TEN YEARS OF THE
BEST PLACES TO WORK IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT® RANKINGS

How Six Federal Agencies Improved Employee Satisfaction and Commitment

SEPTEMBER 2013

PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Deloitte.

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to revitalize our federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works. To help leaders use their *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government®* data to drive reforms, our advisory services program works in partnership with agencies to conduct custom data analysis and lead them through a series of action planning activities that identify and address employee concerns.

Deloitte Consulting LLP is one of the world's largest management consulting providers. More than 6,600 professionals are dedicated to serving federal clients with wide-ranging missions. Deloitte brings a deep understanding of government requirements, processes, and systems—as well as insights into the workforce and technology issues that affect day-to-day operations. By drawing on industry-leading practices across government and business, Deloitte applies a mix of private-sector perspective and public-sector experience to help federal agencies in their efforts to address today's biggest challenges while building a stronger foundation for tomorrow.

INTRODUCTION

The federal government and its 2 million employees perform a wide range of vital services and functions for the American people, including securing the nation's defense, ensuring the safety of food and the environment, managing the aviation system, overseeing financial institutions, caring for veterans and conducting diplomacy around the globe. Satisfied employees who are committed to their jobs and organizations are vital to achieving these and other critical government missions, and central to improved performance, greater innovation and better results.

The *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*® rankings, first published 10 years ago, are produced by the Partnership for Public Service and Deloitte and offer a comprehensive portrait of employee satisfaction and commitment across the government and at individual agencies and their subcomponents.

Based on data from the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, the rankings provide a mechanism to hold agency leaders accountable for the health of their organizations, serve as an early warning sign for agencies in trouble, offer a roadmap for improvement and give job seekers insights into how federal employees view their respective agencies. The role of agency leaders in motivating employees and keeping them focused on the mission at hand is particularly important in today's challenging climate of pay freezes, furloughs, budget cutbacks and persistent fed-bashing.

The *Best Places to Work* rankings provide government-wide and agency employee satisfaction scores based on what federal employees think about their jobs and organizations. In addition, the rankings offer insights from employees into 10 workplace categories, including effective leadership, teamwork, work/life balance, training and development opportunities, employee skills/mission match, satisfaction with pay and strategic management. Leadership is the most important issue affecting overall employee satisfaction scores, followed by the connection between employees' skills and their agencys' mission, and federal workers' satisfaction with their pay. Prior to 2010 and the imposition of a federal pay freeze, work/life balance, rather than pay, was the third most important factor.

The Partnership and Deloitte share the goal of seeing a federal workforce with employees who are highly satisfied and committed to their jobs and organizations. The 10th anniversary of the *Best Places to Work* rankings provides an opportunity to examine how agencies use the data to address workplace issues and improve employee satisfaction. This report goes beyond the numbers by sharing stories from agency officials and employees about successful strategies for improving employee satisfaction and commitment and the critical role played by federal leaders in that process.

Six agencies were selected for further investigation into how they used *Best Places to Work* and employee survey data to create better work environments. Two of the agencies, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and Nuclear Regulatory Commission, were consistent top performers in the *Best Places to Work* rankings. The departments of Transportation and State, the U.S. Mint and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office made significant improvements very quickly or sustained improvement over a number of years.
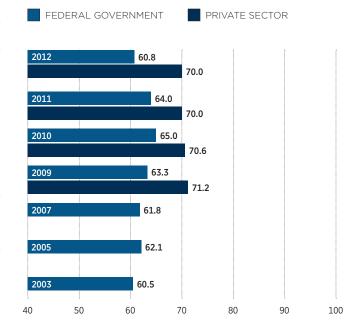
A Best Places to Work Primer

The *Best Places to Work* index score is an agency's primary score. It measures the overall performance of agencies and agency subcomponents related to employee satisfaction and commitment. The index score is derived from the responses to three questions that best measure employee satisfaction and is weighted according to the extent to which each question predicts "intent to remain."

- I recommend my organization as a good place to work.
- Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job?
- Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization?

The 2012 results tell a troubling story about a federal workforce whose satisfaction and commitment levels have dropped to the lowest point since 2003, when the rankings first launched. The government-wide index score fell five percent, from 64 out of 100 in 2011 to 60.8 in 2012. The 3.2-point drop is the largest change in the history of the rankings.
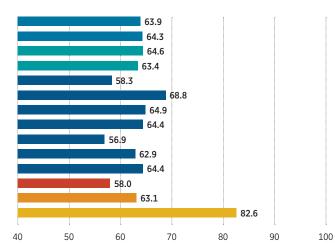
Employee satisfaction in private-sector companies, however, remained stable from 2011 to 2012, with a score of 70 out of 100 both years. Federal agencies have lagged behind the private sector when it comes to worker satisfaction with their jobs and organizations for the past four years, when data became available for comparison.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT **PRIVATE SECTOR**

Year	Federal Government	Private Sector
2012	60.8	70.0
2011	64.0	70.0
2010	65.0	70.6
2009	63.3	71.2
2007	61.8	
2005	62.1	
2003	60.5	

2012 INDEX SCORES BY DEMOGRAPHIC

Looking at differences in scores across groups of employees may reveal gaps and potential areas for improvement.

Demographic	Score
Female	63.9
Male	64.3
40 and Over	64.6
Under 40	63.4
American Indian or Native American	58.3
Asian	68.8
Black or African-American	64.9
Hispanic or Latino	64.4
Multiracial	56.9
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	62.9
White	64.4
Employees with Disabilities	58.0
Veterans	63.1
Senior Executive Service (SES)	82.6

2012 SCORES BY WORKPLACE CATEGORY

In addition to the *Best Places to Work* index, the rankings measure agencies on 10 workplace categories. The workplace category scores are calculated by averaging the percentage of positive responses for each question in that category.

Each year, the Partnership for Public Service and Deloitte, with support from Hay Group, run an analysis to determine which work-place categories are the most important factors contributing to overall satisfaction. Effective leadership has emerged as the key driver every year since the rankings launched in 2003, followed by employee skills-mission match. The third most important factor, satisfaction with pay, emerged for the first time in 2010, replacing work-life balance as a key element for overall satisfaction and commitment.

■ EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP
The extent to which employees believe leadership at all levels of the organization generates motivation and commitment, encourages integrity and manages people fairly, while also promoting the professional development, creativity and empowerment of employees. Effective leadership is also broken into four subcategories (empowerment, fairness, senior leaders and supervisors) to help users interpret the findings more precisely.

■ EMPLOYEE SKILLS/MISSION MATCH
The extent to which employees feel that their skills and talents are used effectively. Furthermore, it assesses the level to which employees get satisfaction from their work and understand how their jobs are relevant to the organizational mission.

■ PAY
How satisfied employees are with their compensation.

■ STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT
The extent to which employees believe that management ensures they have the necessary skills and abilities to do their jobs, is successful at hiring new employees with the necessary skills to help the organization, and works to achieve the organizational goals with targeted personnel strategies and performance management.

■ TEAMWORK
The extent to which employees believe they communicate effectively both inside and outside of their team organizations, creating a friendly work atmosphere and producing high-quality work products.

■ TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT
The extent to which employees believe their development needs are assessed and appropriate training is offered, allowing them to do their jobs effectively and improve their skills.

■ WORK/LIFE BALANCE
The extent to which employees consider their workloads reasonable and feasible, and mangers support a balance between work and life.
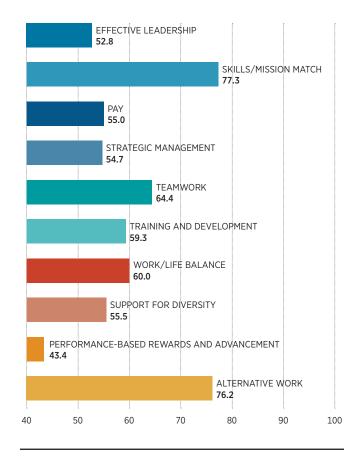
■ SUPPORT FOR DIVERSITY
The extent to which employees believe that actions and policies of leadership and management promote and respect diversity.

■ PERFORMANCE-BASED REWARDS AND ADVANCEMENT
The extent to which employees feel they are rewarded and promoted in a fair and timely manner for their performance and innovative contributions to their workplace.

■ ALTERNATIVE WORK AND EMPLOYEE SUPPORT PROGRAMS
The extent to which employees believe workplace flexibilities are offered to them, including telecommuting and alternative work scheduling, along with personal support benefits like child and elder care subsidies and wellness programs.

Category	Score
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP	52.8
SKILLS/MISSION MATCH	77.3
PAY	55.0
STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	54.7
TEAMWORK	64.4
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT	59.3
WORK/LIFE BALANCE	60.0
SUPPORT FOR DIVERSITY	55.5
PERFORMANCE-BASED REWARDS AND ADVANCEMENT	43.4
ALTERNATIVE WORK	76.2

AGENCY SIZE GROUPINGS

Participating *Best Places to Work* agencies are grouped and compared by size. The total number of participants in each size grouping varies each year.

LARGE AGENCIES (19 in 2012)
15,000 or more employees

MID-SIZE AGENCIES (22 in 2012)
1,000–14,999 employees

SMALL AGENCIES (29 in 2012)
100–999 employees

AGENCY SUBCOMPONENTS (292 in 2012)
Subcomponents, the agencies within large agencies, need to have at least 100 full-time permanent employees to participate.

Patent and Trademark Office

USPTO achieved a 16-point increase in its *Best Places to Work* satisfaction score between 2009 and 2012 through changed work processes, better communication with labor and engaged leadership that resulted in reduced patent backlogs even as applications increased.

