

## Economic Services Administration

### Addressing Employee Concerns



**Employee feedback is vital to a strong organization. We have heard you, we are grateful for the honest and candid feedback. We all agree improvement is possible.**

I want to thank you again, in these stressful and busy times, for taking the time to share your thoughts about your job, work environment and our organization through the DSHS Employee Survey. As communicated previously, the survey results and comments have been carefully reviewed by Division management, issues have been prioritized from staff feedback and collectively we all are ready for action! The ESA leadership, both in Headquarters and around the state, know there is work to be done and our staff want to be engaged in the process.

Based on your feedback, ESA identified three main focus areas for the next year: (1) improve communications; (2) utilize customer feedback, technology and/or Lean strategies to improve work processes; and (3) provide employees recognition for a job well done.

In the pages that follow, I hope you will find acknowledgement of the challenges we are faced with and intentions to address these concerns. Please remember this is a compilation of all the Division's activities, and there are additional measures being taken specific to your work area. In addition to the ESA-wide plan, please also take a look at your Division's planning efforts.

I am proud of the staff in ESA and the commitment you have towards service delivery, clients and their families. Over the last two years we had a budget and employment crisis never experienced before. As an Administration we have pulled together to endure these tough times to meet the increasing demands for our services. Please look for opportunities to be involved in your Division's efforts.

– David Stillman, Assistant Secretary

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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# The 2010-11 Climate

Reflect upon 2010 and 2011 for ESA and it is understandable our staff are feeling pressure. The challenges we faced included the hiring freeze, the budget cuts, furlough days, 3% temporary salary reductions and increased client demand for services. The changes were personal and affected our ability to do a good job. We all felt the pain and some changes were so rapid or unexpected it left little time for the essential steps to communicate and coordinate with staff.

In addition to these challenges above, every Division faced significant changes as well:

- Leadership changes within ESA at every level (Assistant Secretary, Division Directors, Chiefs, Administrators & Managers)
- Organizational changes: DDDS joined ESA, OFR joined DCS, HRSA moved to Health Care Authority, number of Regions from six to three, DCS established Virtual Legal Office
- Facility changes: DDDS- Spokane and Tumwater offices; DCS- Wenatchee, Kennewick, Everett and Fife offices; CSD Spokane office consolidations
- Technology Improvements: DDDS implemented eCAT, the Fiscal Queue, and centralized three Medical Consultant queues into one statewide queue; Washington Connection
- Planning, implementing and reviewing Service Delivery Redesign; activation of a statewide call center
- Significant program and policy changes: Disability Lifeline, WorkFirst/TANF, Childcare, rework due to court actions, Working Connections Childcare requirement to apply for DCS services, expanded DCS payment options, distribution of child support

# Survey Overview

The 2011 employee survey included 21 questions for all DSHS employees and 11 questions for ESA employees only. Our action plan is based on analysis of responses to all 32 questions.

- ESA received over 2,800 responses (71% of all ESA staff) and 4,100 comments.
- ESA scores were at or above the DSHS average on 10 of the 21 “all DSHS” questions.
- Survey results are lower than the 2009 and prior year results. This trend is consistent with other areas within DSHS, and isn’t surprising considering what has occurred over the past two years.
- 80 percent or more ESA employees responded “always” or “usually” to these statements:
  - I know what is expected of me at work. 86% (DSHS-wide result: 87%)
  - I know how my work contributes to the goals of my agency. 80% (DSHS-wide result: 79%)
  - My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect. 84% (DSHS-wide result: 83%)
- 40 percent or fewer ESA employees responded “always” or “usually” to these statements:
  - I receive clear information about changes being made within the agency. 38% (DSHS-wide result: 38%)
  - We use customer feedback to improve our work processes. 34% (DSHS-wide result: 39%)

# Survey Evaluation & Guiding Principles

The process to comb through survey results was facilitated at multiple levels within our organization. ESA Divisions reviewed the Research and Data Administration's reports and compared to prior years results. In February, Division leaders reviewed confidential employee comments. Each Division created a list of focus areas. DCS and CSD sought staff's input to prioritize the critical areas. These lists were shared across the Administration to identify common topics for the ESA-wide focus areas.

The 2011 Baldrige Feedback Report and the ESA team's suggested opportunities for improvement were combined with Division level discussions to develop high-level action plans for the focus areas; summarized at the end of this document. Division leadership has begun implementation and will continue to develop strategies and specific activities to accomplish these plans. We will provide quarterly progress updates to staff.

Three principles guided ESA's efforts for Action Planning:

- Commitment to incorporate process improvement principles (e.g. Plan-Do-Check-Act, Lean, Change and Innovation).
- Continue to seek staff input and provide feedback.
- Incorporate key elements from the 2011 ESA employee survey action plan into the way ESA does business (e.g. strategic planning, business plan, cultural competency).

# This Year's Focus

The three ESA focus areas emerged from survey results and subsequent follow-up conversations with staff:

- **Improve communications** – specifically *managers listen and includes staff; input on decisions affecting work, encouraging staff to come up with better ways of doing things*
- Utilize customer feedback, technology and/or [Lean strategies](#) to **improve work processes**
- Provide **employees recognition** for a job well done

Division survey results identified variations in key focus areas, so each developed an action plan designed to address their specific issues of concern. A link to the Divisions action plans is posted on the ESA Staff Survey webpage and hyperlinks are provided below:

[Community Services Division](#)

[Division of Child Support](#)

[Disability Determination Services](#)

[Office of the Assistant Secretary Divisions](#) (includes IT Solutions, Quality Improvement/Program Integrity, Fiscal, EMAPS, Public Disclosure and Project Management)

