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# JUMPSTART EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUR FEDERAL EMPLOYEE VIEWPOINT SURVEY (FEVS) RESULTS

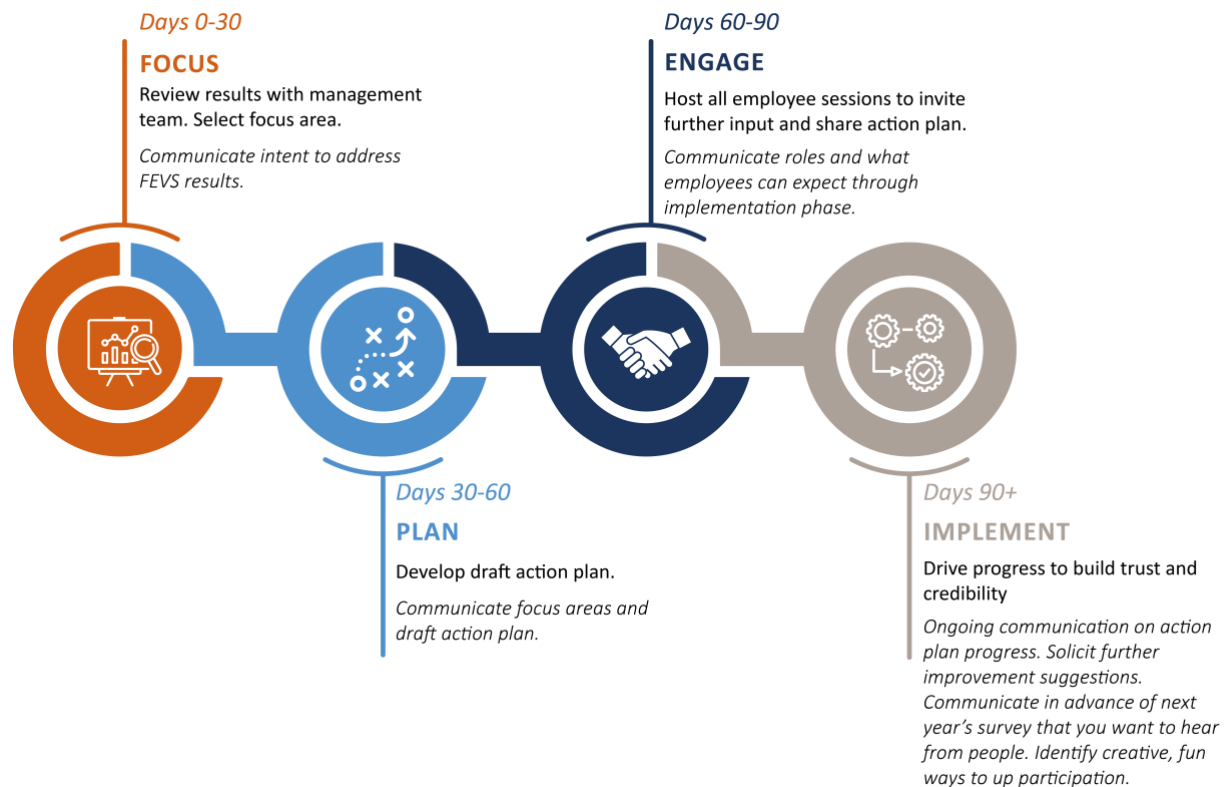
90-DAY GUIDE TO GETTING YOUR TEAM MORE PRODUCTIVE AND HAPPIER AT WORK

PRESENTED BY:



## JUMPSTART EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUR FEDERAL EMPLOYEE VIEWPOINT SURVEY (FEVS) RESULTS

In this 90-day jumpstart guide, you'll find practical tips to understand your FEVS results, prioritize areas of focus, and plan targeted engagement activities. Specific examples are included to help you tailor the approach and messaging to match your program and leadership style.



## MAKING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR FEVS DATA

The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), administered by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), is a purposeful effort to gather employee feedback that federal leaders and managers can use to improve their work environments. And, it's comprehensive. With nearly 100 questions spanning perceptions and demographics, the FEVS — gathers and delivers— lots of data.

This creates a challenge for federal managers. The sheer amount of information can unintentionally create a barrier to change. Information overload makes it difficult for a leadership team— let alone an individual manager— to figure out what to do with it all.

When you first receive results, there is typically a moment of curiosity. “How’d we do?!” Soon after, fatigue set in. Scrolling through pages and pages of tables of questions and percentages leads to uncertainty. “How could we possibly address all of this?” “Where do I start?”

Feeling overwhelmed is not the only challenge. Some employees think leaders have the direct to fix the issues. Further, knee-jerk reactions from managers often don't align with overall strategic priorities or

plans. Combined, the volume of information, misunderstood roles, and reactivity generate a strong headwind to initiative and improvement.