In 2007, employee satisfaction was quite low at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), an agency of the Department of Commerce charged with fostering innovation, competitiveness and economic growth through high-quality and timely review and approval of patent and trademark applications.

That year, the USPTO's *Best Places to Work* ranking was 172nd out of 222 federal agency subcomponents, a reflection of highly strained relations between management and the patent examiner union, a patent review process that was decades old and outmoded, and an enormous and growing backlog of pending patent applications, among many other issues. The *Best Places to Work* data showed low employee scores in such workplace categories as effective leadership, work/life balance, training and development, and strategic management.

This state of affairs began to change in 2009 when new leadership made workplace improvement and job satisfaction top priorities. By 2009, the USPTO's *Best Places to Work* ranking jumped to 105th out of 216, then to 56th out of 224 in 2010, 19th out of 240 in 2011 and finally the number five slot out of 292 subcomponents in 2012. The USPTO, an agency of nearly 10,000 employees, showed improvement on a range of issues that included leadership, the match between skills and mission, strategic management, work/life balance, and training and development.

"Our goal is to make this the best place to work anywhere, not just in government... We want to be just as good as Google."

FRED STECKLER
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, USPTO

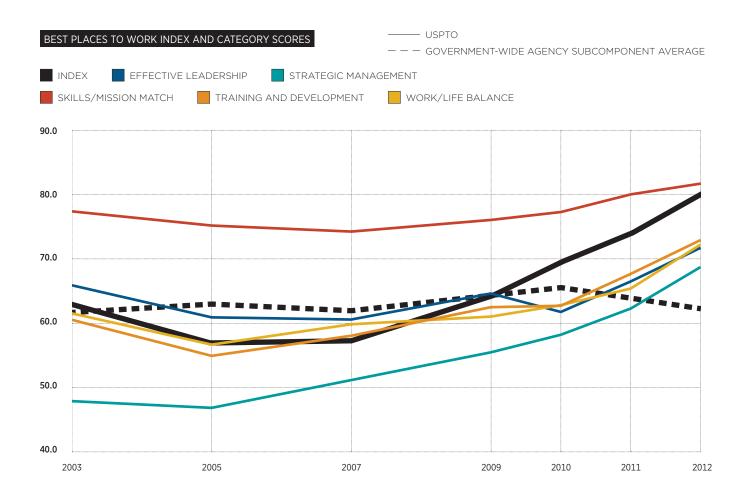**2007-2012** TOTAL INDEX SCORE INCREASE

23.1 ↗

LARGE AGENCY OVERALL RANKINGS

80.3 6.2 ↗	**5th**	2012
74.1 4.5 ↗	**19th**	2011
69.6 5.3 ↗	**56th**	2010
64.3 7.1 ↗	**105th**	2009
57.2	**172nd**	2007

This transformation was the result of strong managerial commitment and a host of new workforce initiatives. Leaders at USPTO understood the connection between employee satisfaction and the agency's ability to recruit and retain the best talent and accomplish its mission.

"Our goal is to make this the best place to work anywhere, not just in government. Our labor force is very attractive and as the economy strengthens, our employees become more and more desirable. We want to be just as good as Google," said Fred Steckler, the USPTO's chief administrative officer.

Alleviating difficulties in the patent review process and improving labor relations after years of mistrust were mutual priorities for David Kappos, the director of the USPTO from 2009 to early 2013, and for other leaders at the agency.

With Kappos' backing, Margaret Focarino, now the commissioner for patents, worked closely with the em-

USPTO

GOVERNMENT-WIDE AGENCY SUBCOMPONENT AVERAGE

■ INDEX   ■ EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP   ■ STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

■ SKILLS/MISSION MATCH   ■ TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT   ■ WORK/LIFE BALANCE

ployee union and external stake-holders to re-engineer the patent examination system for the first time in decades, leading to new timeframes for review, greater flexibility for patent examiners and increased contact with patent applicants. New incentives were created for examiners to reach their goals; new performance requirements were developed for examiners and managers; and increased employee training and leadership development opportunities became available.

"We empowered the unions and treated them not only as valued colleagues, but also as aggregators of employee interests and employee concerns. As a result, we transformed our ability to respond to employees' wants and needs," said Kappos.[1]

"A second thing we did was involve our first-level managers, who are supervisory examiners, in management decisions. It has allowed us to improve morale dramatically because when you get the first-line managers feeling good and informed, the magnifying impact is enormous,"

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1   Tom Fox, "The Intellectual Property of Leadership: An interview with USPTO's David Kappos," *Washington Post*, 3 April 2012, http://wapo.st/HWCqb2 (accessed 29 Aug. 2013).

> "When senior leadership is concerned, you feel it from the top down and everyone gets on board."
>
> WYNN COGGIN
> ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, USPTO

"We developed a mutual level of trust and respect with the union and began to agree on small and significant changes."

MARGARET FOCARINO
COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS,
USPTO

Kappos said. "About 98 percent of how employees view their workplaces depends on how they view their first-line managers."

These and other initiatives led to a reduced backlog of unexamined patent applications even as submissions increased, shortened the amount of time to process applications and improved the quality of the examinations. At the same time, employee attrition decreased and job satisfaction rose.

During the labor negotiations, Focarino said, "We developed a mutual level of trust and respect with the union and began to agree on small and significant changes. We started talking principles and about what the union and management wanted. The basic principles were pretty much the same."[2]

Utilizing employee exit data, information from the *Best Places to Work* rankings and direct feedback from employees, the USPTO developed and enhanced a number of

2   "2013 Finalist, Management Excellence Medal," *Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medals*, Partnership for Public Service, http://bit.ly/15BOWMY (accessed 29 Aug. 2013).

ways to reduce turnover in examiner and supervisory patent examiner positions. This included greater use of mentors as well as additional leadership training to foster development of employees and to help managers and supervisors improve their guidance, coaching and project management skills.
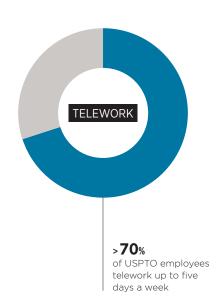
New training opportunities were provided for patent examiners to improve their interview techniques, to help them identify and resolve issues early in the review process and to better understand new technologies. The agency also instituted a number of new employee and manager award programs and offered opportunities for employees to provide feedback.

In addition, the USPTO placed increased emphasis on telework, with more than 7,000 out of nearly 10,000 employees now teleworking up to five days per week, and half of those employees working from home full time. The telework policy allowed the USPTO to hire individuals outside the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The *Best Places to Work* data and other surveys have shown positive changes that the leadership of the agency attributes in part to the growing use of teleworking.

The agency, however, faced challenges in engaging a large virtual workforce and helping it feel connected to the organization. To deal with this issue, the agency now uses internal and external blogs, weekly newsletters and social media sites to remind employees about upcoming events and other organizational news. The head of the agency has a weekly blog where employees can comment and provide input. In USPTO buildings, computer screens display topics of discussion and employees are encouraged to email management with their ideas and opinions. Additionally, employees have the ability to communicate with each other using an internal instant messaging system.

At the heart of all these efforts is a leadership commitment to building and maintaining a healthy workplace culture. This process starts with taking the pulse of the organization, and to do this, the USPTO leaders have relied heavily on the employee survey and the *Best Places to Work* data to pinpoint agency-wide challenges, priorities and goals for the organization. Senior leaders monitor employee satisfaction with regular meetings of the management council, comprising managers and executives from across the organization, and executives are required to include employee satisfaction goals in their executive performance plans.

The USPTO shows that top leadership commitment combined with open and transparent communication with employees and helping workers more effectively do their jobs can bring about lasting change in employee attitudes.

TELEWORK

>70% of USPTO employees telework up to five days a week

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NASA's commitment to innovation and leadership development has kept them ranked consistently high in *Best Places to Work*.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is always ranked near the top in *Best Places to Work* rankings, with a strong, universally recognized brand and a culture of innovation. There have been bumps along the road, such as budget cuts and the end of the space shuttle program, but NASA leaders have sought to enhance the job satisfaction of the agency's nearly 18,000 federal employees by stepping up their focus on innovation, leadership development, work/life balance and other workplace issues.

NASA's engineers, scientists and other employees are motivated by a commitment to the mission of space exploration, scientific discovery and aeronautics research. The agency's strong leadership has fostered an innovative culture and high levels of employee job satisfaction. The efforts of NASA leaders to use employee surveys and *Best Places to Work* data to identify issues and take steps to improve the workplace environment is also an important factor.

Since 2007, NASA employees have rated their agency among the top five large agencies, and in 2012 it held the number one slot. In each of the years (2010, 2011 and 2012) that innovation was tracked and rated, NASA was the top-ranked large agency.

NASA's management solicits employee input on mission safety, program success and work processes through a number of means, including focus groups, team recommendations and participation in employee surveys.

Three years ago, NASA began tracking three employee survey questions that measure innovation, as well as six questions that measure the issues that drive innovation.[3] The theory was that innovation and its drivers were the key to making headway in employee satisfaction, and it has used the data to inform its various workplace initiatives.

In 2013, NASA used an online tool to ask employ-

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3   The Partnership for Public Service developed the innovation index around these questions in the 2010 *Best Places to Work* Snapshot entitled "What Drives Innovation in the Federal Government?"

