

Secretary of State Audit Report

Jeanne P. Atkins, Secretary of State

Mary Wenger, Interim Director, Audits Division



Department of Human Services: To Better Achieve its Mission, Vision, and Goals, DHS Must Increase Efforts to Address Employees' Concerns

Executive Summary

The engagement level of employees can directly influence their ability to do their job and thrive professionally and personally. In April 2016, we conducted a survey of the Department of Human Services (DHS) employees to help DHS management identify work environment factors positively or negatively affecting employee engagement.

Survey respondents generally reported they know the agency's mission, vision, and goals and are proud to work there. But their responses also highlighted areas within DHS that need improvement. These included tools and resources to accomplish the work, compensation, hiring practices, recognition, professional development, stress and workload distribution, and communication. Addressing these issues will help DHS improve employee engagement and better achieve the agency's mission, vision and values.

Overview of DHS

The Department of Human Services' (DHS) mission is to help Oregonians in their own communities achieve safety, well-being, and independence through services that protect, empower, respect choice, and preserve dignity. The agency's biennial budget is about \$10 billion with 7,897 full time equivalent staff.

The agency serves over a million Oregonians each year through two support services units and five program areas. The five programs provide services through numerous field and local offices throughout the state. Central Services, which includes the Director's office, and Shared Services, provide support and leadership to the following programs: Aging and People with Disabilities, Child Welfare, Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities, Self-Sufficiency, and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Employee engagement is important

Engaged employees are passionate, energetic, and dedicated to their job and organization. One study indicates that a higher level of employee engagement correlates with higher rates of success in achieving strategic goals, higher employee retention, and fewer days of sick leave and lost time.

Work environment surveys can help an organization measure its level of employee engagement. DHS has been conducting an employee survey since 2012 that consists of seven questions designed to measure employee engagement.

Our survey was designed to measure the factors that influence employee engagement. DHS management could use the results of our survey to identify areas to improve, and set priorities for action.

Core knowledge and respectful work units given high ratings among respondents

Survey results indicate that DHS is doing well in four areas that influence engagement: mission, vision, goals; job suitability; respectful work units and reporting of harassing and discriminating behavior; and teamwork.

Nearly all respondents reported they knew the mission, vision, and goals of the agency; and how their work relates to these goals. Furthermore, over 85% of respondents reported they are proud to work at DHS. Almost all of the respondents reported they found their work to be meaningful.

Survey highlights concerns DHS management should address

DHS management should address perceived deficiencies that influence employee engagement. We surveyed 7,426 DHS employees and received 4,580 completed surveys, resulting in a 62% response rate. Employees rated their level of agreement with survey questions regarding factors that influence employee engagement. The response benchmarks we used were based on the existing DHS metrics, which are as follows: 85% and above means the respondent perceives DHS as doing well for that factor; between 66% - 84% means a factor that needs some improvement; and 65% and below means a factor that is in critical need of management attention.

Survey respondents identified seven factors in need of improvement - tools and resources, compensation, hiring practices, recognition, stress and workload, professional development, and communication.

Only 55% of respondents felt they had sufficient tools and resources to do their job. At least 50% of respondents across two units and five programs reported a high level of stress. Many respondents reported concerns about the fairness and competitiveness of hiring practices, and a lack of recognition for the work they do.

Another key factor related to employee engagement and organizational success is communication. For an agency as large as DHS, with offices all over the state, communication can be particularly challenging. However, according to a Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency's work environment survey, direct and timely communication from senior leaders can go a long way in making employees feel informed and connected.

Leaders also need honest feedback from employees who provide services to clients, in order to help them make the best decisions. Overall, less than half of the respondents felt that communication and information flows effectively between the central office and the field offices.

Recommendations

To better achieve its mission, vision, and goals, we recommend DHS management develop and implement a plan to address the seven areas needing improvement: tools and resources, compensation, hiring practices, recognition, professional development, stress and workload, and communication.

To gauge whether efforts are improving engagement, we recommend DHS management administer a work environment survey at least annually that includes the factors we identified that influence engagement.

Last, we recommend management use the future survey results to revise the plan, as needed.

Agency Response

The agency generally agreed with our findings and recommendations. The full agency response can be found at the end of the report.

Background

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is one of the largest state agencies in Oregon. The agency has a biennial budget of about \$10 billion and 7,897 full time equivalent staff.

The agency's mission is to help Oregonians in their own communities achieve safety, well-being and independence through services that protect, empower, respect choice and preserve dignity. DHS is responsible for the care of some of Oregon's most vulnerable citizens – children, low-income families, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and seniors. DHS is also responsible for serving Oregonians at times when they are most in need – when they experience abuse, when they are hungry, and when they are homeless.

DHS has the following goals and outcomes:

- safety for children;
- safety for vulnerable adults;
- independence for older adults and people with disabilities;
- community employment for people with disabilities;
- family stability and employment;
- job retention for low-income working families;
- school readiness for young children; and
- program performance and integrity.

The agency serves over a million Oregonians each year through five program areas as shown in Figure 1. The five programs within DHS provide services through field and local offices located throughout the state. For example, the Self-Sufficiency program has 16 district offices that serve Oregonians from Clatsop County to Malheur County. The Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Stabilization and Crisis Unit has 23 homes along the I-5 corridor that deliver services to clients.

The Central and Shared Services units are located in Salem, and provide leadership and support services to the five programs.