This is a critical moment. Will you take action or hope things get better on their own?

Managers who use the FEVS to craft actionable plans see tremendous benefits. They improve work quality and productivity. They build a foundation of trust with employees that enables them to more quickly respond to issues that arise.

**With so much to gain, how can managers take realistic, meaningful action in the face of competing priorities?**

You can use a strategy called **selective focus**, an approach designed to reduce overwhelming feelings and provide clear next steps. It also invites managers and employees alike to be a part of the solution.



*Selective focus is term borrowed from photography. It refers to a technique where the photographer selectively focuses on one aspect of the subject and ignores other things going on in the scene. The contrast of the sharp subject against the soft image background creates powerful, contemplative images.*

*The result captures attention on a specific point while still showing the background context.*

This 90-Day Jump Start will help you create momentum, build trust and credibility, and make everyone part of making your office a better place to work.

## **90-DAY JUMPSTART APPROACH**

This approach uses FEVS data to jumpstart employee engagement activities. Higher employee engagement results in greater productivity and happiness at work.

*How will you know?*

Next year's FEVS scores and participation rates will go up. More importantly, you'll see productivity and involvement rise. More people will speak up, identify both problems and solutions, and offer to take the lead in addressing issues.

*What's the key?*

Don't tackle everything at once. Also, employees, mid-level managers, and leaders together must share responsibility for developing and implementing the improvement plan and monitoring results. While long-standing issues aren't solved in 90 days, this approach demonstrates your commitment to change and sets the course for iterative, ongoing improvements.

*So, where DO you start?*

## FOCUS

Get your data. Typically, agency human capital offices share a series of dates when FEVS results will be released. If you're unsure, inquire about the date for the detailed final report. Plan on setting aside time that week to initiate the following first steps to analyze and understand your results.

As you begin, inform your management team (direct reports or peers within a division) that you'd like to engage them in a coordinated FEVS analysis and action-planning initiative. By default, all managers should be included in prioritizing and planning your FEVS response.

**Review Results:** When your scores arrive, confirm all appropriate managers receive the information. Then schedule the management team review meeting. Set expectations and strongly encourage everyone to review the data in advance of the meeting. They should note areas of interest or concern they'd like to discuss. Then, commit an hour to reviewing the results on your own.

**Meet with the FEVS Action Committee (Your Management Team):** Meet with managers to discuss reactions and observations.

Discussion questions may include: *Which scores went down? Which scores improved? What was most surprising? Where are the areas of concern?*

*Consider using a facilitation technique such as whiteboarding or "voting" using sticky notes to indicate areas of greatest interest. You may see and hear a variety of reactions from delight to disappointment in the results.*



*For any skeptics, help fight the urge to dismiss data they don't believe.*

After the group has had a chance to process the results together, talk about next steps. Share the concept of **selective focus**. Let them know that you'd like their input on where you'll focus your team's time and resources. Instead of diluting your collective efforts across several possible questions and responses, together narrow the options. This strategy will significantly increase your positive impact on employees (yourself included).

**Send Initial All-Employee Communication:** Once you've held a preliminary review meeting with managers, send a message to all employees in the unit.

Let them know:

- You have received FEVS data and have started analyzing and understanding the results.
- In the coming weeks, you will be developing an Action Plan.
- They can expect periodic updates on the plan and ways to get involved in the process.

*Note: During the first 30 days, you complete both Step 1: Analyze and Understand and Step 2: Focus and Plan. Sub-steps can be accomplished through a series of meetings or one, in-depth session.*

**Select Focus Area:** The most critical point in your management team’s FEVS response is selecting your focus area<sup>1</sup>. Here are several selection strategies.

Considering choosing any one (or more) of the following 10 approaches:

1. **Lowest scores.** Looking for lowest scores at the question level can be a way to tackle glaring issues head-on.
2. **Least improved year over year.** These questions flag areas where your organization and team are stuck. Something isn’t changing, and it should.
3. Questions that were **previously high (or higher) that went down.** These questions show areas where the employee experience is eroding. It’s a great opportunity to show that you are nipping emerging problems in the bud.
4. Questions **within your sphere of influence.** As noted previously, the FEVS is comprehensive. For example, questions on Health and Wellness and Employee Assistance Programs are included. Most federal managers don’t have direct control over the scope and implementation of these programs. Nearly everything else, however, is fair game!
5. Questions scoring **low relative to agency mean.** These are places you’re underperforming compared to your agency peers.
6. **FEVS-defined Index.** FEVS questions are grouped into indices. Select one, then drill down into the results by question included in the category.
7. **Outlier low scores within an Index.** When questions within one of the related Indices (shown in Figure 1) tend to be high but you notice an outlying low score, it may flag an issue that, when fixed, would result in an overall, consistently strong score for the category.
8. **Agency-provided theme.** Some agencies tag questions that tie to their organizational priorities. Diversity and Inclusion is one example. Noting where your work unit scores relative to the agency is important. If your scores are lower, this can be a great place to focus and bring