LARGE AGENCY OVERALL RANKINGS

1st 2012

Top 5 2007-2012

2012
LARGE AGENCY CATEGORY RANKINGS

1st 8 of 10 categories

Effective Leadership

Employee Skills/Mission Match

Strategic Management

Teamwork

Training and Development

Support for Diversity

Performance Based Rewards and Advancement
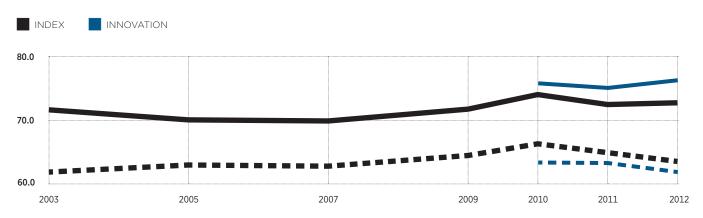
Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs

2nd 2 of 10 categories

Work/Life Balance

Pay

——— NASA   — — — GOVERNMENT-WIDE LARGE AGENCY AVERAGE

■ INDEX   ■ INNOVATION

NASA was the top-ranked large agency in innovation every year from 2010 through 2012.

ees to suggest and vote on a number of agency-specific questions that should be included in the upcoming Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) that is used to develop the *Best Places to Work* rankings. The 10 questions that received the most votes were added to the 2013 survey.

Jeri Buchholz, NASA's chief human capital officer, said the exercise provided important input from employees, helped empower them to think creatively and "encouraged [them] to tell us what they think." The results were provided to supervisors and discussed with employees in an effort to send the message that their input is valued and will be considered in programs to enhance worker satisfaction.

The agency encourages innovation in a number of ways, including awards programs and supporting employee pursuit of innovative ideas. NASA's agency- and center-level awards programs emphasize the innovative achievements of indi-

viduals and teams. For example, the astronaut corps presents the Silver Snoopy awards to employees who improve astronauts' ability to safely do their jobs. Past recipients include the developers of the moon buggy and life support systems.

Multiple NASA centers make small amounts of funding available to employees wanting to pursue new ideas related to their work. High-performing employees can apply for these innovation funds to purchase equipment or reserve lab time to work on their ideas.

Some initiatives to connect employees to the mission have involved helping them learn how to interact in virtual environments so they can have conversations that are just as meaningful as face-to-face meetings. For example, NASA leaders hosted a Virtual Executive Summit using online tools to connect employees and executives, share news and have Administrator Charles Bolden answer employee questions directly.

"I try to communicate with employees through emails and video messages, but the foremost thing I try to do is visit the nine NASA centers and our federally funded research and development center," said Bolden. "It is important to stay in touch with people at all levels and let them know my door is always open. Every NASA center is a little city. We depend on every member of that community pulling their share of the load to be successful."[4]

The agency also offers other opportunities for employees to connect with new work and larger audiences. Employees can apply for a "detail in place," where they can stay at their current NASA location but perform work for a different center. In another initiative, NASA scientists learned how to present ideas or

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4   Tom Fox, "NASA Administrator Charles Bolden on Leadership: 'At NASA, We Do Big Things'," *Washington Post*, 1 June 2011, http://wapo.st/kuEBNJ (accessed 29 Aug. 2013).

NASA'S CUSTOM FEVS QUESTIONS

As part of NASA's efforts to spur participation in the FEVS, the agency held a competition to design customized, agency-specific survey questions. Employees voted on the submissions and NASA included the top 10 questions in the subsequent survey.

1. My center's top-level management team is aware of the areas that can make my job difficult to accomplish.

2. My immediate supervisor/team leader is flexible in how I get my job done.

3. In my organization, leaders require personnel to have the appropriate skills and experience before promoting them to a new position.

4. In our work culture, people feel free to raise dissenting opinions without it having a negative impact on their career.

5. My immediate management (first 2 levels of supervision) takes a personal interest in my career development.

6. My supervisors and managers take time to discuss career planning with their employees.

7. My level of work-related stress has increased significantly over the past year.

8. My level of work-related stress has a negative impact on my work output.

9. My level of work-related stress is higher than I would like it to be.

The 10th question allowed NASA to break down employee responses by the program area in which they worked, including space operations, science, exploration, aeronautics research, space technology and cross-agency support.

> **"It is important to stay in touch with people at all levels and let them know my door is always open. Every NASA center is a little city. We depend on every member of that community pulling their share of the load to be successful."**
>
> CHARLES BOLDEN
> ADMINISTRATOR, NASA

findings to nonscientific audiences or scientists in other areas of work, ultimately improving their ability to communicate more effectively with broader audiences.

NASA also runs leadership training programs for different levels of its workforce. One program is targeted toward new supervisors and designed to transform the role of the supervisor from someone who manages others' work to someone who engages employees and makes them feel excited about coming to work.

In addition, agency leaders have conducted a campaign to educate the workforce and supervisors to promote telework, and make clear that it not only involves working from home or at a telework center, but also working from the airport while on travel, leaving work early to beat rush-hour traffic and completing the day's business from home, or collaborating with colleagues at a laboratory down the hall.

Labeled "Work from Anywhere," the program emphasizes the critical need for NASA employees to be able to work from any location, whether on an airstrip or in a laboratory. Agency leadership reported the educational campaign promoted greater acceptance for telework and attributed an improvement in employee perceptions of senior leaders support for telework in part to this effort.

In 2012, NASA had the highest score among large agencies on: "How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization?"

63.4 PERCENT POSITIVE

Department of State

The State Department has consistently been a top performer in the *Best Places to Work* rankings by building a strong connection between its foreign policy mission and employee skills, empowering employees to do their jobs and providing training and advancement opportunities.

The Department of State maintains diplomatic relationships with more than 180 countries around the globe, employing more than 22,000 Foreign Service Officers and civil service employees. The department's workforce is highly dedicated to carrying out America's foreign policy mission, and departmental leaders know it is critical to continually engage employees and take steps to improve worker satisfaction and commitment.

Since 2007, the State Department has never placed lower than seventh among the large federal agencies in the *Best Places to Work* rankings and has improved its overall employee satisfaction score by 9.2 points since 2003. In 2012 the State Department ranked third among large agencies with a *Best Places to Work* score of 68.2 on a scale of 100. During the past decade, the State Department improved its scores on issues such as strategic management and leadership, including employee empowerment, which increased by nearly 15 points.

State Department officials said they seek to be responsive to employee concerns, to empower employees, to provide training opportunities for career advancement and to connect people's work to the larger mission. As Linda Taglialatela, the deputy assistant secretary of state for human resources, said, "We really talk about people having a career here rather than just having a job. This is not just a place where you put in eight hours and go home. There is a career path and we are a community."

The human resources staff at the State Department regularly analyzes employee survey data and the *Best Places to Work* rankings to identify agency-wide issues and results for each bureau, looking for trends and keeping an eye out for any differences between foreign service officers and other State Department employees. After the analysis, the human resources and leadership teams determine the department's overall action plans by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each bureau and the appropriate places in which to focus personnel efforts.

Connecting employee contributions to the mission is a consistent, effective theme for the State Depart-

2003-2012 TOTAL INDEX SCORE INCREASE

9.2 ⬈

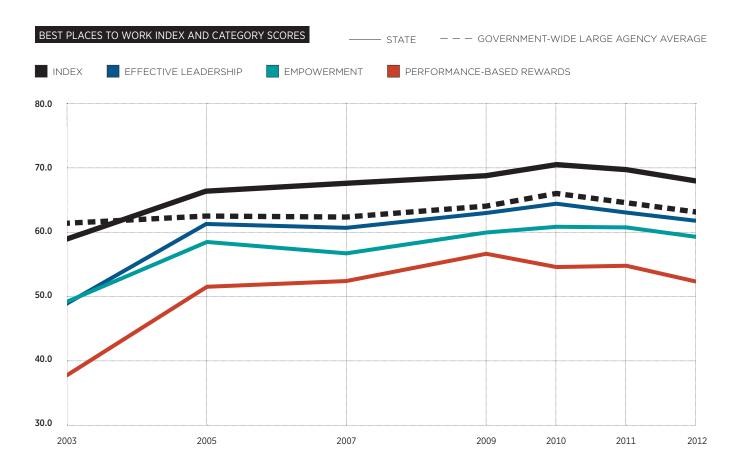LARGE AGENCY OVERALL RANKINGS

3rd 2012

Top 10 2007-2012

ment. This began with former Secretary Colin Powell, who wanted employees to understand how every piece of the organization was essential to American diplomacy. For example, Powell would explain how receptionists are necessary for the mission because "there may be someone on the other line who needs help" or "drafting a memorandum was vital to transmitting information through the organization," said Taglialatela. She said this approach continues today and helps employees "feel involved, part of the bigger picture, and know that they have a role to play."

Senior leaders work to promote openness and solicit feedback on a range of issues. The director general, who serves as the head of the Foreign Service and human resources, and each secretary of state during the past few years have held town hall meetings with employees. These meetings are simulcast and replayed throughout the State Department's streaming Internet service and internal TV network. The meetings cover policy issues, but the agenda is open to employee questions. In one meeting with former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, employees commented that there should be showers available in the basement of the agency's headquarters building for joggers. Clinton acted on the suggestion and had showers installed.

The State Department also publishes e-newsletters, which go out to all employees across the globe, providing

STATE — — — GOVERNMENT-WIDE LARGE AGENCY AVERAGE

■ INDEX   ■ EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP   ■ EMPOWERMENT   ■ PERFORMANCE-BASED REWARDS

Since 2003, the State Department has realized large gains in effective leadership, empowerment and performance-based rewards.

information about special meetings, visitors, report releases and other important agency news.

Taglialatela said the department is working to improve its performance management system and encourages managers to provide "constructive feedback in an honest way and build on the strengths of employees." She said the department's leaders seek to communicate frequently with employees, receiving feedback and acting on issues to improve the work environment.

