



HR NEWS FOR YOU

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The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government 2005

The Best Places to Work rankings are the most comprehensive and authoritative rating and analysis of employee satisfaction in the Federal government. The 2005 rankings are the second edition of this ongoing series.

Best Places draws on responses from close to 150,000 Federal employees to produce detailed rankings across 250 Federal agencies and components.

The rankings found that the best places to work were, in rank order, the Office of Management and Budget, the National Science Foundation, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Government Accountability Office and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Their scores ranged from 77.5 to 70.0. The Department of Commerce was ranked 12 with a score of 63.5.

The Partnership for Public Service and the American University's Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation using data from the OPM's Federal Human Capital Survey have ranked agencies and subcomponents using a "Best Places to Work" index score, which measured overall employee satisfaction. Best Places offers a snapshot overview of each agency and subcomponent, trend data on changes since 2003 and expert analysis of what the results mean. Below is a discussion of the analysis of the results.

The overall Federal government score still falls below the average for the private sector, but in the 2005 rankings one out of every three Federal organizations received higher scores than the private sector average, up from just one in eight two years ago. Also, while just three percent of the agencies beat the benchmark

score for top performing private sector companies in 2003, by 2005 that number had climbed to 20 percent.

Compared to workers in the private sector, Federal employees are more likely to say their work relates to the organization's mission, their supervisors are supportive in balancing work and life issues, and the people they work with cooperate to get things done.

The key drivers behind workplace satisfaction and engagement remain the same: effective leadership and a good match between employee skills and the mission of the organization. A statistical analysis of the Best Places to Work results shows both in 2005 and 2003 that these two factors are the most significantly connected to overall employee satisfaction and engagement across the 250 agencies and components measured.

In terms of demographics, the best news is the substantial parity of employee satisfaction and engagement across gender, age and racial and ethnic lines. The average score for men and women, as well as workers over and under 40 is the same: 61. Only three points separate the four largest racial and ethnic groups measured: African Americans (60), Whites (61), Hispanics (63), and Asians (63). There was a sharp upswing of African American scores, which increased seven percent in just two years.

Since the first Best Places rankings were released in 2003, employee engagement scores have increased in 75 percent of all Federal organizations. On average, employee engagement is up nine percent at the 30 largest Federal agencies and five percent at smaller agencies and subcomponents. The strong upward trend was driven by a significant and positive change in employees' attitudes toward their supervisors and organizational leaders. Effective Leadership and



Teamwork had the highest rate of increase (4.3 percent and 4.6 percent respectively).

There are continuing challenges. For example, compared with the average private sector scores, Federal workers give low marks to their organizations for the performance of their immediate supervisors and the recognition provided for a job well done. The largest gaps with top performing companies are found in resolving disputes fairly (16 percent lower in government) and in rewarding workers for providing high quality products and services (25 points in government). To read the entire The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government 2005 report, go to <http://www.bestplacetowork.org>.

Understanding Job Satisfaction

The Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) report on the results of its 2004 Federal Human Capital Survey, What Do Federal Employees Say, found that 68 percent of respondents were satisfied with their jobs. This was a slightly lower percentage than what was found for employees in the private sector where, on average 71 percent were satisfied.

Because job satisfaction is becoming a key indicator of how agencies measure whether they are an "agency of choice," the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) reviewed its own data on job satisfaction in its last four Merit Principles Surveys. They found that overall job satisfaction for Federal employees varied only slightly from a high of 72 percent in 1992 to a low of 67 percent in 2000. At the same time, there was greater variation among individual agencies.

In the September 2005 edition of MSPB's publication, Issues of Merit, they analyzed the results from their surveys to see if they could better understand what factors contribute to overall job satisfaction. They found three key dimensions to job satisfaction, in order of importance:

1. The match between the person and the job.
2. The extent to which employees believe they are respected for what they do.
3. The extent to which employees believe they are well managed.

By far, the most influential factor in job satisfaction appears to be the degree to which employees think that their jobs make good use of their skills and abilities. This was closely followed by the extent to which employees think that the work that they perform is meaningful. If employees believe their work and the

work of their agencies is important and makes good use of their skills, there is a high likelihood they will be satisfied with their jobs.

The next major component appears to be whether employees believe they are treated with respect. Higher job satisfaction comes from working conditions where employees believe their opinions count and where they receive recognition for their work.

