# Office of Inspector General

**Federal Maritime Commission
Workplace Evaluation Report**

**A15-04**

**March 10, 2015**

# FEDERAL MARITIME COMMISSION

**FEDERAL MARITIME COMMISSION**
Washington, DC  20573

March 10, 2015

*Office of Inspector General*

Dear Chairman Cordero and Commissioners:

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) is pleased to provide the attached report on the OIG's evaluation of the Federal Maritime Commission's (FMC) workplace.  The OIG relied on the expertise of the Partnership for Public Service, a non-profit, non-partisan organization to understand the root causes behind scores on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) for the FMC, and to provide recommendations for improvement.

FMC management generally agreed with the OIG's six recommendations.   When fully implemented, these recommendations should build on the agency's strengths and address ongoing employee concerns in the workplace.  Consistent with Office of Management and Budget Circular No. A-50, Audit Followup, revised, FMC management should develop a corrective action plan that includes criteria and timeframes for proper resolution on the OIG recommendations.  The OIG requests that management provide the corrective action plan to the OIG within 30 calendar days from the date of this report for review and comment.

The OIG appreciates the participation and input from the FMC employees during the evaluation.  The OIG also appreciates the active engagement during the evaluation by the FMC's Chairman, Commissioners, and senior executives.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact the OIG at (202) 523-5863.  Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Jon Hatfield
Inspector General

Attachment

cc:     Senior Executives

Federal Maritime Commission
Office of Inspector General

# Report Highlights

## *FMC Needs to Conduct a Robust Action Planning Process to Improve Employee Satisfaction*

*(Evaluation A15-04, March 10, 2015)*

## Why We Did This Review

Since 2011, the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) has ranked in the bottom 25% of small agencies in the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*® rankings of employee satisfaction and commitment.

The Partnership for Public Service, on behalf of the FMC Office of Inspector General (OIG), conducted an independent evaluation to examine employee satisfaction at the FMC and provide recommendations for improvement.

## Background

An agency's focus on improving employee engagement and satisfaction can bolster its reputation and competitiveness as an employer in the global marketplace.

The *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*® rankings, provide a comprehensive analysis of employee satisfaction in the federal government. The rankings are based on employee responses to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), administered annually by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

The rankings offer information about which factors drive employee satisfaction, enabling managers and leaders to understand and address their agency's most critical workplace challenges.

## What We Found

The evaluation focused on a review of the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) data and *Best Places to Work* results for FMC and feedback from staff during workshops, a webinar and one-on-one interviews. The goal was to validate FEVS results, receive additional or updated feedback from employees, identify areas of agreement and disagreement and receive specific ideas for improving the workplace.

The major cause of disengagement was in the area of effective leadership. Within this, three main issues were uncovered:

- *Leadership legacy*: Challenges with previous leaders remain top-of-mind at the agency and continue to impact morale.
- *Low levels of trust:* Management and staff exhibit signs of distrust and a fear of retribution for speaking up or being perceived as out of favor.
- *Poor communication*: Information is not widely or effectively shared across the agency, which results in rumors and misinformation.

During the evaluation process, it was found that the FMC has been taking positives steps to improve low employee satisfaction and commitment scores. In particular, employees pointed to the following areas as organizational strengths:

- Actions taken to address low leadership scores.
- Transparency in the hiring and promotion process.
- Expertise and talent among staff.
- Small agency culture and environment.

## Recommendations

The OIG recommends that the FMC conduct a robust action planning process. In summary, the OIG recommends the agency implement the following:

1. Select an executive champion to lead improvement efforts. Any change effort requires executive level support to be successful.
2. Update the FMC-wide action plan to focus on high impact and achievable action items that are drawn from employee recommendations or the top ideas to implement provided in this report. For each action item, include key deliverables, a timeline, responsible parties, resource needs and metrics for evaluating progress.
3. In addition to FMC-wide actions, leaders of each Bureau or Office should promptly commit to and implement up to three office-level actions for their work unit.
4. Make the FMC-wide action plan available for all employees to view, then conduct one or more meetings with all agency staff to share the results of this evaluation and the plan for addressing the feedback. Once a plan is in place, senior leadership and SES should communicate progress against the plan at least quarterly and through multiple channels including the FMC intranet.
5. Empower employees by inviting their participation through an employee engagement council sponsored by the executive champion. The employee engagement council will assist in implementation, communication and annual updates to the action plan.
6. Schedule regular check-ins with the executive champion, responsible parties and the employee engagement council to review progress and impact at the agency and office levels.

FMC Management agreed with the recommendations, with some explanation.

In addition to the six recommendations, we also offer ten top ideas to implement in the report drawn from FMC employee feedback as well as best practices from across successful agencies.

**PARTNERSHIP** FOR **PUBLIC SERVICE**

# FEDERAL MARITIME COMMISSION
# WORKPLACE EVALUATION REPORT

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2011, the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) has ranked in the bottom 25% of small agencies in the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*® rankings of employee satisfaction and commitment. To understand these low scores, the Partnership for Public Service (the Partnership) conducted a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of employee survey data and employee feedback. This process specifically focused on identifying the barriers to a highly engaging work environment and providing recommendations for improvement.

While ten workplace categories are discussed in this report, the major cause of disengagement was in the area of effective leadership. Within this, three main issues were uncovered:

- *Leadership legacy*: Challenges with previous leaders remain top-of-mind at the agency and continue to impact morale.
- *Low levels of trust:* Management and staff exhibit signs of distrust and a fear of retribution for speaking up or being perceived as out of favor.
- *Poor communication*: Information is not widely or effectively shared across the agency, which results in rumors and misinformation.

During the evaluation process, it was found that the Federal Maritime Commission has been taking positive steps to improve low employee satisfaction and commitment scores. In particular, respondents pointed to the following areas as organizational strengths:
- Actions taken to address low leadership scores
- Transparency in the hiring and promotion process
- Expertise and talent among staff
- Small agency culture and environment

To effectively build on strengths and address ongoing concerns, it is recommended that the Federal Maritime Commission conducts a robust action planning process that implements recommendations with a focus on leadership, as well as other suggestions detailed in this report.

## PURPOSE

The Partnership for Public Service, on behalf of the Federal Maritime Commission, Office of the Inspector General (OIG), conducted an independent evaluation to examine employee satisfaction at FMC and provide recommendations for improvement.  The FMC OIG contracted with the Partnership to conduct this evaluation due to concerns with the FMC's low levels of employee engagement and satisfaction as reported in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). Specifically, in 2014, the Partnership ranked the FMC 28th out of 30 small agencies in the Partnership's annual *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* report.

The Partnership is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that acts as a neutral third party to understand root causes behind scores on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) for FMC, uncover organizational strengths and garner insights for improvement from agency employees. By conducting this evaluation, the Partnership identifies qualitative reasons behind the employee survey data and provides recommendations for improvement to the Federal Maritime Commission.

## BACKGROUND

Low levels of employee engagement and satisfaction can contribute to inadequate productivity and lower-quality customer service, potentially resulting in poor agency performance. An agency's focus on improving employee engagement and satisfaction can bolster its reputation and competitiveness as an employer in the global marketplace. High employee engagement, satisfaction and demonstrated commitment to effectively accomplishing the agency's mission will help attract –and keep– top talent.

In addition to recruitment and retention, multiple positive organizational outcomes have been documented as result of high engagement. As illustrated in Table 1, Gallup and the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) found that high engagement or satisfaction led to better, more efficient work products, fewer sick days, more innovation, a decrease in on the job injuries and higher customer satisfaction ratings.

