



# BEST PLACES TO WORK IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT®

## PROVIDING EMPLOYEES WITH HIGH-QUALITY TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

**61.8**

2019  
GOVERNMENT-WIDE SCORE

The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® Training and Development category measures the extent to which employees believe their development needs are assessed and that appropriate training is offered, allowing them to do their jobs effectively and improve their skills.

### Corresponding Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Questions

- I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization. (Q. 1)
- I have enough information to do my job well. (Q. 2)
- My training needs are assessed. (Q. 18)
- How satisfied are you with the training you receive for your present job? (Q. 68)

Ensuring that employees have access to robust training and development is vital to employee engagement. That's true regardless of whether employees are in the office or teleworking due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It not only signals to employees that their leaders are invested in their growth, but it equips staff to do their jobs more effectively. Unfortunately, training and development is an area where government trails the private sector.<sup>1</sup> According to 2019 Best Places to Work data, just over 53% of federal employees are satisfied with the training they receive compared to 66% in the private sector. Based on our research and discussions with agency leaders, the Partnership for Public Service and Boston Consulting Group have identified actionable steps agencies can take to improve the quality of training and development.

<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/3dckWOR>

## EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS



### Consider delivering team or cohort-based training and development

Employees are more likely to commit to training and development when they know their colleagues are also bought in. Additionally, when every member of a team learns the same material, it's easier to transfer knowledge from the classroom to the office and makes the training more likely to stick.

Cohort-based training, where employees from across an agency are strategically grouped together by a common characteristic like GS level or occupation-type, can also be very effective. It enables employees to get to know people from across the agency and learn from colleagues who face many of the same challenges.

### Agency Example

The Department of Transportation onboards its new executives as a group, providing a valuable opportunity for the executives to get to know each other and build their networks. In addition to building technical and leadership competencies, DOT's onboarding curriculum consists of team-based activities that enable new executives to learn about their colleagues' roles and the work they are doing across the department.

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### Tailor training and development to the needs of the employee

Setting aside time for training and development can be challenging for busy employees. Employees will be more likely to take the time to invest in their own development—and gain the buy-in of supervisors—if the training is closely tailored to their needs.

Agencies could regularly poll employees on the skillsets they want to acquire and use that information to inform their training curriculums. Agencies could also ask staff to evaluate training sessions they participate in, removing less-effective courses and better leveraging those that are highly rated.

### Agency Example

The Securities and Exchange Commission makes a concerted effort to understand the types of training its staff would like to receive and how they would prefer to receive it.

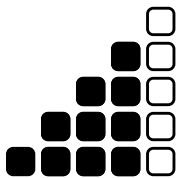
SEC University, the agency's training and development office, deploys its staff across the agency to serve as "learning officers." Every office or division at the SEC is assigned a learning officer, whose job is to engage with managers and staff in that office or division, develop an understanding of their challenges and needs, and identify what SEC University can do to help.

"There are many microcultures at the SEC, more than 40 divisions and offices, and each has a different flavor," said Christelle LaPolice, senior advisor for training and development. "The learning officers provide valuable insights. What's going to be good for one division or office may need to be tailored differently for another."

Recently, SEC University conducted focus groups with employees and learned that the agency could benefit from improving how managers and staff discuss performance feedback. In response, training programs were developed to improve staff-manager communication.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SEC quickly converted in-person training to virtual delivery. The agency also added new content to help its staff adjust to fulltime telework, including small group coaching sessions for managers on how to engage teleworks, and a workshop on how to effectively work remotely.

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### Provide leadership development for all levels

Senior leaders are deserving of training and development, but so are mid-level managers, front-line supervisors and even employees who do not currently manage a team but aspire to move up the ranks.

### Agency Example

The SEC's "Aspiring Leaders" program is geared toward employees currently in an individual contributor role but who hope to be in a managerial position later in their career. The program, a combination of in-person sessions and virtual content, introduces participants to the foundations of effective leadership. The series is offered two or three times a year, fills up immediately and has a lengthy waitlist.

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At the Department of Veterans Affairs St. Louis Health Care System, leaders at all levels participate in biannual symposiums that focus almost exclusively on the soft skills—for example, how to develop relationships and build trust. While optional, the symposiums generate significant demand. Initially sessions were only open to senior leaders, but now include customer-facing managers and first-line supervisors.

To help agencies identify the key competencies needed at each leadership level, the Partnership for Public Service recently unveiled its Public Service Leadership Model. The model outlines key competencies that federal leaders at all levels need to advance the mission of government, and the steps leaders can take to attain them.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bit.ly/3em7LLk>



### Ensure buy-in from senior leaders

When senior leaders encourage staff to pursue training and development, it signals to employees that leadership is committed to their professional growth. It also sends a message to staff that participating in training and development opportunities is a valuable use of time. Senior leaders can further demonstrate buy-in by regularly and transparently attending trainings themselves.

#### Agency Example

At the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, one of the top-ranked large agencies, senior leaders regularly urge mid-level managers to ensure that their employees are growing. Hearing from senior leadership induces mid-level managers to advocate for training and development more aggressively, even if that means temporarily losing a staff member to the classroom or a developmental assignment.

“The message we’re trying to send is that you don’t build creativity and productivity by holding somebody in and not letting them grow,” said Sherry Van Sloun, ODNI’s chief human capital officer. “It’s okay to let them go because you’re going to get back an employee that’s better.”



### Think about training and development opportunities outside the classroom

While classroom learning can be beneficial, encouraging staff to pursue experiential opportunities like rotations, short-term projects with another team, or even shadowing a senior leader is also important. Agencies should not overlook a valuable provider of training and development—their own employees.

#### Agency Example

Striving to develop a more robust learning culture, the Small Business Administration established the “Peer-to-Peer Power Hour” in 2017. The initiative’s goal is to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between employees. Every month, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, SBA staff from field offices and headquarters alike convene for an hour to learn about a topic of interest from their colleagues. Peer-to-Peer Power Hour is employee-driven: SBA employees identify the topics they want to learn about, and staff volunteer to conduct the tutorials. Topics that have been covered run the gamut and include an overview of technical financial processes, how to use new software that’s being rolled out, leadership development, stress management and technical writing. Since 2017, the SBA’s “Training and Development” category score has improved by more than six points.

#### Additional Resources

For more information about the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government rankings, see [bestplacetowork.org](https://bestplacetowork.org).

For more information about the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government categories, including Training and Development, see [bestplacetowork.org/analysis/categories](https://bestplacetowork.org/analysis/categories).