GAO

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Report to the Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

January 2021

DHS EMPLOYEE MORALE

Some Improvements Made, but Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Employee Engagement

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Why GAO Did This Study

DHS has faced challenges with low employee morale and engagement—an employee's sense of purpose and commitment—since it began operations in 2003. DHS has made some progress in this area, but data from the 2019 OPM FEVS show that DHS continues to rank lowest among similarly-sized federal agencies. GAO has reported that increasing employee engagement can lead to improved agency performance, and it is critical that DHS do so given the importance of its missions.

GAO was asked to review DHS employee morale. This report addresses (1) drivers of employee engagement at DHS and (2) the extent that DHS has initiatives to improve employee engagement and ensures effective engagement action planning. To answer these objectives, GAO used regression analyses of 2019 OPM FEVS data to identify the key drivers of engagement at DHS. GAO also reviewed component employee engagement action plans and met with officials from DHS and component human capital offices as well as unions and employee groups.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations. DHS OCHCO should, in its anticipated written guidance, establish the elements required in employee engagement action plans and the approval process for these plans. OCHCO should also monitor components' action planning to ensure they review and assess the results of their actions to improve employee engagement. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View GAO-21-204. For more information, contact Chris Currie at (404) 679-1875 or CurrieC@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and each of its major components face the same key drivers of employee engagement—as measured by the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (OPM FEVS)—as the rest of the federal government (see table). Higher scores on the OPM FEVS indicate that an agency has the conditions that lead to higher employee engagement, a component of morale.

Key Drivers of Employee Engagement across the Federal Government, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and within Each DHS Component Agency

Driver of engagement	Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey question
Constructive performance conversations	My supervisor provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my job performance (Question 46).
Career development and training	I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization (Question 1).
Work-life balance	My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues (Question 42).
Inclusive work environment	Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds (Question 55).
Communication from management	How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization (Question 64)?

Source: GAO analysis of 2014 and 2019 Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey data. | GAO-21-204

DHS has implemented department-wide employee engagement initiatives, including efforts to support DHS employees and their families. Additionally, DHS's major operational components, such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Transportation Security Administration, among others, have developed annual action plans to improve employee engagement. However, DHS has not issued written guidance on action planning and components do not consistently include key elements in their plans, such as outcome-based performance measures. Establishing required action plan elements through written guidance and monitoring the components to ensure they use measures to assess the results of their actions to adjust, reprioritize, and identify new actions to improve employee engagement would better position DHS to make additional gains in this area. In addition, approval from the DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) and component leadership for these plans would help ensure department-wide commitment to improving employee engagement.

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Abbreviations

CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
Education	Department of Education
EEI	Employee Engagement Index
FTC	Federal Trade Commission
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
NCUA	National Credit Union Administration
OCHCO	Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
OPM FEVS	Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey
TSA	Transportation Security Administration
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Secret Service	U.S. Secret Service

January 12, 2021

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Since it began operations in 2003, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has faced challenges with low employee morale, including low employee engagement. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) defines employee engagement as employees' sense of purpose that is evident in their display of dedication, persistence, and effort in their work or overall attachment to their organization and its mission. The OPM Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (OPM FEVS) has consistently found that DHS employees have lower engagement than the government-wide average of federal employees. According to the OPM FEVS and the Partnership for Public Service's rankings of the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*®, DHS is consistently the lowest ranking in engagement for similarly-sized federal agencies.[1]

In 2015, we reported that a number of studies of private-sector entities have found that increased levels of employee engagement result in better individual and organizational performance.[2] This includes increased employee performance and productivity; higher customer service ratings; fewer safety incidents; and less absenteeism and turnover. Studies of the public sector, while more limited, have shown similar benefits. For example, the Merit Systems Protection Board found that higher levels of employee engagement in federal agencies led to improved agency performance, less absenteeism, and fewer equal employment opportunity

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[1]FEVS is a tool offered by OPM that measures employees' perceptions of whether, and to what extent, conditions characterizing successful organizations are present in their agencies.

