



OPM Being the “Model” Employer Position Paper from Federally Employed Women

Following a request received from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Director John Berry, Federally Employed Women (FEW) conducted a membership survey requesting their rating of current OPM practices, as well as soliciting ideas and suggestions on how OPM could become the “model” employer in our nation.

Overall Rankings:

The survey was broken into four major areas: Diversity, Training, Awards and Performance. FEW members were asked to rate how well the federal government was performing in these four areas. The data results are as follows:

Diversity: On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the best), how would you rate the federal government’s achievements in the category of “Diversity?”

Federal workforce is very representative of all	10.6%
Federal workforce is more than adequately diverse	14.5%
Federal workforce is acceptably diverse, but not at all levels	48.9%
Federal workforce is somewhat diverse	20.6%
Federal workforce is not at all diverse and needs a lot of work	5.5%

Training: On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the best), how would you rate the federal government’s achievements in the category of “Training?”

Training in numerous job responsibility areas in the federal workforce is always available to employees	11.6%
Training is available in most circumstances, but not in all areas	42.8%
Training is available half the time	14.5%
Training is sporadic and not available the majority of the time	22.8%
Training opportunities in the federal workforce is totally inadequate	8.4%

Awards: On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the best), how would you rate the federal government’s achievements in the category of “Awards?”

Awards are given in sufficient quantity, at all grade levels and very fairly	4.5%
Awards are adequate, but not perfect	26.7%
Some awards are given but more need to be and better oversight is necessary	39.2%
Awards are not given enough or to all grade levels	24.8%
Awards are not given	4.8%

Performance: On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the best), how would you rate the federal government’s achievements in the category of “Performance?”

Federal workers are all top performers and are given recognition for this outstanding work and evaluations are very reflective of their responsibilities	0.6%
The majority of federal workers do a more than average job, and in most cases managers recognize their performance and evaluate them fairly	33.1%
The majority of federal workers do a more than average job, but managers do not recognize them and evaluations are not adequate	48.9%
The majority of federal workers do an adequate job, but performance evaluations are not adequate	13.2%
Most federal workers do not do a good job and management ignores this non-performance	4.2%

Suggestions and Ideas for Improvement:

Respondents were also asked to provide specific suggestions and ideas that they thought would improve the ratings of the federal government in each of these four areas. A summary of these submissions follow.

Diversity:

The biggest diversity problems, according to the survey respondents, are the lack of representation of women and minorities in the higher level positions. It was noted several times that the lower pay grades are in most cases quite diverse, but the higher pay grades are still represented by many more white males.

Most of the survey suggestions concerning diversity centered around four major themes: recruiting efforts at targeted institutions; high-level support for Special Emphasis Programs, including the Federal Women’s Program; mentoring or training those in the lower grades so that they are better equipped for promotions and managing their career ladders; and better oversight.

Recruiting Efforts – Many respondents urged OPM to conduct recruiting campaigns and/or career fairs on college campuses, and specifically minority universities and institutions. These career fairs could be organized by the 28 Federal Executive Boards together so as not to duplicate efforts and funds. (Currently, individual federal agencies are each conducting their own recruitment fairs.) Federal agencies should also actively recruit qualified college students to work during the summers, in internships and/or stay-in-school programs which can evolve into full-time positions to introduce these younger workers to the benefits of a career in the federal government. Intern grade levels could even be widened to include entry level grade series positions. Another related point cited was the fact that the application process must be less onerous and more open.

Special Emphasis Programs – There must be high-level support for the various Special Emphasis and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Programs, including the Federal Women’s Program. The employees who serve in these positions (some as collateral duties) need to be not only supported in principle and given the knowledge, tools and training in order to successfully carry out the roles and duties required in these areas, but these offices must be adequately funded and staffed. (NOTE: FEW has prepared a draft revision of the guidance document for these programs for consideration and possible implementation by OPM.)

Mentoring or Training – Many respondents stated that training is key to increased diversity at the higher ranks. There needs to be formal leadership training within career ladders for women and minorities. Also the Upward Mobility program to help move lower level employees into higher grade levels must be reinstated in **all** federal agencies.

Oversight – OPM must ensure that all federal agencies follow legal requirements such as the requirement to monitor and maintain race and gender data on all applicants, new hires, promotions and terminations. This is the only real way to ensure that the federal government is recruiting, hiring and promoting fairly and responsibly in accordance with EEO requirements. Many agencies do not comply with these regulations. Also OPM should require managers to take diversity training to ensure that they have the knowledge necessary to achieve a more diverse workforce. Overall, managers need to be held accountable as to why senior leadership positions are not more diverse.

Training:

The vast majority of survey respondents stated the importance of training to morale and to the development of employees. It also serves as an incentive for hiring and retaining employees and therefore should be given high priority – yet in many cases it is not.

By far the most cited problem with training for federal workers is the funding issue. It was repeated over and over that not enough money is set aside for training, and when there is some funding for training, it is always the first to go in a budget crunch. The number one solution was to make training funding an essential and separate line item in the agency budgets and require that this funding be used for training and not other office purposes. If agencies cannot afford a certain training course for an individual employee, then they should at least allow paid time off for the employee to receive this developmental training.

