



Best Places to Work **GUIDE**

Chapter 1: Understanding Your Data and Communication

BESTPLACESTOWORK.ORG



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE



tmp.government

The *Best Places to Work* guide is the first-ever collection of tools, tips and guidelines to help agencies better understand their *Best Places to Work* data and use it to improve the workplace environment in a way that also improves organizational effectiveness.

The guide will be released online at bestplacestowork.org as a series of chapters:

Chapter One: Understanding Your Data and Communication (June 2009)—Gain an in-depth understanding of what your data mean to better focus and set priorities during action planning. Enhance two-way communication across all levels of your organization to engage key stakeholders in improving employee satisfaction.

Chapter Two: Action Planning (July 2009)—Use your data to develop a viable plan of action and maintain stakeholder engagement to ensure long-term support and resources for the effort.

Chapter Three: Sustaining Results (August 2009)—Incorporate the commitment to improve the workplace environment into the agency's culture and broader mission and sustain progress over time. Document lessons learned and start planning for future action.

BEST PLACES TO WORK GUIDE

UNDERSTANDING YOUR DATA AND COMMUNICATION

The 2009 *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* rankings have shown that any agency can improve its employee satisfaction—in fact, 71 percent of federal organizations increased their scores since 2007. Even top-ranked agencies can improve—both the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Government Accountability Office improved their scores, even though they already held the number one and number two spots, respectively.

At the other end of the spectrum, the three lowest-ranked agencies in 2007—the Departments of Education and Homeland Security and the Small Business Administration—are among the top four most improved large agencies. SBA improved its index score by 30 percent and jumped four spots in the rankings to become this year’s top riser.

After hearing these success stories and viewing the 2009 *Best Places to Work* rankings for your own agency or subcomponent, you may be inspired and motivated to enhance the workplace environment for your employees. However, you may still have some questions about how to understand and use the *Best Places to Work* data and how to better address employee satisfaction and commitment in your organization.

This first chapter of the *Best Places to Work* guide will walk you through three initial steps to improve the workplace environment for your employees:

1. Gather your *Best Places to Work* data and understand how each dataset can advance your objectives;
2. Develop a strategic approach to improve employee satisfaction; and
3. Identify and communicate with key stakeholders to garner buy-in for improvement efforts across your agency or subcomponent.

Use the **Data Checklist** and **Stakeholder Engagement Plan** tools in the **Action Toolkit** at the end of this chapter to keep track of your data and to plan your stakeholder outreach strategy. For more information on specific topics, you can refer to the additional resources listed in the **Annotated Bibliography**.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR DATA AND COMMUNICATION STEPS AND KEY ACTIVITIES

STEP 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR DATA	→	STEP 2: DEVELOP A STRATEGIC APPROACH	→	STEP 3: ENGAGE KEY STAKEHOLDERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The <i>Best Places to Work</i> Web Site• Workplace Analysis Report• Hay Group Excel Tool		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take the Long View• Identify Focus Areas• Form <i>Best Places to Work</i> Action Teams		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify Key Stakeholders• Develop Your Message• Begin Stakeholder Outreach

STEP 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR DATA

The *Best Places to Work* data is useful in a variety of ways. First, it allows you to see changes in employee satisfaction overall, along demographic lines and across workplace dimensions. Second, it shows you where there may be gaps in satisfaction at your agency or subcomponent—perhaps some demographic groups report lower satisfaction than others, or a particular workplace dimension has greater impact at your agency. Third, the data enable you to compare your agency or subcomponent to similar organizations as a point of reference for improvement.

The full set of *Best Places to Work* data can be accessed from three sources: 1) the *Best Places to Work* Web site, 2) your organization’s Workplace Analysis Report, and 3) the Hay Group Excel Tool. Each dataset offers a different level of insight about employee satisfaction at your agency or subcomponent.