**Table 1: Engagement Drives Organizational Outcomes***

| Low Engagement | High Engagement |
|---|---|
| Lower productivity | Higher productivity |
| More absenteeism | Less absenteeism |
| Negatively influence coworkers | Drive innovation |
| Increase in injuries | Decrease in injuries |
| Low customer service ratings | High customer service ratings |

*Adapted from *Federal Employee Engagement: The Motivating Potential of Job Characteristics and Rewards*, MSPB Report 2012 and *State of the American Workplace Employee Engagement Insights for U.S. Business Leaders*, Gallup 2013.

The *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*® rankings, produced by the Partnership, provide a comprehensive analysis of employee satisfaction in the federal government. The 2014 rankings are the ninth edition of the rankings, which are based on employee responses to the FEVS, administered annually by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. The rankings offer information about which factors drive employee satisfaction, enabling managers and leaders to understand and address their agency's most critical workplace challenges.
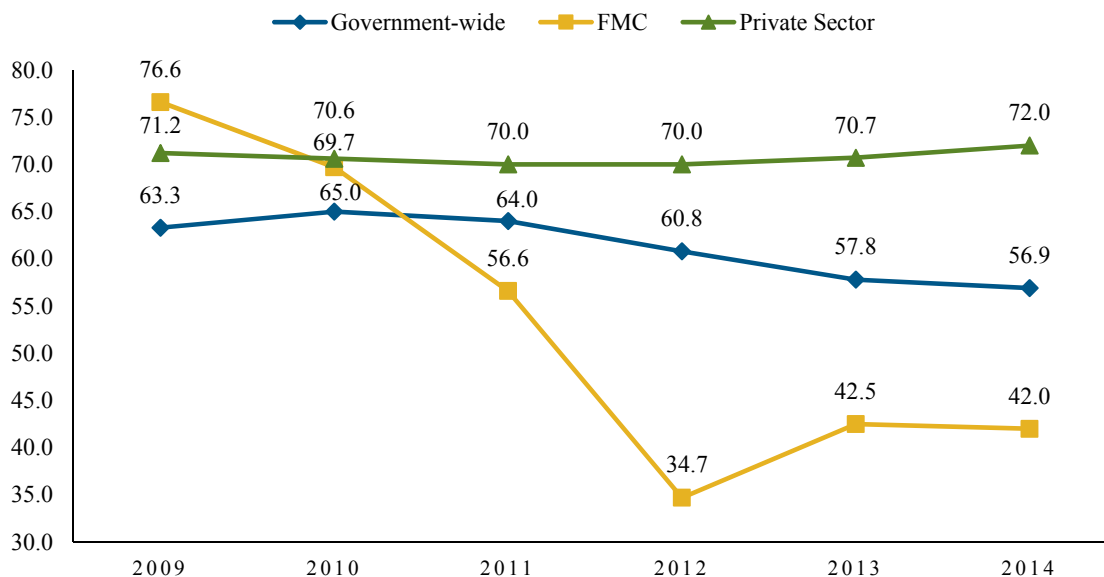
The *Best Places to Work* overall index score measures the performance of agencies related to employee satisfaction and commitment. The index is weighted according to the extent to which each question predicts "intent to remain." The index score is comprised of three questions from the FEVS:

- 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?

In 2009, the *Best Places to Work* index score for FMC was 76.6 on a scale of zero to one hundred, 5.4 points higher than the private sector score and 13.3 points higher than the government-wide average.  However, from 2009 to 2012, FMC saw a precipitous drop in the measures of overall employee satisfaction, falling to a low of 34.7 in 2012. The FMC score increased 7.8 points from

2012 to 2013 moving from 34.7 to 42.5. There was a small decline in between 2013 and 2014 of .5 points. This data is illustrated below in Table 2.

**Table 2: Best Places to Work Index Score Trends**



In addition to the index score, the *Best Places to Work* rankings examine ten workplace categories: effective leadership; strategic management; performance-based rewards and advancement; pay; employee skills-mission match; work-life balance; alternative work and employee support programs; training and development; teamwork; and support for diversity. The *Best Places to Work* category scores are calculated by averaging the percent positive responses to 47 additional FEVS questions. From 2013 to 2014, FMC saw improvements in the areas of work-life balance; training and development; effective leadership; and performance-based rewards and advancement. From 2013 to 2014, FMC saw declines in the areas of employee skills-mission match; teamwork; support for diversity; strategic management; and pay. These trends are highlighted in Table 3[1], below. A full mapping of FEVS questions to the *Best Places to Work* categories is available in Appendix C of this report.

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[1] FEVS data on Alternative Pay and Employee Support Programs for FMC is not available due to the small number of responses and is not included in Table 3. Qualitative feedback on this category is included in the "Findings" section of this report.

**Table 3: FMC Workplace Category Scores for 2014 and 2013**
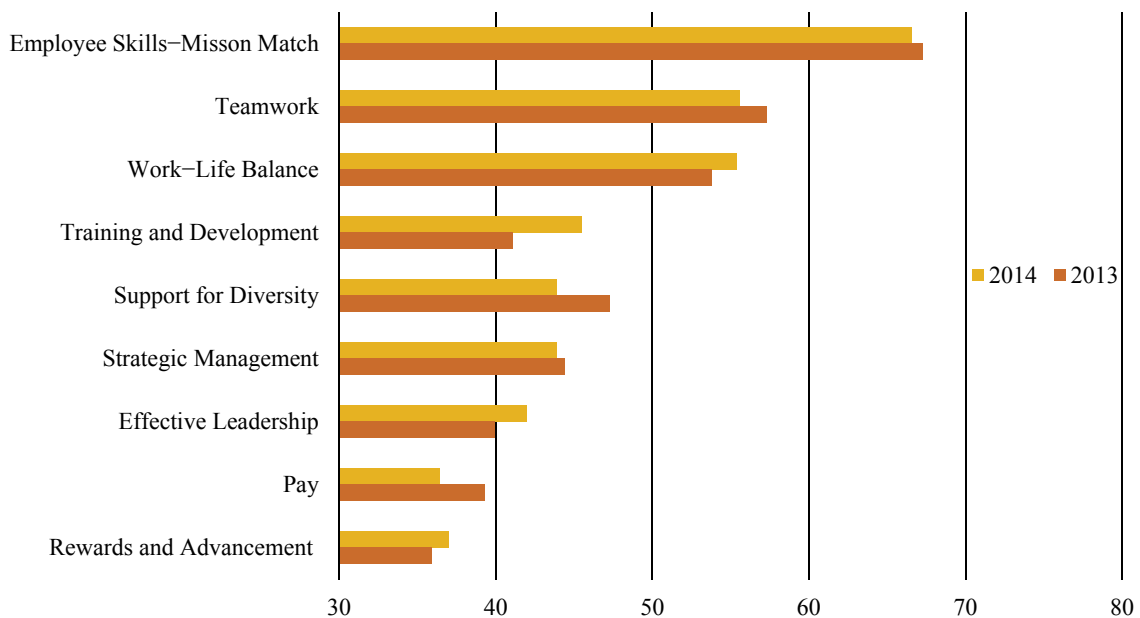


## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this evaluation is to examine FMC's workplace environment to help identify root causes of low employee satisfaction, organizational strengths and provide recommendations for improvement.

The evaluation focused on a review of the 2012, 2013 and 2014 FEVS data and *Best Places to Work* results for FMC and then collecting qualitative input from staff during workshops and one-on-one interviews. During October and November of 2014, the Partnership conducted two staff workshops, a workshop for supervisors, a senior executive service[2] (SES) workshop and a virtual webinar session for area representatives that serve major ports and transportation centers.  All employees were invited to contribute and approximately 29 individuals participated in-person at a group session and eight participated via webinar.

