

Annual Employee Survey Guidance

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Annual Employee Survey Guidance

INTRODUCTION

This guidance provides information to agencies on conducting and reporting on the Annual Employee Survey (AES) as required under subpart C, Employee Surveys, of 5 CFR part 250, Personnel Management in Agencies. It specifies which agencies are covered by the regulation and explains, in more detail, survey design, sampling, administration, and the reporting procedures agencies shall follow to meet the annual survey requirement.

Background

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004 (Public Law 108-136, November 24, 2003, 117 STAT. 1641), Congress established a requirement for agencies to conduct an annual survey of their employees to assess employee satisfaction as well as leadership and management practices that contribute to agency performance.

Specifically, section 1128 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004 (Act) requires each agency to conduct an annual survey of its employees “to assess --

1. leadership and management practices that contribute to agency performance; and
2. employee satisfaction with --
 - A. leadership policies and practices;
 - B. work environment;
 - C. rewards and recognition for professional accomplishment and personal contributions to achieving organizational mission;
 - D. opportunity for professional development and growth; and
 - E. opportunity to contribute to achieving organizational mission.”

As required by the Act, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued final regulations implementing mandatory employee surveys on Thursday, August 24, 2006, as subpart C, Employee Surveys, of 5 CFR part 250, Personnel Management in Agencies. The final regulations, which are effective as of January 1, 2007, prescribe survey questions that must appear on each agency’s employee survey. These items constitute the Annual Employee Survey, which agencies must conduct and report annually.

Results from 2007 Administration

A review of agency submissions indicated that the majority of the issues were in three areas: 1) timely submission of results, 2) use of the prescribed survey questions and response choices and 3) narrative evaluation of results. Agencies need to adhere to the 120 day deadline from the close of survey data collection to posting of results on the internet, and the AES report and the internet link must be provided to OPM (e.g. Human Capital Officer) promptly. Survey questions and response options must not be modified from the published form. All items and response options must be included, and if unique agency items are added, the AES items must be identified in the results. The required narrative evaluation of results should be reviewed for

accuracy prior to publication; we observed discrepancies between the narrative and reported data, in some agencies.

Related Human Capital Management Regulations and Metrics

The Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (HCAAF) provides standards for success agencies use to measure their progress and achievements in managing their workforces. Establishment of the HCAAF and its related standards and metrics fulfills OPM's mandate under the Chief Human Capital Officers Act of 2002 (CHCO Act), as codified in 5 U.S.C. 1103(c), to "design a set of systems, including appropriate metrics, for assessing the management of human capital by Federal agencies." The AES provides one source of information for evaluating success in three of the delivery systems incorporated in the HCAAF: Leadership and Knowledge Management, Results-Oriented Performance Culture, and Talent Management.

For more information on these systems and metrics, refer to OPM's Website at:

http://www.opm.gov/hcaaf_resource_center/assets/hcaaf_ssm.pdf

Relationship to the Federal Human Capital Survey

In years when OPM conducts the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS), which will always contain the AES questions prescribed in subpart C of 5 CFR part 250, it is anticipated agencies will choose to use the FHCS, to the extent possible, to comply with the requirement to administer a survey for that calendar year. OPM ultimately expects to administer the FHCS in the fall of even-numbered years and to offer services, on a reimbursable basis, to support agencies surveying their employees with the subpart C questions in odd-numbered years. It is suggested agencies administer the required AES questions in the fall of those odd-numbered years to align with the FHCS administration.

Agencies that do not participate in the FHCS are still required to conduct and report on the AES.

Agencies Covered by the Annual Employee Survey Regulation

By law, each executive agency, as defined by 5 U.S.C. 105, must conduct an annual survey of its employees containing each question prescribed by OPM in regulation. According to 5 CFR 250.301 Subpart C, "Agency" means an executive agency as defined in 5 U.S.C. 105. 5 U.S.C. 105 indicates "Executive agency" means an executive department, a government corporation, and an independent establishment. Clarification is found in 5 U.S.C. 104, which indicates the United States Postal Service and Postal Regulatory Commission are not included, and the Government Accountability Office is included in this definition. Questions about this coverage requirement should be addressed by the agency's General Counsel.