Figure 1: Overview of DHS

DHS Enterprise Units

Shared Services - Provides enterprise support functions including information technology, financial services, budget, human resources, facilities, and procurement to both DHS and the Oregon Health Authority. 2015-17 Budget: \$117 million; 645 Full Time Equivalent Employees (FTE)

Central Services - Provides functions directly related to policy and program areas within DHS, including the director's office, communications, and the Governor's Advocacy Office. 2015-17 Budget: \$35 million; 94 FTE

DHS Program Areas

Aging and People with Disabilities

- Provides services for seniors and adults with physical disabilities.
- Clients Served - 360,000 Oregonians
- 2015-17 Budget - \$2.9 billion; 1,241 FTE

Child Welfare

- Provides services for the safety of children, including responding to reports of child abuse or neglect; in home supports or out of home care when necessary; and arranges adoption or guardianship services and support.
- Clients Served - 7,000 children; 64,000 reports of abuse or child neglect
- 2015-17 Budget - \$941 million; 2,559 FTE

Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities

- Provides services to children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout their life span, by helping them to be fully engaged in life and, at the same time, address any critical health and safety needs.
- Clients Served - 23,000 children and adults
- 2015-17 Budget - \$2.1 billion; 851 FTE

Self Sufficiency

- Provides services to low-income families in the form of food, cash, employment, and childcare assistance; and parenting support, to promote family stability and self-sufficiency.
- Clients Served - Food assistance to 750,000 Oregonians; cash assistance to 26,000 families; childcare assistance for 14,000 children in day care
- 2015-17 Budget - \$3.4 billion; 2,029 FTE

Vocational Rehabilitation

- Provides vocational rehabilitation services to youth and adults whose disabilities present impediments to employment
- Clients Served - Over 15,000 Oregonians
- 2015-17 Budget - \$97 million; 249 FTE

Workplace Environment Surveys

A Workplace Environment Survey (WES) is a tool that can be used to measure factors that influence employee engagement. Engagement matters because engaged employees may help an organization (public or private) be more successful.

Job satisfaction is just one possible attribute of employee engagement. Engaged employees are also more likely to go beyond the minimum asked of them. According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, engaged employees are passionate, energetic, and dedicated to their job and organization. Furthermore, one study indicated that a higher level of employee engagement correlates with higher rates of success in achieving strategic goals, higher employee retention, and fewer days of sick leave and lost time.

While there is no single solution to improve employee engagement, an organization can measure its own level of employee engagement, analyze the results, identify areas to improve, and set priorities for action.

Factors that can influence employee engagement include:

- Vision, mission, goals
- Workplace safety
- Tools and resources
- Compensation (Pay and benefits)
- Staffing practices
- Job suitability
- Teamwork
- Respectful environment
- Employee recognition
- Empowerment
- Stress and workload
- Professional development

Employees might be more engaged if they believe in the purpose of their organization, work in a supportive environment where they feel safe, are given the tools and resources to do their job, and receive appreciation and feedback for the work they do.

Work environment surveys help provide useful benchmarks for measuring engagement. But without action to address the results, an organization may be worse off than if no survey had been conducted. This is because surveys can raise expectation that the organization is going to take action based on the results.

DHS's Offices of Program Integrity, and Payment Accuracy and Recovery, have jointly conducted annual workplace environment surveys since 2011. Both offices reported an increase in workplace satisfaction over the years.

Management reported that the survey results have led to an improved employee onboarding process, mentoring program, and a quarterly peer recognition program.

DHS has conducted agencywide employee engagement surveys since 2012. On a quarterly basis, the agency's human resources department sends out the survey to a randomly selected sample of 1,500 (6,000 a year) employees. The survey asks the following seven questions specific to engagement, which are similar to Gallup's employee engagement survey questions:

1. When I am at work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
2. In the last month, I have received praise for doing good work.
3. My supervisor or someone at work seems to care about me as a person.
4. There is someone at work who encourages my professional development.
5. When I am at work my opinions seem to count.
6. The DHS Mission and Core Values makes me feel my job is important.
7. During the past year I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

In 2015, 2,148 employees completed the DHS survey, for a response rate of about 36%.

Audit Results

Survey respondents generally reported they know the agency's mission, vision, and goals and are proud to work there. But their responses also highlighted areas within DHS that need improvement. These included tools and resources to accomplish the work, compensation, hiring practices, recognition, professional development, stress and workload distribution, and communication.

Audits Division's Survey of DHS

DHS recently experienced a change in leadership. In 2015, Governor Kate Brown appointed Clyde Saiki as the department's new interim director. We conducted this employee survey to provide DHS management with a snapshot of employee perceptions regarding the department's strengths and weaknesses. The director and his management team can use this information to identify issues and design plans to address employee concerns, thus improving employee engagement and ultimately assisting the department in accomplishing its mission.

In April 2016, we sent our survey with 51 questions to 7,426 DHS employees to assess employee engagement and identify strengths and areas for improvement. As shown in Figure 2 we received 4,580 completed surveys (a 62% response rate) covering all five programs and the 2 central services units. We also received over 1,800 substantive written comments that help illustrate some of the respondents' concerns.

We analyzed and compared our survey results between the five programs and two units, between the central office and field offices (Appendix B), and between supervisory and non-supervisory staff (Appendix C). The response categories for most of the questions were strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree. For each question, we calculated the percentage of respondents who chose either "strongly agree" or "agree."

For the purpose of this audit, we are reporting the results between the five programs and two units. We are also only reporting results for 22 of the 51 survey questions. Of these 22 questions, 14 indicated areas in need of improvement and 8 indicated areas where DHS is doing well. Refer to Appendix A for results to all 51 survey questions.

Figure 2: Survey response rate by programs and units

Program/Unit	Response Count	Response Rate
Programs		
Aging and People with Disabilities (APD)	673	72%
Child Welfare (CW)	1,601	60%
Self Sufficiency (SS)	1,331	73%
Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (IDD)	206	28%
Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)	144	65%
Enterprise Units		
Central Services/Director’s Office	155	24%
Shared Services*	470	127%
Total	4,580	

*More respondents identified themselves in the survey as working in Shared Services compared to the numbers reported by DHS.

To identify areas of strength and improvement across the five DHS programs and two units, we developed the benchmarks levels shown in Figure 3, which are similar to those DHS uses in its quarterly survey. For example, if 85% or more of the responses to a question were strongly agree or agree, the response benchmark for that question is “DHS is doing well.”

