

Economic Services Administration

Addressing Employee Concerns



Thank you for your input. We are committed to addressing the suggestions and concerns we heard.

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts about your job, work environment and our organization through the DSHS Employee Survey. We take your opinions and honesty seriously. Your participation in the employee survey, focus groups, and other opportunities to provide input is crucial to the success of ESA. The ESA leadership Team has carefully reviewed the results and concerns raised in the 2007 Employee Survey, and we know that we have work to do.

Based on your feedback, we have identified four main focus areas for the next year: (1) ensuring objective hiring and promotional practices throughout ESA; (2) providing more opportunities for employee input; (3) using customer feedback to improve our work processes; and (4) having a safe workplace.

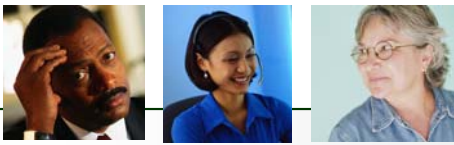
What we commit to do in each of these areas is described in this Survey Action Plan.

In carrying out the plan, we will hold firm to the key values of our organization: providing quality customer service; empowering and supporting staff; valuing our partners; being good stewards; and pursuing innovation and continuous improvements.

– Troy Hutson, ESA Assistant Secretary

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information, please contact **Roxie Schalliol** at **360.725.4558**.



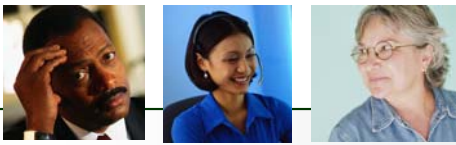
Introduction

The 2007 employee survey included 19 questions for all DSHS employees and 14 new questions for ESA employees only. Our action plan is based on analysis of responses to all 33 questions.

- ESA received over 2,900 responses (71% of all ESA staff) and 4,700 comments.
- ESA scores were at or above the DSHS average on 15 of the 19 “all DSHS” questions.
- ESA showed significant improvement in 4 areas compared to the last survey. Although there is still room for improvement, staff generally feel better about:

	2006	2007
• Their opportunities to give input on decisions affecting their work	48%	52%
• Opportunities to learn and grow	54%	59%
• Knowing how the agency measures its success	60%	64%
• Confidence in senior leaders (an ESA question)	35%	44 – 54%

- ESA showed no significant decline in any survey area between 2006 and 2007.



Building on Our Work

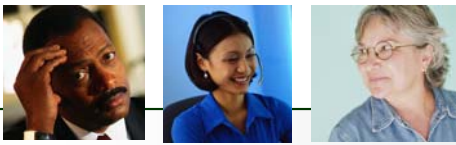
2007 Employee Survey Action Plan

Following the 2006 staff survey, ESA focused on the following four areas where 50% or more of ESA staff answered “almost always” or “usually”:

- *I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work. (48%)*
- *I receive recognition for a job well done. (50%)*
- *I have confidence in the decisions made by senior leaders in ESA. (35%)*
- *In my workgroup we use customer feedback to improve our work processes. (43%)*

ESA improved in each area, and is committed to continuing work already underway:

- ***Recognition for a job well done*** Increased from 50% to 52%
We will continue to provide meaningful recognition and feedback to employees, through both formal and informal means, including activities like:
 - After asking staff what meaningful recognition would look like to them, DCS increased funding for employee recognition awards and revised its internal recognition policy.
 - The DCS Director individually met with each and every staff member in field office visits presenting them with individually addressed letters of appreciation from him for their contribution to overall performance.
- ***Confidence in senior leaders*** Increased from 35% to a 44 – 55% range depending on the level of the organization
 - Over the past year, senior leaders have been visiting local offices to listen to staff, get input on critical issues, and better understand the challenges facing staff each day.
 - Focus groups were conducted to listen to staff directly about last year’s survey results and get input into specific actions that would help address concerns.