Another area of focus is training, which took on added importance under Powell between 2003

and 2005. During that timeframe, the department's training and development *Best Places to Work* score rose by 12.6 points. The department today offers a wide range of training topics and allows employees to pursue their interests. Topics include speech delivery, negotiation, leadership and specific skill training. For GS-13 and GS-14 employees in the Foreign Service, mandatory training is required to be eligible for promotion. The Foreign Service Institute provides subject-matter expertise and language training for foreign service officers.

Civil service employees can en-

> "This is not just a place where you put in eight hours and go home. There is a career path and we are a community."
>
> LINDA TAGLIALATELA
> DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF
> STATE FOR HUMAN RESOURCES

"There is a level of investment in all of our employees in a way that is more holistic than I have seen in other departments"

RAY LIMON
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF CIVIL SERVICE
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT,
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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ter a nine-month mentorship program that pairs them with more experienced colleagues who share the same professional interests. The State Department has run the program for the past 10 years and it involves mentoring agreements, action plans for mentors and mentees, frequent meetings with mentors, forums, training and a formal graduation ceremony at the end of the program.

The State Department also seeks to empower employees and encourage them to come up with new ways of doing business, and makes innovative use of social media, online platforms and technology to change the way employees communicate, share information and reach outside their own boundaries. This is particularly important because so much of the State Department staff is scattered around the globe.

Recently, three employees designed an online platform to better enable workers to conduct flexible assignments or work on additional projects in other areas of the agency.

Called Flex Connect, the tool lets employees create profiles that include their skills and desired work assignments. Supervisors and managers can search through the list of available workers to find the right fit to help part time on 30-day virtual projects.

In addition, the State Department created Sounding Board, an online site where employees have contributed several thousand ideas for making the department more effective, as well as Corridor, a professional networking platform like LinkedIn that allows nearly 10,000 users to form groups, share what they are working on and locate State Department subject-matter, country and language experts. The department also runs Communities@State, a group of 80 internal multiauthor blogs designed to present information to and promote dialogue between State Department employees.

The State Department's success lies in the fact that "there is a level of investment in all of our employees in a way that is more holistic than I have seen in other departments," said Ray Limon, director of the Office of Civil Service Human Resources Management.

The State Department takes numerous steps to maintain high satisfaction levels, but its consistently high rankings are due in large measure to career development and training opportunities, as well as a close connection between employees and the agency's mission.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S CIVIL SERVICE MENTORING PROGRAM

The State Department runs a Civil Service Mentoring Program for employees of the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development. The program matches employees with experienced professionals to help employees develop and prepare for current and future career opportunities and to improve morale. The other goals of the program are to improve organizational communication, succession planning, diversity and retention.

The program runs for nine months, and during the course mentors and mentees go through a number of components:

- Informational meetings open to all employees, including potential mentors, mentees and others to learn more about the program.

- A mentoring agreement that lays out roles, expectations and logistics.

- Regularly scheduled meetings between mentors and mentees for two to four hours per month.

- Development of mentoring action plans to focus on three developmental needs of the mentee, what they need to do to improve in those areas, and the resources required to do so.

- Trainings for mentors and mentees throughout the program to offer further skills training and career development.

- Finally, a graduation celebration with speeches from executives. Mentors and mentees can choose to continue their relationship after the end of the program, and the State Department encourages them to do so.

In 2012, the State Department had the second highest score among large agencies on: "I know how my work relates to agency goals and priorities."

86.6 PERCENT POSITIVE

Department of Transportation

The DOT was cited in *Best Places to Work* as the most improved large agency in both 2010 and 2012 based on a commitment from top leadership, improved communication and the establishment of better relations with a major labor union.

The leadership of the Department of Transportation (DOT), the federal agency responsible for overseeing the nation's highway, air, rail and other transportation systems, faced a big challenge in 2009—reversing the unfavorable distinction of being rated as one of the worst places to work in the federal government. Employees at the time expressed dissatisfaction with effective leadership, particularly senior leaders and supervisors.

Newly appointed Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood understood there was a direct link between employee attitudes toward their jobs and their performance, and decided to meet the challenge head-on, declaring that improving employee satisfaction and commitment among the department's 56,000 employees would be a priority during his tenure.

During the next several years, DOT employees registered higher *Best Places to Work* scores on workplace issues such as leadership, empowerment and overall satisfaction with their jobs and organization.

In 2010 and 2012, the department was the most improved large agency in the *Best Places to Work* rankings, and from 2009-2012 it rose from the 30th-ranked large agency (out of 30) to the ninth-best large agency (out of 19). The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), DOT's largest subcomponent with more than 47,000 of the department's 56,000 full-time permanent federal employees and a large driver behind DOT's overall improvement, increased its employee satisfaction score from 49.4 to 64.5 on a scale of 100 from 2009 to 2012, a 15.1-point improvement.

LaHood and his management team accomplished this transformation through enhanced employee communication—listening to what employees were saying and responding to their concerns. He also relied heavily on the annual federal employee survey and *Best Places to Work* data to help identify workplace problems and chart the strategy for change.

LaHood said he wanted to quickly and explicitly

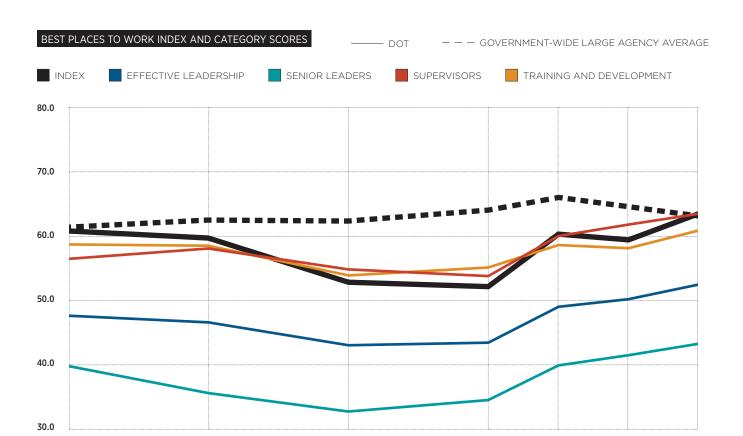**2009-2012** TOTAL INDEX SCORE INCREASE

11.4 ↗

LARGE AGENCY OVERALL RANKINGS

63.6 4.1 ↗ **9th** 2012

59.5 0.9 ↘ **26th** 2011

60.4 8.2 ↗ **26th** 2010

52.2 **30th** 2009

convey his commitment to improving the work environment after he took office. He did so in part by reaching a contract agreement early in his tenure with the air traffic controllers union after years of deadlock.

"The majority of our employees are FAA employees. There was no secret around here about how disenchanted National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) workers were for not having a contract for five years. One of our first goals was to reach a contract, which we did within 100 days of my being sworn in," said LaHood. "Reaching that goal and satisfying that number of employees set us on a course that people understood, that showed that we care about our employees. It felt like it was a very good giant first step."[5]

5   Tom Fox, "Improving the Department of Transportation: A Conversation with Ray LaHood," *Washington Post*, 19 Dec. 2012, http://wapo.st/YpgOSb (accessed 29 Aug. 2013).

DOT — — — GOVERNMENT-WIDE LARGE AGENCY AVERAGE

■ INDEX ■ EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP ■ SENIOR LEADERS ■ SUPERVISORS ■ TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

DOT improved their scores in all but three categories between 2011 and 2012.

"We're not afraid of what employees are going to tell us because we're going to act on it. That's what's driving success."

STEVE GOMEZ
SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF THE
SECRETARY, DOT

Gaining buy-in from managers across the entire department also was critical to success. Career executives and administration appointees needed to understand that LaHood's motivation was an improved DOT, according to Rob Seidner, a human resources specialist. Seidner said it was important to convey the message that "nothing we're doing is political," but rather designed to help the organization accomplish its mission and its employees do a better job.

LaHood paid constant attention to employee satisfaction issues and held his executives accountable. Every few weeks, he met with top assistants to discuss the agency's progress. The department provided training for first-line supervisors in the core competencies of effective leadership, empowerment, employee engagement and ethics, and included an employee satisfaction goal in all career and noncareer Senior Executive Service (SES) performance plans. When DOT developed standards for employee satisfaction goals in performance plans, LaHood sent a message to DOT's staff explaining how executives would be held accountable for improving communication, conducting listening sessions with employees and creating action plans.

Seidner said LaHood also de-

cided to focus on shorter-term and more intermediate goals, and have a series of quick, attainable workplace improvements. To achieve this result, Seidner said the secretary required all of DOT's subcomponents to develop action plans that were "tight, contained programs."

"He didn't want to see us saying, 'In 2014 this is what we're going to do,'" said Seidner. He said this approach helped employees see more immediate changes and allowed the leadership to track the progress through the yearly federal employee survey and the *Best Places to Work* rankings.

For example, when DOT moved to a new headquarters, it no longer had an on-site health clinic, and employees expressed their desire for a clinic at the new facility. Even though the clinic wasn't in the budget, the leadership responded quickly by establishing a clinic for one day per week, and eventually increased the time the clinic stayed open until it was fully funded.

The leadership also used a variety of techniques to improve communication with employees and to solicit feedback. According to Brodi Fontenot, the assistant secretary for administration and the chief human capital officer for the department, communication was crucial to DOT's success.[6]

The department instituted Idea Hub, an online site to collect employee suggestions for workplace improvements. DOT removed multiple "headaches" for employees by implementing worker-submitted solutions from Idea Hub, including improving the meeting room booking system, reducing the number of electronic logins required for DOT systems and increasing the amount

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6   "Profiles of Notable Movers: U.S. Department of Transportation," *The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government 2012 Rankings*, Partnership for Public Service, http://bit.ly/188h0Gu (accessed 29 Aug. 2013).