Prescribed Definitions and Items

OPM conducted a series of analyses and reviews to identify items that meet the intent of the law. The assessment requirements of the law are restated below, along with the item numbers of the AES questions that meet each requirement.

AES Assessment Requirements	AES Item Numbers
(1) leadership and management practices that contribute to agency performance; and	6, 7, 8, 16, 17, 23, 27, 30, 31
(2) employee satisfaction with;	39
(A) leadership policies and practices;	5, 24, 25, 26, 29, 33, 34, 37
(B) work environment;	1, 11, 28, 32
(C) rewards and recognition for professional accomplishment and personal contributions to achieving organizational mission;	15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 36, 40
(D) opportunity for professional development and growth; and	2, 12, 14, 22, 35, 38
(E) opportunity to contribute to achieving organizational mission.	3, 4, 9, 10, 13

In addition to the prescribed items above, the regulation included five demographic items and a set of key terms and definitions agencies are to include on their annual surveys. The definitions of the terms are consistent with their use in OPM's FHCS. They are included to provide a common frame of reference as employees answer the survey items and to facilitate comparisons across agencies, as called for by the Act. The demographic items are included to examine and report on the extent to which respondents are representative of the agency population surveyed, which also is necessary to facilitate comparisons across agencies. In addition to the prescribed set of demographic items, agencies may ask other demographic questions, such as length of service with the agency or overall time in Federal service.

The prescribed definitions and 45 AES items and response choices are listed in the following tables:

Key Terms	Definitions
Agency	<i>[Enter the name of your executive agency, as defined in 5 U.S.C. 105.]</i>
Executives	Members of the Senior Executive Service or equivalent.
Leaders	An agency's management team. This includes anyone with supervisory or managerial duties.
Managers	Those individuals in management positions who typically supervise one or more supervisors.
Organization	An agency, office, or division.
Supervisors	First-line supervisors who do not supervise other supervisors; typically those who are responsible for employees' performance appraisals and approval of their leave.
Team Leaders	Those who provide employees with day-to-day guidance in work projects, but do not have supervisory responsibilities or conduct performance appraisals.
Work Unit	An immediate work unit headed by an immediate supervisor.

Employee Survey Questions	Response Choices
Personal Work Experiences	
(1) The people I work with cooperate to get the job done.	Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree Nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
(2) I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.	
(3) My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.	
(4) I like the kind of work I do.	
(5) I have trust and confidence in my supervisor.	
(6) Overall, how good a job do you feel is being done by your immediate supervisor/team leader?	
Recruitment, Development, & Retention	
(7) The workforce has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals.	Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree Nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree Do Not Know
(8) My work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills.	
(9) I know how my work relates to the agency's goals and priorities.	
(10) The work I do is important.	
(11) Physical conditions (for example, noise level, temperature, lighting, cleanliness in the workplace) allow employees to perform their jobs well.	
(12) Supervisors/team leaders in my work unit support employee development.	
(13) My talents are used well in the workplace.	
(14) My training needs are assessed.	

Employee Survey Questions	Response Choices
Performance Culture	
(15) Promotions in my work unit are based on merit.	Strongly Agree
(16) In my work unit, steps are taken to deal with a poor performer who cannot or will not improve.	Agree
(17) Creativity and innovation are rewarded.	Neither Agree Nor Disagree Disagree
(18) In my most recent performance appraisal, I understood what I had to do to be rated at different performance levels (e.g., Fully Successful, Outstanding).	Strongly Disagree Do Not Know
(19) In my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way.	Strongly Agree
(20) Pay raises depend on how well employees perform their jobs.	Agree
(21) My performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my performance.	Neither Agree Nor Disagree
(22) Discussions with my supervisor/team leader about my performance are worthwhile.	Disagree
(23) Managers/supervisors/team leaders work well with employees of different backgrounds.	Strongly Disagree
(24) My supervisor supports my need to balance work and family issues.	Do Not Know
Leadership	
(25) I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders.	Strongly Agree
(26) In my organization, leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.	Agree
(27) Managers review and evaluate the organization's progress toward meeting its goals and objectives.	Neither Agree Nor Disagree
(28) Employees are protected from health and safety hazards on the job.	Disagree
(29) Employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes.	Strongly Disagree
(30) My workload is reasonable.	Do Not Know
(31) Managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization.	
(32) My organization has prepared employees for potential security threats.	