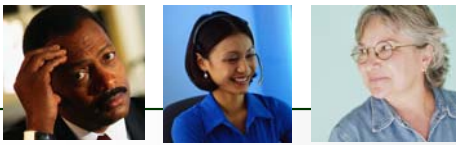


This Year's Focus

2007 Employee Survey Action Plan

Two of the focus areas from last year continue to challenge ESA and remain part of our action plan. In addition, we will add one new area from the ESA-specific questions:

- *I have opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work*
Although ESA improved in this area (from 48% to 52%), survey comments indicate we still have work to do
- *In my workgroup we use customer feedback to improve our work processes*
ESA showed a slight decline in this area, from 43% to 42%. We need to engage our customers more often and more effectively to strengthen this result.
- *Objective hiring and promotional practices are followed in my division* -- 52%

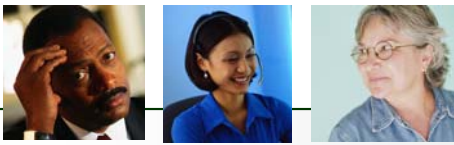


This Year's Focus

2007 Employee Survey Action Plan

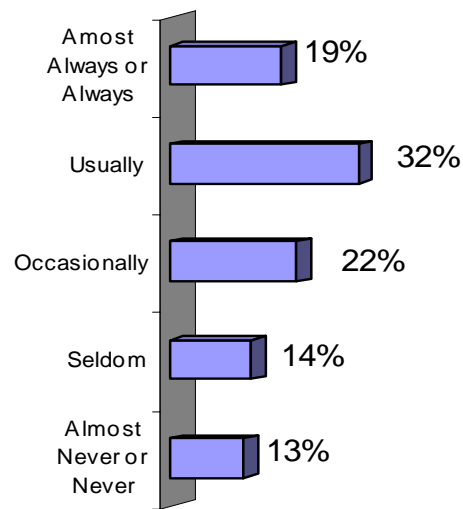
Three principles guide ESA's efforts in responding to this staff survey:

- Follow through with action plan items from the last survey. Many regions and local offices conducted focus groups to get input from staff and developed localized action plans specific to their areas. Managers want to follow through with commitments and efforts currently underway.
- Continue to seek staff input to gain a better understanding of this year's survey results and comments to help us develop targeted responses and strategies. Staff input is critical to developing a meaningful action plan.
- Incorporate key elements of the survey action plan into ESA's Strategic Plan.



Focus Issue 1: Ensure the use of objective hiring practices

Question: Objective hiring and promotional practices are followed in my division

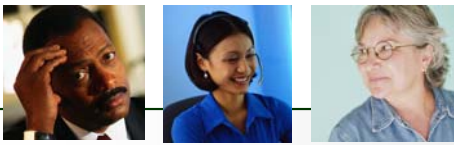


Employees say: "...We do not have confidence in the hiring practices at our office..." "Hire by ability, experience and capability rather than by 'easy fit'..."

Summary of the issue

Open, transparent hiring and promotional practices are vital to every organization. Recognizing the importance of these issues to ESA staff, ESA added a specific question to the 2007 survey in an attempt to determine how staff perceive current hiring practices. The comments provide a fairly clear picture of staff concerns, including:

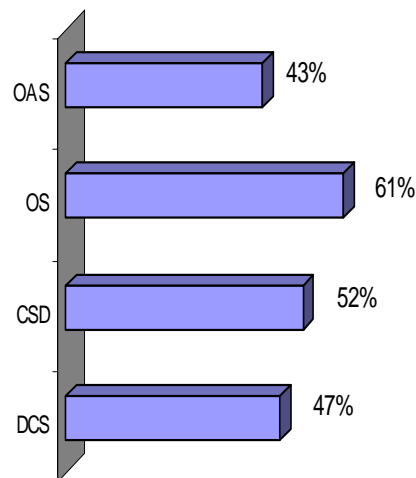
- Many staff feel the hiring process lacks fairness and openness, with hiring and promotions based on relationships (family, friends, and close colleagues) rather than skills and abilities
- The challenges of the State's new Human Resource Management System (HRMS) limit staff's ability to easily apply for new positions and/or promotions
- Some staff do not feel encouraged and supported, through growth and development opportunities, in seeking promotions or lateral movement to new challenges



Focus Issue 1 (continued): Ensure the use of objective hiring practices

Question: Objective hiring and promotional practices are followed in my division

Percent responding "Always" or "Usually"