[2]GAO, *Federal Workforce: Additional Analysis and Sharing of Promising Practices Could Improve Employee Engagement and Performance*, GAO-15-585 (Washington, D.C.: July 14, 2015).

complaints.[3] As we have previously reported, it is essential for DHS to improve employee engagement given its impact on agency performance and the importance of DHS's missions.[4]

In 2003, we designated *Implementing and Transforming DHS* as a high-risk area to the federal government. DHS has made considerable progress in transforming its original component agencies into a single cabinet-level department. As a result, in 2013, we narrowed the scope of the high-risk area to focus on *Strengthening DHS Management Functions*, through which we also monitor DHS's progress in the area of employee engagement.[5] Although DHS employee engagement scores have increased in recent years, scores from OPM's 2019 administration of the FEVS show that DHS remains the lowest-scoring large or very large federal agency.

Action planning is a strategic tool that assists agencies in their efforts to improve employee engagement. OPM has described the action planning process as a cycle of continual improvement that seeks to build an organizational culture with engaged employees by planning and implementing actions and then reviewing progress to inform future actions. In response to the annual OPM FEVS results, the DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) requires each major

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[3]U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *The Power of Federal Employee Engagement* (Washington, D.C.: September 2008). Results were based on responses to the Merit System Protection Board's Merit Principles Survey, which asks employees about their perceptions of their jobs, work environments, supervisors and agencies.

[4]GAO, Department of Homeland Security: *Employee Morale Survey Scores Highlight Progress and Continued Challenges*, GAO-20-349T (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 14, 2020).

[5]Since the early 1990s, our high-risk program has focused attention on government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement, or that are in need of transformation to address economy, efficiency, or effectiveness challenges. We issue an update to the High-Risk List every 2 years at the start of each new session of Congress. Our most recent update was issued in March 2019. See GAO, *High-Risk Series: Substantial Efforts Needed to Achieve Greater Progress on High-Risk Areas*, GAO-19-157SP (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 6, 2019).

GAO-21-204 DHS Employee Morale

operational component to develop an employee engagement action plan and submit this plan to OCHCO for review.[6]

You asked us to review the key drivers of employee morale at DHS, as well as its efforts to improve morale. This report addresses: (1) key drivers of employee engagement at DHS and how they compare to government-wide engagement drivers, and (2) the extent to which DHS and its component agencies have implemented initiatives to improve employee engagement and undertaken effective action planning.

To address both objectives, we focus on employee engagement as a key indicator of morale because OPM and DHS center their efforts on improving employee engagement. Specifically, OPM focuses its attention on employee engagement because it is an element of the President's Management Agenda. To measure the conditions that lead to engagement, OPM calculates an employee engagement index (EEI) each year based on FEVS responses. According to DHS officials, they focus on engagement because it is an actionable measure of morale.

To address our first objective, we analyzed record level data from OPM's 2019 administration of the FEVS. Because OPM calculates and reports the EEI at the group level—such as across DHS, for a component, or for a specific work site such as an airport—and not for individual respondents, we used data from OPM to recalculate the EEI for each individual employee that responded to the survey. This calculation enabled us to conduct regression analysis and examine which drivers were most strongly associated with the EEI. The individual level EEI calculation is scaled between 0 and 100 and is based on the proportion of each individual employee's positive responses to the 15 constituent EEI questions. We used regression analysis to test which of the OPM FEVS questions was most strongly associated with increased scores for an individual DHS employee's EEI, after controlling for other factors such as employee demographics and DHS components. We also used regression analyses to test which of the OPM FEVS questions were most strongly associated with an individual employee's EEI score within each DHS

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[6]The DHS major operational components that submit annual employee engagement action plans to DHS OCHCO are the Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

component that had more than 1,000 responses to the OPM FEVS (or, "major DHS operational components").[7] We conducted similar regression analyses using OPM FEVS data from across the government in 2015. We referred to that work as appropriate when developing the regression models for DHS.[8]

We assessed the reliability of the 2019 OPM FEVS data and determined these data to be reliable for the purposes of identifying the key drivers of employee engagement at DHS. Specifically, we reviewed response rates from the 2019 OPM FEVS and conducted tests to identify missing data from the 2019 OPM FEVS data set. We also reviewed the 2019 OPM FEVS Technical Report to determine how OPM designed and administered its 2019 FEVS. In addition, we met with OPM officials knowledgeable about their FEVS data to ensure we understood how to appropriately characterize the data.

