



Best Places to Work **GUIDE**

Chapter 3: Sustaining and Building on Results

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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 and Building on 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

SUSTAINING AND BUILDING ON RESULTS

Congratulations! So far, you have likely accomplished a great deal toward your mission to improve employee satisfaction in a way that also improves organizational effectiveness at your agency. You have analyzed your data, developed a strategic approach and engaged key stakeholders to garner buy-in for action. You have also developed an action plan (or plans), created a set of informed recommendations and implemented some, if not all of those solutions.

Sustaining higher levels of employee satisfaction at your agency takes time. It requires a long-term commitment, especially from leadership. It takes continuous effort to maintain positive changes, not just a one-time push—think of it as ongoing “diet and exercise” for your agency as opposed to a one-week fast. Don’t be discouraged if it takes longer than expected to see desired results; external events and setbacks can happen, but it’s up to you to be persistent in your efforts.

Long-term results often require cultural shifts to support changes in the workplace. Employees at all levels in your agency may need some time to adjust to change, and some may even resist. But staying steady is really getting left back. Government-wide employee satisfaction ratings have continued to rise since 2003, so agencies must change and improve to keep up with the average. As you help employees understand how new agency values translate into action and that higher levels of employee satisfaction relate to better agency outcomes, your agency can institutionalize changes and help turn “new” into “normal” to sustain improvements over time.

Chapter Three: Sustaining and Building on Results will help you incorporate your changes into the agency’s culture and mission to enhance efforts to improve the workplace environment for your employees over the long term. This third chapter will help you:

1. Document improvements and lessons learned;
2. Institutionalize changes from “new” to “normal”; and
3. Plan next steps.

SUSTAINING AND BUILDING ON RESULTS STEPS AND KEY ACTIVITIES

STEP 1: DOCUMENT IMPROVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED	→	STEP 2: INSTITUTIONALIZE CHANGES FROM “NEW” TO “NORMAL”	→	STEP 3: PLAN NEXT STEPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gather Information• Evaluate Outcomes• Continue to Engage with Stakeholders		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share Your Success with Others• Leverage Improvements for Retention and Recruitment• Establish an Ongoing Improvement Initiative that Spans Across Levels		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue Best Practices• Maintain Alignment with Senior Leadership Goals and Agency Mission• Continue to Evaluate the Environment and Adjust Plans Accordingly• Plan for Future Improvement

STEP 1: DOCUMENT IMPROVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Some solutions that came out of your action planning may have worked well while others may have been less effective than previously hoped. It is important to measure, record and analyze the impact of your action plan recommendations to assess which solutions can become best practices and which should be reconsidered.

Gather Information

Collect data based on the metrics you established during the action planning phase. Engage stakeholder groups as sources of information (e.g., leaders, managers, staff, unions, etc.) via additional surveys, meetings, focus groups, interviews or other feedback vehicles. As during the research phase of action planning, focus groups should be conducted by a neutral third party and separately from managers and leaders to ensure candid responses. You can also use this opportunity to gauge employee reactions to changes in the workplace across levels: are people welcoming the changes, or reacting defensively? This information can help you think about ways to help your employees adjust to future changes.

Evaluate Outcomes

Return to the “effort vs. impact” framework that you used to prioritize and select which solutions to implement. Which actions had the biggest effect on employee satisfaction, while at the same time requiring a reasonable amount of effort and resources? Which solutions required too much effort for too little benefit? Track the solutions that worked well, those that didn’t, and why. Also note which successful changes require continued support and/or resources. Remember: big and small wins both count and deserve recognition to encourage continued success. Document any improvements in organizational outcomes related to employee satisfaction initiatives.

Continue to Engage with Stakeholders

Share the results of your evaluation with key stakeholder groups to reinforce buy-in for future action. You can schedule meetings or disseminate a summary memo to communicate your findings. Work with your executive sponsor to ensure continued resources for solutions that require ongoing support. Check the alignment of these efforts with senior leadership goals and the agency’s mis-

sion. At the end of the day, sustained improvement will require support from the top. Reinforce the point that higher levels of employee satisfaction have been linked to better agency outcomes and document outcome improvements if possible.

