



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

CENTER *for* PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION

# A GUIDE FOR CABINET SECRETARIES AND AGENCY LEADERS

PREPARING FOR THE 2017 FEDERAL EMPLOYEE VIEWPOINT SURVEY



In May 2017, the Office of Personnel Management will begin distributing the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey to several hundred thousand employees across approximately 80 federal agencies and their subcomponents. The 2017 survey will be administered in two six-week waves and close in late June. It will be followed by the release of results to agencies on a rolling basis starting in August.<sup>1</sup>

According to OPM, “The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey is a tool that measures employee perceptions of whether and to what extent conditions characterizing successful organizations are present in their agencies. Survey results provide valuable insight into the challenges agency leaders face in ensuring the Federal Government has an effective civilian workforce and how well they are responding.”<sup>2</sup>

The survey is confidential and contains approximately 100 questions grouped into eight topic areas: Personal Work Experiences, Work Unit, Agency, Supervisor, Leadership, Satisfaction, Work/Life Programs and Demographics.<sup>3</sup> The data also is used to develop the annual Best Places to Work in the Federal Government rankings®—the most comprehensive and authoritative rating of employee engagement in the federal government—produced by the Partnership for Public Service and Deloitte.

<sup>1</sup> Office of Personnel Management Memo on 2017 FEVS. Available at <http://bit.ly/2pICgS8>

<sup>2</sup> Office of Personnel Management, 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. Available at <http://bit.ly/2omI9Ua>

<sup>3</sup> Office of Personnel Management, 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Governmentwide Management Report. Available at: <http://bit.ly/2oOTerg>

# WHY IS THE EMPLOYEE SURVEY IMPORTANT?

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Having a highly engaged workforce is a critical part of an agency's ability to achieve its mission objectives. Strong participation and response rates to employee surveys provide agency leaders with detailed information on employee engagement levels and can pinpoint areas of employee dissatisfaction. The information can help senior leaders make adjustments to personnel practices and address management deficiencies to enable the agency to function more effectively.

As the head of your agency, the survey will provide you with an opportunity to communicate directly with your staff about the importance of their work to the agency's mission, your commitment to listening to their feedback, and your agency's plan to act on the results to address the challenges and opportunities raised by their responses. There are several ways that you can do this, including highlighting progress with the survey's roll out, emphasizing the importance of employee feedback and thanking employees for their dedication to the mission and service to the American people.

In addition, you play a key role in determining and guiding the implementation of improvements based on the identified trends and challenges. A thoughtful review of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results and subsequent Best Places to Work data can inform the steps your agency should consider to successfully support employee engagement and ultimately improve agency performance. The Best Places to Work results are released later in the year and provide additional insights on how federal employees view their jobs and workplaces across the government, as well as at individual agencies and their subcomponents. Case studies have shown how leaders have leveraged various employee survey data to develop realistic and innovative action plans.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Best Places to Work in the Federal Government agency profiles. Available at: <http://bit.ly/2ptGLRA>

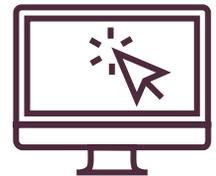
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## BEST PLACES TO WORK CASE STUDIES

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### DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Several DHS agencies registered increases in their 2016 Best Places to Work scores, reflecting improvements in how the employees of these organizations view their jobs and workplaces. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services is one of the DHS agencies that has demonstrated an interest in empowering employees. Last May, the agency started actively soliciting employee feedback through pulse polls by using an internal polling system that collects feedback about employee concerns and perspectives. Agency leaders have also employed a web-based portal called USCIS Innovation that allows for online peer interaction and voting regarding workplace issues that employees would like to resolve. USCIS leadership used the information to improve how employees perform their jobs, ultimately highlighting the importance of responding to the concerns of employees in order to improve engagement.