We also met with human capital officials at the Departments of Commerce, Transportation, and Justice, as well as with officials from components within each of these departments to discuss their approaches to addressing employee engagement. We selected these departments based on shared similarities with DHS such as size, law enforcement focus, or diversity of component missions. The results of our interviews cannot be generalized; however, the information we obtained provides valuable perspectives on initiatives these departments have undertaken related to employee engagement. In addition, we reviewed our 2015 work that discussed lessons the National Credit Union Administration, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Department of Education learned in developing and implementing strategies to improve employee engagement.[9]

To address our second objective, we reviewed documents and data and conducted interviews with officials from five DHS components: Transportation Security Administration (TSA), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the U.S. Secret Service (Secret Service), and U.S. Immigration and Customs

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[7]We developed component-specific models only for eight components that had more than 1,000 responses to the OPM FEVS to accommodate the large number of variables within the model. These eight components account for over 95 percent of DHS survey respondents on the OPM FEVS.

[8]GAO-15-585.

[9]GAO-15-585.

Enforcement (ICE). We selected these five components for a non-probability sample based on a combination of factors including component size, component employee engagement and satisfaction scores, and input from external stakeholders including the DHS OCHCO and the Partnership for Public Service. Collectively, employees of these five components make up over 70 percent of the DHS workforce.

According to OCHCO officials, developing employee engagement action plans guides the component action planning process. As a result, for each of these five component case studies, we reviewed information contained in annual component employee engagement action plans from 2018 through 2020 to determine the extent to which the components' action planning processes align with OPM's Key Elements of Effective Action planning.[10] Those key elements are: (1) identify the issues, (2) set goals, (3) identify staff and budget resources, (4) develop the action plan, (5) implement the action plan, and (6) monitor and evaluate the results of the implementation. For example, we reviewed each employee engagement action plan to determine whether the components identified the root causes of their employee engagement challenges. In instances where the action plans did not identify whether the component took a step in the process, we also leveraged information from interviews and program documentation to determine whether the components had taken the step. Specifically, we conducted semi-structured interviews with officials from human capital offices within each of the selected components who develop these plans, reviewed program documentation for initiatives to improve employee engagement, and met with officials knowledgeable about these initiatives.

We also determined the extent to which DHS components, as part of their action planning process, identify and use outcome-based performance measures consistent with our guidelines for using effective performance

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[10]For each of the six steps in OPM's action planning process, we determined whether the component took and documented the step each of the three years, in some years but not others, or not at all.

measures.[11] We assessed this because of the role of performance measurement in the sixth action planning step—monitoring and evaluating results of implementation. In addition, we reviewed the extent to which DHS has made progress in improving employee engagement, defined as one of the outcomes required to address the *Strengthening DHS Management* high-risk area.[12] When available, we also met with representatives of unions or employee groups for these components in our sample to discuss their perspectives on DHS and component efforts related to employee engagement.[13] In addition, we also reviewed DHS-wide initiatives related to employee engagement. We also determined that the monitoring component of internal control was significant to this objective, along with the underlying principle that management should establish and operate activities to monitor the internal control system and evaluate the results.[14] We assessed program documentation of initiatives DHS leads to improve employee engagement and met with DHS OCHCO officials to discuss these initiatives, to determine the extent to which DHS supports and monitors employee engagement efforts.

We conducted this performance audit from December 2019 to January 2021 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe

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[11]GAO, *Illicit Opioids: While Greater Attention Given to Combating Synthetic Opioids, Agencies Need to Better Assess their Efforts*, GAO-18-205 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 29, 2016); GAO, *Electronic Health Record Programs: Participation Has Increased, but Action Needed to Achieve Goals, Including Improved Quality of Care*, GAO-14-207 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 6, 2014); *Designing Evaluations: 2012 Revision* (Supersedes PEMD-10.1.4), GAO-12-208G (Washington, D.C.: January, 2012); *Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships* (Supersedes GAO-05-739SP), GAO-11-646SP (Washington, D.C.: May, 2011); *Defense Infrastructure: Improved Performance Measures Would Enhance Defense Reform Initiative*, GAO/NSIAD-99-169 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 4, 1999); and *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, GAO/GGD-96-118 (Washington, D.C.: June 1, 1996).

[12]GAO-19-157SP.

[13]We met with representatives from employee unions that represent employees at CBP, TSA, and ICE. We met with an employee group that represents Secret Service employees because there are no employee unions within the Secret Service. The union that represents USCIS employees was not available to meet with us.