The goal of the workshops, interviews and webinar was for employees to provide feedback and add insight to the quantitative FEVS findings, thereby allowing FMC to base workplace improvement efforts on more robust information. Through large, facilitated group discussions and small, focused breakout groups, employees had an opportunity to validate FEVS results, offer additional or updated feedback, identify areas of agreement and disagreement and share specific ideas for improving the workplace. To offer another avenue for staff to provide insight, the Partnership hosted open office hours at FMC for two days and for a weeks' time over the phone. These office hours allowed employees to provide feedback via an individual interview. Approximately 16

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[2] The Deputy General Counsel participated in the evaluation activities for the SES due to the SES General Counsel position being vacant; and the Acting Chief of Staff, an employee not in the SES, also participated.

employees participated in the one-on-one interviews. The Partnership also conducted separate individual interviews with each of the five Commissioners.

At the completion of the workshops and interviews, the Partnership conducted an Action Planning Session with FMC's SES to prioritize the recommendations provided by level of effort and impact. A web-based survey was sent to all SES members, asking them to rate each recommendation by either low effort or high effort and then by either low impact or high impact. There was also an option to mark a recommendation as "unfeasible" if it violated laws, rules or regulations, or otherwise was considered unfeasible, and could not be implemented. These prioritized recommendations are listed in the "Findings and Results" section of this report and organized by workplace category. Recommendations marked as "unfeasible" by one SES member are included in the "Findings and Results" section whereas recommendations marked as "unfeasible" by two or more SES members are included in an appendix to this report. Additionally, any recommendations where the SES members were evenly split in their rankings for low-high effort, or low-high impact, are denoted as "**effort tied**" or "**impact tied**" in the charts that follow under the "Findings and Results" section.

Prior to the sessions, the Partnership was provided with insight into previous activities FMC had pursued to improve the work environment.  In May 2013, FMC Senior Executives developed a Plan of Action to address employee engagement and FEVS scores at the agency. Executives also committed to a Principles of Leadership document signed by all SES. Additionally, separate efforts have been underway or completed to improve the IT infrastructure, offer a space and resources for training and create informal opportunities for employees to connect. While past efforts appear to have made positive strides, more sustained effort must be undertaken in order to achieve long-term results.

## FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This section provides a detailed overview of the *Best Places to Work* data and a qualitative summary of the most significant themes and insights from the employee feedback workshops, interviews and webinar in ten areas: effective leadership; strategic management; performance-based rewards and advancement; pay; employee skills-mission match; work-life balance; alternative work and employee support programs; training and development; teamwork; and support for diversity. Suggestions for improvement collected from employees during Partnership interviews and workshops are listed within each category. These ideas were then prioritized by the FMC SES during an Action Planning Session facilitated by the Partnership. The SES prioritized the ideas by impact and effort to assist FMC in selecting recommendations that will make the biggest difference in the work environment with the available agency resources.

### Effective Leadership

In the *Best Places to Work* analysis, the effective leadership category measures 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. In the 2014 rankings, the effective leadership category increased by 2.1 points to 42.0 on a scale of 0 to 100.

During workshops and interviews, participants expressed that the agency has historically experienced struggles with leadership at the Commission level, but is now on a better path. Despite the positive movement, participants felt the legacy of leadership challenges, including a lack of

respect for employees, low levels of trust and poor communication has left a negative imprint on the organization that has not been fully resolved. Participants expressed some frustration that some of the former leadership who were in the middle of these past issues are still with the agency. Participants cited the new Chairman's open-door policy and social events as activities that are slowly helping the agency move forward. Participants appreciated the efforts that the new Chairman is making to improve communication and hosting events such as the Chili Cook-off and Bike to Work Day.

Participants noted that some Commissioners criticize staff in public meetings, which leads to employees feeling demoralized. Participants felt a clear division is not always made between policy debates and personal attacks on the quality of work or expertise of staff. Participants commented that some career leaders struggle with "emotional intelligence" and treating staff with respect.

Participants pointed to unclear communication from leaders at all levels. Most participants expressed that they experience a lack of transparency at all levels as well. However, some participants commented that the open door policies and all-hands meetings were helping keep employees better abreast of what is going on.

Participants directly pointed to low levels of trust as a main driver for low satisfaction. Participants felt that employees lack trust in leaders and leaders do not trust employees. Many participants stated that they preferred the Partnership's one-on-one sessions conducted for this evaluation over the group sessions because they did not feel comfortable speaking about the workplace in front of their colleagues.

Participants stated they felt some career managers are struggling to transition under new leadership and noted the relationship between career and political leaders can cause tension and issues within the agency.

Below is a summary of ideas that the Partnership's workshops and interview participants provided to improve in this area. Suggestions were then prioritized by the SES using a Partnership survey tool around impact and effort into four categories: low impact/low effort, low impact/high effort, high impact/low effort and high impact/high effort.

| Low Impact, Low Effort | Low Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • Institute a workgroup to refresh the suggestion program.<br>• Discuss, amongst the Commissioners' Counsels, policy concerns, questions and other proposals.<br>• Conduct pre-meetings with Commissioners prior to public Commission meetings.<br>• Look at the delegation of authority.<br>• Bring Office Directors to meetings. (Impact tied) | • Hold a trust building training or workshop.<br>• Ask the Office of the General Counsel to draft a memo on the legislative history of the use of requests for additional information and make recommendations on its use going forward.<br>• Stream (via video) Commission meetings. |

| High Impact, Low Effort | High Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • Provide more training for managers and supervisors on communication. (Effort tied) <br> • Provide more training for managers and supervisors on emotional and social intelligence. <br> • Ask the Chairman to communicate how the leadership culture has changed and what steps he is taking to improve. <br> • Communicate clearly and strategically to staff. <br> • Bring staff at all levels into meetings to promote empowerment, transparency and staff development. <br> • Initiate opportunities to talk with staff and in some cases be more approachable. <br> • Offer executive coaching for management. <br> • Bring Office Directors to meetings. (Impact tied) | • Provide more training for managers and supervisors on communication. (Effort tied) <br> • Involve staff in decision making. <br> • Work on trust issues across the organization. <br> • Conduct 180 degree evaluations of supervisors and managers. |

**Strategic Management**

In the *Best Places to Work* analysis, the strategic management category measures 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. In the 2014 rankings, the strategic management category decreased by .5 points to 43.9 on a scale of 0 to 100.

During workshops and interviews, participants commented that there is a lack of vision and strategic planning at the agency, particularly from the Offices of the Managing Director and Chairman. Participants also felt that managers do not review past priorities before making strategic plans.

Participants largely felt that the FMC lacks the proper technological infrastructure and still uses too many manual processes. They cited a lack of forethought and planning as a reason for the poor IT infrastructure.

Within the realm of strategic talent management, participants expressed concern that the agency was not hiring the right individuals for positions.

Below is a summary of ideas that the Partnership's workshops and interview participants provided to improve in this area. Suggestions were then prioritized by the SES using a Partnership survey tool around impact and effort into four categories: low impact/low effort, low impact/high effort, high impact/low effort and high impact/high effort.

| Low Impact, Low Effort | Low Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • Communicate limited promotion opportunities in onboarding. | • N/A |

| High Impact, Low Effort | High Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • Replace jobs at lower grades (on-going when appropriate). | • Offer more IT training for all staff.<br>• Onboard new staff on the organizational culture.<br>• Assess strengths and talents of the current staff and how best to use them.<br>• Evaluate systems and processes, particularly those still done on paper, to find efficiencies.<br>• Improve the hiring process. |

**Performance-Based Rewards and Advancement**

In the *Best Places to Work* analysis, the performance-based rewards and advancement category measures 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. In the 2014 rankings, the performance-based rewards and advancement category increased by 1.10 points to 37.0 on a scale of 0 to 100.