# Improve Communications

**ESA Focus Issue:** *Improve Communications~ Specifically, managers listen and include staff input on decisions affecting work; encourage staff to come up with better ways of doing things*

## Staff Comments:

*"I would like to see and hear more cheer-leading and communication from the top."*

*"My supervisor is wonderful about communicating with us, however, I do not feel that our managers and above communicate well enough. I would also like to see some consistencies in this matter."*

*"I would like better communications. Clear cut instructions in "one" location would help employees do their jobs."*

## Percent of staff responded "Always" or "Usually"

- I receive clear information about the changes being made within the agency. 38%
- I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work. 41%
- iESA provides good information and is an effective communication tool. 52%
- I have confidence in the decisions made by leaders at ESA headquarters. 35%

## Issue Summary

The survey comments indicate that some staff would like their manager to proactively share ESA and DSHS information (changes, vision, topic for discussion at ESA's Extended Leadership Team) and issues in ESA Divisions in a timely manner. Consistent with 2009 results, staff hold the opinion that there is a lack of transparency in decision-making. We believe ESA would benefit from soliciting more input from line staff prior to making decisions, especially in those areas that affect their daily work.

Most staff feel like they receive the information they need to do their job effectively and know what is expected of them at work. While the survey results vary from Division to Division on where they post communications (iESA, DCS News, DDDS SharePoint) it is clear staff feel most comfortable and confident in the decisions made at a local level.

# Improve Work Processes

## ESA Focus Issue:

*Utilize customer feedback, technology and/or [Lean strategies](#) to improve work processes*

### Staff Comments:

*"I would like our leaders to actually implement some of ideas that they ask us to give. [I] feel that our dedication and hard work mean nothing to our leaders. While we get "thank you" - there is never any changes made that we feel would benefit US or our workload. We are asked for our input and we give good ideas that would benefit ourselves and our workplace and I have never seen those ideas used."*

*"We are normally asked to provide input on how to implement an idea that staff understand will be changed because it is not working as designed or is pushed forward because it is a project regardless of impact on staff and customers."*

### Percent of staff responded "Always" or "Usually"

- We use customer feedback to improve our work processes. 34%
- I am encouraged to come up with better ways to doing things. 42%

### Issue Summary

Change is constant and an unstructured approach to designing, implementing, and correcting work processes leads to confusion about roles, responsibilities, and identity. We desire a systematic approach that aligns with our mission, vision, and values, is transparent, and engages staff in the process. Staff feel they have little or no opportunity to provide input on important decisions, especially those that directly impact their work.

Survey comments (ESA-wide) indicate staff used to feel valued and believed their input was considered but now are not asked and/or feel their input is disregarded. Even if changes have to be made, staff want decision makers to check in with them and discuss how their job would be impacted from the suggested change.

Additionally, it is recognized some business processes cannot change due to compliance with regulations. But even in a closely controlled environment, opportunities exist to for improvements and staff would like to be engaged in the process.

## ESA Focus Issue:

*Provide employees recognition for a job well done*

### Staff Comments:

*“The stress of large caseloads and pay cuts is getting to us all. Many [employees] will jump ship at earliest opportunity. ...if the stress of my largest caseload ever and multiple priorities and expectation for exceptional customer service doesn't do me in first.”*

*“There is so little recognition for a job well done because they don't know when it has been done well. That makes it hard to come in every day and apply maximum effort when it doesn't seem to matter to anyone but me.”*

*“What I like best about my current job as a Support Enforcement Officer is knowing I am making a difference in the lives of children and families. That may sound kind of corny, but accurate...”*

### Percent of staff responded “Always” or “Usually”

- I receive recognition for a job well done. 46%
- My performance evaluation provides me with meaningful information about my performance. 49%
- My supervisor gives me ongoing feedback that helps me improve my performance. 64%
- My supervisor treats me with dignity and respect. 84%

### Issue Summary

Staff morale is low and budgets reductions have resulted in less people doing more work. ESA staff is the driving force in our effort to provide assistance, safety, and well being for individuals and families in this state. Our staff overwhelmingly responded with feedback on how they enjoy helping people, making a difference and realize they are a critical link in realizing the DSHS mission.

The survey was conducted at a time when the annual performance appraisal process was delayed and timeliness was already an issue throughout DSHS. This is reflected in the feedback. Staff find their co-workers and supervisors to be supportive, respectful, collaborative and embrace teamwork. Staff indicate they do not receive the appropriate recognition for their work.



## Our Plan to address all three focus areas in Economic Services Administration:

- **Gather staff input at all levels** (e.g. conversation café or focus groups) on what methods they would find valuable in providing input regarding new policies, processes or other issues that directly impact workload demands. Then, implement those methods to solicit staff input. Explore using Lean strategies as an integral part of any process improvement effort.
- Leaders will engage in **direct, face-to-face dialog with staff** (e.g. staff meetings, site visits, DDDS “coffee talk,” walk the floor to promote informal interactions).
- Identify methods to **acknowledge individual accomplishments in a timely manner** (e.g. Kudos on Intranet, verbal praise, certificate). Recognize morale is low and encourage informal recognition options for staff at all levels.
- **Insure staff receive relevant and timely feedback** about their performance. Immediately address problems directly with staff; expand discussions at all levels as it relates to performance expectation.
- **Improve consistent messaging throughout the ESA** by identifying where “one message to all” should be deployed. Update staff on Administration activities and decisions impacting ESA . Highlight key initiatives that impact ESA vision, strategic plan and business plan.
- Utilize a **centralized intranet site for information and feedback by Division, similar to DCS home page**, to post key communications and updates (e.g. leadership minutes, draft policy notices, surveys, reports). The Site is to include functionality to post the employees’ suggestions, to allow follow-through with the idea exchange, disseminate the outcomes, and complete the communication loop.