DOT'S QUICK WINS GUIDE

The Department of Transportation's "Leadership Quick Wins" guide offers ideas for managers and leaders to improve communication. These solutions do not need a financial commitment and can help improve employee satisfaction and commitment. Some of the suggestions include:

- **Drop by employee meetings**
  Attend meetings to see what employees are working on and offer any insights you may have. Two minutes of comments may save weeks of discussion or false starts. Getting to know your employees and observing them also can help identify future leaders.

- **Have an open-door policy**
  Make yourself available to employees by setting up office hours, allowing them to make one-on-one appointments and reading and responding to their emails in a timely manner. The personal contact builds trust, making employees more likely to remain committed even if they disagree with your decisions.

- **Walk the halls**
  Build relationships with employees by walking around to meet them, greeting your team and asking them how they are doing. Drop by staff functions to get to know employees on an individual level.

- **Invite employees to coffee or lunch**
  As a reward for a successful project or to get a feel for what employees are thinking, invite them to lunch or coffee.

- **Listen to your employees**
  Hold listening sessions with employees on a regular basis. These will help you better understand their perspective. Following the sessions, share with the team the changes you will make to certain issues or behaviors and hold yourself accountable by incorporating them into your own performance goals.

- **Conduct "stay" interviews**
  Keeping top employees satisfied and committed is a priority for federal managers. Conduct regular interviews with team members to find out more about what they're doing, their goals and what may be keeping them from achieving those goals. You can attempt to remedy issues before they become pain points for employees and thus help improve retention.

- **Turn your employees into your consultants**
  The most practical and cost-effective solutions to agency problems can often be found in your own staff. Assemble a group of employees known for their creative thinking and ask them to brainstorm solutions to problems. Give them time and freedom to think outside the box and the resources to implement their solutions.

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of idle time required before DOT computers locked employees out of their sessions.

LaHood held town hall meetings, as did each subcomponent leader, and senior staff used visits to field offices to take the pulse of the organization. The department also held an awards ceremony once a year to honor and recognize employees for outstanding work.

In addition, the DOT offered guidance for leaders and managers to better connect with their employ-

ees, get their input and spur actions to address workplace issues, and ultimately build trust and increase employee engagement.

The DOT provides clear evidence that a commitment from senior leadership to change the workplace culture combined with using *Best Places to Work* data, connecting with employees to understand their concerns and taking concrete steps to address those issues can make a big difference.

United States Mint

The U.S. Mint made significant progress in improving employee satisfaction after years at the bottom of the *Best Places to Work* rankings by encouraging fully engaged management, targeted training and better communication with employees.

The U.S. Mint is an agency of the U.S. Treasury that manufactures and distributes circulating, precious-metal and collectible coins, as well as national medals. It employs nearly 3,000 people at facilities in Philadelphia; Denver; San Francisco; Washington, D.C.; West Point, New York; and Fort Knox, Kentucky. The Mint's employees serve in a variety of jobs ranging from chemists and management professionals to the blue-collar factory workers in coin production facilities who account for the majority of the workforce.

In 2009, the Mint was near the bottom of the *Best Places to Work* rankings for federal agency subcomponents, as it had been for a number of years. The data showed employees were dissatisfied with leadership, strategic management, training opportunities and the lack of teamwork. Relations between management and the unions were strained; technology was changing the nature of production jobs; communication between management and employees was lagging; and demand for new coins was dropping in part because of the 2008 economic downturn.

As Richard Peterson, the acting director of the Mint, described: "People broke open their piggy banks and all of the coins sitting in sofas and pockets came back into circulation," causing a lower demand for new coins from the Federal Reserve. Lower coin production targets meant fewer production shifts, creating uncertainty for many employees.

By 2011, the Mint's leadership orchestrated a remarkable turnaround. That year the Mint was rated the most improved agency subcomponent in the *Best Places to Work* rankings. The organization recorded an employee satisfaction score of 68.5 out of 100, up from 54.1 in 2009 and 56.5 in 2010. It also catapulted in the rankings from 201st of 216 agency subcomponents in 2009 to the 57th spot in 2011 (out of 240).

Employees gave the Mint improved scores in 2011 for almost all of the categories used in the survey, including

MOST IMPROVED AGENCY SUBCOMPONENT

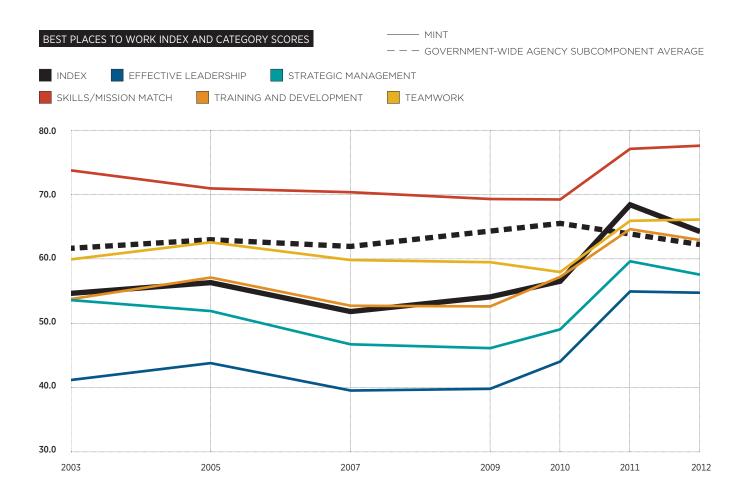12.0 ↗ **21.2%** 2011

AGENCY SUBCOMPONENT
OVERALL RANKINGS

68.5 12.0 ↗ **57th** 2011

56.5 2.4 ↗ **201st** 2010

54.1 **201st** 2009

effective leadership, which involves empowerment, fairness and the role of senior and supervisory leaders. Employees also provided more favorable responses to questions dealing with strategic management, teamwork and employee skills/mission match.

Leaders at the Mint began the process of improving employee satisfaction by closely examining the survey results used in the *Best Places to Work* rankings to better understand employee perspectives. They held focus groups and town hall meetings and took a number of steps to increase communication with employees and encourage feedback. They worked cooperatively with the

MINT

GOVERNMENT-WIDE AGENCY SUBCOMPONENT AVERAGE

INDEX   EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP   STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

SKILLS/MISSION MATCH   TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT   TEAMWORK

The Mint saw large gains between 2010 and 2011 in effective leadership, strategic management, employee skills/mission match, training and development, and teamwork.

union, added new training and development opportunities for workers and held executives accountable for carrying out the workplace changes by having workforce satisfaction goals embedded in their performance plans.

Peterson, as associate director of manufacturing and later as acting director, held town hall meetings with the president of the Mint's chapter of the American Federation of Government Employees. Peterson and his management team visited all of the Mint's facilities to hear first-hand about day-to-day workplace issues and any concerns.

During their travels to agency locations across the country, they laid out their plan to keep the Mint busy and productive even as requests for circulating coin production were down. Their plan involved catching up on work that fell by the wayside

"Anything big or important to do takes a team."

RICHARD PETERSON
ACTING DIRECTOR, MINT

> ## "When you want to know what's going on in the organization, you violate the chain of command. You talk to employees."
>
> RICHARD PETERSON
> ACTING DIRECTOR, MINT

during Mint's previous record-high production years, such as repairing production-line equipment and other maintenance, and conducting employee training.

The training program was designed to increase production flexibility and to give new career opportunities to workers. The employees went through cross-training programs so they could manage and operate machinery used for each of the Mint's three business lines. This allowed employees to keep busy and fill production needs while learning new skills. In addition to the cross-training program, the Mint began a leadership development program for aspiring supervisors.

The management team also bolstered internal communication to help connect employees to each other and the mission, and to keep them informed about organizational news. In addition to the town hall meetings, senior leaders interacted with the workforce through brown-bag lunches. The management team collected ideas through an online platform called My Two Cents. Through this process, employees offer solutions to workplace problems and vote on recommended ideas. Leaders review solutions and choose

whether or not to implement them. In fiscal 2012, the Mint's finance department implemented three ideas submitted by employees totaling $3 million in savings, including suggestions from the Denver and Philadelphia facilities to implement four-day workweeks (10 hours a day) to save money on heating, cooling and other energy costs.

Tom Jurkowsky, the director of public affairs, helps employees learn about each other and the organization through an internal television network called Mint TV. The network features profiles of Mint employees, providing details about their jobs and how their work fits into the Mint's mission. The Mint also runs an online question-and-answer box called Talking Change, where workers can ask anonymous questions about agency initiatives. To reach Mint workers without access to computers or email, Mint factory supervisors print out all electronic communications and hang them in break rooms or meeting areas.

The Mint also worked to open more opportunities for employees across the organization to get involved with special projects. For example, the Mint conducted a public competition to design a baseball commemorative coin. Before the competition began, the Mint offered employees an opportunity to work on the selection and judging process for coin designs.

The Mint demonstrated that substantial improvement in employee satisfaction is possible through a multi-faceted approach that includes listening to employees, responding to their concerns when possible, keeping them informed and getting everyone on the same page in support of the agency's mission.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Emphasizing continuous employee improvement, open communication and the importance of its mission, workers have given high ratings to NRC year after year.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is an independent agency that regulates commercial nuclear power plants and other uses of nuclear materials, such as in nuclear medicine, through licensing, inspection and enforcement. The agency employs about 4,000 workers, nearly half of whom are scientists and engineers.