The data will help you identify the specific challenges that your agency or subcomponent faces and set a course of action to dive deeper into—and address—these challenges. Learn more about the data sources below, and use the **Data Checklist** in the **Action Toolkit** located at the end of this chapter to gather your data together and organize it based on your objectives.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has also published detailed information about the Federal Human Capital Survey and recommendations on how agencies can use their results. Find this information at <http://www.fhcs.opm.gov/2008/Definitions>.

THE BEST PLACES TO WORK WEB SITE

Access:

Visit bestplacestowork.org

What you’ll find:

- Rankings data for all participating agencies and sub-components:
 - Overall index scores
 - Most improved agencies and subcomponents
 - Scores in ten workplace dimensions, including four leadership subcomponents (empowerment, fairness, leaders and supervisors)
 - Index scores by demographic group
 - Ability to compare up to three specific agencies or subcomponents
- Analysis:
 - The big picture
 - Profiles of excellence

- Top trends
- Demographic perspectives
- Private sector comparison
- High-performing average, average, low-performing average index

WORKPLACE ANALYSIS REPORT

Access:

Ask your Office of Human Capital/Human Resources for *agency code and password*; visit the “For Agencies” section of bestplacestowork.org to log in and access this report.

What you’ll find:

- Detailed comparison of your organization’s employee satisfaction and workplace environment ratings with the parent agency (if applicable) and the government as a whole, in each workplace dimension:
 - An important tool to help you decide to what extent—and where—your organization needs to improve.
- Trend comparison of your organization’s employee satisfaction and workplace environment ratings:
 - Consider focusing on drivers for which scores are low or have declined.
- Breakdown of employee satisfaction by key demographic groups:
 - Compare employee satisfaction along demographic lines to the rest of your agency (if applicable) and government-wide; identify any gaps within your agency or subcomponent.
- Priority matrix:
 - See which drivers require the most attention and set your organization’s priorities for action.

HAY GROUP EXCEL TOOL

Access:

Ask your Office of Human Capital/Human Resources for *agency code and password*; visit the “For Agencies” section of bestplacestowork.org to log in and access this tool.

What you’ll find:

- Customizable question-level data outputs:
 - Understand your agency’s specific challenges behind each workplace dimension and decide whether more data is needed.
- Action Planning Worksheet:
 - Organize your action plan by key issue, based on the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) questions.

STEP 2: DEVELOP A STRATEGIC APPROACH

As you become more familiar with the *Best Places to Work* data for your agency or subcomponent, you will be able to determine what type of action is needed. Some agencies and subcomponents may choose to implement gradual changes; others may decide to create action planning teams to target specific issues immediately. Some agencies will blend the two strategies.

Take the Long View

Even the highest-ranked agencies and subcomponents find room for improvement and strive to go from “good” to “great.” As noted earlier, 71 percent of federal organizations improved their scores since the 2007 rankings. Agencies and subcomponents that are doing well in the rankings may want to highlight and institutionalize their best practices to continue to maximize employee satisfaction. Some of the top-ranked agencies integrate continuous improvement into their cultures and missions.

Identify Focus Areas

Use the *Best Places to Work* data to identify high-level focus areas. Senior leaders or action initiative leaders can complete this step prior to forming action teams, so that the action teams know where to focus their efforts.

Review rank and overall index scores

Figure out to what extent your agency or subcomponent can improve by checking your rank and overall index scores. A lower-ranked agency or subcomponent should further examine its data to better understand the specific challenges that it faces, but even highly ranked agencies still have room to improve. Score declines since 2007 may warrant special attention.

Scan your Workplace Analysis Report

This report shows you how your organization compares to the rest of government and the rest of your agency

(i.e., for a subcomponent). The score comparisons also reveal any gaps in your organization between workplace dimensions or demographic groups. Finally, the Priority Matrix identifies the top priority drivers in your agency or subcomponent, which are the areas that require the most attention.

Become familiar with the Hay Group Excel Tool

This dynamic tool will be especially useful during the action planning process. Familiarize yourself with how it sorts the question-level data and how the questions interface with the Action Plan Worksheet.