Figure 3: Survey Benchmarks

Scale	Percentage
DHS is doing well	85% ↑
DHS needs some improvement	66%-84%
DHS in critical need of improvement	65% ↓

Core knowledge and respectful work units are given high ratings among staff

Survey results show four factors, influencing engagement, that DHS is doing well in. These factors are: mission, vision, goals; job suitability; respectful work units and reporting of discriminating and harassing behaviors; and teamwork.

Respondents know the purpose of DHS and are proud to work there

Employees are more likely to be engaged if they know the vision, mission, and goals of their organization. Managers must also communicate with employees to ensure they understand how their work achieves the agency’s vision, mission, and goals. Nearly all respondents reported they know the mission, vision, and goals of DHS, and how their work relates to them. Over 85% of respondents reported they are proud to work at DHS. These results show that DHS survey respondents understand the overall purposes of the agency’s work and are committed to achieving them.

Figure 4: Vision, Mission, and Goals and Pride - Percentage of Respondents That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Questions

Program and Unit Areas										
Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director	Shared Services	Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses
I know what the Mission, Vision, and Goals of DHS are.	98%	97%	98%	94%	98%	96%	97%	4,446	132	4,578
I know how my work relates to the mission, vision, and goals of DHS.	97%	95%	97%	93%	97%	95%	94%	4,381	194	4,575
I am proud to work at DHS.	90%	84%	91%	89%	89%	83%	86%	3,974	581	4,555

Almost all respondents find their work meaningful

Employees are more likely to be engaged when they find their work to be meaningful and a good fit with their skills and interests. If they find meaning in their work, they may be able to fully invest their strengths and efforts and do what it takes to get the job done. Further, they may find more meaning in their work if they believe their contributions provide value to the organization.

Most respondents felt the work they do is important. In fact, 98% of respondents from three programs recognized the importance of their work, and the lowest response from any other program or unit was 95%.

Figure 5: Job Suitability - Percentage of Respondents That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Question

Program and Unit Areas										
Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director	Shared Services	Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses
The work I do is important.	98%	98%	98%	97%	97%	95%	97%	4,460	114	4,574

Respectful work units and reporting discriminating and harassing behavior highly rated by respondents

A respectful environment is important because it affects employee engagement. Employees need a healthy and diverse atmosphere free from discrimination and harassment.

The majority of respondents felt they work in a unit or a program that respects and values diversity; and they know where to report discriminating and harassing behaviors. Between 86% and 93% of respondents across the agency felt this way. Although still high, respondents expressed a little less confidence that their direct supervisor responded appropriately to discriminating and harassing behavior.

Figure 6: Respectful Work Units and Reporting Discriminating and Harassing Behaviors - Percentage of Respondents That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Questions

Program and Unit Areas										
Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director	Shared Services	Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses
The program/unit I work in respects and values diversity.	90%	89%	87%	87%	92%	86%	89%	4,040	531	4,571
My direct supervisor responds appropriately to discriminating and harassing behavior.	85%	85%	85%	85%	80%	83%	86%	3,840	676	4,516
I know where to report discriminating and harassing behavior.	93%	87%	91%	91%	87%	93%	88%	4,080	485	4,569

Many respondents identified strong teamwork within their program/unit

Teamwork can have a positive impact on engagement when employees have positive working relationships. The willingness to share job knowledge with other employees is an important attribute of teamwork. Overall, about 88% of respondents felt employees shared job knowledge with each other.

Figure 7: Teamwork - Percentage of Respondents That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Question

Program and Unit Areas										
Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director	Shared Services	Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses
Employees in my program /unit share job knowledge with each other.	89%	89%	89%	82%	89%	81%	87%	4,035	540	4,575

Employees need resources, recognition, and good communication at all levels to do well at work

While our survey identified areas of strength, we also found seven factors influencing engagement in need of improvement or on the cusp of becoming areas of improvement. These factors are tools and resources, compensation, hiring practices, recognition, stress and workload, professional development, and communication.

Overall, only 55% of the respondents feel they have the tools and resources to do their job

Employee engagement may increase when they believe they have the appropriate technology and equipment to do their job well. For example, DHS needs sufficient technology that allows caseworkers to contact clients

and take notes while in the field, and sufficient staff to handle caseloads. Overall, only 55% of the respondents felt they had adequate tools and resources to perform well. As shown in Figure 8, only 42% of the Child Welfare staff who responded agreed they have adequate resources to perform their job, which corresponds to 58% feeling they do not have sufficient resources.

Figure 8: Tools and Resources - Percentage of Respondents That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Question

Program and Unit Areas										
Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director	Shared Services	Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses
I have sufficient resources to do my job well (people, materials, technology, budget, information).	57%	42%	67%	58%	57%	58%	60%	2,509	2,058	4,567

Respondents’ concerns ranged from not having phones that would allow them to contact clients, check emails, and take notes while in the field, to not enough employees to complete the daily work they are expected to do. One staff commented that the continually increasing staff expectations, without appropriate resources (time, staff, technology, and infrastructure), is not sustainable.

Some respondents feel they do not receive fair and competitive compensation

Compensation and benefits positively influence engagement when employees believe they are compensated fairly and competitively for the work they do and their benefits meet their needs. Employees, for example, often connect their workload and organization’s expectations, to their compensation. Overall, about 53% of respondents felt they received fair compensation while only 45% felt their compensation was competitive with similar jobs in the region. The Child Welfare program’s respondents ranked lowest, with only 45% believing their compensation was fair.