[14]GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government,* GAO-14-704G (Washington D.C. September 2014).

that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

Employees' responses to the OPM FEVS questions measure their perceptions of whether, and to what extent, conditions characterizing successful organizations are present in their agencies. These responses also serve as a tool for employees to share their perceptions in many critical areas including their work experiences, their agencies, and leadership. OPM has conducted this survey every year since 2010.[15]

The EEI is one of three indices OPM calculates to synthesize FEVS data and is measured in percentage points on a scale of 0 to 100 with higher scores indicating an agency has the conditions that lead to higher employee engagement.[16] According to OPM, the EEI does not directly measure employee engagement. Instead, it covers the conditions that lead to engaged employees. OPM calculates the EEI by averaging all the positive responses to 15 FEVS questions covering employee perceptions of leadership integrity and behaviors such as communication, the interpersonal relationship between the employee and supervisor, and employee feelings of motivation and competency relating to their role in the workplace.

Employee Engagement at DHS

In recent years, DHS has made progress in improving its employee engagement, however, it remains below the government-wide average, as shown in Figure 1. Specifically, DHS's EEI has improved from 53 percentage points in 2015 to 62 percentage points in 2019. We began tracking DHS's EEI in 2010 as part of our monitoring of the *Strengthening DHS Management Functions* high-risk area, and 2019 was the first year that DHS surpassed the 2010 benchmark of 61 percentage points. DHS's 2010 EEI serves as the benchmark because that was the first year OPM calculated the EEI and was the highest DHS EEI prior to 2019. In recent years, top leaders at DHS have stated that concerns with working

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[15]From 2002 to 2008, OPM administered the survey biennially.

[16]In addition to the EEI, OPM calculates two other indices. The New Inclusion Quotient, referred to as New IQ, summarizes information about inclusivity in the workplace. The Global Satisfaction index is a combination of employees' satisfaction with their job, their pay, and their organization, plus their willingness to recommend their organization as a good place to work.

conditions, workload, and pay are factors that they believe negatively affect employee morale and engagement.

Figure 1: Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Employee Engagement Index (EEI) Scores, 2010–2019
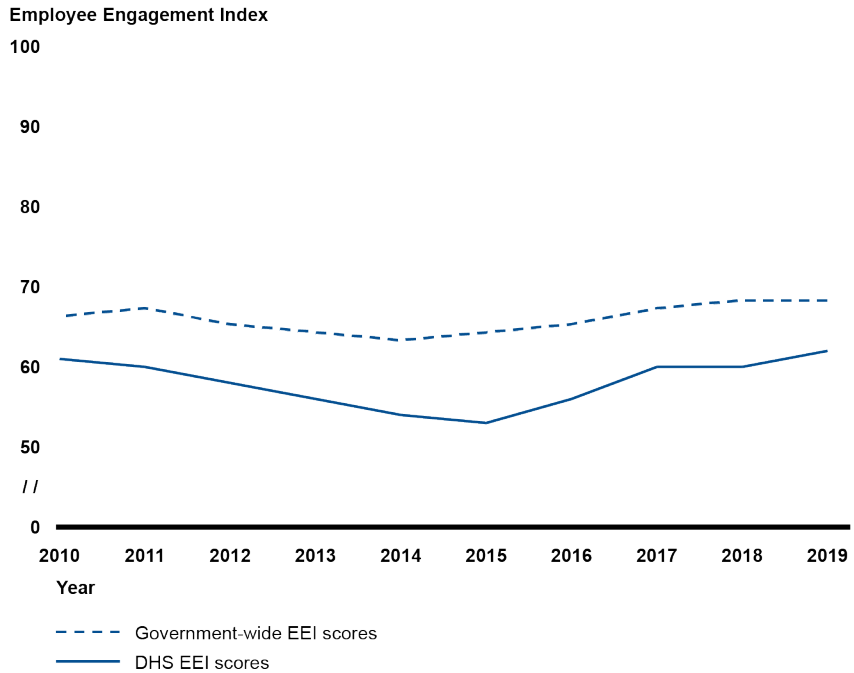
GAO analysis of Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey data. | GAO-21-204

Across DHS, the average EEI score in 2019 for all DHS employees was approximately 62 percentage points. At the component level, the EEI varied from a high of 76 percentage points at the U.S. Coast Guard to a low of approximately 38 percentage points at the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office. See Table 1 for the average EEI scores for each DHS component in 2019.