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### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senior leadership at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has focused on improving scores for three specific Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey questions: “My talents are used well in the workplace;” “In my organization, senior leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce;” and “My organization’s senior leaders maintain high standards of honesty and integrity.” To address these issues, CMS launched an interagency rotational program to develop staff through career development coaching opportunities, including providing front line managers with the opportunity to receive coaching on the job. Elisabeth A. Handley, the director of the Office of Human Capital, explained that agency leadership genuinely wants to hear from employees, as evidenced by a recent campaign to increase staff participation in the government-wide survey. The campaign, complete with a promotional mascot named EIViS the Elephant, helped increase staff participation in the employee survey from 61 percent in 2010 to 69 percent in 2016.



# HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE SURVEY

## BOOSTING PARTICIPATION

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You can take immediate action to increase awareness of the survey and bolster participation by communicating clearly and consistently with your workforce about its importance and how it will be used to inform and improve management's interaction with employees.

- Prior to the release of the survey, speak with your leadership team, including your chief management officer, chief human capital officer, chief of staff and head of communications regarding strategies to promote the survey and drive employee participation**
  
- Send all-staff communication to announce the survey's launch:**
  - Highlight the value of the survey and encourage eligible employees to participate
  - Emphasize its importance to inform leadership's understanding of employees needs and employee engagement priorities
  - Reinforce the leadership's commitment to listening to and acting on the results
  - Inform staff of survey-related logistics and response deadlines
  
- Continue communications throughout the survey period:**
  - Remind employees of survey response deadlines
  - Acknowledge response rates (where possible)
  - Reiterate the importance of responding to the survey by highlighting how it will be used to inform the agency's employee engagement priorities

# HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE RESULTS

## PLANNING TO RESPOND

### **Discuss with your leadership team how you will message and respond to the survey results:**

- Review results and responses from previous years, including trends over the past 5 to 10 years
- Consider engaging with OPM and management councils on key employee engagement issues arising from the survey (e.g. the Chief Human Capital Officer Council)
- Determine benchmarks to inform goals for participation and results. You may wish to do this by benchmarking against 2016 survey results

### **Following the survey response deadline:**

- Thank employees for their participation
- Outline the anticipated timeframe for receiving the results
- Communicate initial plans for responding to results

### **Provide continuous updates to employees regarding the status and progress of planned actions and engagement priorities following the survey.**

- For example, your chief human capital officer could convene employee focus groups to provide additional insights on the survey results.

## CONTACT AND SUPPORT

Maintaining a highly engaged workforce is key to driving productivity, service quality and organizational performance. This survey is one tool that provides a snapshot of employee views at your agency and should inform broader ongoing efforts to strengthen employee engagement.

The Partnership has been supporting agencies for more than a decade to help address their unique workforce challenges. We have assisted agencies in a variety of ways from helping them understand their survey data to delivering targeted training and developing their senior leaders and front line supervisors. We have helped agencies build top to bottom strategies for tackling their engagement issues and have seen agencies reap enormous benefits from this approach.

**For more information on how the Partnership can help your agency, contact Michelle Amante at [mamante@ourpublicservice.org](mailto:mamante@ourpublicservice.org)**

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Best Places to Work in the Federal Government

Rankings and analysis: <http://bestplacestowork.org/>

### Center for Presidential Transition

Federal agency workforce profiles for each CFO Act agency: <http://bit.ly/2iwxowl>

### Office of Personnel Management

2017 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Memo: <http://bit.ly/2pICgS8>

### Office of Personnel Management

Unlocking Federal Talent: <https://unlocktalent.gov/>

### Public Service Recognition Week

(May 7-13, 2017) – To acknowledge employees and publicly highlight agency successes: [psrw.org](http://psrw.org)



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For over 15 years, the nonpartisan, nonprofit Partnership for Public Service has been dedicated to making the federal government more effective for the American people. We work across administrations to help transform the way government operates by increasing collaboration, accountability, efficiency and innovation. The Partnership's Center for Presidential Transition is designed to help presidential candidates navigate the transition process, prepare political appointees to lead effectively and work with the outgoing administration to encourage a smooth transfer of power. Visit [ourpublicservice.org](http://ourpublicservice.org) to learn more.