* Note: This is the only item on the AES that has the "No Basis to Judge" response option.

Employee Survey Questions	Response Choices
Job Satisfaction	
(33) How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization?	Very Satisfied Satisfied Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Very Dissatisfied
(34) How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?	
(35) How satisfied are you with your opportunity to get a better job in your organization?	
(36) How satisfied are you with the recognition you receive for doing a good job?	
(37) How satisfied are you with the policies and practices of your senior leaders?	
(38) How satisfied are you with the training you receive for your present job?	
(39) Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job?	
(40) Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your pay?	

Demographics (for agencies with 800 or more employees)	
Agencies with 800 or more employees are required to ask the demographic items. Agencies with fewer than 800 employees may – but are not required to – ask the demographic items. This safeguard should foster a sense of confidentiality.	
(41) What is your supervisory status?	a. <u>Non-Supervisor</u> : You do not supervise other employees. b. <u>Team Leader</u> : You are not an official supervisor; you provide employees with day-to-day guidance in work projects, but do not have supervisory responsibilities or conduct performance appraisals. c. <u>Supervisor</u> : You are responsible for employees' performance appraisals and approval of their leave, but you do not supervise other supervisors. d. <u>Manager</u> : You are in a management position and supervise one or more supervisors. e. <u>Executive</u> : Member of the Senior Executive Service or equivalent.
(42) Are you:	a. Male b. Female
(43) Are you Hispanic or Latino?	a. Yes b. No
(44) Please select the racial category or categories with which you most closely identify (Please select one or more):	a. White b. Black or African American c. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander d. Asian e. American Indian or Alaska Native
(45) What is your agency subcomponent?	<i>[An agency-provided list of major divisions, bureaus, or other components one level below the agency/department.]</i>

Agency-Specific Items

Section 1128(a) of the Act allows an agency to include survey questions unique to the agency. Therefore, each agency may include survey questions unique to the agency in addition to the AES items OPM prescribes in regulation. Results for an agency's unique items must also be included in the agency's internet report.

SURVEY PLANNING

If you are not an experienced survey researcher and your agency does not have the in-house capability, OPM recommends you seek assistance (e.g., hire a contractor) to conduct, analyze, and produce reports for your survey. If an agency conducts the survey in house, precautions should be taken to ensure employee confidentiality (e.g., removing survey responses from identifying information like name and SSN, only reporting information for groups larger than 10). To assist agencies that do not have the in-house expertise to conduct the AES, OPM will administer the required items and provide the results for the overall agency (i.e., no data breakouts by agency subcomponent or other demographic group) for a small reimbursable fee. For more information on this service, contact OPM's Assessment Services Branch on (202) 606-1794.

Selecting the Sample

Your agency sample will depend on your target population, your expected response rate, and how you want to use the results. Agencies will need to:

1. Determine the Target Population. Determine the employee population from which you will select or “draw” your sample. As an example, the target population for the previous FHCS was full-time, permanent employees included in OPM's Central Personnel Data File. You may use the same target population or elect to include other employees as well (e.g., part-time employees, temporary employees).

NOTE: If you choose to use your FHCS results to meet AES reporting requirements, you will want to consider the target population parameters OPM uses for the FHCS in determining your target population in years OPM does not conduct the FHCS. One option is to use the same parameters as the FHCS, and only survey and report on full-time, permanent employees annually. Alternatively, you can choose to report on a broader target population (e.g., including full-time and part-time permanent employees). If you choose the second option, you should observe the differences when comparing results across years. When reporting your AES results, you may want to consider supplementing your FHCS results, in the years OPM administers the FHCS, with results you obtain by surveying other employees of interest to your agency (e.g., part-time employees, non-permanent employees). Agencies can compare the survey results to previous FHCS results by doing tabulations of similar populations. Or just note the differences in the sample when discussing the results for the different years.

Because the law requires all executive agencies to survey their employees, it is the agency's responsibility to ensure all major subcomponents are represented in their results. The law does not exclude different segments of agencies even if they are not reported to OPM's Central Personnel Data File.