Figure 9: Compensation - Percentage of Respondents That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Questions

Program and Unit Areas										
Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director	Shared Services	Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses
I receive fair compensation (salary plus benefits) for the work I do.	54%	45%	53%	65%	56%	68%	65%	2,411	2,047	4,578*
The compensation (salary plus benefits) I receive is competitive with similar jobs in the region.	42%	46%	43%	60%	42%	44%	42%	2,038	1,915	4,572

*Total responses number include “I do not know” responses

Some respondents commented the compensation they receive did not align with the work they do or were not competitive compared to other entities doing similar work. One respondent commented that supervisors are paid less than the staff they supervise. Another reported that employees were working outside of their classification without increased pay or assistance in obtaining a more appropriate classification. This respondent stated this was an ongoing issue at DHS. A different respondent said Multnomah County pays better for the same job with less stressors.

Fair and competitive hiring practices are also a concern to some respondents

Staffing practices positively influence engagement when hiring practices are seen as fair and based on merit. Also, organizations where employees represent the population they serve, can better understand the needs of its client. Overall, about 60% of respondents felt employees were recruited and hired based on a fair and competitive process. Respondents from the Vocational Rehabilitation program had the highest perception of a fair and competitive hiring process. Self Sufficiency program respondents had the lowest at 53%, but the highest perception, at 72%, that staff are representative of the population they serve.

Figure 10: Hiring Practices - Percentage of Respondents That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Questions

Questions	Program and Unit Areas						Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses*	
	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director				Shared Services
Employees are recruited and hired based on a fair and competitive process.	61%	62%	53%	67%	70%	63%	61%	2,729	1,559	4,573
DHS employees are representative of the population we serve.	68%	56%	72%	64%	64%	54%	63%	2,911	1,389	4,571

*Total responses number include “I do not know” responses

Some respondents commented the hiring process is unfair and is based on who you know, not skills and experience. One respondent said the hiring process appears unfair and is more about relationships and connections rather than quality skills, knowledge or work performance.

Some respondents feel they are not recognized for the work they do

Recognition positively influences engagement when employees’ performance are recognized in a meaningful way. Performance evaluations and promotions are two ways in which employees can be recognized. Overall, about 56% of respondents indicated they received performance evaluations on an annual basis. Only 46% of respondents from the Central/Director unit reported receiving written evaluations.

Fifty-three percent of respondents felt the opportunities for advancement were fair and merit-based. While 58% of respondents from the Aging and People with Disabilities program felt opportunities for advancement were fair and merit-based, only half of the respondents from the Child Welfare program felt the same way.

Figure 11: Recognition - Percentage of Respondents That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Questions

Program and Unit Areas										
Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director	Shared Services	Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses
I receive written performance evaluations on an annual basis.	56%	49%	65%	66%	58%	46%	55%	2,559	1,991	4,550
Opportunities for advancement are fair and merit-based.	58%	50%	54%	56%	54%	52%	53%	2,410	2,124	4,534

Some respondents commented they would like to receive more feedback on their performance, while others indicated they had not received a performance appraisal for years. Similar to hiring practices, some respondents commented that promotions are unfair and are not based on merit.

Half of respondents feel they need more support with professional development

Professional development positively influences engagement when employees believe they are supported in their learning and development, and their employer offers adequate opportunities to develop skills and better prepare for promotional opportunities. A well-developed professional development process may help the agency attract and retain quality employees.

Overall, about half of the respondents felt there were plenty of opportunities for promotion within DHS. The percentage of respondents in agreement ranged from a low of 39% to a high of 60%. Similarly, about half of the respondents reviewed and updated their Employee Development Plans (EDP) with their supervisors on a regular basis.

Figure 12: Professional Development - Percentage of Employees That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Questions

Program and Unit Areas										
Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director	Shared Services	Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses
There are plenty of opportunities for promotion in DHS.	57%	40%	60%	54%	39%	48%	48%	2,266	2,267	4,553
I review and update my EDP with my direct supervisor on a regular basis.	53%	39%	53%	55%	46%	53%	65%	2,236	2,285	4,521

The EDPs are part of the DHS’s performance feedback cycle. These plans are supposed to include an employee’s professional goals and may identify skills and knowledge areas the employee can focus on for professional development. Once EDPs are created, managers are expected to regularly check in with employees to discuss their progress. Some respondents also commented promotional opportunities were limited, with most opportunities for advancement located in Salem.

At least 50% of respondents feel a high level of stress and unfair distribution of workload

Employees’ perceptions regarding stress and workload may influence their engagement. For example, excessive workload, and also stress, might interfere with an employee’s ability to fulfill their family responsibilities and personal commitments. Excess stress could also negatively influence employee engagement and productivity. Across the two units and all five programs, at least 50% of respondents reported a high level of stress. Seventy-three percent of Child Welfare program respondents reported work related stress is too high.

Figure 13: Stress and Workload - Percentage of Respondents That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Questions

Program and Unit Areas										
Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director	Shared Services	Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses
Work is distributed fairly among the people with whom I work.	65%	54%	62%	62%	51%	56%	63%	2,695	1,864	4,559
My work related stress level is too high.*	62%	73%	56%	60%	63%	51%	50%	2,848	1,718	4,566

*Color coding not applied to percentages since a lower percentage is better.

Some respondents commented their workload is overwhelming and not distributed fairly among staff. For example, some staff felt they have higher demands and workload compared to others. One staff noted requesting a step down from their position due to the high level of stress from having to

take work home during the workweek and sometimes the weekend just to get it done. Another commented that caseloads are too high, which could leave children and families unsafe.

Less than half of respondents feel communication flow is effective

Communication can be a challenge for many organizations. According to a Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency’s work environment survey, direct and timely communication from senior leaders can go a long way in making employees feel informed and connected.

Employees who lack timely and effective communication may rely on assumptions and hearsay to form an opinion, which in turn adds to a negative work environment. Leaders also need honest feedback from front line employees who provide services to clients, in order to assist them in making optimum decisions.

Overall, less than half of respondents felt communication and information flows effectively between the central and field offices and vice versa. Only 33% of respondents from the Central/Director unit felt communication and information flowed effectively from the central office to the field offices. Similarly, only 27% felt communication was effective from the field offices to the central office.