The NRC performs highly each year, ranking in the top two in 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2011 among large agencies and third in 2012 in the new mid-size agency category regarding employee satisfaction with their jobs and workplace. In each of these years, employees gave the NRC high marks for effective leadership, strategic management, work/life balance, teamwork and the match between mission and worker skills.

Miriam Cohen, the NRC's chief human capital officer (CHCO), said the agency's repeated high standing in the *Best Places to Work* rankings is due in part to its culture of continuous improvement, a product of NRC's workforce that includes a large number of scientists and engineers and other highly motivated employees. "They're always pushing for a better solution. If there's a new process that may help out, that's always something they gravitate towards," said Cohen.

Cohen cited a "strong connection to the mission" as another reason for NRC's high level of job and workplace satisfaction, since employees are acutely aware of the value of their work and the agency's position in protecting the American people from potential nuclear incidents.

Although the seeds for a positive work environment are present because of the nature of NRC's work and its mission, the high *Best Places to Work* scores also are a product of an effort by the agency's management to continually monitor the pulse of the organization, solicit feedback and respond to concerns.

The NRC maintains a formal open-door policy that encourages staff members to schedule meetings with any manager or supervisor to discuss their issues or concerns. Jody Hudson, the deputy CHCO, explained that it is "imperative to have frank and open feedback because if there is an issue that affects nuclear safety, we need to know

MID-SIZE AGENCY OVERALL RANKINGS

Top 3 2007–2012

2012
MID-SIZE AGENCY CATEGORY RANKINGS

1st 2 of 10 categories

Work/Life Balance

Training and Development

2nd 4 of 10 categories

Effective Leadership

Pay

Teamwork
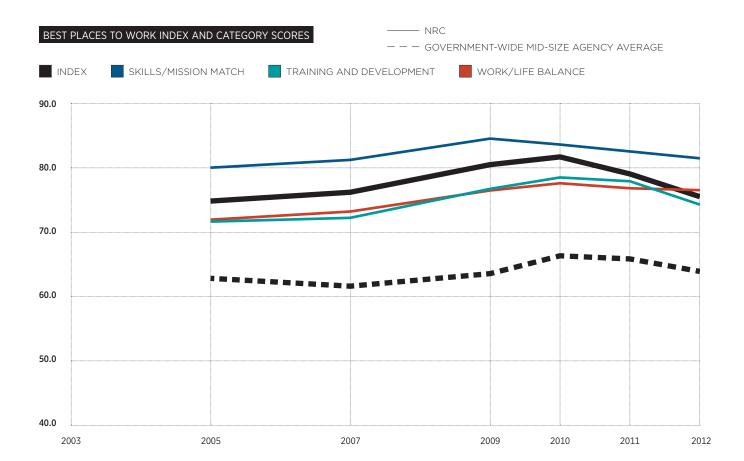
Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs

3rd 4 of 10 categories

Employee Skills/Mission Match

Strategic Management

Support for Diversity

Performance Based Rewards and Advancement

NRC

— — — GOVERNMENT-WIDE MID-SIZE AGENCY AVERAGE

■ INDEX   ■ SKILLS/MISSION MATCH   ■ TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT   ■ WORK/LIFE BALANCE

> ## "[The employees are] always pushing for a better solution. If there's a new process that may help out, that's always something they gravitate towards."

MIRIAM COHEN
CHCO, NRC

about it." To further improve transparency, the NRC holds town hall meetings where workplace issues can be raised and any employee can schedule a one-on-one meeting with the chairman to discuss issues facing the agency.

Each year, the NRC's Chief Human Capital Office analyzes the federal employee survey and the *Best Places to Work* data in collaboration with the labor union to identify and flag employee concerns. The CHCO's office along with a cross-organizational team use the data and the union input to determine the top issues adversely impacting employee satisfaction and engagement for the agency as a whole. Individual offices are responsible for identifying their own problem areas and how to tackle them.

Using the survey results, NRC officials recently realized that a sizable number of employees were unaware of the availability of work/life programs, including the agency's fitness center, employee counseling programs and flexible work arrangements. As a result, the NRC instituted an employee education effort.

As a separate effort, the NRC holds focus-group sessions with employees to inform action planning efforts and to monitor the current progress of initiatives. These groups allow NRC leaders to ask more detailed questions about initiatives or issues reflected in the surveys and employee comments. The agency also solicits employee feedback on smaller issues using online suggestion boxes.

The NRC runs a leadership de-

> ## "[It is] imperative to have frank and open feedback because if there is an issue that affects nuclear safety, we need to know about it."
>
> JODY HUDSON
> DEPUTY CHCO, NRC

velopment program to help high-performing employees learn the skills necessary to become the agency's next group of first-line supervisors. The results-oriented program lasts between 12 and 18 months and culminates with an employee-designed project that tackles a particular workplace issue.

As a recent initiative, the 2012 participants worked on the issues that the employee survey identified as agency-wide problems, including the handling of discrimination complaints, labor relations issues and bullying in the workplace. As part of this exercise, the participants developed handouts and brochures to inform supervisors and managers of best practices for handling related issues.

NRC officials also said that organizational values of integrity, service, openness, commitment, cooperation, excellence and respect are regularly emphasized and lie at the core of every interaction.

These values are reiterated in town hall meetings and regular staff meetings, and senior leaders continually convey these points in communications with employees. According to one employee, NRC employees believe it is one of the best places to work because of "an intrinsic understanding and incorporation of living by a set of values that all 4,000 people exhibit every single day."

To increase civility in the workplace, the agency sponsors "values cafes," which are informal discussions where employees can share experiences and help each other find ways to diplomatically deal with co-workers who are not acting according to the organizational values.

At the core of NRC's success is the role of the agency's senior leaders, who are held accountable for improving the workplace. Every quarter, the agency's executive director meets with each deputy to discuss operating plans as well as employee satisfaction goals and the progress on any action plans designed to meet those goals. If an office is struggling, representatives from the Chief Human Capital Office consult with managers to determine how to address the problems. Managers are also strongly encouraged to incorporate employee satisfaction goals into their performance plans.

In 2012, NRC had the second highest score among mid-size agencies on: "My agency is successful at accomplishing its mission."

87.5 PERCENT POSITIVE

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

The *Best Places to Work* rankings continually serve as a strong indicator of the health and productivity of the federal workforce. While the data informs the steps agencies should take to successfully support their employees, agency leadership plays a key role in determining and guiding implementation of improvements. This requires taking the time to thoughtfully step back, review the data and develop realistic and innovative action plans. These case studies show how leaders have laid a clear path for improvement, helped guide and drive the change and focused on communicating the results to their staff.

A series of common themes emerged from our examination of six agencies that have had success in improving or maintaining high levels of employee satisfaction, which include the importance of leadership and accountability, the value of soliciting and acting on employee feedback and the need for open communication.

By following the examples of the six agencies highlighted in this report, agency leaders and managers can use employee surveys and *Best Places to Work* data to take the pulse of their organizations and implement policies to bring about real change in employee satisfaction and commitment—and, ultimately, agency performance. Stakeholders that aim to improve employee satisfaction and perceptions, and ultimately rise in the rankings, can adapt practices from the highlighted agencies to fit their own unique situations and environments.

This process requires leaders to take the time to understand and interpret the survey data through a careful analysis of what drives employee perceptions and by collecting of additional complementary data, for instance with focus groups or employee interviews.

We recommend agencies consider the following strategies:

➤ **Own the change**
Hold executives accountable for using employee survey data and use the data as a measure of their success

➤ **Partner with unions**
Establish an effective working relationship with employee unions

➤ **Go for quick wins**
Design and execute short-term activities to act on employee feedback that can contribute to a longer-term culture change

➤ **Develop shared values**
Commit to shared organizational values and align agency activities and employee interactions to those values

➤ **Build connections through communication**
Use multiple communication methods to connect employees to the mission, the agency and their co-workers

➤ **Invest in employees**
Develop employees through leadership, technical training and mentoring

MAKE AGENCY LEADERS OWN THE CHANGE

Hold executives accountable for using employee survey data and use the data as a measure of their success

Leaders at agencies with high employee satisfaction levels created a powerful vision around the improvements necessary to build a "best place to work" and held themselves and their executives accountable for making that vision a reality. These efforts have been enhanced by the analysis of employee survey results and *Best Places to Work* data, and ensure that the findings provide the basis for implementing workplace improvements. Multiple agencies, including the USPTO, DOT and NRC, have created incentives for senior leaders by incorporating employee survey targets or goals in their executive performance plans. Evaluating leaders on their performance against improvements in a variety of workplace issues can establish leadership investment in the process and achieve better outcomes.

In addition, top agency leaders have kept employee satisfaction and commitment at the top of people's minds. During meetings with staff and the senior leadership team, successful leaders prioritized discussions about employee survey results, action planning and workplace improvements. Top executives at the NRC, DOT and USPTO hold regular meetings with their senior leadership to discuss survey results and the follow-up on action plans. Regular check-in meetings about employee survey results keep the issues from disappearing to the bottom of leaders' and managers' to-do lists.

PARTNER WITH UNIONS

Establish an effective working relationship with employee unions

Our case studies provide examples of agencies that have made significant strides in employee satisfaction in partnership with employee unions. Unions can serve as a voice for employee views regarding survey results. Effective working relationships with unions can help agency leaders better identify and understand employee challenges more fully and completely, as well as partner in the development of new, innovative solutions.

One of the keys to success involves working with union representatives in the decision-making process. According to National Treasury Employees Union President Colleen Kelley, involving the employee unions at an early stage can reduce the amount of formal bargaining around an initiative because "employee concerns, voiced through the union, are addressed in the initiative itself." She said early involvement "works because it helps develop trust and respect—key ingredients in facilitating agreement."