2. *Construct the Sample Frame.* This is a list of individuals from which you will select your sample based on the target population parameters identified in #1 above (e.g., full-time, part-time, permanent, temporary).

3. *Determine the Size of the Sample.* Agencies may either conduct a census (i.e., survey all employees in the target population) or select a sample of employees from the target population to survey. At a minimum, the sample should be large enough to produce 400 completed surveys to ensure reports accurately reflect the target population. The typical response rate for the FHCS has been approximately 50 percent. Based on these findings, OPM recommends the selected sample include at least 800 employees to obtain 400 completed surveys. Smaller agencies (i.e., smaller than 800 employees) will need to survey all of their employees to meet this requirement. If you have evidence from past surveys in your agency that your response rate is typically higher or lower than 50 percent, you should adjust your sample size accordingly.

In addition, agencies should consider the number and size of the subgroups for reporting and statistical analyses. To meet the requirements of the AES regulation at subpart C of 5 CFR part 250, agencies only need to report AES results for the agency/department as a whole (e.g., Department of the Interior, Office of Personnel Management). It should be noted, though, for large agencies, reporting at the department level masks the meaningful results at the subcomponent level. It is recommended agencies evaluate results and focus action planning efforts at the subcomponent level, as well.

If agencies sample at the subcomponent level, they only need to report the overall agency results to OPM and on their Websites. However, as indicated in the “Survey Reporting” section below, an agency will need to report information on the number of people surveyed in the various subcomponents to demonstrate representativeness.

OPM recommends a sample size of at least 30 in each group to be compared. This should allow for standard statistical tests for differences. Testing can be done for smaller sample sizes but this requires the use of small sample methods such as the exact binomial distribution. In any case, agencies should consult a statistician to assist with the analysis of the data.

Where feasible, a larger sample is always better. Whenever a survey is administered to a sample rather than the entire target population, sampling error will occur. Sampling error is the difference between the true population value and the population value estimated from the sample. When one interprets sample data, there is a chance wrong conclusions will be drawn because of sampling error. Surveys are also subject to nonsampling error, including nonresponse error, measurement error, coverage error, and processing error. However, the extent of sampling error can be estimated directly from the sample itself. That estimate is often referred to as the margin of error, a statistical measure (confidence interval) that indicates the precision of a sample estimate.

For example, assume the margin of error is plus or minus 3 percent for a 95 percent level of confidence. If the percent favorable is 92 percent, a statement such as the following would be

accurate: "There is a 95 percent chance the population percent favorable is between 89 percent and 95 percent." Of course, there is still a 5 percent chance the true population value will be outside that range.

Margin of error is linked to sample size. The more surveys returned, the smaller the margin of error. The smaller the margin of error, the more confidence you can have that the results you report accurately reflect the results you would have obtained if you surveyed and received responses from the entire target population.

4. Select a Sampling Method. There are many types of sampling methods, including simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, and more complex methods. For the FHCS, OPM uses random, stratified sampling. OPM stratifies by major subcomponent (i.e., subcomponents that have 1,500 or more employees or represent 5 percent or more of the agency workforce) and supervisory status (non-supervisor, supervisor/manager, executive). Agencies may choose to use stratified random sampling. OPM advises agencies to consult statistical references or a statistician for advice on what will best meet their needs.

5. Refine the Sample. If you are sampling your agency, OPM recommends you use the following procedure:

- Randomly select employees from the target population using the sampling method of choice until you have a sample large enough to obtain at least 400 surveys (taking into consideration the expected response rate) and statistical power sufficient to identify real differences in results when they exist. The larger the sample size the greater the statistical power.

Simple random sampling provides results that can be used to represent all employees within an agency. However, sample sizes for some relevant subgroups of the population may be too small to obtain sufficiently reliable estimates within the subgroup. Agencies should ensure their sample is representative of their population, or ensure the sample drawn can compensate for representation issues through statistical weighting. For example, when OPM conducts the FHCS, OPM uses a stratified random sample, and stratifies by supervisory status and agency subcomponent (i.e., subcomponents larger than 1500 employees or representing 5% or more of the agency). OPM recommends agencies consult with a statistician for designing and drawing their samples of employees.