STEP 2: INSTITUTIONALIZE CHANGES FROM “NEW” TO “NORMAL”

It may be easy to be satisfied with immediate results after your action plan has been implemented. For employee satisfaction to continue to rise, however, your agency must institutionalize this “culture of improvement.” In other words, employees across all levels at your agency must assimilate new values and practices into their daily work life until “new” becomes “normal.” There are things you can do to maintain an organizational focus on workforce issues and encourage continued improvement over time. It may be difficult for this process to gain permanence, especially in organizations where leaders and budgets can change from year to year. External events can also influence employee satisfaction. However, if a commitment to improvement can become instilled in your agency’s culture, your efforts may endure for future generations of employees.

Share Your Success with Others

Recognize and reward success within your agency. Improvement isn’t just about addressing weaknesses; it’s also about building on strengths. If your agency’s efforts are going well, you should communicate those achievements both inside and outside your organization. Highlight the highest or most improved scores to reinforce continued positive change.

Agency-wide.

Encourage continued positive change and actions by communicating results and spotlighting what is going well in your agency. Recognize individuals who have made extraordinary efforts to improve the workplace environment, perhaps by means of an honorary award or other incentive. Rewards can inspire others across your agency to make their own improvements.

Job Seekers.

Make it known among job seekers that your agency cares about the well-being of its employees. Your agency can mention its efforts to improve the workplace environment in its recruiting messaging and materials, which

signals to potential employees that satisfaction is an agency priority.

Across Government.

Have you ever wanted to know what other agencies are doing to improve employee satisfaction? Chances are they're curious about what you're doing as well. Sharing your experiences with other agencies—and learning from theirs—can help you broaden your knowledge of best practices and inspire new ideas, all while contributing to better federal management.

Leverage Improvements for Retention and Recruitment

Improving the workplace environment can benefit your agency's retention and recruitment efforts. Not only do these efforts send the message that your agency's leadership cares about the well-being of its employees, but job seekers will also view such actions in a positive light. Overall, you want your current employees to share your vision for an improved workplace environment as they tell potential employees about what it's like to work at your agency. You can also use *TMP Government's Top Retention Strategies* in the **Annotated Bibliography** as an additional resource.

Make the connection between employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.

Communicate to employees across levels that research, such as the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board report, "The Power of Federal Employee Engagement," has linked higher levels of employee satisfaction and engagement to better agency outcomes. Remind key players in your organization that satisfied employees can help your agency better achieve its mission.

Communicate efforts and improvements to current and potential employees.

Communicate regularly with current employees about ongoing efforts to improve employee satisfaction, as current employees are also credible information sources for potential hires. Consider including this information in your recruiting message, as well, to differentiate your agency as a competitive employer. You can engage your current employees in the recruitment process by inviting them to join the search for more top talent "just like you."

Understand what current and potential employees want in an employer.

One way to gather information about what current employees seek is to conduct interim interviews. For example, you may have discovered that employees tend to

depart at or around 13 months of employment. You can engage employees before this critical point in a "pulse check" survey or by other means to get an idea of what they may be thinking. You can also use an exit interview to gather this information. Employees who are moving on to other opportunities will likely offer more candid feedback regarding their experiences at your agency, and this information can help you identify potential areas of improvement moving forward.

Establish an Ongoing Improvement Initiative that Spans Across Levels

Establish a standardized process for periodic or ongoing improvement with a timeline that includes points of accountability. Work with your executive sponsor to arrange ongoing budget support for this initiative. Assign accountability, responsibility and action planning across all levels to energize, engage and empower employees. You may even consider establishing a permanent, standing committee that is responsible for periodically reviewing employee satisfaction and initiating improvements as necessary.

TIP

All Hands on Deck!

Key Roles for Continuous Improvement

Senior Leadership: Senior leaders in certain positions can act as permanent executive sponsors for Best Places to Work action planning teams. Their involvement is essential for continued resources and support.

Supervisors: Establish a process with supervisors to monitor the status of their offices. Periodic pulse checks on their employees' satisfaction levels can inform ongoing improvements.

Employees: Employees should continue to be part of action planning teams. Team participation can be a competitive process among volunteers, offered as a professional development opportunity or employees can also be empowered to pursue their own areas of concern or interest. People who are personally invested in improving the workplace environment may be even more committed to the cause.

Employees across levels who are involved in this improvement should plan to meet on a regular basis (e.g., quarterly, monthly) to maintain a current picture of employee satisfaction and to prepare for the next action planning cycle.