Figure 14: Communication - Percentage of Respondents That “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” to Survey Questions

Program and Unit Areas										
Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central-Director	Shared Services	Total Agree Responses	Total Disagree Responses	Total Responses
I am confident that communication and information from the Central office to Field offices flows well.	47%	43%	63%	45%	39%	33%	41%	2,193	2,326	4,519
I am confident that communication and information from the Field office to the Central office flows well.	47%	40%	59%	46%	39%	27%	38%	2,071	2,436	4,507
I am satisfied with the amount of information my program/unit communicates to staff.	70%	65%	73%	56%	58%	64%	64%	3,045	1,492	4,537

These results were echoed in the comments we received. Some respondents noted communication in all directions, including between the central and field offices, needs improvement. Some employees indicated they are not getting the right information in a timely manner, which in turn affects their work. One respondent commented there are many times the central office waits too long to communicate changes to the field offices.

Another respondent indicated the communication between the field and the central office needs improvement.

Conclusion

Employees can be more successful and productive when they are engaged. When they are passionate, energetic, and dedicated to their jobs, they are more successful in achieving their organization's mission, vision, and goals. A positive work environment with good communication flow, free of harassment and other negative influences, sets the stage for employees to perform their best.

Our survey results show nearly all of the survey respondents reported knowing the purpose and goals of the agency and how their work relates to DHS' mission, vision, and goals. For the most part, respondents are proud to work at DHS and feel the work they do is important. However, to better achieve the agency's mission, vision, and goals, DHS management needs to take steps to address employees' concerns identified in the survey.

A comprehensive work environment survey, focused on factors influencing engagement, can help DHS management measure engagement, and identify and address areas needing attention.

Recommendations

To better achieve its mission, vision, and goals, we recommend DHS management develop and implement a plan to address the seven areas needing improvement: tools and resources, compensation, hiring practices, recognition, professional development, stress and workload, and communication.

To gauge whether efforts are improving engagement, we recommend DHS management administer a work environment survey at least annually that includes the factors we identified that influence engagement.

Last, we recommend management use the future survey results to revise the plan, as needed.

Objectives, Scope and Methodology

The objective of this audit was to assess employee engagement and identify areas of strength and improvement within the Department of Human Services.

To address our audit objective, we sent a survey to over 7,000 DHS employees across two units and five program areas. We excluded from our survey DHS executive managers, and temporary and unclassified employees. We asked employees to rate their experience by answering 51 questions regarding specific factors that influence employee engagement. We generated these questions based on research and reviews of existing work environment surveys that have been conducted by DHS and other government entities.

We obtained the survey population from DHS. To ensure the completeness of the survey population was adequate for our audit objective, we compared the population information against the agency's Legislatively Approved Budget and the final count of employees' email addresses provided by DHS. We found the survey population to be reasonably close to the number of legislatively approved full time equivalent positions.

To ensure survey statements were understandable, we provided a draft of the survey to agency management for feedback. We also pre-tested the survey with some Audits Division employees as well as employees from different programs and units within DHS.

To ensure a high response rate, we designed the survey to provide as much anonymity as possible. We excluded from our survey any demographic information that we determined could potentially be used to easily identify employees. We also did not utilize the features of the survey tool to tie survey results to respondents' email addresses.

The survey used a four point Likert type scale for the responses: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Two questions had an option for "I do not know." For the purpose of our audit, we combined Strongly Agree and Agree to calculate the percentages for each survey question.

We note potential limitations in the data from nonresponses, which could affect the overall survey results. We also acknowledge the ranking of the survey responses can change depending on how the benchmark scale is adjusted. For the purpose of this audit, we adopted a scale similar to DHS' and confined our analyses and reporting to responses obtained from our survey.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained and reported provides a reasonable basis to achieve our audit objective.

Auditors from our office, who were not involved with the audit, reviewed our report for accuracy, checking facts and conclusions against our supporting evidence.

Appendix A: DHS Survey Results by Program and Unit Areas (Percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree)

>=85% (areas doing well; high)

66% - 84% (need some attention; medium)

<=65% (areas needing improvement; low)

	Questions	APD	CW	SS	I/DD	VR	Central/ Director	Shared Services
1	I know what the Mission, Vision, and Goals of DHS are.	98%	97%	98%	94%	98%	96%	97%
2	I know how my work relates to the Mission, Vision, and Goals of DHS.	97%	95%	97%	93%	97%	95%	94%
3	I know what each of the major service delivery programs in DHS do.	84%	80%	92%	65%	76%	89%	76%
4	The major service delivery programs in DHS each have a unique function and work may overlap but is not duplicated.	77%	77%	83%	68%	72%	67%	68%
5	I am proud to work at DHS.	90%	84%	91%	89%	89%	83%	86%
6	The physical environment I work in is safe.	83%	77%	83%	69%	85%	90%	91%
7	I have sufficient resources to do my job well (for example: people, materials, technology, budget, information).	57%	42%	67%	58%	57%	58%	60%
8	I receive fair compensation (salary plus benefits) for the work that I do.	54%	45%	53%	65%	56%	68%	31%
9	The compensation (salary plus benefits) I receive is competitive with similar jobs in the region.	42%	46%	43%	60%	42%	44%	42%
10	Employees are recruited and hired based on a fair and competitive process.	61%	62%	53%	67%	70%	63%	61%
11	DHS employees are representative of the population we serve.	68%	56%	72%	64%	64%	54%	63%
12	I received sufficient training and education to do my job effectively.	69%	68%	77%	68%	67%	68%	79%
13	My job skills are evaluated and I am given an opportunity to improve them if needed.	72%	66%	77%	75%	73%	70%	74%
14	My job makes good use of my knowledge and abilities.	81%	79%	79%	73%	83%	72%	79%
15	I feel a sense of accomplishment in my job.	84%	79%	85%	76%	82%	81%	85%
16	The work I do is important.	98%	98%	98%	97%	97%	95%	97%
17	I feel I can question a policy or practice without being criticized for doing so by team members.	77%	69%	73%	67%	72%	77%	76%
18	The people I work with cooperate to get the job done.	84%	84%	82%	77%	81%	81%	82%
19	Employees in my program/unit share job knowledge with each other.	89%	89%	89%	82%	89%	81%	87%
20	The program/unit I work in respects and values diversity.	90%	89%	87%	87%	92%	86%	89%
21	I work in an environment that is free of discriminating and harassing behavior.	81%	79%	76%	69%	74%	74%	83%
22	My direct supervisor responds appropriately to discriminating and harassing behavior.	85%	85%	85%	85%	80%	83%	86%
23	I know where to report discriminating and harassing behavior.	93%	87%	91%	91%	87%	93%	88%
24	I am provided with opportunities to lead from any chair.	70%	62%	72%	65%	65%	73%	70%
25	I receive written performance evaluations on an annual basis.	56%	49%	65%	66%	58%	46%	55%
26	Opportunities for advancement are fair and merit-based.	58%	50%	54%	56%	54%	52%	53%
27	I receive feedback about the good work I have done.	71%	69%	71%	66%	65%	77%	73%