While it's not a substitute for collective bargaining, agencies have found that actively soliciting the views of front-line employees through their representatives, taking these views seriously, instituting changes when possible, sharing credit with the union and being willing to make adjustments as time goes by will go a long way toward solving problems and increasing employee satisfaction.

Leaders also should set the tone that working with the union can be imperative to the success of the agency. At the USPTO, top leaders made it a priority to improve the working relationship with the union after years of mistrust and spent countless days in face-to-face meetings resolving differences and seeking common ground. Leaders of the DOT resolved a longstanding contract dispute with the nation's air traffic controllers during the early days of the Obama administration, to set the tone that the leadership cared about employees.

GO FOR QUICK WINS

Design and execute short-term activities to act on employee feedback that can contribute to a longer-term culture change

Creating an environment that encourages employees to voice their opinions on changes needed in the workplace is a hallmark of agencies that have improved their *Best Places to Work* employee satisfaction scores. In order to encourage employees and get results, agencies have constructed quick, attainable goals around workplace issues that respond to employee concerns. After producing a solution, they have communicated the facts to employees, instituted the changes and gotten feedback, demonstrating that the leaders are listening. When employees see tangible results, it helps to build trust and participation in the future and improves satisfaction.

At the NRC, survey results showed that employees were not aware of a range of available federal benefits such as child and elder care and health and wellness programs. The agency responded by holding seminars and providing reading materials—initiatives that showed employees that agency leaders received the message and were doing something to correct the problem.

At the State Department, officials responded to feedback from a town hall meeting about the lack of shower facilities for joggers at headquarters. While a small matter, it sent a signal that the leadership was listening and responsive. The DOT responded to day-to-day workplace complaints by opening a health clinic at their new headquarters and simplifying the conference room reservation system and the login process at computer workstations.

It is critical to solicit employee feedback through various forums, with the likelihood that issues will range from day-to-day workplace frustrations to matters of greater consequence. Acting on the issues that are easier to solve, at least initially, will send a signal that leadership is paying attention and cares about employees, while efforts are underway to solve more systemic, longer-term challenges that can lay a strong foundation for improving worker satisfaction.

DEVELOP SHARED VALUES

Commit to shared organizational values and align agency activities and employee interactions to those values

A lesson from a highly successful *Best Places to Work* agency, the NRC, has been to articulate a set of core organizational values, speak about their importance and act in accordance with those values in terms of broad policy prescriptions and everyday interactions.

The values should be explicitly stated, clearly outlined on the agency's website and in agency buildings, and fundamental to the way leaders and staff conduct business and interact with each other.

The NRC puts a great deal of effort toward ensuring their organizational values permeate interactions at the agency. The organization and its employees strive to let these values guide their actions in regulatory decisions, administrative tasks and how they relate to colleagues or external stakeholders. The agency's values call for integrity in working relationships, practices and decisions; service to the public and others who are affected by their work; openness in communication and decision-making; commitment to public health and safety, security and the environment; cooperation in the planning, management, and performance of agency work; excellence in their individual and collective actions; and respect for diversity and individual viewpoints.

BOOSTING EMPLOYEE VIEWPOINT SURVEY PARTICIPATION

One part of establishing participation and high response rates to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey is by getting the word out about it. Agencies can use multiple communication vehicles to let employees know when the survey is out and the importance that the agency places on their input.

- **Leave voicemail messages for every employee or send all-staff emails from the head of your agency communicating the value of the survey and encouraging them to participate**
  Former Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood would often record a voicemail that would go to every employee's desktop phone. The chairman of the NRC sends an all-staff email on the first day of the survey period ever year to communicate its importance.

- **Create a recognizable brand around the survey**
  The USPTO utilizes a character, referred to as the "bubble man," who is present on any communications around the survey. When employees see the bubble man, they know what it is about.

- **Remove barriers to employees taking the survey**
  The Mint moved from a paper-based survey to an online survey after paper surveys from their San Francisco location were delayed due to a snowstorm in 2010. The Mint provided computer and email training to any employees unfamiliar with computers and established computer labs and designated times out of the day for employees to take the survey.

- **It's never too late to promote the survey**
  NASA sent a promotional video about the survey to all employees during the last week of the survey period. According to NASA, the agency's response rates jumped by eight points in that last week.

HOW TO RUN AN EFFECTIVE TOWN HALL
Town hall meetings are a commonly used tool for agency leaders to communicate with employees and hear directly from them. For town hall meetings to be effective and serve their desired purpose, there are a few things agencies should do:

- Utilize town halls as a means to share and receive information from employees. It is important to clarify the purpose of each town hall, but it is also important to know your employees and what they want to get out of the meeting.

- Determine that town halls are interactive and visible and are available to employees across the organization, including field offices.

- Brand town hall meetings so they are informal and approachable. A more informal environment lets employees feel more comfortable with sharing their concerns.

- Follow up on town hall action items and report on their progress.

- Consider holding town hall meetings with different groups within the agency. The USPTO holds regular town hall meetings with employees that are two levels apart in the organization (i.e., patent examiners meet with directors).

BUILD CONNECTIONS THROUGH COMMUNICATION

Use multiple communication methods to connect employees to the mission, the agency and their co-workers

Virtually all of the agencies that set out to improve employee satisfaction placed a focus on having managers and senior leaders improve communication in a variety of ways. They took steps to keep employees informed about the challenges the organization was facing and why certain decisions were made. They communicated both the good and bad news, and did so in an open and honest way.

Many of these agencies improved transparency and understanding by addressing employee questions and concerns during town hall meetings, video conferences or brown-bag sessions with senior leaders, and through online question boxes and sites to propose ideas and solutions to workplace issues.

NASA, for example, hosted a virtual executive summit connecting the administrator with employees through a video conference, where he shared organizational news and answered employee questions.

The State Department and a number of other agencies regularly distribute electronic newsletters providing information about upcoming events, special meetings and organizational changes. At the USPTO, the communications staff engages a large virtual workforce and seeks to make them feel part of the organization through regular blog postings, weekly newsletters and the use of social media. The USPTO also uses its social media sites to interact with employees in less formal ways and to help employees connect the agency's work to its impact on the country and society. In addition, the patent office hosts an annual Community Day for employees during which they can meet, interact and celebrate the agency at the main campus.

DOT leaders held town hall meetings and visited the agency's field offices to meet with employees and understand their challenges. The same is true for officials at the Mint, where senior leadership held town hall meetings and visited production facilities throughout the country to get in-person feedback on worker concerns.

A number of agencies, including DOT, the Mint and the State Department, utilize online platforms to obtain employee suggestions for changes in the workplace and have processes in place to review those ideas and to keep employees informed of actions being taken.

INVEST IN EMPLOYEES

Develop employees through leadership,
technical training and mentoring

Leadership development programs bolster employee motivation, improve job satisfaction and have been a trait of successful agencies. At the NRC, employees can participate in a program designed for aspiring supervisors, which lasts 12 to 18 months. The USPTO develops and delivers training for managers to help them learn about career advancement opportunities and provides patent examiners with training on new technologies. The DOT provides training for supervisors on effective leadership, employee engagement and ethics, while the State Department offers a wide variety of options ranging from leadership and specific skill training to language classes and negotiation techniques.

Successful federal organizations also provide technical training to help employees find ways to do their jobs better. The Mint developed a cross-training program to allow employees to shift between product lines and use different machinery to create coinage. This gave employees more variety in their work, but also provided the organization with more flexibility in using personnel to meet pressing needs. The USPTO often brings in external stakeholders to run training programs for patent examiners on new technologies.

Agencies also have found positive results in establishing mentoring and coaching programs and by encouraging mobility, rotational and special assignments.

After reviewing nearly 10 years of *Best Places to Work* data, we created a list of agencies that we wanted to profile based on their *Best Places to Work* performance. Some of the questions explored during agency selection included:

- Did the agency show an improvement in employee satisfaction or was the agency a consistent top performer? If the agency improved, was the improvement rapid or steady?

- Is the agency centrally located or does it have offices at many different locations (nationally or internationally)?

- What is the composition of the agency's workforce? What types of occupations do the agency's employees hold?

- What is the size of the agency's workforce?

- Is the agency independent or is it a subcomponent of a larger organization?

In interviews with agency leaders, we asked about their organizations' processes for identifying problems when looking at employee survey data, how they communicated with employees and solicited their feedback, any challenges they faced implementing new initiatives based on survey data and their most successful efforts addressing employee satisfaction and commitment. We also conducted a focus group with employees from each agency to gauge employee understanding of each agency's actions in response to the survey results and employee opinions on various agency initiatives.

