

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-585](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Research on both private- and public-sector organizations has found that increased levels of engagement—generally defined as the sense of purpose and commitment employees feel toward their employer and its mission—can lead to better organizational performance.

GAO was asked to review recent trends in federal employee engagement and steps OPM and agencies are taking to improve it. Among other things, this report: (1) describes trends in employee engagement from 2006 through 2014, (2) identifies practices in improving employee engagement, and (3) evaluates OPM's tools and resources to support employee engagement.

To meet these objectives, GAO analyzed responses to FEVS questions from 2006 through 2014, conducted a regression analysis, and reviewed OPM documents and interviewed OPM and other agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Director of OPM take the following three actions: (1) report annually on drivers of the EEI, (2) provide information on statistically significant changes in EEI scores, and (3) share examples and lessons learned to improve engagement and link engagement to performance in time to inform results of the next survey cycle. OPM concurred with the first recommendation and partially concurred with the second and third recommendations. GAO continues to believe that additional action on these recommendations is needed as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-15-585](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or goldenkoffr@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL WORKFORCE

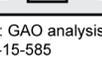
Additional Analysis and Sharing of Promising Practices Could Improve Employee Engagement and Performance

What GAO Found

From 2006 through 2014, government-wide engagement levels—as measured by the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Employee Engagement Index (EEI)—increased to an estimated high of 67 percent in 2011 and then declined to an estimated 63 percent in 2014. This decline is attributable to several large agencies—including the Department of Defense—bringing down the government-wide average. The government-wide decline masks the fact that the majority of federal agencies either sustained or increased EEI levels during the period. Of the three components that comprise the EEI—employees' perceptions of agency leaders, supervisors, and their intrinsic work experience—perceptions of leaders consistently received the lowest score.

GAO's regression analysis of selected Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) questions identified six practices as key drivers of the EEI (see table), with constructive performance conversations being the strongest.

Strongest Drivers of the Employee Engagement Index, 2014

Driver of engagement	FEVS question
 Constructive performance conversations	My supervisor provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my job performance (Q46).
 Career development and training	I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization (Q1).
 Work-life balance	My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues (Q42).
 Inclusive work environment	Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds (Q55).
 Employee involvement	How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work (Q63)?
 Communication from management	How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization (Q64)?

Source: GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) data, 2014. | GAO-15-585

For example, at one agency, supervisors and employees developed a set of topics for quarterly performance conversations to ensure that employees receive consistent and regular constructive feedback and coaching.

OPM developed resources to help agencies use EEI data to strengthen employee engagement but fell short of supporting a holistic approach to improving engagement and linking to performance. For example, OPM does not report whether annual EEI changes are statistically significant—that is, whether the changes were meaningful or due to random chance. Likewise, OPM does not analyze which FEVS questions are associated with higher EEI scores. This information would help agencies better focus their efforts to improve engagement and target resources. Further, OPM has provided limited examples or lessons learned on linking engagement to agency performance, which agencies will need to inform their next survey cycle.