During workshops and interviews, participants discussed the lack of career advancement in the agency and some still did not believe that promotion opportunities are fair because of past practices that appeared to be based on favoritism. Many other participants reported that the increasingly transparent promotion process was helping to dispel these concerns. Participants expressed concern that it was difficult to retain talent, especially new hires, at the agency due to the lack of upward mobility.

Participants felt leaders could do more to recognize and appreciate staff contributions, particularly in light of ongoing pay freezes. Participants pointed to non-monetary recognition, time-off awards and bonuses as effective tools to reward employees.

Additionally, participants mentioned that the appraisal process is confusing to understand and that managers need guidance on how to rate employees consistently using the new system. Participants commented on a lack of proper training on performance appraisals at the supervisor level and that supervisors do not provide employees with enough information on how to interpret the results. Participants noted they felt managers were told by the Chairman that they were no longer allowed to rate individuals as "exemplary" on their performance reviews.  Participants also noted challenges in dealing with poor performers, particularly in senior positions.

Below is a summary of ideas that the Partnership's workshops and interview participants provided to improve in this area. Suggestions were then prioritized by the SES using a Partnership survey tool around impact and effort into four categories: low impact/low effort, low impact/high effort, high impact/low effort and high impact/high effort.

| Low Impact, Low Effort | Low Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • Provide more training for managers and supervisors on dealing with poor performers. (Effort and Impact tied)<br>• Offer more flexibility in developing performance elements based on the job responsibility.<br>• Set realistic expectations for employees. (Impact tied) | • Provide more training for managers and supervisors on dealing with poor performers. (Effort and Impact tied)<br>• Automate the performance system.<br>• Allow employees to make mistakes and fail productively and learn. |
| **High Impact, Low Effort** | **High Impact, High Effort** |
| • Provide more training for managers and supervisors on dealing with poor performers. (Effort and Impact tied)<br>• Celebrate/recognize staff, team and agency successes.<br>• Implement a non-monetary recognition program.<br>• Set realistic expectations for employees. (Impact tied) | • Provide more training for managers and supervisors on dealing with poor performers. (Effort and Impact tied)<br>• Provide more training for managers and supervisors on the appraisal process.<br>• Deal with poor performers. |

### Pay

In the *Best Places to Work* analysis, the pay category measures how satisfied employees are with their pay. In the 2014 rankings, the pay category decreased by 2.9 points to 36.4 on a scale of 0 to 100.

During workshops and interviews, supervisors and managers tended to report concern with employee pay where, in contrast, non-supervisory participants made few or no comments on pay. Participants understood that external factors effecting pay, such as sequestration and other mandatory budget cuts, are not within the agency's control.

No ideas or recommendations were provided in the workshops and interviews to address satisfaction with pay.

### Employee Skills-Mission Match

In the *Best Places to Work* analysis, the employee skills-mission match category measures 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. In the 2014 rankings, the employee skills-mission match category decreased by 0.70 points to 66.6 on a scale of 0 to 100.

During workshops and interviews, participants appreciated how small the agency was, as well as the competency and dedication of the workforce. Participants consistently and strongly voiced that they loved their work and the mission of the agency.

While the workforce has a wealth of knowledge and expertise, participants expressed concern that there are mismatches between individuals' skills and the work performed. Participants pointed to the previous reorganization of the agency that threw people into roles that they weren't prepared for while promoting some individuals to GS-14 and GS-15 positions.

Below is a summary of ideas that the Partnership's workshops and interview participants provided to improve in this area. Suggestions were then prioritized by the SES using a Partnership survey tool around impact and effort into four categories: low impact/low effort, low impact/high effort, high impact/low effort and high impact/high effort.

| Low Impact, Low Effort | Low Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • Make gear with the FMC logo available for purchase. | • N/A |
| **High Impact, Low Effort** | **High Impact, High Effort** |
| • Communicate the mission of the agency to staff/help people find their commitment to the mission. | • Offer clarity on organizational priorities. |

**Work-Life Balance**

In the *Best Places to Work* analysis, the work-life balance category measures the extent to which employees consider their workloads reasonable and feasible, and managers support a balance between work and life. In the 2014 rankings, the work-life balance category increased by 1.60 points to 55.4 on a scale of 0 to 100.

During workshops and interviews, participants felt that supervisors and senior leaders are supportive of work-life balance in regards to accommodating use of leave to care for a sick family member, doctor's appointment, etc. However, participants expressed that they do not have a dedicated break room and have to use the restroom to wash their dishes. Participants expressed a desire for fitness time as a part of their workday. Participants also noted that high workload, inadequate staffing and unreasonable deadlines contribute to feelings of work-life imbalance.

Below is a summary of ideas that the Partnership's workshops and interview participants provided to improve in this area. Suggestions were then prioritized by the SES using a Partnership survey tool around impact and effort into four categories: low impact/low effort, low impact/high effort, high impact/low effort and high impact/high effort.

| Low Impact, Low Effort | Low Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • N/A | • N/A |

| High Impact, Low Effort | High Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • N/A | • Create kitchen space for staff.<br>• Create a dedicated break room. |

**Alternative Work and Employee Support Programs**

In the *Best Places to Work* analysis, the alternative work and employee support programs category measures 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. Due to limited sample size, data for the alternative work and employee support programs category is not available.

During workshops and interviews, participants valued the telework program, workplace flexibility, and alternative work schedules. Participants expressed frustration that support for telework varies across the organization based on manager and supervisor preferences. Participants suggested that the telework policy needs to be revisited and that FMC should look across government to review best practices and trends for telework in other agencies.

Below is a summary of ideas that the Partnership's workshops and interview participants provided to improve in this area. Suggestions were then prioritized by the SES using a Partnership survey tool around impact and effort into four categories: low impact/low effort, low impact/high effort, high impact/low effort and high impact/high effort.

| Low Impact, Low Effort | Low Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • N/A | • N/A |

| High Impact, Low Effort | High Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • N/A | • Examine/revisit the telework policy. |

**Training and Development**

In the *Best Places to Work* analysis, the training and development category gauges 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. In the 2014 rankings, the training and development category increased by 4.40 points to 45.5 on a scale of 0 to 100.

During workshops and interviews, participants overall understood that budget challenges were the reason behind the lack of training opportunities. However, participants felt that senior leadership should try to expand the internal and external detail program as well as offer additional internal training opportunities.

Additionally, participants felt details are awarded based on favoritism and not offered fairly to interested and eligible employees. Participants cited a lack of cross-organizational opportunities to gain knowledge of other jobs or roles at FMC. They also noted that senior leadership's attitude of

"not being able to change anything due to budget constraints" as a cause of low satisfaction in this area.

Below is a summary of ideas that the Partnership's workshops and interview participants provided to improve in this area. Suggestions were then prioritized by the SES using a Partnership survey tool around impact and effort into four categories: low impact/low effort, low impact/high effort, high impact/low effort and high impact/high effort.

| Low Impact, Low Effort | Low Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • N/A | • Offer a CDP (candidate development program). (Impact tied) |
| **High Impact, Low Effort** | **High Impact, High Effort** |
| • N/A | • Offer a CDP (candidate development program). (Impact tied)<br>• Offer an emerging leaders program.<br>• Develop a mentoring program.<br>• Offer more details/rotations within FMC.<br>• Offer more details to organizations outside of FMC. |

### Teamwork

In the *Best Places to Work* analysis, the teamwork category measures 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. In the 2014 rankings, the teamwork category decreased by 1.70 points to 55.6 on a scale of 0 to 100.

