the DEOMI at Public Affairs Office deomipa@us.af.mil.

From the conception of this program to present day, DEOMI continues to develop special observance materials that assist and support local field commanders in executing their own awareness programs. However, local field commanders have the option to develop their own products and/or themes to meet their own unit needs and desires; they do not have to wait for a DEOMI item to be released for the year. Local field commanders also have the option to use previously published special observance materials that can be accessed by clicking on an archive link located at the bottom of each special observance tab.