One suggestion provided by a survey respondent was to inform the employee of the funding levels for their training that year and have her/him develop their own training program. These employees should be more involved and proactive in what training they need to improve their job performance.

Another problem related to the tight funding is the fact that much of the training dollars are spent on higher grade levels. Many units send their managers and supervisors to temporary duty (TDY) locations which leaves the lower grade workers with little or no training to help them move up the career ladder. This also impacts the lack of diversity at the higher levels cited above because lower grade employees (who tend to be women and minorities) cannot receive training to help them improve their work skills and knowledge.

Other areas for improvement cited by respondents included: standardized training schedules/roadmaps; upward mobility training should be permitted and encouraged; better virtual learning programs; joint training with other agencies; and more OPM training at no cost.

Standardized Training Schedules/Roadmaps – Agencies should be required to develop a training roadmap for each skill field and determine what training would be needed to have the necessary skills at each grade level. There should also be a standardized training schedule of courses that employees must take in each job category. Finally it was recommended by several respondents that all federal agencies use, to the maximum extent possible, Individual Development Plans (IDPs) to help each employee develop

their careers. These IDPs should include some type of annual training for the individual employee that will help her/him obtain additional skills to move up the career ladder.

Upward Mobility Training – Many agencies still use the outdated requirement that the training must be directly related to the employee's current job. As a result, lower grade employees are not able to take leadership and/or supervisory courses in order to learn management skills. That makes it very difficult to provide career mobility for many employees. Training needs to be done across the board and at all levels so that personnel can meet the competencies required for advancement.

Virtual Learning – OPM should increase and improve specialized online training courses. This would keep training costs down as well as allow for employees to receive needed training but not have to travel outside the office. However, these employees need to be allowed to take these courses with no interruptions.

Joint Training with Other Agencies – Federal agencies should allow federal workers to have access to other agencies' training and conduct joint training in common areas when possible (i.e., environmental, project management, leadership, etc.). This way costs are shared among different organizations and employees are afforded the opportunity to network with other federal workers and exchange ideas about problem solving and/or other challenges. Another survey respondent suggested that more federal agencies should allow for job shadowing and/or temporary duty assignments with other agencies.

Free OPM Training – Another suggestion provided in the surveys was for OPM to provide free training on leadership, mentoring and managerial skills. These skills are so important for our federal workforce that in order to provide it to the most employees possible, it should be offered at no charge. This training would result in better managers and leaders which in the end would turn into a cost savings for OPM.

Awards:

Among the major issue areas cited by the survey respondents with respect to awards were complexity of the process; rewarding exemplary performance; and other award options.

Complexity – Several survey respondents stated that the administrative burden and awards process is so complex that many times awards are not given simply because it takes supervisors too much time to fill out the paperwork and push it through the bureaucracy. There needs to be less red tape associated with giving awards.

Rewarding Exemplary Performance – Another major issue cited with awards is that in many cases the process is subjective and awards merely given to those favored by the awarding manager. Somehow there needs to be a better way to link awards to actual job performance. This might require additional training for supervisors in how to fairly evaluate performance and bestow awards. In too many cases, employees are awarded inconsistently, leading to declining morale in the workplace. It was also suggested that awards be given throughout the year rather than just at the end of a rating period. This would allow employees to be rewarded for the successful completion of a project, task, etc. at the time when it is completed instead of ten months later.

Other Award Options – Several ideas were given for alternative awards that could be given to federal employees that would prove just as beneficial. Among some of the

suggestions were saving bonds, paid time off, small bonuses and the opportunity to take additional training courses.

Performance:

FEW conducted a separate survey specifically on Pay-for-Performance Personnel Systems. The results of this survey are included in a separate position paper and are quite detailed. While this paper includes some overall comments, we would refer OPM to consider the more detailed Pay-for-Performance Position Paper (<http://few.org/docs/PayforPerformancePositionPaper.pdf>) released by FEW for more suggestions.

One interesting suggestion provided in this survey was for OPM to consider the Booz, Allen and Hamilton 360 Degrees evaluation process for use in the federal government. Evaluations in this system are written by personnel outside the chain of command of the rated individual, and the evaluation must provide substantiating evidence for the rating the employee receives. Supervisors do have input into an employee's appraisal, but so do peers, co-workers, clients and subordinates as well. As a result, a very clear picture of the employee's impact is achieved through this type of rating system. Additionally, the rater is evaluated on their performance in investigating and writing the appraisal so they must do a good job. Finally, appraisals are written throughout the year, not all at once. Therefore no one individual is overwhelmed by a huge stack of evaluations at one time.

(NOTE: This was suggested by a survey respondent. FEW has no particular experience or knowledge about this system but asserts it might be worth researching.)

Other issue areas include the need to improve communication between supervisors and their employees so that expectations are clearly understood by both parties. This should include regular one-on-one meetings with employees to get updates on their performance and discuss their contribution to the organization's mission.

Finally, it was cited several times that the performance rating process needs to be standardized government-wide. Specific performance standards for certain skill categories should be established and training needs to be provided to give employees the knowledge necessary to meet these standards.