Table 1: Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Employee Engagement Index (EEI) of the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, 2019

DHS component	EEI	Survey responses
U.S. Coast Guard*	76.0	3,120
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*	73.8	11,406
Federal Law Enforcement Training Center	66.6	600
Science and Technology Directorate	66.2	195
Office of Operations Coordination	66.2	116
Federal Emergency Management Agency*	65.8	2,485
Management Directorate	65.7	981
Office of the Secretary	64.8	270
U.S. Secret Service*	64.5	2,749
Office of the Inspector General	62.2	405
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*	62.1	8,171
Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency*	61.2	1,974
Transportation Security Administration*	59.9	27,356
U.S. Customs and Border Protection*	57.1	16,450
Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction	37.6	124

Legend:

* = major operational components that submit employee engagement action plans to the DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer

Source: GAO analysis of the Office of Personnel Management's 2019 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Data. | GAO-21-204

Employee Engagement Action Planning at DHS

As the chief human resources agency and personnel policy manager for the federal government, OPM identifies six steps to guide effective action planning to improve scores on the OPM FEVS (see fig. 2). These steps are (1) identify the issues, (2) set goals, (3) identify staff and budget resources, (4) develop the action plan, (5) implement the action plan, and (6) monitor and evaluate the results of the implementation. These steps flow in a cycle and are a continuous process incorporating information from the annual administration of the OPM FEVS. We have previously reported the importance of following OPM's action planning guidance for action planning to improve FEVS scores, and recommended that DHS components link findings from root cause analyses to their employee engagement action plans.[17] In response, in 2017, all DHS components

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[17]GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Taking Further Action to Better Determine Causes of Morale Problems Would Assist in Targeting Action Plans*, GAO-12-940 (Washington D.C.: Sept. 28, 2012).

linked their action plans to the root causes of their employee engagement challenges.

Within DHS, OCHCO is responsible for implementing policies and programs to recruit, hire, train, and retain DHS's workforce. As the department-wide unit responsible for human capital issues within DHS, OCHCO also provides guidance and oversight related to employee engagement issues to the DHS components. As previously discussed, OCHCO requires each major operational component to develop an annual employee engagement action plan. According to DHS officials, components are to submit their annual action plans to OCHCO for review by February. After OCHCO's review, the components finalize their plans in March or April. The components also submit a mid-year action plan update to OCHCO in the fall.[18]

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[18]Because the onset of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic occurred during the time frame that the components typically develop their annual action plans, DHS's 2020 action planning process was delayed, according to OCHCO officials. The components finalized their 2020 action plans in late summer 2020, rather than in the spring.

Figure 2: Office of Personnel Management's Six Steps for Action Planning to Improve Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) Scores

FEVS action planning steps

2 Set goals
Develop goals for improvement.

1 Identify the issues
Review the survey results and conduct follow-up activities needed to clarify their meaning. Communicate the results to employees and describe the issues the agency plans to address.

3 Identify staff and budget resources
Assemble a team and evaluate the time and resources available to you.

6 Monitor and evaluate the results of the implementation
Monitor progress and evaluate outcomes of the action plan. Provide regular feedback on progress and outcomes to managers and employees.

4 Develop the action plan
Break down the goals into actions to be accomplished, assign them to responsible parties, and seek necessary approvals for the action plan.

5 Implement the action plan
Publicize the plan within the agency and launch the plan that will help meet the agency's goals.

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management. | GAO-21-204

DHS and Each of Its Major Components Face the Same Key Drivers of Employee Engagement as the Rest of Government

Across DHS, the strongest drivers of an individual's EEI score are (1) constructive performance conversations, (2) career development and training, (3) work-life balance, (4) an inclusive work environment, and (5) communication from management.[19] These same five drivers were among the key drivers of the EEI across the federal government that we previously identified in 2015.[20] Furthermore, although EEI scores vary across DHS components, our analyses showed that the five drivers that had the strongest association with engagement across DHS were generally also the top drivers of engagement within each major operational component.[21] Figure 3 lists these five top drivers of the EEI and the associated OPM FEVS question that serves as the proxy measure for each driver in our analysis.[22]

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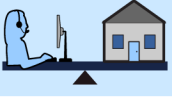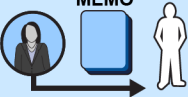
[19]The Departments of Commerce, Justice, and Transportation share similarities with DHS such as size, components with a diverse collection of missions, a focus on law enforcement, or a workforce that operates in the public facing positions. Appendix II includes examples of actions these agencies have taken related to the key drivers of employee engagement. Appendix II also includes our past work discussing leading practices for how agencies can effectively address these drivers to improve effective organizational management.