Designing the Survey

Agencies have choices in the survey instrument they administer to meet the AES requirement. OPM recommends agencies present the items in the order they are listed in the regulation to minimize the potential effects order and context may have on survey results. Agencies wishing to incorporate additional items of their own should include those after the required items. However,

if an agency chooses to alter the order of required items or embed their own items among the required items, the agency must report this to OPM and provide a copy of their instrument highlighting the differences. Results from the AES items must be reported as they are presented in the regulation.

For agencies that want to develop new items of interest, the Additional References section and Appendix A of this Guidance provide information on writing good survey items. Remember, if you add questions, consider carefully how many you add. The increased burden on respondents may lead to a lower response rate—it is always a balance.

Agencies with 800 or more employees will be required to ask the demographic items. Agencies with fewer than 800 employees may but are not required to ask the demographic items. This safeguard should foster a sense of confidentiality.

Helpful Hint: OPM typically places the demographic items at the end of the survey to minimize reluctance to answer non-demographic survey items.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

There are two key steps to good survey administration practice: 1) communicate the purpose and importance of the survey to employees, and 2) send reminders. Barring unforeseen circumstances, if you do these two things, at a minimum, you should achieve adequate and representative survey responses.

Communicating the Survey

Each agency will need to communicate the purpose of the survey, how the survey results will be used, and the importance of participation. Varying the type of media is helpful in increasing participation (e.g., bulletin boards, email messages, staff meetings). Communicate early and often in varied formats throughout the fielding of the survey.

In a study of survey nonrespondents, OPM found people most often do not complete surveys because they are “too busy” or believe the “results will not be used to change anything.” These reasons emphasize the need for senior management and agency managers to communicate the importance of the survey. In addition, messages should highlight changes that have occurred as a consequence of using previous survey results.

Finally, some employees are hesitant to participate because they feel they can be identified. Messages should clearly affirm agency managers will receive only summary results and no survey responses will be linked to individual employees.

Fielding the Survey

Once the sample is drawn and the survey is assembled, you will begin the data collection phase. The length of this phase varies depending on whether you use a mail-only survey or an online survey. Online surveys are recommended for their ease in data collection, but consider the feasibility in your agency, and make sure to coordinate with your information technology office regarding firewalls, spam filters, etc.

You will want to set an initial timeframe for fielding the survey based on your agency’s past experience with surveys of this nature. A timeframe of 4 to 5 weeks is recommended, but if you administer the survey when many employees are traveling or in the field, you may want to extend the administration. OPM recommends sending an initial survey, and then following up with weekly reminders. Alternatively, you may want to shorten the length of time the survey is open, but send reminders more frequently (e.g., every 3 days).

Calculating the Response Rate

Response rates on surveys vary. If in prior surveys you typically achieved a 60 percent response rate, your sampling strategy should accommodate for that (see discussion of sample size on p. 9).

OPM recommends checking your response rate at least weekly, at the subcomponent level as well as the agency overall. Checking at the subcomponent level will help identify groups that have not responded and need additional reminders. If you are not achieving the desired response rate (and a minimum of 400 respondents for large agencies), you will want to extend the survey administration phase and continue communications about the survey. OPM's research shows a minimal increase in response rates after 4 to 5 weeks, with weekly reminders.

The response rate is the total number of completed surveys divided by the total number of employees who received the survey. This "raw response rate" is shown here:

$$\frac{\text{Number of completed returned surveys}}{\text{Total number of employees who received the survey}}$$

However, both parts of this calculation usually need to be adjusted to arrive at a truly accurate response rate. Adjustments will be based on determinations of what constitutes a "completed survey" and who is included in the final group of selected employees (the denominator).

It is good practice to track undeliverables and correct them during survey administration so you reach as many sample employees as possible. OPM has found two primary reasons for undeliverable surveys: 1) the employee separated from the agency between the time you drew the sample and the time you conducted the survey, or 2) the employee never received the survey due to an inaccurate email or mailing address. With regard to the denominator, OPM suggests subtracting employees whose surveys were returned as "undeliverable".

Improving Participation

OPM conducted a rigorous study of employees who did not respond to the 2004 FHCS to identify reasons and barriers to responding. OPM used this information to improve the survey design and administration of subsequent FHCS. The findings are not specific to the FHCS, so agencies can use the findings of the nonresponse study to improve their own survey efforts as well.