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Ray Limon
    Director, Office of Civil Service Human Resource Management

Linda Taglialatela
    Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Human Resources

Department of Transportation

Stephen Gomez
    Special Assistant to the Director, Office of the Secretary

Rob Seidner
    HR Specialist, Departmental Office of Human Resource Management, Office of the Secretary

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Jeri Buchholz
    Chief Human Capital Officer

Jeffrey Frank
    Human Resources Specialist, Office of Human Capital Management

Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Miriam Cohen
    Chief Human Capital Officer

Jody Hudson
    Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer

Patent and Trademark Office

Wynn Coggins
    Acting Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

Paul Fucito
    Public Affairs Specialist, Office of the Chief Communication Officer

Fred Steckler
    Chief Administrative Officer

John Tindal
    Human Capital Liaison

United States Mint

Tom Jurkowsky
    Director of Public Affairs

Richard Peterson
    Acting Director

PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012
Best Places to Work Index Score	63.0	56.8	57.2	64.3	69.6	74.1	80.3
Effective Leadership	47.8	46.8	51.1	55.5	58.2	62.3	68.8
Effective Leadership—Empowerment	40.7	38.9	45.1	48.8	51.6	54.3	62.6
Effective Leadership—Fairness	44.2	42.5	41.6	49.6	54.2	58.9	63.5
Effective Leadership—Senior Leaders	40.1	37.7	43.3	49.8	52.9	59.1	66.7
Effective Leadership—Supervisors	60.9	61.9	66.7	67.5	68.7	71.1	76.8
Employee Skills/Mission Match	77.4	75.1	74.3	76.1	77.3	80.1	81.8
Pay	—	—	51.3	65.0	69.2	66.1	69.6
Strategic Management	65.9	60.9	60.5	64.6	61.7	66.5	71.8
Teamwork	66.2	65.6	69.5	69.3	65.3	66.5	73.8
Training and Development	60.5	54.9	58.0	62.5	62.7	67.7	73.0
Work/Life Balance	61.5	56.6	59.8	61.0	62.8	65.4	72.3
Support for Diversity	67.2	62.4	60.1	63.9	59.6	65.0	71.4
Performance Based Rewards and Advancement	46.8	49.9	47.1	53.8	53.9	58.4	65.1
Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs	—	—	—	—	—	88.1	85.8

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012
Best Places to Work Index Score	71.6	69.9	69.7	71.7	74.2	72.5	72.8
Effective Leadership	62.3	63.4	63.6	65.1	67.7	67.0	68.1
Effective Leadership—Empowerment	60.3	60.1	60.6	62.0	62.6	61.0	62.2
Effective Leadership—Fairness	60.5	61.5	60.1	62.0	67.2	66.9	67.9
Effective Leadership—Senior Leaders	56.3	55.2	56.9	59.7	63.1	62.3	63.0
Effective Leadership—Supervisors	70.3	74.3	73.6	73.8	75.2	74.8	76.1
Employee Skills/Mission Match	81.8	79.2	80.4	80.8	80.7	80.0	80.7
Pay			71.6	71.8	74.7	70.7	67.0
Strategic Management	62.8	59.8	59.0	62.8	63.5	62.1	62.4
Teamwork	75.8	78.6	78.2	80.0	75.9	75.2	77.3
Training and Development	70.0	72.0	70.5	72.8	73.9	72.2	72.4
Work/Life Balance	70.3	67.2	66.4	67.3	67.2	66.4	68.4
Support for Diversity	72.4	72.3	70.3	71.6	71.2	71.0	71.8
Performance Based Rewards and Advancement	56.5	58.0	57.7	59.7	60.6	59.4	59.8
Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs						87.4	85.7

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012
Best Places to Work Index Score	59.0	66.6	67.9	69.1	70.8	70.0	68.2
Effective Leadership	49.2	58.7	56.9	60.3	61.1	61.0	59.5
Effective Leadership—Empowerment	37.7	51.7	52.6	56.9	54.8	55.0	52.5
Effective Leadership—Fairness	51.1	49.8	49.6	55.4	57.6	58.9	57.3
Effective Leadership—Senior Leaders	45.6	57.0	51.7	53.4	55.9	56.9	55.1
Effective Leadership—Supervisors	57.6	68.4	67.9	71.4	71.4	69.1	68.4
Employee Skills/Mission Match	76.1	76.8	78.9	80.2	80.6	80.3	78.9
Pay	—	—	64.0	59.5	71.2	65.8	62.1
Strategic Management	57.8	60.6	59.0	62.3	61.7	63.2	60.9
Teamwork	67.6	74.6	74.3	77.0	70.6	71.8	70.3
Training and Development	48.9	61.5	60.9	63.2	64.7	63.3	62.0
Work/Life Balance	61.9	65.7	61.4	62.2	61.3	59.9	60.0
Support for Diversity	62.9	64.7	64.7	65.3	63.6	63.5	61.4
Performance Based Rewards and Advancement	43.1	48.8	51.2	52.8	52.4	52.2	51.5
Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs	—	—	—	—	—	—	73.5

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012
Best Places to Work Index Score	60.9	59.8	52.9	52.2	60.4	59.5	63.6
Effective Leadership	47.7	46.7	43.1	43.5	49.1	50.3	52.6
Effective Leadership—Empowerment	47.7	43.8	42.5	40.0	44.4	43.0	46.7
Effective Leadership—Fairness	45.6	48.4	40.7	44.3	49.8	51.6	54.5
Effective Leadership—Senior Leaders	39.9	35.8	32.8	34.6	40.0	41.6	43.4
Effective Leadership—Supervisors	56.5	58.2	54.9	53.8	60.1	61.9	63.6
Employee Skills/Mission Match	78.9	75.8	76.1	75.6	78.2	78.1	79.2
Pay	—	—	63.9	55.7	65.7	64.4	63.3
Strategic Management	56.1	50.2	49.3	47.8	49.6	51.1	52.3
Teamwork	70.2	69.4	67.4	69.4	64.3	64.6	66.7
Training and Development	58.8	58.5	53.9	55.2	58.7	58.2	61.0
Work/Life Balance	62.4	58.4	56.2	55.8	61.5	60.2	63.2
Support for Diversity	61.6	57.4	50.5	52.9	51.5	53.9	53.8
Performance Based Rewards and Advancement	38.0	38.9	35.2	37.9	40.6	39.6	41.1
Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs	—	—	—	—	—	77.7	76.5

UNITED STATES MINT

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012
Best Places to Work Index Score	54.6	56.3	51.8	54.1	56.5	68.5	64.3
Effective Leadership	41.1	43.7	39.5	39.7	44.0	55.0	54.8
Effective Leadership—Empowerment	34.4	39.6	36.1	37.4	38.6	51.9	52.1
Effective Leadership—Fairness	35.9	36.0	32.5	34.1	40.5	50.1	52.1
Effective Leadership—Senior Leaders	34.9	37.2	33.6	34.1	35.9	50.8	49.4
Effective Leadership—Supervisors	53.2	56.2	50.6	49.3	56.4	63.1	63.0
Employee Skills/Mission Match	73.8	71.0	70.4	69.3	69.2	77.2	77.7
Pay	—	—	57.8	55.7	64.0	62.7	54.7
Strategic Management	53.6	51.9	46.7	46.1	49.0	59.7	57.6
Teamwork	59.9	62.6	59.9	59.4	57.9	66.0	66.2
Training and Development	53.7	57.1	52.6	52.6	57.2	64.7	63.0
Work/Life Balance	68.0	67.8	64.1	62.1	65.1	70.0	69.2
Support for Diversity	54.5	50.7	43.8	46.5	48.9	58.5	58.1
Performance Based Rewards and Advancement	32.9	33.9	35.6	33.4	35.9	46.7	45.3
Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs	—	—	—	—	—	80.0	—

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012
Best Places to Work Index Score	—	74.8	76.2	80.7	81.8	79.1	75.5
Effective Leadership	—	61.5	64.2	71.1	73.5	72.0	67.6
Effective Leadership—Empowerment	—	53.1	57.9	64.5	68.9	67.2	62.3
Effective Leadership—Fairness	—	56.7	58.0	67.6	71.2	69.3	65.6
Effective Leadership—Senior Leaders	—	57.5	59.9	69.5	72.2	70.2	63.8
Effective Leadership—Supervisors	—	72.2	74.6	77.7	78.4	77.6	75.1
Employee Skills/Mission Match	—	80.0	81.3	84.6	83.7	82.6	81.5
Pay	—	—	74.5	76.4	80.8	74.6	67.1
Strategic Management	—	67.6	68.4	71.0	73.3	71.2	66.8
Teamwork	—	77.9	78.4	83.2	79.2	76.6	77.4
Training and Development	—	71.6	72.2	76.8	78.6	78.0	74.3
Work/Life Balance	—	71.9	73.2	76.6	77.7	76.9	76.6
Support for Diversity	—	70.6	73.4	78.0	75.5	73.9	70.8
Performance Based Rewards and Advancement	—	53.9	58.2	64.1	66.1	63.6	57.5
Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs	—	—	—	—	—	93.3	86.3

GOVERNMENT-WIDE

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012
Best Places to Work Index Score	60.5	62.1	61.8	63.3	65.0	64.0	60.8
Effective Leadership	49.1	51.5	51.5	52.7	54.5	54.9	52.8
Effective Leadership—Empowerment	45.4	47.4	47.9	48.6	49.1	48.5	45.8
Effective Leadership—Fairness	46.4	47.5	46.6	49.1	53.3	54.3	53.0
Effective Leadership—Senior Leaders	42.7	45.3	45.6	47.3	49.0	49.3	46.7
Effective Leadership—Supervisors	58.6	61.8	61.5	61.9	63.3	63.9	62.3
Employee Skills/Mission Match	78.8	77.9	78.1	78.8	78.9	78.6	77.3
Pay	—	—	61.3	60.4	63.0	59.1	55.0
Strategic Management	58.1	56.4	56.0	57.2	56.4	56.8	54.7
Teamwork	67.9	71.0	70.2	71.2	65.3	65.3	64.4
Training and Development	57.7	60.8	59.8	61.5	61.1	60.7	59.3
Work/Life Balance	63.6	62.9	61.4	62.1	60.7	60.2	60.0
Support for Diversity	60.4	58.6	58.0	60.5	56.9	57.8	55.5
Performance Based Rewards and Advancement	42.9	43.8	44.4	45.6	46.4	45.9	43.4
Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs	—	—	—	—	—	78.8	76.2

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