The third component is related to how well an organization is managed. But this factor does not seem to work in isolation from job fit and respect. In other words, a well-managed organization does not necessarily translate to high job satisfaction scores in the absence of a good match between employees and the job, or under conditions where employees do not feel respected for what they do.

Finally, the MSPB article concluded that differences in agency missions might explain differences in overall satisfaction. Agencies that have a clear and compelling mission can probably attract applicants who believe in that mission. But the prospects for high job satisfaction can be easily undermined by working conditions that convey either a lack of respect for the employee or poor management. To read this article or others in MSPB's periodic newsletter, Issues of Merit, go to MSPB's website at <http://www.mspb.gov> and click on MSPB Studies on the left-hand side and scroll down to Issues of Merit Newsletters on the right side and click on the "Sept 2005" issue.

Emergency Preparedness

In the wake of the hurricane-related emergency evacuations that people living in the Gulf Coast area were required to undertake, it is important for all employees to familiarize themselves with evacuation procedures. There are several government websites that provide information on emergency preparedness and evacuation procedures. The Department of Commerce's evacuation handbook is at this website at <http://home.commerce.gov/osy/oep/oep4272005.pdf>. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has a substantial amount of valuable information on what to do in an emergency including publications that can be downloaded from the website www.ready.gov. There is information on what to put in an emergency kit. There is good advice on making a plan of what needs to be done in an emergency whether it occurs at work and/or at home. For example, local telephone service may be disrupted in an emergency. DHS suggests that the family agree on an out-of state-contact person that each family member can call in case of an emergency.



That contact person can let the family members know each person's status and location. Your planning should take into account the various types of emergencies or threats that may occur. Different situations may require different actions. Finally, the District of Columbia has a website that describes the evacuation procedures from downtown Washington. The main website is at <http://ddot.dc.gov> but once there click on Emergency Preparedness under Information on the left side. Under the District's evacuation plan, Pennsylvania Avenue between Rock Creek Park and the U.S. Capitol will serve as the dividing line for exiting the city. If an evacuation is ordered, motorists north of Pennsylvania Avenue will be directed North, East and West on designated radial evacuation routes; motorists south of Pennsylvania Avenue will be directed South, East and West on the radial evacuation routes. Officials in the Metropolitan Washington, DC area have identified twenty-five (25) corridors radiating from downtown Washington, DC as emergency event/evacuation routes. There will be specific signs on each street and the traffic lights will be timed to expedite the evacuation process. After reading the Emergency Preparedness information, you can click on Evacuation/Event Routes Map to see the 25 evacuation routes. Other major American cities should also have evacuation and emergency preparedness information on their websites. If you want more information on emergency preparedness, please contact Tony Proctor on 202-482-2384 or via email at Tony.Proctor@mail.doc.gov.

Working for America Act

Linda Springer, the Director, Office of Personnel Management, testified on October 5, 2005, on the Administration's Working for America Act, which is a legislative proposal for improving Federal government personnel systems. She said: "Simply stated, the Working for America Act will require agencies to better manage, develop and reward employees to better serve the American people."

Ms. Springer went on to compare the new proposed system to the existing General Schedule (GS) personnel system:

An employee's career (and pay) potential should recognize achievement and not be determined by the passage of time or obsolete job classifications. For example, General Schedule pay grades were defined by a law that has remained largely unchanged since the middle of the last century and serves as a legacy of the industrial age. It takes

employees up to 18 years to reach the top of a General Schedule pay grade, regardless of how well they perform. Our proposed legislation recognizes that enhancements to the personnel system must be made within the context of the core values, principles, and protections of the American civil service. Reform can be accomplished while fully preserving core principles and protections. In fact, the Working for America Act promotes merit system principles by putting them into practice more broadly.

Personnel systems that make it more likely that employees reach their full potential will soon cover more than half of the Federal workforce. The rest should be afforded similar opportunities. The Working for America Act ensures that remaining agencies are not left at a competitive disadvantage.

The Act will generally cover agencies that are currently covered by Title 5 of U. S. Code but not most intelligence agencies, financial regulatory agencies, government-controlled corporations, and Foreign Service employees. There will be a results-driven, market-based compensation system. OPM would establish a core compensation system for the Federal government, defining broad groups of like occupations (such as law enforcement or science and engineering), as well as pay bands within each group that represent clearly distinct levels of work (entry, full performance, senior expert, supervisory). In the core system, market-based pay would constitute a significant portion of base pay adjustments, with the balance allocated on the basis of individual performance.