Form *Best Places to Work* Action Teams

As we’ve mentioned, many agencies and subcomponents have successfully improved employee satisfaction by creating *Best Places to Work* action teams that focused on specific human capital challenges. These teams are generally responsible for identifying key issues, researching the problems, developing recommendations and assisting with implementation. This is an effective strategy for change, and if it’s one you can feasibly deploy, here’s how to get started:

Find an executive champion

Any effort requires executive-level support to be fully successful. If it hasn’t been done already, identify and engage an executive champion for the project to generate support, resources and buy-in from other stakeholders across the organization.

Build a team of volunteers

Agencies that have done *Best Places to Work* action projects in the past have experienced greater success with all-volunteer teams. It is important to select individuals who are personally invested in improving the workplace environment and open to the additional responsibility to serve on action teams. Action teams should be comprised of individuals with the right talent with a variety

SPOTLIGHT ON

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

The Office of Personnel Management improved its score by more than 14 percent since 2007, making it one of the most improved large agencies in the 2009 rankings. A key to OPM’s improvement was the adoption of specific action plans to address the issues that the 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey and the 2007 *Best Places to Work* rankings surfaced. In addition to an enterprise-wide strategic action plan, each unit developed its own plan that reinforced the OPM-wide plan. The plans were not just put on the shelf. Each month, the units produced progress updates on how the plans were moving forward.

of backgrounds across functions, levels and demographic groups, who are motivated to make change.

Specify milestones and measurable goals

Set a broad timeline for the action team(s) and identify short-term, mid-term and long-term goals. Start thinking about your expectations for potential outcomes and develop an evaluation plan that your agency can use to measure success.

STEP 3: ENGAGE KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Change can't happen in a vacuum. Any successful improvements at your agency or subcomponent will require a shared vision of the future that starts with senior leadership and extends across levels. Improvement will require a significant effort to orient your organization toward change. Engage stakeholders at every level to start turning this vision of a better place to work into reality.

Communicate the need for change to key stakeholders, garner buy-in before you take action, and you will reap the benefits. As you engage senior leaders and managers, you will be able to generate more top-level support, enthusiasm and cooperation to sustain the improvement effort over time. Staff members, who are also credible sources of information for job seekers, will be encouraged to see that leaders and managers care about the well-being of their employees. Unions and Congressional staff/committees can also be powerful allies for change at your agency or subcomponent. Opening these lines of communication now will also help you start to better understand the issues at hand and facilitate research and learning for solutions later on.

Use the tips below and the **Stakeholder Engagement Plan** template in the **Action Toolkit** at the end of this chapter to identify key stakeholders, develop your key points and begin outreach.

Identify Key Stakeholders

After you define high-level target areas by analyzing your data, you can begin to identify the key stakeholders both inside and outside your organization to garner buy-in for improvement, to prepare for additional data-gathering and to take some first steps to improve employee satisfaction.

Here are a number of key stakeholder groups to consider:

- **Senior leaders:** The data shows that leadership is the main driver of employee satisfaction government-wide and senior leadership is the biggest driver of overall leadership. Be sure to engage senior leaders early in the action planning process. Senior leaders who endorse the effort can help engage others across all levels in your organization to support the project. Senior leaders can also integrate the commitment to human capital issues into the agency's strategy, culture and long-term mission.

- **Supervisors and managers:** Buy-in at the supervisor and manager level is essential to coordinate support and resources from multiple departments and facilitate cooperation across your agency or subcomponent. If your organization has a low score for the supervisor subcategory in the leadership dimension, keeping managers informed and involved during the improvement process may also help improve employee satisfaction in this dimension.
- **Staff:** If senior leadership clearly communicates its intentions to improve the workplace environment, employees will respond positively because they will feel that leaders and managers are receptive to their concerns and well-being. Engaging staff members in the action planning process may also lead to better results, since they will share ownership of the effort. A team of volunteers may be more receptive to the responsibilities associated with an action planning project than a task force comprised of appointed members.
- **The general public:** Employees may feel less satisfied in their jobs if their agency receives negative public attention or bad press. Consider partnering with your Office of Public Affairs to highlight the positives in the rankings and spotlight the good things that are happening at your agency. Also think about making your existing methods of public communication (e.g., the agency Web site) more user-friendly to make it easier for people to learn about your organization. These efforts may have the additional benefit of helping your agency recruit top talent.
- **Unions:** Unions represent the voice of the employee and have a vested interest in human capital issues. They can be valuable allies for improvement and may be able to offer important information about ways to improve employee satisfaction. Be sure to go through the proper channels to share your plans with relevant unions, as they can become great advocates for your efforts once they get involved. Look into reaching out to professional associations and public interest groups as well.
- **Congressional staff/committees:** Congress is paying closer attention to agency performance. Work with your congressional affairs office to brief members of Congress on your plans to improve employee satisfaction as part of your efforts to improve your agency performance.