OPM found the most often cited reason for not responding to the 2004 FHCS was "being too busy." The next most cited reasons for not completing the survey were:

- “the results won’t be used to change anything,”
- “the survey is not important,” and
- “the results of the survey are never shared with employees.”

Sending reminders (which will be especially important for prompting those who were “too busy” to complete the survey at first) and a carefully executed communication plan emphasizing the value of these surveys and their positive consequences can address all of these, and increase participation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Cleaning the Data

You should check for and edit data problems before any results are calculated, including:

- Out-of-range values (e.g., responses that are not between 1 and 6 for 6-point scales);
- Omission or duplication of records; and
- Coding errors (e.g., are there more female respondents than in your target population because males and females were coded incorrectly?)

Comparing Respondents to the Target Population

Agencies should examine characteristics of their survey respondents to assess how well they match the target population. Agencies should compare the percentage distribution of respondents for each required demographic (i.e., supervisory status, gender, ethnicity, race, and subcomponent, if sampled) to the percentage distribution of the target population for these required demographics.

If there are notable differences in percentage distributions between respondents and target population for any demographic (i.e., indicating nonresponse did not occur at random), you will want to continue your data collection to achieve adequate responses from all groups and subcomponents in your target population. Consider additional reminders to your sample to encourage participation. If the differences are discovered after the survey administration has ended, these differences should be noted when reporting the results.

ANNUAL REPORTING

Reporting Results

Agencies are required to collect data on the survey items by December 31 of each calendar year. An agency is also required to make the results available to the public and post the results on its Website no later than 120 days after the agency completes survey administration, unless the agency head determines that doing so would jeopardize or negatively impact national security. If an agency samples at the subcomponent level, they only need to report the overall agency results to OPM and on their Website. However, an agency will need to report information on the number of people surveyed in the various subcomponents to demonstrate representativeness, as noted below. If an agency believes posting results on the Web would have jeopardized or negatively impacted national security, they must notify OPM in writing, and the agency still must submit results to OPM.

To coordinate and encourage the timely availability of agency survey results, the regulation requires agencies to 1) send results and internet link to the agency's OPM Human Capital Officer, and 2) post their survey results on their agency websites, with access for the public, no later than 120 days after an agency completes survey administration each year. OPM may extend this date under unusual circumstances. These results should be based on surveys conducted during that calendar year. The reports must contain--

- (1) A brief evaluation of the survey results (narrative);
- (2) How the survey was conducted (online or paper, dates of administration, census or sample, etc.);
- (3) A description of the employee sample, if sampling was used (i.e., number in the sample, percentage distributions on required demographics);
- (4) The survey items and response choices with the items prescribed in regulation identified;
- (5) The number of employees surveyed and number of survey respondents (including response rate); the agency should comment on whether the respondents were representative of the target population, noting deviations in percentage distributions by demographic, as warranted; and
- (6) The number of respondents and the results, calculated as percentages, for each response scale choice (for example: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Do Not Know). Ensure that if a question requires a Do Not Know or No Basis to Judge response that results for this option are included.

Reporting to OPM

Each agency must submit its survey results to OPM no later than 120 days after the Agency completes survey administration. These results should be reported to OPM (e.g., Human Capital Officer) with a link to their AES report on the agency website.

The internet link to the agency's AES report should be easy for the public to find via a search engine.

NEXT STEPS--USING YOUR AGENCY RESULTS

The AES is a tool. It provides information that allows organizations to focus their efforts and to improve various programs and processes. After the survey results have been reviewed, agencies have a responsibility to provide feedback to their employees on the results, as well as to let employees know the intended actions to address the results and progress on these actions. This could include information on decisions not to take action on various areas of concern, and reasons why not. Posting the results on the agency Website is one way of providing feedback to employees, but an agency should consider multiple methods of communication.

Provide Feedback and Begin Action Planning

Once the results are analyzed and posted on the Website, feedback is critical. Agencies may want to:

- Have the head of your agency share the results with top executives and union officials in the organization.
- Share your agency results with employees via intranet, email, and/or printed version. The head of your agency or other senior leadership may want to discuss the results in “all hands” meetings.
- Consult with union representation and/or employees to decide what areas to target for improvement. Action plans should be developed at multiple levels: agencywide, by subcomponent, and even several levels down in the agency. Some agencies have pushed action planning down to the manager level. Remember, some changes in working conditions may require bargaining with union representatives. Consult with your labor relations staff to facilitate meetings with union officials and bargaining unit employees.