[20]GAO-15-585.

[21]Across the federal government, the top drivers of engagement in order of strongest association with the Employee Engagement Index were constructive performance conversations, career development and training, inclusive work environment, communication from management, work-life balance, and employee involvement. Across DHS, employee involvement is the sixth strongest association with the employee engagement index. We present the top five drivers of engagement at DHS as key drivers because there was a natural break in the magnitude of the drivers between the fifth and sixth strongest drivers of engagement across DHS. See appendix III for all drivers.

[22]The question numbers refer to their order on OPM's 2019 FEVS. The numbering will not be consistent with OPM's 2020 FEVS because OPM removed some questions from the 2020 survey as part of its adjusted plan for administering the 2020 FEVS because of workplace disruptions caused by COVID-19. OPM included all questions required to calculate the EEI in its 2020 FEVS. The questions removed include questions 46 and 55 from 2019 that are associated with the key drivers holding performance constructive conversations and an inclusive work environment. According to OPM officials, the Director of OPM will determine which questions to include in the 2021 FEVS based on feedback from federal agencies regarding the 2020 FEVS.

Figure 3: Key Drivers of the Employee Engagement Index across the Federal Government, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and within Each DHS Component Agency

Driver of engagement	Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey question
Constructive performance conversations	My supervisor provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my job performance (Question 46).
Career development and training	I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization (Question 1).
Work-life balance	My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues (Question 42).
Inclusive work environment	Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds (Question 55).
Communication from management	How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization (Question 64)?

Source: GAO analysis of 2014 and 2019 Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey data. | GAO-21-204

Note: As we reported in 2015, across the federal government, the top drivers of engagement in order of strongest association with the Employee Engagement Index were constructive performance conversations, career development and training, inclusive work environment, communication from management, work-life balance, and employee involvement. Across the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), employee involvement is the sixth strongest association with the employee engagement index. We present the top five drivers of engagement at DHS as key drivers because there was a natural break in the magnitude of the drivers between the fifth and sixth strongest drivers of engagement across DHS. See GAO, *Federal Workforce: Additional Analysis and Sharing of Promising Practices Could Improve Employee Engagement and Performance*, GAO-15-585 (Washington, D.C.: July 14, 2015).

Across DHS and each of its major components, holding constructive performance conversations is the strongest driver of employee engagement based on our regression analyses of data from the 2019 OPM FEVS. The other key drivers across DHS are also generally among the strongest drivers of employee engagement within multiple

components, although their order of significance differs by component.[23] For example, career development and training and work-life balance are the second and third strongest drivers of engagement respectively at USCIS, while the order of these drivers is reversed for the Secret Service. The results for each of the 18 OPM FEVS questions from our DHS and component regression models are listed in Appendix III.

Table 2: Rank Order of the Drivers Associated with the Employee Engagement Index across the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and within Its Major Components

DHS Component	Driver of Employee Engagement				
	Constructive Performance Conversations	Career Development and Training	Work-life Balance	Inclusive Work Environment	Communication from Management
U.S. Coast Guard	1	4	2	3	5
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services	1	2	3	4	5
Federal Emergency Management Agency	1	2	4	3	6
U.S. Secret Service	1	3	2	4	6
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement	1	2	3	4	5
Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency	1	4	3	2	5
Transportation Security Administration	1	3	4	2	5
U.S. Customs and Border Protection	1	2	3	5	4
All DHS	1	2	3	4	5

Source: GAO analysis of the Office of Personnel Management's 2019 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Data. | GAO-21-204

Note: For each component agency, numbers represent the order of significance for a particular driver with the number 1 labeling the driver with the greatest association with an individual's employee engagement index score.