One way to start identifying stakeholders is to use the Action Planning Worksheet found in the Hay Group Excel Tool. You can select which dimensions and questions you want to focus on, and then start identifying the related stakeholders within your agency or subcomponent.

Develop Your Message

As you garner buy-in from stakeholders, here are some important points to keep in mind as your agency or subcomponent prepares to take action. Some messages should be communicated to everyone, while others are more suitable for certain stakeholder groups over others. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Explain why it is important to improve the workplace environment

Use information from the *Best Places to Work* Web site and brochure to help senior leaders and managers understand that improving employee satisfaction can help the agency achieve its mission more effectively and attract top talent. Emphasize that improvements will require cooperation across the organization. Show how human capital issues directly relate to the goals of your senior leadership. Ask for input and feedback on ways to improve employee satisfaction at your agency or subcomponent.

Stress the importance of institutionalizing human capital issues into the agency culture and mission

Improving employee satisfaction is a long-term commitment to your agency's future. One way to sustain improvements over time is to integrate a focus on human capital issues into the agency's culture and mission.

SPOTLIGHT ON

The Federal Maritime Commission (FMC)

The Federal Maritime Commission's efforts to improve communication helped it become the most improved small agency in the 2009 rankings. An important step to improve communication was opening meetings of the full Commission and encouraging employees to attend. Now, FMC staff members have a much better understanding of the basis for management decisions. The Commission also sought to better educate staff regarding issues faced by the industry by inviting representatives from the maritime industry to speak directly with staff.

Emphasize the need for senior leaders to communicate a clear vision and message to the rest of the agency or subcomponent

Effective leadership is the main driver of employee satisfaction across government, and senior leaders set the tone for improvement efforts moving forward. Ensuring that leaders and managers are all on the same page will facilitate cooperation across the agency during the improvement process. Job-seekers also view current employees as credible sources of information, so employees who are encouraged by their leaders' dedication to human capital issues may be able to act as ambassadors for their agency and pass that information on to others.

Announce your agency or subcomponent's commitment to improving the workplace environment

This step is valuable even before the actual planning process begins. Simply announcing that your agency or subcomponent intends to focus on human capital issues can make employees feel that leaders and managers care about them. Publicly announcing your agency's plans to address human capital issues shows current employees, job seekers and the general public that your organization is committed to the welfare of its workers.

Highlight the positives in the rankings and acknowledge areas for development

Praising the parts of your agency that are doing well can improve employee satisfaction by helping employees feel more positively about where they work and reinforce best practices. Acknowledging areas for development sets expectations and recognizes the challenges to improvement. Educating the public about your agency's work can help improve public opinion of your organization and positive news stories can encourage current employees to take greater pride in their agency.

Begin Stakeholder Outreach

Your stakeholder outreach method may depend on your intended audience. Here are some ideas to get you started, based on the past experiences of different agencies:

- **Individual in-person meetings:** Meeting with people individually may foster a more candid exchange and help you better understand and anticipate potential concerns down the road.
- **Symposiums and town hall meetings:** If senior leaders and managers also participate in organization-wide town hall meetings to convey information, employees will see your agency's commitment to human capital issues and better understand management decisions. They may also appreciate the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers in real-time.
- **Electronic communication:** E-mail newsletters, downloadable videos or agency-wide blogs can help you share information with large groups of people, as well as disseminate agency-wide policies and procedures.
- **Public announcements:** These messages can better educate job-seekers and the general public about what your agency is doing. Employees may also be encouraged by positive news stories and their leaders' commitment to improving the workplace environment.