During workshops and interviews, participants noted that FMC functions in a compartmentalized fashion; everyone works only within their offices, with little interaction across the agency on projects. There are few or no meetings with the purpose of sharing information and providing updates on work projects that engage multiple offices. Participants reported that a siloed culture exists in some areas of the organization and impedes collaboration across the FMC. Participants did note that because of the small size, they were a family and "knew each other's pluses and minuses" which made it easier to cooperate with one another, there are just not opportunities for cross-team work or deliberate efforts to work across the agency.

Below is a summary of ideas that the Partnership's workshops and interview participants provided to improve in this area. Suggestions were then prioritized by the SES using a Partnership survey tool around impact and effort into four categories: low impact/low effort, low impact/high effort, high impact/low effort and high impact/high effort.

| Low Impact, Low Effort | Low Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • Bring in other offices to all-hands meetings. Schedule more regular meetings (across teams and for all staff). | • N/A |

| High Impact, Low Effort | High Impact, High Effort |
|---|---|
| • Continue teambuilding or social events to build connections across the agency. | • Get staff involved in cross-bureau projects. |

**Support for Diversity**

In the *Best Places to Work* analysis, the support for diversity category measures the extent to which employees believe that actions and policies of leadership and management promote and respect diversity. In the 2014 rankings, the support for diversity category decreased by 3.40 points to 43.9 on a scale of 0 to 100.

When discussing barriers to engagement during the workshops and interviews, some participants felt that women; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons; and minorities are limited to certain roles at FMC. A few employees cited a perception that in some cases, individuals are undermined based on their gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

No ideas or recommendations were provided in the workshops and interviews to address satisfaction with support of diversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this evaluation and years of experience supporting federal agencies, the Partnership recommends the following process for addressing employee engagement at the FMC:

1. Review this report with the senior management team, including the Chairman and SES, and select an executive champion to lead improvement efforts. Any change effort requires executive level support to be successful, hence, selecting and engaging an executive champion for the project will assist in generating backing, resources and buy-in from other stakeholders across the organization.

   Management Response:   Agree. This report has been reviewed with both the Chairman and the FMC's Senior Executive Service (SES). The Chairman will oversee improvement efforts, in collaboration with the SES.

   Evaluator response:  Management's plan of action is responsive to the recommendation and the OIG looks forward to following up on the issue.

2. Update the FMC-wide action plan to focus on high impact and achievable action items that are drawn from employee recommendations or the top ideas to implement provided in this report. For each action item, include key deliverables, a timeline, responsible parties, resource needs and metrics for evaluating progress. Evaluate the completed action plan against defined criteria and adjust as necessary. A sample action plan template and an action plan evaluation worksheet are included as Appendices in this report.

   Management Response:  Agree. The FMC's Plan of Action is in the process of being updated, and the SES will adopt a project management outline and template for each action item selected for implementation, including long term and short term activities. Management already has initiated a process to identify, prioritize, and implement high impact and achievable

action items. Office-level meetings with staff to discuss the current Plan of Action, the FMC's Strategic Plan, and the SES Statement of Principles have already occurred, and additional meetings to solicit views, comments and suggestions for new action items will be ongoing.

Evaluator response:  Management's plan of action is responsive to the recommendation and the OIG looks forward to following up on the issue.

3.  In addition to FMC-wide actions, leaders of each Bureau or Office should promptly commit to and implement up to three office-level actions for their work unit.

    Management Response:  Agree with explanation. As a small agency with a limited budget, office-level actions are often difficult to effectively implement without fostering disparities between offices due to issues such as budget constraints. Nonetheless, office-level actions will be identified and undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

    Evaluator response: Management's plan of action is responsive to the recommendation and the OIG looks forward to following up on the issue.

4.  Make the FMC-wide action plan available for all employees to view, then conduct one or more meetings with all agency staff to share the results of this evaluation and the plan for addressing the feedback. Once a plan is in place, senior leadership and SES should communicate progress against the plan at least quarterly and through multiple channels including the FMC intranet.

    Management Response:  Agree. All employees will have access to the updated Plan of Action and this evaluation. Agency staff will participate in regular meetings to discuss the plan and address feedback and concerns. Management will hold office-level as well as agency-wide all hands meetings on a recurring basis, in order to facilitate a thorough discussion of feedback and concerns.

    Evaluator response:  Management's plan of action is responsive to the recommendation and the OIG looks forward to following up on the issue.

5.  Empower employees at all levels to be active leaders of workplace improvement initiatives by inviting their participation in the process through an employee engagement council sponsored by the executive champion. The employee engagement council will assist in implementation, communication and annual updates to the action plan.

    Management Response: Agree with explanation. Management will empower employees by encouraging their participation in cross-bureau/office, project-based teams that will be convened to identify steps, resources and timelines needed to bring particular action items to implementation rather than a single employee engagement council. Each employee team will be directly involved in assisting in the implementation, communication, and progress updates for the action item with senior management.

    Evaluator response: Overall, management's plan of action is responsive to the recommendation. Further clarity should be provided during implementation on the means for providing more robust involvement of employees in the cross-bureau/office activities and project based teams. The OIG looks forward to following up on the issue.

6. Schedule regular check-ins with the executive champion, responsible parties and the employee engagement council to ensure accountability. Decide on a follow-up date (e.g., within 3-6 months) to reconvene and review progress and impact at the agency and office levels.

Management Response: Agree with explanation. The Plan of Action will be reviewed by the Chairman and SES every six months, or more frequently as warranted. Cross-bureau/office teams will convene to work on various projects identified in the Plan of Action, and, as stated above, recurring all-hands meetings with the Chairman and inter-and intra-bureau/office meetings will be conducted to deliver, discuss, and promote continued agency activity to address and improve the identified issues and challenges.

Evaluator response: Generally, management's plan of action is responsive to the recommendation. Keeping Plan of Action top of mind and ensuring accountability is critical in seeing meaningful improvement and progress. Additional focus and more frequent review of the Plan of Action may be necessary. The OIG looks forward to following up on the issue.

**Top Ideas to Implement**

Within the action plan to address employee engagement, the Partnership offers the following top ideas, drawn from FMC employee feedback as well as best practices from across successful agencies. These may help guide FMC in selecting ideas. In some cases, the organization may have taken steps to address the issues below, however, some employees were not aware of the actions taken.

1. Offer Executive coaching to managers, the SES and Commissioners.

2. Conduct 180 degree assessments of supervisors, managers and SES.

3. Establish supervisor, manager, and SES performance plan standards around improving employee engagement and communication to ensure accountability at all levels of management.

4. Review all management training and ensure that appropriate focus is on leadership competencies from the assessment and selection of supervisors, through their career.

5. Allow employees the opportunity to comment on draft agency policies and procedures before they are finalized.

6. Encourage supervisors, managers and SES to appropriately recognize and reward employees.

7. Publicize team opportunities across the organization and implement a team awards and recognition program. Conduct more "team building" activities in the organization.

8. Review alternative work schedules and telework policies, review government-wide best practices, and ensure consistency across the organization and publish appropriate criteria. Implement metrics to track productivity.