Appendix A: DHS Survey Results by Program and Unit Areas (Percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree)

		<div style="background-color: #c8e6c9; padding: 2px;">>=85% (areas doing well; high)</div> <div style="background-color: #fff9c4; padding: 2px;">66% - 84% (need some attention; medium)</div> <div style="background-color: #ffcdd2; padding: 2px;"><=65% (areas needing improvement; low)</div>						
28	I receive feedback about things I could do better.	77%	73%	80%	69%	80%	73%	75%
29	I have opportunities to provide input on future changes that will affect my job.	70%	60%	69%	65%	65%	73%	74%
30	I am encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.	75%	65%	74%	69%	72%	79%	79%
31	I am empowered to make choices necessary to excel in my job.	72%	67%	70%	69%	75%	76%	74%
32	My work related stress level is too high.*	62%	73%	56%	60%	63%	51%	50%
33	Work is distributed fairly among the people with whom I work.	65%	54%	62%	62%	51%	56%	63%
34	My job allows me to balance my work and personal obligations (for example: an alternative schedule or teleworking).	76%	59%	63%	71%	77%	79%	83%
35	I am assigned more work than one person can reasonably do well each week.*	51%	65%	37%	35%	60%	42%	41%
36	My direct supervisor supports me in my efforts to balance work and life demands.	84%	83%	84%	86%	84%	88%	87%
37	My direct supervisor helps me to take advantage of professional development opportunities.	76%	72%	75%	70%	78%	77%	77%
38	There are no barriers if I am interested in improving my skills or taking advantage of professional development opportunities.	66%	54%	65%	62%	67%	66%	64%
39	There are plenty of opportunities for promotion in DHS.	57%	40%	60%	54%	39%	48%	48%
40	When an opportunity for promotion in my program/unit opens up, my direct supervisor notifies staff members on an equal basis.	77%	60%	68%	62%	64%	63%	70%
41	I have an employee development plan (EDP).	70%	57%	73%	76%	65%	74%	79%
42	I review and update my EDP with my direct supervisor on a regular basis.	53%	39%	53%	55%	46%	53%	65%
43	I receive information that will affect DHS as a whole directly from Executive management.	80%	74%	83%	74%	87%	68%	74%
44	My direct supervisor is good about keeping team members updated about information we need to know.	80%	80%	84%	77%	76%	74%	76%
45	I am confident that communication and information from Central office to Field offices flows well.	47%	43%	63%	45%	39%	33%	41%
46	I am confident that communication and information from Field offices to Central office flows well.	47%	40%	59%	46%	39%	27%	38%
47	I have the ability to communicate directly with other programs whose work relates to my program.	83%	84%	81%	66%	85%	83%	80%
48	I am satisfied with the amount of information my program/unit communicates to staff.	70%	65%	73%	56%	58%	64%	64%
49	My direct supervisor provides me with clear expectations on work assignments.	79%	78%	82%	79%	76%	75%	77%

Appendix A: DHS Survey Results by Program and Unit Areas (Percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree)

>=85% (areas doing well; high)

66% - 84% (need some attention; medium)

<=65% (areas needing improvement; low)

50	I am satisfied with how my direct supervisor manages me.	77%	77%	79%	84%	78%	79%	78%
51	I am satisfied with how my direct supervisor manages the program/unit I work in.	70%	70%	74%	79%	69%	66%	69%

**Low percentages = positive responses*

Appendix B: DHS Survey Results by Central and Field Offices (Percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree)

>=85% (areas doing well; high)

66% - 84% (middle of the road; medium)

<=65% (areas needing improvement; low)

		APD		SS		CW		VR		IDD/SACU	
		Central	Field	Central	Field	Central	Field	Central	Field	Central	SACU
1	I know what the Mission, Vision, and Goals of DHS are.	98%	98%	98%	98%	95%	97%	96%	98%	94%	94%
2	I know how my work relates to the Mission, Vision, and Goals of DHS.	99%	96%	98%	97%	95%	95%	93%	98%	93%	93%
3	I know what each of the major service delivery programs in DHS do.	75%	85%	88%	92%	80%	80%	81%	75%	74%	59%
4	The major service delivery programs in DHS each have a unique function and work may overlap but is not duplicated.	69%	79%	79%	83%	72%	77%	56%	76%	63%	71%
5	I am proud to work at DHS.	88%	90%	93%	91%	85%	83%	70%	93%	85%	91%
6	The physical environment I work in is safe.	88%	82%	89%	83%	90%	76%	78%	87%	94%	52%
7	I have sufficient resources to do my job well (for example: people, materials, technology, budget, information).	61%	56%	61%	68%	48%	41%	44%	59%	59%	57%
8	I receive fair compensation (salary plus benefits) for the work I do.	64%	52%	71%	52%	64%	44%	56%	56%	85%	52%
9	The compensation (salary plus benefits) I receive is competitive with similar jobs in the region.	42%	43%	48%	43%	44%	46%	48%	40%	65%	56%
10	Employees are recruited and hired based on a fair and competitive process	51%	63%	63%	53%	46%	63%	52%	74%	71%	64%
11	DHS employees are representative of the population we serve.	52%	70%	66%	72%	52%	57%	37%	70%	49%	73%
12	I received sufficient training and education to do my job effectively.	77%	68%	70%	78%	63%	69%	56%	69%	58%	75%
13	My job skills are evaluated and I am given an opportunity to improve them if needed.	68%	72%	73%	78%	67%	66%	63%	75%	79%	72%