ACTION TOOLKIT

Data Checklist

Gain context on the <i>Best Places to Work in the Federal Government</i> rankings.			
SOURCE	SECTION	HOW TO USE IT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Web site	About Best Places and why the rankings matter	Read about the origin of this study and understand why improving employee satisfaction is important to helping your organization better achieve its mission.	
	Methodology	Learn how the data were collected and analyzed and see which questions were used to calculate the satisfaction index and Best in Class scores.	
	The Big Picture	Read about the top-level findings including government-wide trends, most improved, notable newcomers, and leadership as the key driver across government and public sector comparison to the private sector.	
	Top Trends	See high-level trends from the 2009 rankings.	
	Demographic Perspectives	Read about government-wide trends among gender, age and racial/national origin groups; look more closely at individual agencies and read about two “model agencies.”	
	Private Sector Comparison	See how the federal government compares to the private sector on 13 key questions and see where the gaps are.	

See how employee satisfaction at your agency or subcomponent has changed over time, and how it compares overall.			
SOURCE	SECTION	HOW TO USE IT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Web site	Overall index scores	On the “Rankings” page, you can see how your agency’s or subcomponent’s score has improved or declined since the 2007 rankings. You can also see how your agency or subcomponent ranks relative to others.	
	Agency or Subcomponent report	Click on your agency’s or subcomponent’s name to view its dedicated report. Under the “Scores and Rankings” heading, click on the “Previous Years” tab to see how your organization’s Best in Class, Demographic and Index scores have changed over time.	
	Government-wide High Performing Average, Average and Low Performing Average Index and Best in Class scores	Click on your agency or subcomponent’s link and scroll to down the page to see how your organization measures up to the rest of government. Use this knowledge to set a target benchmark for improvement.	
Workplace Analysis Report	Detailed comparison of your organization’s employee satisfaction and workplace environment ratings with the parent agency (if applicable) and the government as a whole	An important tool to help you decide to what extent—and where—your organization needs to improve.	

See how your agency or subcomponent compares to similar organizations.			
SOURCE	SECTION	HOW TO USE IT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Web site	Compare up to three specific agencies	See how your agency or subcomponent index, workplace dimension and demographic scores measure up to similar organizations, or any agency or subcomponent of your choice.	

Identify the employee satisfaction “gaps” at your agency or subcomponent.			
SOURCE	SECTION	HOW TO USE IT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Web site	Index scores by demographic group	See if demographic groups at your agency or subcomponent report different levels of satisfaction, identify any gaps and see how your organization measures up to others.	
Workplace Analysis Report	Breakdown of employee satisfaction and engagement by key demographic categories	Compare employee satisfaction along demographic lines to the rest of your agency (if applicable) and government-wide; identify any gaps within your agency or subcomponent.	

Figure out where your agency or subcomponent needs to focus its attention and prioritize resources.			
SOURCE	SECTION	HOW TO USE IT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Workplace Analysis Report	Trend comparison of your organization’s employee satisfaction and workplace environment ratings	Consider focusing on drivers for which scores are low or have declined.	
	Priority matrix	Understand which workplace dimensions require your attention and set your organization’s priorities for action.	

Better understand the root causes of low employee satisfaction at your agency or subcomponent.			
SOURCE	SECTION	HOW TO USE IT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hay Group Excel Tool	Customizable question-level data outputs	Understand your agency’s specific challenges behind the categories and decide whether more data is needed.	
	Action Planning Worksheet	Organize your action plan by key issue, based on FHCS questions.	

