

# Employee Engagement

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Every year, Federal agencies participate in the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) which is a tool that measures employees' perceptions of whether, and to what extent, conditions characterizing successful organizations are present in their agencies. This annual survey is typically administered between April and June, with results made available by OPM in late summer or early fall.

Using the FEVS data, the Partnership for Public Service (PPS) typically releases its annual "Best Places to Work" (BPTW) rankings by early December, providing a means by which to hold agency leaders accountable for the health of their organizations, serve as an early warning sign for agencies in trouble, and offer a roadmap for improvement. The PPS rankings are well publicized.

Over the past three years, the FEVS data demonstrate that DOL has succeeded in increasing its focus on employee engagement. Over the past several years, the Department has taken unprecedented steps to promote the FEVS and encourage participation throughout the Department. In 2013, the Department's response rate was 44.7%. In 2014, that increased dramatically to 71.7%. In 2015, it again increased to 76.5% and, in 2016, our response rate was 74.6%.

The Department has markedly increased not only its response rate to the FEVS but also its results. For 2 years in a row, in 2014 and 2015, the Department was recognized by PPS for receiving the "most improved" score for departments and large agencies. The Department's ranking increased from 17th of 18 in 2013 to 10th in 2014 to 8th in 2015.

DOL has received positive attention for our increased employee engagement as demonstrated by our FEVS scores. For example, in 2016 DOL's Chief Human Capital Officer testified in front of the House Subcommittee on Government Operations in a session titled "The Best and Worst Places to Work in the Federal Government".

While we have not yet received our 2016 BPTW ranking, we have once again received positive FEVS results this year. Agencies that stand out for improved 2016 FEVS Employee Engagement Index results include the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, the Office for Disability Employment Policy, the Office of Labor-Management Standards, and the Office of the Solicitor. This paper outlines the Department's recent efforts to improve employee engagement based on the Secretary's commitment toward building a better DOL through employee input and feedback.

## **Our Best Places to Work Ranking Shows Progress**

Nearly seventy percent of the Department's subagencies improved their 2015 "Best Places to Work" subcomponent rankings from 2014. Four DOL subagencies were ranked among the top 100 subcomponents: Office of the Solicitor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Administrative Law Judges, and the Mine Safety and Health Administration. The Department's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) was recognized as the most improved subcomponent, having increased its ranking by 165 places from 2014 to 2015. ILAB moved from 303<sup>rd</sup> place to 138<sup>th</sup>. ILAB's 2016 FEVS results show a decrease in employee engagement since last year, showing that sustained improvements typically require long-term effort and that looking at trends in FEVS and BPTW metrics over time is critical.

The Department is making progress in every measurable way and in all categories: Effective Leadership, Skills-Mission Match, Pay, Strategic Management, Teamwork, Innovation, Training and

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Development, Work-Life Balance, Support for Diversity and Performance Based-Rewards and Advancement. The Department has improved in each category, and some categories have seen significant improvement. For example, in the category of Effective Leadership, the Department was ranked 17th out of 19 departments and large agencies in 2013, 13th in 2014, and 7th in 2015, with further improvements among this category's four subcomponents: Empowerment, Fairness, Leaders and Supervisors. DOL's ranking in another area, Teamwork, increased from 15th in 2013 to 10th in 2014 to 7th in 2015.

DOL scored in the top ten rankings for the following "Best Places to Work" categories in 2015: Effective Leadership (7), Skills-Mission Match (10), Strategic Management (5), Teamwork (7), Work-Life Balance (10) and Performance-Based Rewards and Advancement (8). DOL continues to strive toward top ten rankings in all categories and has specifically focused resources toward improving our rankings for Innovation (15); Training and Development (15), and Support for Diversity (14).

## How We Did It

Much of the progress has been the result of strong interest from Departmental leadership. Representatives from the Office of the Secretary, along with leaders in the Office of Public Affairs and OASAM's Human Resources Center were tapped to lead DOL-wide employee engagement efforts. The engagement team has met weekly for nearly two years and continues to do so to discuss progress on various workplace initiatives and author many DOL-wide communications to keep employee informed on what they've shared matters most. Union leadership<sup>1</sup> has also been heavily engaged, particularly with suggestions on improving supervisory training and accountability. Also important has been the engagement and buy-in of DOL's affinity groups.

Our efforts to focus on the workforce have also improved our labor-management relations. One example is the collaboration with our labor unions to implement important workplace flexibilities. In recognition that we must continue to enable employees to balance their responsibilities to deliver exceptional and efficient service to the American public while meeting family and other needs at home, we implemented changes to the variable work week and alternative work schedules, and implemented a midday flex pilot. With these changes, came related training and updated dispute resolution parameters.

The unions were also partners in developing a project called Behavior Matters, focused on positive workplace behaviors and civility. Where possible, we have strived to obtain pre-decisional input and informal dispute resolution, as well as to utilize labor-management forums. In March, the unions were invited to submit custom survey questions, eight of which were included in the 2016 FEVS.

The engagement team has worked with program leaders and others to increase communication efforts. Numerous town hall meetings and listening sessions have been conducted throughout the Department, including visits to all of the DOL regional offices. The frequency and comprehensive coverage of these employee meetings led to more meetings being conducted by DOL senior and regional leaders. Employees were invited to submit questions in advance of and during meetings.

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<sup>1</sup> Each of the Department's three unions has been engaged: the National Federation of Federal National Council of Field Labor Locals (NCFLL); Local 12, American Federation of Government Employees; AFL-CIO; and the National Union of Labor Investigators (NULI).