9. Conduct a training survey to identify opportunities for on-the-job and outside training for employees.

10. Develop an intranet page or tool that enables employees to ask questions and receive a response from the agency within 30 days.

## CONCLUSION

While the Federal Maritime Commission remains in the bottom 25% of small agencies in the 2014 *Best Places to Work* rankings, some positive steps are being taken to improve these low scores. As noted previously, the SES developed a Plan of Action in May 2013 to address employee engagement and FEVS scores at the agency. The SES also committed to a Principles of Leadership document. Additional efforts have been underway or completed to improve the IT infrastructure, offer space and resources for training and create informal opportunities for employees to connect. Participants in the evaluation noted that the organization has made some progress and has a wealth of expertise and talent among staff. Building on these strengths and activities, it is recommended that FMC continue to address employee engagement through a robust action planning process that implements recommendations with a focus on leadership, as well as other suggestions detailed in this report.

## APPENDIX A: ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

This template provides a commonly used framework for action planning to address employee engagement within federal agencies.

| FEVS Action Plan |
|---|
| Action Plan Focus: |
| Describe the main problem being addressed. If this is a strength you wish to sustain, describe your agency's strength: |
| Explain what is potentially causing this problem. If focused on a strength, describe what factors enabled your agency to shine in this area: |
| Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of action steps below. Be sure to include specific measures that indicate success: |
| Primary Action Planning Team (note lead and members): |

| Action Steps | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Actions to be Taken** | **Key Deliverables** | **Start Date/ End Date** | **Responsible Party (Parties)** | **Budget, Resources, and Approvals Needed** | **Metrics** |
| Describe each specific step/task that needs to occur to achieve the desired outcome. | Describe all deliverables that are needed for each action step. | Set a realistic timeframe for the completion of each step. Be as specific as possible (e.g., provide actual dates instead of FY quarters). | Identify who is accountable for completion of each step. Also, identify key stakeholders. | Identify available funding, as well as approvals needed from leadership and other stakeholders. | Discuss how progress on this action will be evaluated. |

# APPENDIX B: ACTION PLAN EVALUATION WORKSHEET

This tool provides seven areas to evaluate action plans to address employee engagement. Each area can receive a rating from "excellent" to "poor". Action plans that score "excellent" or "satisfactory" in each area are more likely to be successful, when implemented, in improving employee engagement.

## CRITERIA: LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Is there an executive champion for the improvement effort, and are senior leaders and implementing managers held accountable for implementation and progress?

| Excellent | Satisfactory | Poor |
|---|---|---|
| Agency has identified an executive champion for the improvement effort. | Agency has identified an executive champion for the improvement effort. | Agency has not identified an executive champion for the improvement effort. |
| Senior leaders and implementing managers are clearly held accountable for implementation and progress (e.g., performance plans, incentives). | No clear system of accountability for senior leaders or implementing managers. | No clear system of accountability for senior leaders or implementing managers. |

## CRITERIA: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Has the agency solicited/will the agency solicit feedback and ideas for improvement from stakeholder groups including senior leaders, supervisors, staff and unions?

| Excellent | Satisfactory | Poor |
|---|---|---|
| Well-defined plans to solicit feedback, support and ideas for improvement from all stakeholder groups. | Some plans to solicit feedback, support and ideas from some stakeholder groups; may be vague or weakly defined. | No plans to solicit feedback, support or ideas from any stakeholder groups. |

## CRITERIA: ROBUSTNESS OF PLAN

Has the agency identified/will the agency identify key priority areas for improvement?
Do action items reflect challenge areas as identified by survey data?

| Excellent | Satisfactory | Poor |
|---|---|---|
| Agency has clearly identified/will identify key priority areas for improvement. Agency has used or intends to use survey data to drive actions.<br><br>Action items reflect challenge areas as identified by survey data. | Action items appear unfocused. Unclear whether agency has used or plans to use survey data.<br><br>Action items may or may not reflect challenge areas as identified by survey data. | Agency has not defined/will not define key priority areas. Unclear whether agency has used or plans to use survey data.<br><br>Few or no action items. |

## CRITERIA: MEASURES FOR PROGRESS AND IMPACT

Has the agency defined/will the agency define measurable indicators of progress and impact, both in the short and long term?
Does the agency plan for quick wins as well as long-term improvements?

| Excellent | Satisfactory | Poor |
|---|---|---|
| Agency has defined/will define both qualitative and quantitative measurable indicators of progress and impact, both in the short and long term.<br><br>Agency plans for quick wins as well as long-term improvements. | Agency has defined some indicators of progress but may not be well-defined.<br><br>Plan may focus heavily on either short-term or long-term solutions, but not necessarily both. | Plan does not contain any measures to gauge progress/impact.<br><br>Agency has not clearly defined its short-term or long-term objectives. |

## CRITERIA: COMMUNICATION PLAN

Has the agency shared/will the agency share employee survey results with all staff?
Has the agency shared/will the agency share plans for improvement with all staff?
Does the agency intend to share measures of progress and impact?

| Excellent | Satisfactory | Poor |
|---|---|---|
| Agency has already shared and addressed employee survey results with all staff members, OR<br>Agency has a clear plan to share survey results with staff.<br><br>Agency has already shared this plan for improvement with staff, OR<br>Intends to share plan in the near future.<br><br>Agency describes how it plans to share measures of progress and impact with staff, preferably at regular intervals. | Agency has shared employee survey results with only a limited number of staff members.<br><br>Agency does not intend to share plans for improvement with staff.<br><br>Agency does not intend to or does not indicate plans to share measures of progress with all staff.<br><br>No mention of periodic updates for all staff. | Agency has not shared employee survey results with staff, nor does it intend to address the results in any way. |

## CRITERIA: IMPLEMENTATION

Has the agency allocated financial resources and staff time to the improvement effort?
Does the plan specify milestones and clearly assign responsibilities for implementation?

| Excellent | Satisfactory | Poor |
|---|---|---|
| Agency clearly describes the financial resources and staff time allocated to the improvement effort. Resources adequately match requirements.<br><br>The plan specifies milestones and clearly assigns responsibilities for implementation. | Agency indicates that it has allocated financial resources and staff time to the improvement effort, but actual amounts and sufficiency are unclear.<br><br>The plan specifies some vague or high-level milestones and responsibilities. | Agency has not indicated any allocation of resources or staff time to the improvement effort.<br><br>Plan specifies few or no milestones, nor does it assign responsibilities for implementation. |

## CRITERIA: FEEDBACK AND REVIEW OF PLAN

Has the agency made provisions to continuously review progress?
Is there a defined mechanism to periodically assess progress and adjust plans accordingly?

| Excellent | Satisfactory | Poor |
|---|---|---|
| Agency clearly intends to monitor and control its plan over time.<br><br>Plan includes periodic, scheduled reviews and times for adjustment. | Agency suggests that it will monitor its plan over time but has not described specific plans to do so.<br><br>Plan suggests flexibility for changes over time. | Agency does not indicate that it plans to review progress or adjust plans over time. |

# APPENDIX C: 2014 FEDERAL EMPLOYEE VIEWPOINT SURVEY QUESTION KEY BY BEST PLACES TO WORK CATEGORY

The data used to develop the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*® rankings was collected through the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS).

The Partnership uses three of the survey questions to calculate the *Best Places to Work* index score that determines the overall agency rankings. The survey questions are then grouped into 10 categories that measure employee views on various aspects of their jobs and workplaces, from leadership to work–life balance.

The number to the left of each question is the corresponding question number in the FEVS.