Identify the highest-ranked agencies and subcomponents and read success stories.			
SOURCE	SECTION	HOW TO USE IT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Web site	Best in Class scores for each workplace dimension	See which agencies and subcomponents have the highest satisfaction in each workplace dimension, and take note of the top-ranked agencies in workplace dimensions that are most important to your agency or subcomponent according to the Priority Matrix in your Workplace Analysis Report.	
	Profiles of Excellence	Learn more about the experiences of top-ranked agencies and subcomponents.	
	Most improved agencies and subcomponents	See to what extent other agencies and subcomponents have improved since the last rankings and consider benchmarking the practices of the most improved organizations.	

ACTION TOOLKIT

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

	Identify Key Stakeholders List names of individuals or stakeholder groups to contact.	Develop Your Message Fill in the important messages and key points that you want to communicate to each stakeholder group.	Begin Stakeholder Outreach Brainstorm methods to communicate with each individual or stakeholder group.
<p>Senior Leaders</p> <p>Which key decision-makers need to support this effort?</p>			
<p>Managers</p> <p>Which groups and individuals will be involved to develop solutions to improve satisfaction?</p>			
<p>Staff</p> <p>Which staff groups require tailored messaging?</p> <p>Who can I partner with to develop a message for staff groups?</p>			
<p>General Public</p> <p>Who can I partner with to communicate with the general public?</p>			
<p>Unions, Professional Associations and Public Interest Groups</p> <p>Who can I partner with to communicate with employee groups?</p>			
<p>Congressional Committees</p> <p>Which Congressional committees work with my agency or subcomponent?</p>			

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

U.S. Office of Personnel Management. “Federal Human Capital Survey 2008—Using Results.” (2008)

<http://www.fhcs.opm.gov/2008/Definitions/>

A list of general guidelines from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management on how to use the Federal Human Capital Survey results to improve your agency’s human capital management. Specific suggestions include tracking your agency’s results over time to determine whether progress is being made overall and on specific survey items and using the survey results as one source of information for tracking your agency’s progress under the Human Capital Standards for Success.

Gallup Management Journal.

<http://gmj.gallup.com/>

An online journal from one of the world’s leading experts on employee satisfaction and engagement. Find articles about management, organizational performance and individual performance. You can also subscribe to the Gallup Management Journal newsletter, a free monthly newsletter that alerts you to the latest Gallup research and provides access to select articles.

Esty, Katharine and Mindy Gewirtz. “Creating a Culture of Employee Engagement.” *NEHRA—The Voice of HR.* (2008)

<http://www.boston.com/jobs/nehra/062308.shtml>

An article written by two organizational management specialists that discusses how employee engagement grows out of an organizational culture of engagement. Employee engagement in this article is defined as employees feeling fully involved and enthusiastic about their jobs and their organizations and having the willingness and ability to contribute their discretionary effort into their work to help the organization to achieve success. The authors also suggest three tools that they have found to be very effective in the private sector.

Havard, Mark and Ellis Pines. *Talentbrew: Tap into NXT GEN Thinking.* (Blog entries)

<http://tmpgovernment.com/blogs.aspx>

Blog entries written by Mark Havard, Senior Vice President of Business Development at TMP Government and Ellis Pines, Vice President of Branding at TMP Government. Learn about human resources challenges from around the world and technology trends from two experts on federal recruiting and communications.

ABOUT THE BEST PLACES TO WORK IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT GUIDE DEVELOPERS

About the Partnership for Public Service

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that works to revitalize the federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works.

The Partnership:

- Raises awareness and helps improve public attitudes about government service.
- Promotes government service through outreach to college campuses and jobseekers.
- Provides hands-on assistance to federal agencies to improve their operations.
- Advocates for needed legislative and regulatory reforms to strengthen the civil service.
- Generates thought-provoking research on, and effective responses to, the workforce challenges facing the federal government.

ourpublicservice.org

About TMP Government

TMP Government is a wholly owned subsidiary of TMP Worldwide Advertising & Communications, the world’s largest independent recruitment advertising agency. Within its McLean, Virginia headquarters, they develop and implement digital and traditional recruitment and outreach communications programs for government and those organizations working with government.

tmpgovernment.com