Appendix B: DHS Survey Results by Central and Field Offices (Percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree)

		>=85% (areas doing well; high)									
		66% - 84% (middle of the road; medium)									
		<=65% (areas needing improvement; low)									
14	My job makes good use of my knowledge and abilities.	77%	82%	82%	79%	77%	80%	70%	85%	75%	71%
15	I feel a sense of accomplishment in my job.	82%	84%	86%	85%	82%	79%	67%	85%	78%	74%
16	The work I do is important.	91%	99%	100%	98%	95%	98%	89%	98%	98%	97%
17	I feel I can question a policy or practice without being criticized for doing so by team members.	69%	78%	88%	72%	75%	69%	67%	73%	69%	65%
18	The people I work with cooperate to get the job done.	82%	84%	95%	81%	82%	84%	67%	84%	74%	79%
19	Employees in my program/unit share job knowledge with each other.	81%	90%	88%	89%	83%	90%	78%	91%	77%	86%
20	The program/unit I work in respects and values diversity.	94%	90%	93%	86%	87%	89%	89%	92%	84%	90%
21	I work in an environment that is free of discriminating and harassing behavior.	71%	83%	83%	76%	82%	79%	70%	75%	78%	63%
22	My direct supervisor responds appropriately to discriminating and harassing behavior.	79%	87%	84%	85%	81%	86%	88%	79%	88%	83%
23	I know where to report discriminating and harassing behavior.	90%	93%	89%	91%	86%	87%	89%	86%	91%	90%
24	I am provided with opportunities to lead from any chair.	71%	70%	84%	71%	68%	62%	52%	68%	73%	61%
25	I receive written performance evaluations on an annual basis.	46%	58%	53%	65%	37%	50%	52%	59%	77%	60%
26	Opportunities for advancement are fair and merit-based.	45%	60%	65%	53%	50%	51%	48%	55%	55%	57%
27	I receive feedback about the good work I have done.	71%	71%	80%	70%	74%	69%	59%	67%	78%	58%
28	I receive feedback about things I could do better.	71%	78%	71%	80%	71%	73%	67%	83%	74%	65%
29	I have opportunities to provide input on future changes that will affect my job.	75%	69%	80%	69%	70%	59%	67%	64%	67%	65%

Appendix B: DHS Survey Results by Central and Field Offices (Percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree)

		>=85% (areas doing well; high)									
		66% - 84% (middle of the road; medium)									
		<=65% (areas needing improvement; low)									
30	I am encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.	76%	74%	82%	74%	77%	64%	74%	71%	74%	66%
31	I am empowered to make choices necessary to excel in my job.	73%	72%	82%	70%	75%	66%	67%	77%	74%	66%
32	My work related stress level is too high.*	56%	63%	61%	55%	55%	75%	59%	63%	54%	64%
33	Work is distributed fairly among the people with whom I work.	48%	68%	55%	62%	54%	54%	41%	53%	65%	61%
34	My job allows me to balance my work and personal obligations (for example: an alternative schedule or teleworking).	86%	75%	88%	62%	85%	57%	89%	74%	88%	60%
35	I am assigned more work than one person can reasonably do well each week.*	42%	52%	46%	37%	47%	66%	56%	61%	40%	31%
36	My direct supervisor supports me in my efforts to balance work and life demands.	86%	84%	87%	84%	87%	83%	93%	82%	95%	80%
37	My direct supervisor helps me to take advantage of professional development opportunities.	74%	76%	76%	75%	76%	72%	70%	79%	76%	66%
38	There are no barriers if I am interested in improving my skills or taking advantage of professional development opportunities.	66%	66%	75%	64%	56%	54%	63%	68%	64%	60%
39	There are plenty of opportunities for promotion in DHS.	41%	59%	68%	59%	48%	40%	41%	39%	44%	60%
40	When an opportunity for promotion in my program/unit opens up, my direct supervisor notifies staff members on an equal basis.	66%	79%	67%	68%	66%	59%	59%	65%	67%	59%
41	I have an employee development plan (EDP).	65%	72%	82%	73%	50%	57%	58%	67%	80%	74%
42	I review and update my EDP with my direct supervisor on a regular basis.	46%	54%	53%	53%	39%	39%	38%	48%	62%	50%

Appendix B: DHS Survey Results by Central and Field Offices (Percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree)

		>=85% (areas doing well; high)									
		66% - 84% (middle of the road; medium)									
		<=65% (areas needing improvement; low)									
43	I receive information that will affect DHS as a whole directly from Executive management.	77%	80%	84%	82%	71%	74%	81%	88%	74%	73%
44	My direct supervisor is good about keeping team members updated about information we need to know.	79%	81%	71%	85%	71%	81%	70%	77%	78%	76%
45	I am confident that communication and information from Central office to Field offices flows well.	39%	48%	43%	64%	31%	43%	15%	45%	37%	50%
46	I am confident that communication and information from Field offices to Central office flows well.	39%	48%	44%	60%	24%	41%	15%	44%	33%	54%
47	I have the ability to communicate directly with other programs whose work relates to my program.	84%	83%	93%	81%	88%	84%	85%	85%	79%	58%
48	I am satisfied with the amount of information my program/unit communicates to staff.	67%	71%	77%	72%	66%	65%	38%	62%	57%	56%
49	My direct supervisor provides me with clear expectations on work assignments.	77%	79%	79%	83%	73%	78%	73%	76%	79%	80%
50	I am satisfied with how my direct supervisor manages me.	73%	77%	80%	79%	76%	77%	81%	77%	86%	82%
51	I am satisfied with how my direct supervisor manages the program/unit I work in.	64%	71%	80%	74%	68%	71%	69%	69%	85%	76%