### Best Places to Work Index

The overall index score measures the performance of agencies and agency subcomponents related to employee satisfaction and commitment. The index is weighted according to the extent to which each question predicts "intent to remain."

| # | Question |
|---|----------|
| 40 | I recommend my organization as a good place to work. |
| 69 | Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job? |
| 71 | Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization? |

### Employee skills/mission match

The employee skills/mission match category measures 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.

| # | Question |
|---|----------|
| 4 | My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment. |
| 5 | I like the kind of work I do. |
| 11 | My talents are used well in the workplace. |
| 12 | I know how my work relates to the agency's goals and priorities. |
| 13 | The work I do is important. |

### Strategic management

The strategic management category measures 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.

| # | Question |
|---|----------|
| 21 | My work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills. |
| 27 | The skill level in my work unit has improved in the past year. |
| 29 | The workforce has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals. |
| 57 | Managers review and evaluate the organization's progress toward meeting its goals and objectives. |

## Teamwork

The teamwork category measures 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.

| # | Question |
|---|----------|
| 20 | The people I work with cooperate to get the job done. |
| 26 | Employees in my work unit share job knowledge with each other. |
| 58 | Managers promote communication among different work units (for example, about projects, goals, needed resources). |

## Effective leadership

The effective leadership category measures 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.

Questions under Effective Leadership are divided into four sub-dimensions: Senior Leaders, Supervisors, Fairness and Empowerment.

*Senior Leaders*: The Senior Leaders category measures the level of respect employees have for senior leaders, satisfaction with the amount of information provided by management, and perceptions about senior leaders' honesty, integrity and ability to motivate employees. The definition of Senior Leaders is: The heads of departments/agencies and their immediate leadership team. Typically these individuals would be members of the Senior Executive Service or equivalent.

*Supervisors*: The Supervisors category measures employees' opinions about their immediate supervisor's job performance, how well supervisors give employees the opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills, and the extent to which employees feel supervisors support employee development and provide worthwhile feedback about job performance. The definition of Supervisors is: First-line supervisors who do not supervise other supervisors; typically those who are responsible for their employees' performance appraisals and approval of their leave.

*Fairness*: The Fairness category measures the extent to which employees believe arbitrary action and personal favoritism is tolerated, and if employees feel comfortable reporting illegal activity without fear of reprisal.

*Empowerment*: The Empowerment category measures the extent to which employees feel empowered with respect to work processes and how satisfied they are with their involvement in decisions that affect their work.

| # | Question | Sub-Category |
|---|----------|--------------|
| 30 | Employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes. | Empowerment |
| 63 | How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work? | Empowerment |
| 17 | I can disclose a suspected violation of any law, rule or regulation without fear of reprisal. | Fairness |
| 37 | Arbitrary action, personal favoritism and coercion for partisan political purposes are not tolerated. | Fairness |
| 53 | In my organization, leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce. | Senior Leaders |
| 54 | My organization's leaders maintain high standards of honesty and integrity. | Senior Leaders |
| 61 | I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders. | Senior Leaders |
| 64 | How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization? | Senior Leaders |
| 43 | My supervisors/team leader provides me with opportunities to demonstrate my leadership skills. | Supervisors |
| 44 | Discussions with my supervisor/team leader about my performance are worthwhile. | Supervisors |
| 47 | Supervisors/team leaders in my work unit support employee development. | Supervisors |
| 52 | Overall, how good a job do you feel is being done by your immediate supervisor/team leader? | Supervisors |

## Performance-based rewards and advancement

The performance-based rewards and advancement category measures 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.

| # | Question |
|---|----------|
| 15 | My performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my performance. |
| 22 | Promotions in my work unit are based on merit. |
| 31 | Employees are rewarded for providing high quality products and services to customers. |
| 32 | Creativity and innovation are rewarded. |
| 65 | How satisfied are you with the recognition you receive for doing a good job? |
| 67 | How satisfied are you with your opportunity to get a better job in your organization? |

## Training and development

The training and development category gauges 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.

| # | Question |
|---|----------|
| 1 | I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization. |
| 2 | I have enough information to do my job well. |
| 18 | My training needs are assessed. |
| 68 | How satisfied are you with the training you receive for your present job? |

## Support for diversity

The support for diversity category measures the extent to which employees believe that actions and policies of leadership and management promote and respect diversity.

| # | Question |
|---|----------|
| 34 | Policies and programs promote diversity in the workplace (for example, recruiting minorities and women, training in awareness of diversity issues, mentoring). |
| 45 | My supervisor is committed to a workforce representative of all segments of society. |
| 55 | Managers/supervisors/team leaders work well with employees of different backgrounds. |

## Alternative work and employee support programs

The alternative work and employee support programs category measures 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. Due to changes in the survey format, the scores for 2003-2010 are not available.

| # | Question |
|---|----------|
| 79 | How satisfied are you with telework/telecommuting? |
| 80 | How satisfied are you with alternative work schedules? |
| 81 | How satisfied are you with the following Work/Life programs in your agency? Health and Wellness Programs (for example, exercise, medical screening, quit smoking programs). |
| 82 | Employees Assistance Program. |
| 83 | Child Care Programs (for example, daycare, parenting classes, parenting support groups). |
| 84 | Elder Care Programs (for example, support groups, speakers). |

## Pay

The pay category measures how satisfied employees are with their pay.

| # | Question |
|---|----------|
| 70 | Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your pay? |

## Work/life balance

The work/life balance category measures the extent to which employees consider their workloads reasonable and feasible, and managers support a balance between work and life.

| # | Question |
|---|----------|
| 9 | I have sufficient resources (for example, people, materials, budget) to get my job done. |
| 10 | My workload is reasonable. |
| 42 | My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues. |

## APPENDIX D: UNFEASIBLE RECOMMENDATIONS

A web-based survey was sent to all SES members, asking them to rate each employee recommendation from the evaluation workshops by either low effort or high effort and then by either low impact or high impact. There was also an option to mark a recommendation as "unfeasible" if it violated laws, rules or regulations, or otherwise was considered unfeasible, and could not be implemented. The following recommendations were deemed "unfeasible" by two or more SES members.

- Open interaction at the Commissioner level with the SES as a group.
- Hold one-on-one sessions with Commissioners.
- Create hybrid positions tapping into our existing talent.
- Offer 3-5 hours per week to use fitness center at work.
- Offer Quality Step Increases (QSIs).
- Institutionalize a program that awards "exemplary" on performance reviews with the choice of a cash reward or a step increase.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

FEDERAL MARITIME COMMISSION

# Memorandum

**TO** : Inspector General          **DATE:** February 27, 2015

**FROM** : Managing Director

**SUBJECT:** A15-04: Federal Maritime Commission Workplace Evaluation Report

I have reviewed the comments contained in the Federal Maritime Commission Workplace Evaluation Report (A15-04 or report) dated January 27, 2015. Commission management appreciates the efforts of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) in reviewing the FMC's mission-critical issues of workplace satisfaction and employee engagement and provides its response below.

A15-04 reflects the work product of the Partnership for Public Service (the Partnership), functioning pursuant to a contract with the OIG, to evaluate the FMC work environment and provide recommendations for improvement. As the report indicates, "the Federal Maritime Commission has been taking positive steps to improve low employee satisfaction and commitment scores." A15-04 at 1. However, it is clear that additional efforts must be taken by FMC management to pursue constructive and open dialogue to continue improvement in employee workplace satisfaction and engagement. To that end, FMC management fully participated, and encouraged staff participation, in the Partnership's evaluation.