Our plan for the coming year

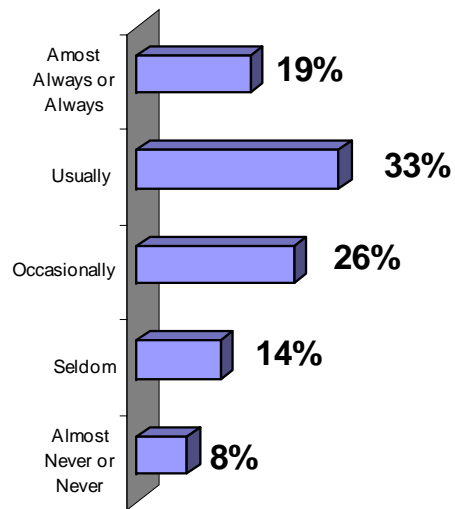
Most of us value work that is meaningful and challenging. As good jobs and promotional opportunities become more limited, it is critical that we feel we are able to compete for those positions based on our skills and abilities, in a process that is open, transparent, and consistent. The leadership team is committed to implementing competitive, open, and transparent recruitment, hiring, and promotional processes in ESA. We will:

- Develop and implement an ESA-wide recruitment, hiring, and promotional practice policy by June 30, 2008. Many areas of ESA currently use a protocol developed in conjunction with the ESA Administrator's Academy, and we will build on that effort in development of our policy. Finally, we will minimize acting appointments that don't have at least a limited open and competitive process.
- Train all managers to the policy and evaluate how well we are doing with implementation.
- Review and implement changes, as needed, to our staff development and training programs to more adequately prepare staff for promotional opportunities. The Leadership Team recently approved enhancements to the ESA Administrators Professional Development Program (APDP), effective July 1, 2008, and is beginning a full review of our staff development and training plan for all staff. We've also made a commitment to continued support of the Certified Public Managers program in ESA.



Focus Issue 2: Provide opportunities for employee input

Question: I have the opportunity to give input to decisions affecting my work.



Employees say:

"More respect for staff...."

"More input on changes from the people that are affected by the change..."

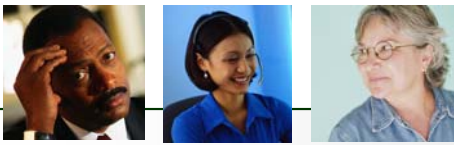
Summary of the issue

ESA focused effort this past year to solicit input from staff at all levels on major issues affecting their work, including changes to policy or service delivery, organizational structure, major hiring decisions, and work processes and procedures. We've seen significant improvement from our last survey; however, comments continue to suggest that although staff acknowledge their input is solicited, many believe decisions are made before input was gathered. Others felt their opinions and suggestions were discounted.

Our plan for the coming year

The ESA Leadership Team has developed a set of principles to guide our approach to implementing changes in program policy, operations, and service delivery. We will:

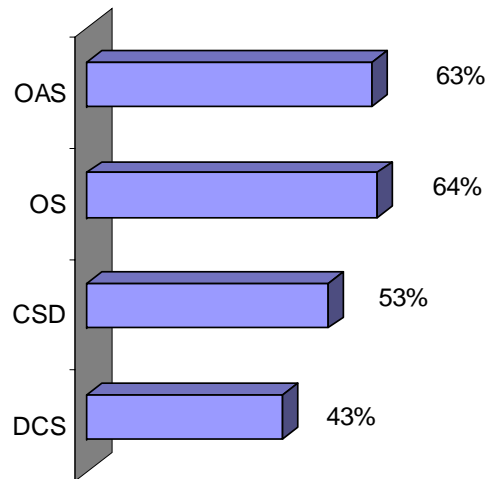
- **Actively seek staff input.** The request for input may come in a variety of forms, including focus groups, surveys, and team meetings, and will be clearly communicated to staff how feedback will be solicited.
- **Communicate to staff** what feedback was received, how it was used, and the general basis for the decision made.
- **Regularly evaluate** both our process for gathering input and the decisions we make.



Focus Issue 2 (continued): Provide opportunities for employee input

Question: I have the opportunity to give input to decisions affecting my work.

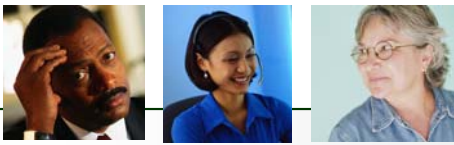
Percent responding "Always" or "Usually"



Our plan for the coming year, continued...