According to Ms. Springer, the act "crafts a careful balance, ensuring that Federal unions retain core collective bargaining rights, but precluding them from exercising those rights in a way that would deter, divert or delay managers from meeting their mission."

In the area of employee relations, Ms. Springer said:

Federal employees are accountable to the American people, not only to do their jobs but also to comport themselves according to high standards of conduct and performance. If employees fail to meet performance expectations, the Working for America Act would provide for a simplified and streamlined process that preserves the fundamental due process rights Federal employees deserve—including the right to take the case to the Merit



Systems Protection Board (MSPB) or an arbitrator. It would also require a tough burden of proof for an agency to sustain an adverse action (including those taken for poor performance); however, when that burden is met, the proposal would require the penalty chosen by the agency be granted deference.

In 2006, agencies will be required to develop and expand robust performance management systems as part of the Human Capital Initiative of the President's Management Agenda. OPM anticipates that agencies will have a plan in place by 2008 for the development and deployment of an OPM-certified performance adjustment plan or will have adopted the standard OPM system. The legislation then would permanently "sunset" the General Schedule and the Federal Wage System by 2010.

To learn more about the Working for America Act, including facts about the draft bill; a summary of the draft bill; the draft bill; a section-by-section analysis of the draft bill; answers to frequently asked questions; and a comparison of the draft bill to current law and reforms currently underway at the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, go to: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/results/agenda/working.html>.

Outstanding Scholar Program and the Federal Career Intern Program

OPM has for a long time encouraged managers to use two hiring flexibilities to fill entry-level two-grade interval positions: the Outstanding Scholar Program and the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP). The Outstanding Scholar Program was developed to replace a written exam that a class action lawsuit of blacks and Hispanics brought against the Professional Administrative Career Exam (PACE) because the plaintiffs alleged that the exam had adverse impact on the employment of these minorities for reasons that were not job related. In 1981, OPM, on behalf of all Federal agencies, entered into the Luevano Consent Decree and established the Outstanding Scholar program, which was designed to facilitate the hiring of more minorities.

The Decree covered the 120 career occupations at the GS-5 and GS-7 levels that were covered by PACE. To be eligible, college graduates from accredited schools must have obtained a 3.5 or higher grade point average on a 4.0 scale or rank in the top 10% of their graduating class. Use of the Outstanding Scholar option was only to supplement competitive hiring at

these grade levels. However, over time, many agencies did not use it to supplement the competitive hiring but relied substantially on the program to fill covered positions.

In 2000 and again in 2001, the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) called on OPM to drop the Outstanding Scholar Program because it still primarily benefits white women, and not the blacks and Hispanics it was designed to assist in gaining entry-level Federal employment. MSPB noted also that the two minority groups were not the most candidates hired under the program. In fact the use of competitive hiring procedures for entry-level professional and administrative occupations had resulted in significantly more minority hires.

The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) found in a recent decision that a veteran's rights were violated when he was passed over for a job and another applicant was selected without competition through the Outstanding Scholar program. In the specific case, David Dean, a disabled Vietnam veteran, applied for a personnel management job with the Department of Agriculture in Columbia, South Carolina. He was notified that he was qualified for the position but he learned that the position went to an Outstanding Scholar who was not a veteran. He said that the Department had hired this person without seeking OPM's approval to pass over him because of his veteran's preference.

OPM contended that the Luevano Consent Decree, which was entered into by the Federal government to address discrimination against blacks and Hispanics in hiring for entry-level positions, overrode the veterans' preference provisions. MSPB ruled that the Consent Decree was not a sufficient basis to frustrate the intent of Congress in giving veterans preference in the Federal hiring process.

On September 9, 2005, OPM petitioned MSPB for reconsideration of this and another case. The Board has not issued a decision on the OPM petition. Since the Luevano Consent Decree was to resolve the class action suit by blacks and Hispanics on behalf of all Federal agencies, the agencies have been advised by OPM to make their own determination. Until the issues in the case have been resolved, OPM has stopped all hiring under the Outstanding Scholar program. The Department of Commerce is studying the problem presented by the MSPB decision and once a determination is made, information will be disseminated.