## Scope of Evaluation

The OIG's purpose in retaining the Partnership, a non-profit, non-partisan organization, was to "act as a neutral third party to understand root causes behind scores on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) for FMC, uncover organizational strengths and garner insight for improvement from agency employees." A15-04 at 1. To do so, the Partnership performed a quantitative evaluation of the 2014 FEVS data to look at the trends and areas with low scores. The remainder of the evaluation was qualitative in nature, based on information gathered in meetings with employees, both management and staff, in group and individual settings.

Qualitative evaluation, by its nature, is more subjective than quantitative, and the importance of a neutral third party is critical to limit bias and to facilitate participation resulting in better, more complete information. In setting up its evaluation, employee participation was voluntary, but encouraged. The Partnership reported that approximately 37 individuals participated in workshops and a virtual webinar for non-headquarters employees, and 16 employees participated in one-on-one interviews, with some overlap in participants. The views from 46% of 114 Commission employees on board during the evaluation period were included in

the Partnership's evaluation. In contrast, the 2014 FEVS had a response rate of 81%, with 86 of 106 FMC employees participating. Management appreciates that the evaluation participation level cannot fully represent the complete views of its workforce, but hopes that continuing the dialogue and addressing staff concerns will move the agency forward to a more engaged and satisfied workforce. The findings in the report represent statements made by participating Commission employees and provide valuable insight.

Management notes that, due to the scope of this evaluation, the Partnership tailored its focus to a review of the FEVS findings and staff interactions to "provide feedback and add insight to the quantitative FEVS findings, thereby allowing FMC to base workplace improvement efforts on more robust information." A15-04 at 4. The evaluation does not directly draw on the Partnership's subject matter expertise in organizational design and government knowledge to deliver its own action plan and priority list for implementing changes. The report does not explicitly consider the efforts made at other Federal agencies, nor did the evaluation contemplate a facilitated discussion with FMC staff on the best practices of other agencies. Thus, the Partnership's *Top Ideas to Implement* are primarily internally driven and prioritized.[1] The Partnership's report has collected staff suggestions in a clear, usable format that can be folded into FMC's action plan to improve employee workplace satisfaction and engagement. It is clear that the findings of the report seek to memorialize the many individual employee viewpoints expressed. These viewpoints must and will be addressed. The following section briefly responds to the report's specific recommendations and highlights the FMC's continuing efforts to improve both employee engagement and workplace satisfaction.

**Report Recommendations**

Recommendation 1. Review this report with the senior management team, including the Chairman and SES, and select an executive champion to lead improvement efforts. Any change effort requires executive level support to be successful, hence, selecting and engaging an executive champion for the project will assist in generating backing, resources and buy-in from other stakeholders across the organization.

Response:

Agree. This report has been reviewed with both the Chairman and the FMC's Senior Executive Service (SES). The Chairman will oversee improvement efforts, in collaboration with the SES.[2]

Recommendation 2. Update the FMC-wide action plan to focus on high impact and achievable action items that are drawn from employee recommendations or the top ideas to implement provided in this report. For each action item, include key deliverables, a timeline, responsible

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[1]      The Partnership collected ideas from employees and requested that the FMC SES prioritize the ideas in an Action Planning Session facilitated by the Partnership. A15-04 at 5. Management also notes that a number of ideas appear to be additions made by the Partnership based on its expertise without discussion with FMC employees, management, or explanation as to their origins. *Top Ideas to Implement*, A15-04 at 13.

[2]      Management agrees that executive level support is necessary to effectively execute change. Chairman Cordero, the agency's Chief Executive Officer, has led current efforts to improve workplace satisfaction and employee engagement and will continue to work to generate backing, resources, and buy-in across the FMC.

2

parties, resource needs and metrics for evaluating progress. Evaluate the completed action plan against defined criteria and adjust as necessary. A sample action plan template and an action plan evaluation worksheet are included as Appendices in this report.

Response:

Agree. The FMC's Plan of Action is in the process of being updated, and the SES will adopt a project management outline and template for each action item selected for implementation, including long term and short term activities. Management already has initiated a process to identify, prioritize, and implement high impact and achievable action items. Office-level meetings with staff to discuss the current Plan of Action, the FMC's Strategic Plan, and the SES Statement of Principles have already occurred, and additional meetings to solicit views, comments and suggestions for new action items will be ongoing.

Recommendation 3. In addition to FMC-wide actions, leaders of each Bureau or Office should promptly commit to and implement up to three office-level actions for their work unit.

Response:

Agree with explanation. As a small agency with a limited budget, office-level actions are often difficult to effectively implement without fostering disparities between offices due to issues such as budget constraints. Nonetheless, office-level actions will be identified and undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

Recommendation 4. Make the FMC-wide action plan available for all employees to view, then conduct one or more meetings with all agency staff to share the results of this evaluation and the plan for addressing the feedback. Once a plan is in place, senior leadership and SES should communicate progress against the plan at least quarterly and through multiple channels including the FMC intranet.

Response:

Agree. All employees will have access to the updated Plan of Action and this evaluation. Agency staff will participate in regular meetings to discuss the plan and address feedback and concerns. Management will hold office-level as well as agency-wide all hands meetings on a recurring basis, in order to facilitate a thorough discussion of feedback and concerns.

Recommendation 5. Empower employees at all levels to be active leaders of workplace improvement initiatives by inviting their participation in the process through an employee engagement council sponsored by the executive champion. The employee engagement council will assist in implementation, communication and annual updates to the action plan.

Response:

Agree with explanation. Management will empower employees by encouraging their participation in cross-bureau/office, project-based teams that will be convened to identify steps, resources and

timelines needed to bring particular action items to implementation rather than a single employee engagement council. Each employee team will be directly involved in assisting in the implementation, communication, and progress updates for the action item with senior management.

Recommendation 6. Schedule regular check-ins with the executive champion, responsible parties and the employee engagement council to ensure accountability. Decide on a follow-up date (e.g., within 3-6 months) to reconvene and review progress and impact at the agency and office levels.

Response:

Agree with explanation. The Plan of Action will be reviewed by the Chairman and SES every six months, or more frequently as warranted. Cross-bureau/office teams will convene to work on various projects identified in the Plan of Action, and, as stated above, recurring all-hands meetings with the Chairman and inter- and intra- bureau/office meetings will be conducted to deliver, discuss, and promote continued agency activity to address and improve the identified issues and challenges.

## Conclusion

The FMC appreciates the efforts of the OIG and the Partnership in providing the FMC with its evaluation and recommendations, and considers the report's findings an important part of the ongoing solution to low employee engagement and workplace satisfaction. The FMC remains dedicated to improving both engagement and satisfaction levels and will continue to work diligently to make improvements.

Vern W. Hill

cc:     Office of the Chairman

## EVALUATOR RESPONSE

FMC management was provided a draft copy of the evaluation report and their response is included in its entirety. Management agreed with all of the recommendations, with some explanation.

The management response states, "The evaluation does not directly draw on the Partnership's subject matter expertise in organizational design and government knowledge to deliver its own action plan and priority list for implementing changes. The report does not explicitly consider the efforts made at other Federal agencies, nor did the evaluation contemplate a facilitated discussion with FMC staff on the best practices of other agencies. Thus, the Partnership's *Top Ideas to Implement* are primarily internally driven and prioritized."

In drafting the *Top Ideas to Implement*, the Partnership drew on the expertise of staff, FMC employee feedback as well as best practices from across successful agencies. These best practices are outlined in the report, "Ten Years of the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government Rankings*: How Six Federal Agencies Improved Employee Satisfaction and Commitment." The full report can be viewed here: http://ourpublicservice.org/publications/download.php?id=23.