*With 71 perception questions, where do you start? Choosing a few is more effective than spreading your efforts and resources across all.*

Index	2017	2016	2015
Best Places to Work Index	54%	38%	N/A
New Inclusion Quotient (IQ) Index	47%	45%	N/A
Employee Skills/Mission Match Index	73%	61%	N/A
Teamwork Index	40%	46%	N/A
Pay Index	59%	67%	N/A
Work/Life Balance Index	53%	47%	N/A
Training/Development Index	44%	39%	N/A
Support for Diversity Index	47%	57%	N/A
Strategic Management Index	31%	38%	N/A
Effective Leadership - Leader Index	31%	29%	N/A
Effective Leadership - Supervisor Index	71%	55%	N/A
Effective Leadership - Empowerment Index	37%	27%	N/A
Effective Leadership - Fairness Index	47%	36%	N/A
Performance-Based Rewards & Advancement Index	43%	35%	N/A
Family Friendly Culture Index	58%	80%	N/A
Organizational Safety Index	60%	59%	N/A

FIGURE 1: ILLUSTRATIVE RESULTS BY INDEX

<sup>1</sup> 71 questions measure federal employees’ perceptions about agency workforce management, 7 questions relate to usage of work/life programs, and 16 questions are demographic.

greater uniformity to the employee experience across the agency. If you are unsure, work with your Human Capital Office to determine if there are enterprise-level focus areas and if it makes sense for your unit to align with them.

9. **Change readiness.** An organization’s general readiness for change can be an indicator of the challenges you’ll face introducing new tools, processes, or policies. Knowing your unit’s level of openness or resistance to change generally can be useful. You can implement activities to build the “change muscles” to make future initiatives easier to implement.
10. **Further what you’ve started.** Release of the FEVS results is an excellent time to reinvigorate activities you started last year. Keep in mind that employees are looking for progress, not perfection. By furthering what you already have underway, you’ll build further trust that you can be counted on to do what you say you’re going to do.

After considering these various ways to “slice” your data, select no more than three or four individual questions with your management team. Selecting a few items around which to focus your improvement plan will have a tremendous impact — not just on the employee perceptions and experiences on those questions — but on your overall scores.

Know there is no one “right” answer. The simple truth is that employees appreciate feeling heard, having the chance to participate, and seeing management’s efforts to address issues. The fascinating phenomenon about your response to the FEVS results is that by focusing improvement efforts on a few items, you’ll likely see an overall rise in scores, and therefore improved engagement and productivity.

## PLAN

Up until this point, reviewing your FEVS data and determining the area(s) of focus have been management team activities. It’s important for this group to be involved, understand, and aligned on decisions that will impact resources including staff time and funding. Like budgeting and other strategic planning exercises, the management team should work together on these early steps to build a sense of ownership and agreement. However, once the focus area(s) are set, your FEVS Action Committee can be expanded to include volunteers or select employee representatives. You can also ask others, such as a representative from your human capital office, for support and ideas.

**Develop an Action Plan.** Reflecting on the focused questions you selected, what are some steps you and your team can take?

Brainstorm at least 10-12 feasible actions you could take in the coming six months<sup>2</sup>. Rank them by ease and cost. There are many creative possibilities to address the feedback.



*Days 30-60*

### PLAN

Develop draft action plan.

*Communicate focus areas and draft action plan.*

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<sup>2</sup> Managers typically have a 6-month window of time to implement improvement actions before next year’s FEVS survey is issued.



For example, after receiving a low score on management encouraging information sharing among divisions, the Policy Director at a federal regulatory agency developed “Teatime Tuesday.” Every Tuesday at 2pm, she serves tea and cookies outside of her office and encourages everyone to talk with each other about what they have going on.

Effective Leadership - Leader Index		Percent Positive (2017)		
Question	Index Score	31%	38%	40%
53	In my organization, leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.	11%	28%	32%
54	My organization's leaders maintain high standards of honesty and integrity.	27%	37%	40%
61	I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders.	48%	44%	43%
64	How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization?	39%	45%	47%

FIGURE 2: LOW SCORES OR LOW SCORES WITHIN AN INDEX CAN BE TARGETED

Another client was concerned about his scores on honesty and integrity. He started sharing his raw notes after each management team meeting (typos and incomplete thoughts included) with the entire staff. Consider expanding your response team to include other people who can provide creative input.