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Electronic suggestion boxes were implemented, subsequent written communications included descriptions of suggestions and actions taken. Later, suggestion boxes were replaced with the Department's implementation of IdeaMill, an electronic crowd-sourcing tool.

Based on feedback received through various engagement methods, the Department has implemented several new initiatives since 2014. For instance, in response to feedback that details were not advertised and were targeted toward certain employees, the Department implemented the ROAD (Repository of Opportunities, Assignments and Details) program, a central online clearinghouse for internal developmental opportunities.. Employees have indicated that the temporary assignments enable them to refresh themselves with new skills, new programs and even new co-workers. Several ROAD assignments have also led to permanent placements, helping employees find other jobs for which they are better suited, while remaining part of the DOL team. ROAD raises awareness of the breadth and depth of our mission and build one DOL. This program has been very well received by our workforce and has gained attention outside of DOL as a Federal best practice. In the less than two years since the program has been implemented, over 560 employees have participated, usually for 120 days. .

Other examples of new initiatives include a Bicycle Reimbursement subsidy; a new employee Innovation award; greater access to telework and flexible work schedules; a greater use of time-off awards to recognize superior performance; an emergency dependent care back up program; improved accommodations and facilities for nursing mothers; a policy allowing for up to 40 hours of duty time to participate in management-approved professional development activities; and improved leadership training for managers. We have also recently implemented a Mentoring program pilot.

OASAM/HRC has worked closely with PPS to create customized training offerings to our SES, supervisors, and aspiring leaders. The SES Onboarding training is a tailored program that includes executive management workshops, mentoring, executive coaching, and coach-led action learning. The program offers a unique developmental experience for new SES to transition into their new role within DOL and provides strategic development opportunities. This is required training for all new SES hired on or after December 29, 2013.

DOL also worked with PPS to design a customized training program called Leading@Labor. This program aims to develop an effective supervisory corps across the Department with a shared vision of supervisory success, supported by a common set of tools, skills, language and knowledge. The program includes a one-day intensive program for all supervisors and an in-depth, four-day program for more experienced supervisors and managers.

In addition to the enterprise-wide efforts, DOL's agencies were required to develop their own engagement goals. Early in 2014, every DOL agency was required to produce Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) annual action plans that reacted to their FEVS results and organizational needs. All DOL Agencies were required to include actions in three areas: Leadership, Training and Innovation. DOL created its own index of FEVS items under each of these areas and has tracked progress. Action plan templates were developed and posted to our internal website alongside survey results. This consistent and accountability-focused approach allows our DOL Agencies to focus on meaningful solutions that may extend beyond the year of the survey timeframe. Agency action plan progress is discussed at quarterly performance reviews with Departmental leadership.

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In 2016, the Department established an FEVS Community of Practice within DOL. At these meetings, DOL Agencies share progress, challenges and different initiatives which have improved networking and provided another forum for input on Department-wide initiatives.

Because of marked differences in FEVS results based on demographic groups, the Department has also been focused on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I). The Department is committed to bringing high quality D&I trainings, highly promoting them, and encouraging as many employees as possible to attend. The first such training was with world-renowned social psychologist Dr. Mahzarin Banaji, who discussed implicit bias. The second was with Jeffrey Vargas, of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, who discussed how to address dynamic generational differences in the workplace.

In early 2015 we created a Department-wide D&I Council to identify and recommend strategies to promote inclusion and diversity and to facilitate these conversations throughout the Department. The D&I Council created a three-year Strategic Plan which is comprised of three goals, aligned with OPM's D&I priorities – Workforce Diversity, Workplace Inclusion, and Sustainability. The D&I Strategic Plan formalizes many actions that are already taking place at the Department and agency levels.

In September of 2016 we created the Office of Employee Engagement (OEE) within the HRC, incorporating the existing offices of Training and Development, and Diversity and Inclusion. OEE also runs the ROAD Program, workplace flexibilities, and is responsible for FEVS data analysis and coordinating FEVS Action Planning across the Department.

In October of 2016 we created an Innovation Council to respond to scores and feedback. This Council is charged with driving innovation forward in the Department— coordinating and scaling agency approaches that work, and fostering the redesign processes, policies, and systems to meet today's challenges and those in the future. The 14-Member Council, armed with the necessary training and tools, will take calculated risks, pilot new approaches, learn from failure, and get right back to it. The Council will also engage more than 75 additional employees who submitted applications for the Council and employees across DOL to continually surface and implement new ideas that are meaningful to a wide variety of employees.

## **DOL FEVS Trends**

The Department uses the data reports compiled by OPM to measure progress in the following areas: Workforce Engagement, Global Satisfaction, Diversity and Inclusion, Leadership and Knowledge Management, Results-Oriented Performance Culture, Talent Management and Job Satisfaction. The Department has developed its own indices with regard to Leadership, Training and Innovation. Using OPM's index for Workforce Engagement, the Department improved its score from 64 in 2012 to 69 in 2016. Our Global Satisfaction score also increased over the same time period from 61 in 2012 to 66 in 2016. We have also seen progress with our own indices. For Leadership, we have increased our score from 57 in 2012 to 63 in 2016. For Training, we have increased from 60 in 2012 to 65 in 2016. Finally for Innovation, we have increased from 53 in 2012 to 59 in 2016. A line chart is provided below to show improvement.

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