**low percentage = positive response*

Appendix C: DHS Survey Results by Supervisory and Non-Supervisory Staff (Percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree)

>=85% (areas doing well; high)
66% - 84% (middle of the road; medium)
<=65% (areas needing improvement; low)

	Questions	Supervisory Staff	Non - Supervisory Staff
1	I know what the Mission, Vision, and Goals of DHS are.	99%	97%
2	I know how my work relates to the Mission, Vision, and Goals of DHS.	99%	95%
3	I know what each of the major service delivery programs in DHS do.	93%	82%
4	The major service delivery programs in DHS each have a unique function and work may overlap but is not duplicated.	83%	76%
5	I am proud to work at DHS.	93%	86%
6	The physical environment I work in is safe.	90%	80%
7	I have sufficient resources to do my job well (for example: people, materials, technology, budget, information).	49%	56%
8	I receive fair compensation (salary plus benefits) for the work that I do.	48%	53%
9	The compensation (salary plus benefits) I receive is competitive with similar jobs in the region.	34%	46%
10	Employees are recruited and hired based on a fair and competitive process.	85%	56%
11	DHS employees are representative of the population we serve.	71%	63%
12	I received sufficient training and education to do my job effectively.	79%	71%
13	My job skills are evaluated and I am given an opportunity to improve them if needed.	78%	71%
14	My job makes good use of my knowledge and abilities.	91%	78%
15	I feel a sense of accomplishment in my job.	89%	81%
16	The work I do is important.	99%	97%
17	I feel I can question a policy or practice without being criticized for doing so by team members.	88%	70%
18	The people I work with cooperate to get the job done.	91%	82%
19	Employees in my program/unit share job knowledge with each other.	95%	87%
20	The program/unit I work in respects and values diversity.	95%	87%
21	I work in an environment that is free of discriminating and harassing behavior.	91%	77%
22	My direct supervisor responds appropriately to discriminating and harassing behavior.	94%	84%
23	I know where to report discriminating and harassing behavior.	98%	88%
24	I am provided with opportunities to lead from any chair.	91%	64%
25	I receive written performance evaluations on an annual basis.	48%	57%
26	Opportunities for advancement are fair and merit-based.	71%	51%
27	I receive feedback about the good work I have done.	79%	69%
28	I receive feedback about things I could do better.	78%	75%

Appendix C: DHS Survey Results by Supervisory and Non-Supervisory Staff (Percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree)

		>=85% (areas doing well; high)	66% - 84% (middle of the road; medium)	<=65% (areas needing improvement; low)
29	I have opportunities to provide input on future changes that will affect my job.	81%	64%	
30	I am encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.	89%	69%	
31	I am empowered to make choices necessary to excel in my job.	83%	68%	
32	My work related stress level is too high.*	73%	61%	
33	Work is distributed fairly among the people with whom I work.	69%	58%	
34	My job allows me to balance my work and personal obligations (for example: an alternative schedule or teleworking).	66%	67%	
35	I am assigned more work than one person can reasonably do well each week.*	61%	48%	
36	My direct supervisor supports me in my efforts to balance work and life demands.	91%	83%	
37	My direct supervisor helps me to take advantage of professional development opportunities.	85%	73%	
38	There are no barriers if I am interested in improving my skills or taking advantage of professional development opportunities.	71%	60%	
39	There are plenty of opportunities for promotion in DHS.	57%	49%	
40	When an opportunity for promotion in my program/unit opens up, my direct supervisor notifies staff members on an equal basis.	78%	65%	
41	I have an employee development plan (EDP).	63%	68%	
42	I review and update my EDP with my direct supervisor on a regular basis.	49%	50%	
43	I receive information that will affect DHS as a whole directly from Executive management.	86%	76%	
44	My direct supervisor is good about keeping team members updated about information we need to know.	90%	79%	
45	I am confident that communication and information from Central office to Field offices flows well.	50%	48%	
46	I am confident that communication and information from Field offices to Central office flows well.	49%	46%	
47	I have the ability to communicate directly with other programs whose work relates to my program.	89%	81%	
48	I am satisfied with the amount of information my program/unit communicates to staff.	83%	65%	
49	My direct supervisor provides me with clear expectations on work assignments.	85%	79%	
50	I am satisfied with how my direct supervisor manages me.	87%	77%	
51	I am satisfied with how my direct supervisor manages the program/unit I work in.	84%	70%	

**low percentage = positive response*

About the Secretary of State Audits Division

The Oregon Constitution provides that the Secretary of State shall be, by virtue of her office, Auditor of Public Accounts. The Audits Division exists to carry out this duty. The division reports to the elected Secretary of State and is independent of other agencies within the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of Oregon government. The division is authorized to audit all state officers, agencies, boards, and commissions and oversees audits and financial reporting for local governments.

Audit Team

William Garber, CGFM, MPA, Deputy Director

Sandra Hilton, CPA, Audit Manager

Olivia Reched, MPA, Principal Auditor

Jeannette Hulse, MPH, Staff Auditor

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mail: Oregon Audits Division
255 Capitol Street NE, Suite 500
Salem, Oregon 97310

The courtesies and cooperation extended by officials and employees of the Department of Human Services during the course of this audit were commendable and sincerely appreciated.