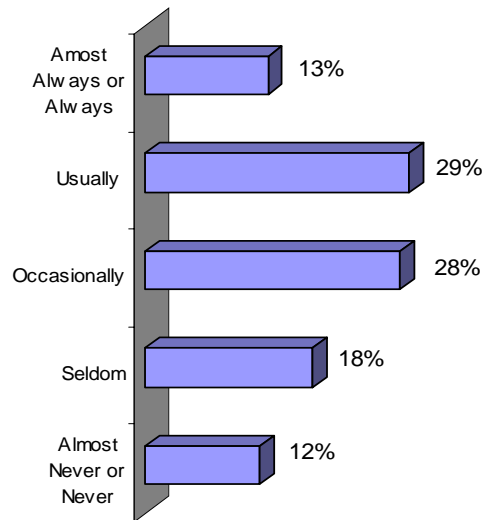
To put these principles into practice, we will:

- Over the next year, conduct focus groups in all regions/districts to talk about local operational policies and processes and solicit input and innovative ideas. The feedback will be compiled and shared with staff, with a commitment to timely follow-up on comments/suggestions.
- Develop new, automated methods to involve and engage staff in providing input / feedback, compile, and respond to the information received. We will build on strategies ESA currently uses to gather input regularly, such as:
 - The "Ask Troy" email "in box", which provides staff in ESA an easy avenue to provide input and/or ask questions of the new Assistant Secretary. Assistant Secretary Hutson reads and responds, or assures response, to all emails.
 - ESA posts all WAC and manual changes on the internet for review and comment prior to finalization. This "blue page" is available to staff and outside stakeholders.
- Implement a quarterly survey program to regularly gather input on a variety of issues within the administration. Provide timely response to comments received (within 30 days).
- Implement a "staff exchange" program, allowing local office staff to spend time in headquarters and headquarters staff to spend time in a local office to gain more insight into the daily activities, issues, and challenges each face.



Focus Issue 3: Use customer feedback to improve work processes

Question: In my workgroup we use customer feedback to improve work processes



Employees say: "More input from clients." "...I would like to see all clients treated with dignity and respect..."

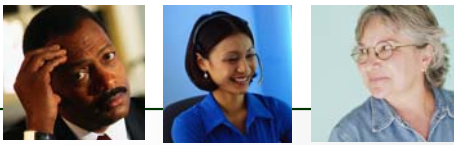
Summary of the Issue

This area continues to score rather low for ESA. Unlike other questions with lower scores, the staff comments do not provide a lot of insight into their concerns. We believe it is possible some staff scored this question low, but do not think customer input is realistic, since many of our programs are driven by federal and/or state requirements. While federal and state regulations may drive our policy, we provide the framework for service delivery and quality customer service. Customer feedback is vital to continuous improvement.

Our plan for the coming year

Although we will continue to seek clarification from staff, there are steps we believe we can and should take to help improve our customer feedback.

- Identify areas where customer feedback would be appropriate and useful. Develop survey and data collection processes and automated methods to compile customer input to ensure the information can be used effectively.
- More fully engage local offices with communities and customers. Use feedback from staff who regularly hear from customers about services.
- Restructure the ESA Advisory Committee and use those quarterly meetings to fully engage stakeholders in providing feedback and brainstorming creative approaches to service delivery and other issues. We have identified a plan for restructure that would take effect July 1, 2008, and are working to identify appropriate membership for the Committee.
- Share the results of the 2007 Client Survey with staff and respond to the issues identified in the survey.
- Use customer feedback to expand our Plain Talk efforts – forms, letters, build on ACES.



Other important issues: Making ESA an Employer of Choice

Focus Area 4: Having a safe workplace

Although we have chosen to focus time and resources on three key areas in this action plan, there are issues beyond those identified through our analysis of the data that remain important and deserve our attention.

We will focus additional attention on one issue in particular – safety in the workplace. Over 25% of our staff indicate they do not feel safe at work. We believe it is critical that we do all we can to help ensure staff safety in the workplace. Our efforts will include:

- Providing staff training and support to help avoid placing employees in situations that compromise safety
- Developing protocols to quickly and appropriately respond to situations that may compromise safety
- Mitigating risks, where possible, through effective facilities management and administrative support
- Evaluating management data from ESA's Critical Incident Reporting System to identify trends and issues

We want ESA to be an employer of choice, where staff find challenging, fulfilling, and meaningful work in an environment that is safe, supportive, and productive – an employer we could all say we gladly recommend to family and friends as a prime place to work. We are committed to listening to our employees and following through on this action plan.