The Federal Career Intern Program is another Federal employment program for hiring graduates into entry-level positions at the GS-5, 7, and 9 levels in professional, administrative and technical positions. The interns are given an initial two-year appointment. At the end of the two-year period, during which the intern will have received rotational and other developmental assignments, they can be converted to a competitive status appointment without competition. Or if the intern was not successful, the appointment can be terminated. The career internship does not guarantee the individual a permanent appointment in the competitive service in the Federal government at the end of two years.

The MSPB, in a report issued in October 2005, found the FCIP program offers Federal agencies a streamlined hiring tool that can help them meet their workforce needs. The program was initially established by E.O. 13162 in July 2000. MSPB found that:

The program has had an auspicious beginning. Of all the different hiring methods that can be used across government to hire new entry-level employees, only the FCIP showed a dramatic increase in the number of hires from fiscal year 2001 through 2004. In addition, survey data the Board has gathered show that career interns and their supervisors have positive views about and experiences with the program.

MSPB noted that although career interns serve a two-year trial period, many agencies have not stressed its importance to managers. Many times the trial period was not adequately addressed in the program plans. Agencies also need, according to MSPB, to provide formal training and developmental activities during the trial period to maximize the benefits of the program to the interns and managers.

In recruiting for career interns, agencies have a great deal of flexibility, including attending job fairs or posting vacancy announcements. Agencies must, however, adhere to the requirements of the first merit system principle that states:

Recruitment should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources in an endeavor to achieve a workforce from all segments of society, and selection and advancement should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and

skills after fair and open competition, which assures that all receive equal opportunity.

To read more of the report, go to www.mspb.gov and click on MSPB Studies and then scroll down to Recent Reports and click on Building a High Quality Workforce: The Federal Career Intern Program, October 2005.

The Department of Commerce is currently piloting the Federal Career Intern Program on a limited basis in certain occupations.

Energy Efficiency

In this time of rising gasoline and fuel prices, most individuals are looking for ways to conserve fuel and increase energy efficiency. The Department of Energy (DOE) has created a website (<http://www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/>) that provides consumers with valuable information on energy efficiency and renewable energy. The site provides information on how to save energy costs for your home, your vehicle and workplace.

For your home, the site notes that the home uses energy every day, all day long. Energy is used to heat the house in winter and cool it in the summer. Energy is used for lighting and for hot water. It is also used to run appliances. There are links to information on reducing the energy that appliances and electronics use. Using energy-efficient doors, windows and skylights can lower energy costs. There are links for information on "Do-It-Yourself Home Energy Audits" and on "Professional Home Energy Audits."

To make your automobile more fuel efficient, the website provides information on alternative fuels such as biodiesel, electricity, ethanol, natural gas or propane. There is information on hydrogen-powered vehicles with the potential to significantly reduce energy use and emissions. There are links to information on hybrid electric vehicles, neighborhood electric vehicles and the FreedomCar and Vehicle Technologies Program.

Finally, there are links to information on making the workplace more energy efficient. "Saving energy in the workplace results in saving money." At this part of the website, you can learn how to use energy in the workplace more efficiently. There is also information on how to incorporate renewable energy in the workplace for cost savings and some of these technologies can also help to improve worker comfort.



National Disability Employment Awareness Month, October 2005

October 2005 was National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Congress in 1945, enacted Public Law 176, which designated the first week in October as "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week." In 1962, the word "physically" was removed from the week's name to recognize the employment needs of all Americans with disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed its name to "National Disability Employment Awareness Month." October has evolved into the kick-off month for year-round programs that highlight the abilities and skills of Americans with disabilities.

Fifteen years ago, President George H. W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which reduced barriers for millions of Americans with disabilities and provided a mandate for the elimination of discrimination in the workplace and the community. In a Presidential Proclamation, President George W. Bush said:

Since the ADA was enacted, people with disabilities have been able to participate more fully in the workplace, and our Nation has become stronger and more just. Yet more work remains, and we continue to our efforts to enable Americans with disabilities to live and work with greater freedom.

In October 2005, Americans celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the first annual designation of a period of time recognizing the employment needs of people with disabilities and the fifteenth anniversary of the ADA. To learn more about National Disability Employment Awareness Month go to www.dol.gov/odep. Information on the ADA is available on both the Department of Justice website at <http://www.ada.gov> and at the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEOC) website at <http://www.eeoc.gov> and then click on Disability on the left side to learn more about EEOC's responsibilities for enforcing the employment provisions of the ADA.

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