Many agencies have found it beneficial to conduct focus groups after reviewing survey results. Focus groups allow you to delve more deeply into the “why’s” behind the numbers and to get employee suggestions for how to improve.

Develop and Implement Action Plans

Once action plans are developed, it is important to implement them. It is equally important to tell employees what actions are being implemented as a result of their responses on the survey. If certain actions will not or cannot be implemented, it is important to *communicate* that information, as well. Also, remember to thank employees for participating in the survey.

When developing action plans, consider the following:

- What resources are required; what shifts are required in budget or resource allocation, and who must approve them?
- Who will be responsible for action?
- Who will be responsible for oversight?
- Will the people involved have the authority to make things happen?
- If actions require coordination, how will that be accomplished?
- Do your plans include ways to detect and recover from changes or delays?

Changes are likely to require time and sustained effort. Plans should include regular feedback to management and employees on progress and scheduled consideration, at appropriate levels in the agency, for adjustment.

Follow-Up

This is the most important part of the process for effectively using survey results. Often this stage is where the process breaks down. Follow-up ensures problems identified are dealt with effectively. If problems are not dealt with, then adjustments should be made.

Follow-up includes evaluation. Evaluate how the action is going. This can include readministering the survey, or administering a broader survey, such as the FHCS, to track change or more fully explore issues of interest.

In addition to monitoring planned activities, establish and maintain sensitivity to employee needs.

- Consider formal and informal feedback.
- Consider *ad hoc* as well as standing committees.
- Consider focus groups at different levels to get unbiased feedback.
- Keep employee representatives involved.

Action officers and committees should provide regular feedback to top management.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Proposed Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys, 14 July 2005

http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/proposed_standards_for_statistical_surveys.pdf

Questions and Answers when Designing Surveys for Information Collections.

http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/pmc_survey_guidance_2006.pdf

Developing and Using Questionnaires, October 1993, GAO/PEMD-10.1.7.

Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method, Don A. Dillman, 2000.

APPENDIX A

Writing Good Survey Questions

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If an agency chooses to add items to the group of required items some suggestions for writing good survey questions are provided below. The items in the regulation are required to be asked by each agency as stated in the regulation (i.e., no word replacements, no revisions). However, agencies can also add items dealing with their own programs and initiatives.

- 1) Consider various response scales and choose the most appropriate one. Here are a few possibilities:

- Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree
- Very Unfavorable to Very Favorable
- Poor to Excellent
- Very Dissatisfied to Very Satisfied
- No Extent to A Very Great Extent

When selecting a scale, use equal numbers of positive and negative categories (e.g., two positive and two negative with one neutral). In addition, distinguish undecided and neutral, and, if offering it, place the “undecided” or “no opinion” at the end of the scale.

- 2) Consider question structure when developing the item. Open-ended items are more difficult to analyze and may not yield adequate answers. Close-ended items, where responses are provided, are easier to answer.
- 3) Simplify the sentence and word structure. Aside from shortening the sentence length, the most effective way to increase readability is to simplify the word structure. Simple words are preferable, provided they express the idea clearly.
- 4) Reduce the complexity of ideas and present them one at a time.
- 5) Do not use abstract words, or words that convey general or broad meanings or relationships. Make questions concise, direct and keep the number of words to a minimum.
- 6) Keep the use of technical language to a minimum. Keep in mind words you know may not be familiar to your audience. Words used should express the exact meaning that is intended, and the respondents must know that meaning.

- 7) Use the active voice when writing questions, unless it is unavoidable.
- 8) Be careful about words with several meanings and other problem words. Sometimes a question is misunderstood because a word in it has several meanings and its context is not clear.
- 9) Avoid abbreviations or jargon.
- 10) Do not lead the respondents with slanted introductions.
- 11) Avoid “double-barreled” questions. When more than one idea or topic is presented in an item, the respondent has difficulty providing an answer or selecting a response. Analysis of responses will be meaningless because there will be no way of knowing to which idea the subjects really responded.