Once you’ve generated a list:

- Select five or six realistic actions, prioritize, then plan the initial steps. Designate a notetaker (or rotate among the team) to document ideas.
- Assign points of contact among the management team to lead further planning and implementation.
- Remember the format of your improvement plan isn’t as important as the agreed-upon actions.

**Send Second All-Employee Communication, and Schedule a Staff Session.** Once your improvement plan is developed, issue an update to employees outlining the management team’s identified focus areas and the preliminary improvement plan. Emphasize that employee input at this stage is critical.

## ENGAGE

**Host Engagement Sessions:** Once you’ve communicated your intent, schedule an all-employee session to review the results, share the focus areas, and introduce high-level next steps on the improvement plan. This is an excellent opportunity to get further input and engagement from employees.

**Discussion:** During the session, you may consider asking the following reflection questions:

- What did we miss or misinterpret?
- What other ideas for solutions do you have?
- How can we build on areas of strength?
- What would “good” or “success” look like? How might we measure success?
- How can we drive greater survey participation next year?

Days 60-90

### ENGAGE

Host all employee sessions to invite further input and share action plan.

Communicate roles and what employees can expect through implementation phase.



*Tips for Talking with Employees: Be transparent. Use confusing results as a discussion topic with your team. Engage in conversation about the results and enlist their help in coming up with areas in which to focus.*

Close this meeting by sharing information on what employees can expect next, with a commitment to keep employees engaged in the improvement process. Describe the management team’s role and the employees’ role in continuing the dialog and providing input to help refine the plan over time. Lastly, share how employees can stay informed of progress on the action items and organizational impact.

## IMPLEMENT

Of course, the last step is to implement your action plan. To increase the chances of doing so (we’ve all created plans that sit on a shelf), we suggest:

- Keep it simple; five or six initiatives at once is plenty. Nothing should require an act of Congress to get started.
- Develop a shared vision of what success looks like. This should be an ongoing conversation among managers and staff.
- Create a “light” project plan and designate a champion responsible for oversight. Integrate progress check-ins as a standing agenda item into existing management team and all-employee meetings. Consider how FEVS contributes to broader plans for process improvement, innovation, and increasing agility.
- Encourage employees through a feedback loop (anonymous email box, idea wall, team meetings, or one-on-ones) to continue to surface solutions to identified issues.
- Be upfront about progress and adjust as you go.
- Continue to communicate as much as you can. Every time you introduce a change or improvement, remind people it is in response to the FEVS data and what employees indicated. Reiterating that you’ve heard their message is critical to building future engagement and participation.



Days 90+

### IMPLEMENT

Drive progress to build trust and credibility

*Ongoing communication on action plan progress. Solicit further improvement suggestions.*

*Communicate in advance of next year’s survey that you want to hear from people. Identify creative, fun ways to up participation.*

Part of implementing your action plan should be increasing your response rate for next year. Interestingly, scores tend to be higher when participation is up. The more people who respond, the more accurate the data. Additionally, with increased participation, you can be assured you are hearing from a diverse cross-section of employees and not just the ends of the satisfaction spectrum — from delighted to disgruntled. Employees will see positive changes as a result of your action plan, further encouraging them to participate. They know it’s worth their time because they feel heard.



## **FEVS RESPONSE CHECKLIST**

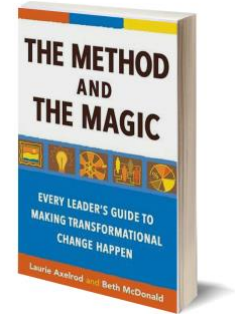
**Follow these steps once you've received your teams scores**

- Review results
- Meet with fellow leaders to discuss and flag common areas of concern
- Select focus area
- Develop draft action plan
- Schedule all-employee session to share draft. Solicit additional input and feedback
- Update and finalize action plan
- Discuss expectations, roles, and monitoring impact with staff and management team
- Implement action plan and communicate progress

## ABOUT WHEELHOUSE GROUP

Since its founding in 2003, Wheelhouse Group has helped government clients, global Fortune 100 companies, and non-profit organizations utilize a variety of organization effectiveness, change management and communications disciplines to address their critical business challenges. We partner with our clients to successfully navigate constant change; improve how individuals and teams function; and continuously improve organizational performance and program management. Our team consists of senior consultants who offer extensive experience and bright ideas—and then dig in and get things done – in the areas of communications, change management, and program governance.

Beth McDonald and Laurie Axelrod captured years of experience supporting the “people side” of transformational change in their book, *The Method and the Magic: Every Leader’s Guide to Making Transformational Change Happen*. The approach and real-life lessons in this book help leaders confidently and competently deliver lasting, meaningful change. Honed over years of helping organizations large and small, public and private, their methodology is based on common sense principles, informed by the best thinking in the change management field, and guided by an understanding of human behavior.



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