STEP 3: PLAN NEXT STEPS

It takes continuous effort to maintain positive changes. Think about improvement as an ongoing cycle of assessing the workplace environment and employee satisfaction, and then creating, implementing and evaluating solutions, and repeating the process.

Continue Best Practices

Be persistent. Continue applying solutions that have positively affected employee satisfaction and commitment. Maintain the momentum behind your efforts by making sure there will be future support and resources for lasting improvement. Keep collecting data on the metrics that you established throughout the effort. If solutions that were implemented only in a small section of your agency proved effective, employ those actions agency-wide. Keep results visible; share the good, the bad and the ugly.

Maintain Alignment with Senior Leadership Goals and Agency Mission

Keep senior leaders consistently involved and informed. Explain to leaders how efforts to improve the workplace environment align with their objectives and benefit the agency. Senior leadership support will help incorporate continuous workplace improvements into the agency mission and culture.

Continue to Evaluate the Environment and Adjust Plans Accordingly

Any number of changes could affect your agency, from reorganization and/or changes in mission, to budget cuts, leadership shifts or external events. Assess the potential impact of these changes on employee satisfaction and opportunities as they arise. Remember that employees at all levels may face change with difficulty and may require additional encouragement and support during these periods. Beware of detractors. Monitoring employee satisfaction and improving the workplace environment accordingly is essential to better organizational outcomes. Even agencies that face major changes can adapt and improve.

Plan for Future Improvement

Keep managers and employees in the loop and engaged. Let them know in a variety of ways that improving the work environment and becoming a best place to work is an ongoing goal and commitment. Don't be discouraged if results slip one year—there will be another opportunity to improve the following year, and use lessons learned to adjust solutions. Create a central resource for future efforts so that successors can learn from past efforts. Start preparing for the next *Best Places to Work* action planning cycle and look forward to continued improvement for years to come.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Partnership for Public Service and Universum USA. *Great Expectations: What Students Want in an Employer and How Federal Agencies Can Deliver It*. January 2009.

This examination of the Universum IDEAL Employer Survey 2008, Universum USA's 2008 survey of undergraduates, identifies the qualities young people seek in an employer. Key findings suggest that the government's appeal to the younger generation extends beyond the new president. The report also offers operational advice to federal recruiters about how they can use this information to better attract and retain top talent.

The Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton. *Getting on Board: A Model for Integrating and Engaging New Employees*. May 2008.

This diagnosis of the current challenges facing federal onboarding presents a model for strategic onboarding, which can serve as a guide for agency reforms. The model outlines a set of overriding principles that underpin effective onboarding programs. It identifies key stakeholders and clarifies their roles in the process, breaking down the onboarding process into five distinct time periods and explaining what agencies should be doing during each phase.

The Partnership for Public Service. *Leaving Talent on the Table: The Need to Capitalize on High Performing Student Interns*. April 2009.

This report focuses on ways to leverage student interns as a strategic component of workforce planning, recruitment and hiring at the entry levels. For instance, the report examines the significant gap between the private and federal sectors in intern conversion rates - private employers report converting more than half of their interns, whereas federal agencies convert fewer than 7 percent.

TMP Government. *TMP Government's Top Retention Strategies*. August 2009.

According to a Harvard Business Review study, a 5 percent increase in retention efforts can garner a 10 percent decrease in costs and a 25 to 65 percent increase in productivity. These strategies from TMP Government can help give you ideas about how to better understand the ways your agency can keep its top talent.

United States Merit Systems Protection Board. *The Power of Federal Employee Engagement*. November 2008. <http://www.mspb.gov/netsearch/viewdocs.aspx?docnumber=379024&version=379721&application=ACROBAT>

The findings in this study suggest that a higher level of employee engagement, between federal employees and their organization, is related to better organizational outcomes. It also offers suggestions on how agencies can attract and retain their best employees.

Bridges, William. "Getting them Through the Wilderness: a Leader's Guide to Transition." 1987. <http://www.wmbridges.com/pdf/getting-thru-wilderness-2006-v2.pdf>

This article by change management expert and consultant William Bridges, Ph.D., emphasizes the need for leaders to manage people's transitions during periods of organizational change. It discusses the psychological process of transition and offers anecdotes, tips and ideas to inspire leaders as they help their employees adjust to new situations.

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 job seekers.
- 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.

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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.

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