An example of a double-barreled item is, “Are you able to discuss work problems with your supervisor in private and in confidence?” This example is actually asking two questions -- can you discuss work problems with your supervisor in private, and can you discuss them with her/him in confidence.

Tip: If the words “and” or “or” are in the item, review to make sure you are presenting only one idea.

* Adapted from the following sources:

- (1) Developing and Using Questionnaires, October 1993, GAO/PEMD-10.1.7, and
- (2) Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method, Don A. Dillman, 2000.

APPENDIX B

Frequently Asked Questions

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WHO?: By law, each executive agency, as defined by 5 U.S.C. 105, must conduct an annual survey of its employees containing each question prescribed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in regulation. All executive branch agencies and employees are covered by the Annual Employee Survey (AES) requirement. Each agency needs to decide what their target population will be. At a minimum, an agency needs to sample full-time, permanent employees in all major subcomponents.

WHY?: Section 1128 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004 (Public Law 108-136, 5 U.S.C. 7101 note) requires each Executive agency to conduct an annual survey of its employees “to assess --

1. leadership and management practices that contribute to agency performance; and
2. employee satisfaction with --
 - A. leadership policies and practices;
 - B. work environment;
 - C. rewards and recognition for professional accomplishment and personal contributions to achieving organizational mission;
 - D. opportunity for professional development and growth; and
 - E. opportunity to contribute to achieving organizational mission.”

WHAT?: As required by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004, OPM issued final regulations implementing mandatory employee surveys. The final regulations prescribe survey questions that must appear on each agency’s employee survey. These items constitute the AES, which agencies must assess and report annually.

WHEN?: All agencies must survey their employees, annually, within the calendar year (January 1 through December 31). In years when OPM conducts the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS), which will always contain the survey questions prescribed in 5 CFR part 250, subpart C, it is anticipated agencies will choose to use the FHCS, to the extent possible, to comply with the requirement to administer a survey for that calendar year. Agencies that do not participate in the FHCS still are required to conduct and report on the AES.

WHERE?: OPM requires agencies to 1) post their survey results on their agency Websites, with access to the public and 2) send the web link to these agency results to OPM, no later than 120 days after an agency completes survey administration each year. Posting the results on an intranet is not sufficient to meet the requirements of this law. Agencies should leave the results on their Website until new results are available and posted.

- Q: My agency and others have been conducting employee surveys for the past several years, and we are concerned this new requirement may have a negative impact on the progress agencies have made in their own surveys. Is it possible for agencies to merge annual survey items into their existing surveys to create less confusion for employees?
- A: Yes; however, OPM recommends agencies present the items in the order they are listed in the regulation to minimize the potential effects that order and context may have on survey results and to ensure that results are comparable across agencies. Agencies wishing to incorporate additional items of their own should include those after the required items. However, if an agency chooses to alter the order of required items or embed their own items within the required items, the agency must report this to OPM and provide a copy of their instrument highlighting the differences. Results must be reported as presented in the regulation.
- Q: Agencies with fewer than 800 employees are not required to ask demographic items. Can the smaller agencies ask the demographic items if they want to do so?
- A: Yes. Small agencies may include these items. Demographic items are not required for the smaller agencies because participants sometimes feel their survey is not confidential when they answer these items. To ease discomfort on the part of employees, OPM does not require these items for smaller agencies (i.e., agencies with fewer than 800 employees).
- Q: The FHCS results are reported as weighted and unweighted. Do we have to weight the results?
- A: No. Weighting is not required, but agencies can weight their results if they think it is appropriate for their situation and intended use. Note the FHCS Website provides both weighted and unweighted results. Be sure to make the appropriate comparisons between your AES results and the FHCS weighted and unweighted results.
- Q: Can agencies use a vendor to implement the survey?
- A: Yes, agencies have the option of using a vendor of their choosing. For a small reimbursable fee, OPM will administer the required items and provide the results for the agency.
- Q: Will OPM post results on its Website for all of the agencies?
- A: No. Agencies are responsible for posting their own results on their own Websites, making them available to the public.
- Q: How long must survey results be posted on an agency's Website?

A: Results shall remain on the agency's Website until the next year's results are available and posted.