Key drivers associated with the EEI. Because holding constructive performance conversations, career development and training, work-life balance, an inclusive work environment, and communication from

[23]The top five drivers of employee engagement across DHS are generally the same top drivers across the components. Communication from management as measured by question 64 on the OPM FEVS was not among the top five drivers of employee engagement within the Federal Emergency Management Agency or the Secret Service, however, it did have a significant association with employee engagement within both of these components as shown in table 2.

management are the strongest predictors of the EEI, these areas could be foundational for DHS efforts to improve employee engagement. Collectively, across DHS, a respondent who answers positively to the questions that serve as proxies for these five strongest drivers of the EEI would be associated with an increase of approximately 50 percentage points on the EEI compared to a respondent who did not respond positively to each of those questions. Table 3 presents the association between each driver and the EEI across DHS, as well as the range in associations between the components.

Table 3: Association between the Employee Engagement Index (EEI) and the Top Five Drivers of Employee Engagement at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Controlling for Other Factors

Top five drivers of employee engagement at DHS	Associated increase on the DHS EEI	Range of the associated increase across DHS component EEIs
1. Constructive performance conversations	A DHS survey respondent who answered positively to the question "My supervisor provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my job performance," would have, on average, an individual EEI that was approximately **14 percentage points higher** than someone who did not answer positively.	The association varied across DHS components, from a low of approximately 11 percentage points at the Federal Emergency Management Agency to approximately 14 percentage points at the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).
2. Career development and training	A DHS survey respondent who answered positively to the question "I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization," would have, on average, an individual EEI that was approximately **10 percentage points higher** than someone who did not answer positively.	The association varied across DHS components, from a low of approximately 8 percentage points at TSA to approximately 11 percentage points at U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).
3. Work-life balance	A DHS survey respondent who answered positively to the question "My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues," would have, on average, an individual EEI that was approximately **9 percentage points higher** than someone who did not answer positively.	The association varied across DHS components, from a low of approximately 8 percentage points at TSA to approximately 12 percentage points at U.S. Secret Service.
4. Inclusive work environment	A DHS survey respondent who answered positively to the question "Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds," would have, on average, an individual EEI that was approximately **9 percentage points higher** than someone who did not answer positively.	The association varied across DHS components, from a low of approximately 8 percentage points at CBP to approximately 11 percentage points at the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

Top five drivers of employee engagement at DHS	Associated increase on the DHS EEI	Range of the associated increase across DHS component EEIs
5. Communication from management	A DHS survey respondent who answered positively to the question "How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization," would have, on average, an individual EEI that was approximately **8 percentage points higher** than someone who did not answer positively.	The association varied across DHS components, from a low of approximately 7 percentage points at the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to approximately 8 percentage points at CBP.

Source: GAO analysis of 2019 Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Data. | GAO-21-204

Note: The regression models controlled for factors including respondent demographics. The DHS-wide regression model also controlled for the respondent's component. For each of these estimates, the 95 percent confidence interval ranged from 0.0006 to 0.1476 across all components.

Additional drivers. In addition to the five drivers with the strongest association with the EEI discussed above, five additional drivers were associated with a statistically significant and substantively meaningful association with the EEI across DHS and within most major operational components.[24] These included views on employee empowerment and involvement, fair and equitable treatment, alignment between the organizational mission and skills and job knowledge, innovation, and coworkers and teamwork. Answering positively to the questions associated with these five drivers was associated with an increase in the EEI ranging from approximately 6 percentage points for employee empowerment and involvement to approximately 3 percentage points for coworkers and teamwork.

Factors without a strong relationship or with an unknown relationship to the EEI. Across DHS, the following drivers did not have a substantively meaningful association with an individual DHS employee's EEI score, after controlling for other variables: workload, performance recognition, access to resources and information, and the physical work environment. Further, employee satisfaction with pay did not have a

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[24]Given the large number of observations in our DHS-wide and component analyses, many variables in the model were statistically significant. This statistical significance, however, does not necessarily correspond to a substantial increase in the EEI. Accordingly, we incorporated a substantive threshold in our determination of whether an independent variable acted as a driver. We considered variables to be drivers of engagement if they had a coefficient that rounded to 3 or above, indicating that on average, each increase in positivity of responses was associated with a 3 percentage point increase in the 0 to 100 measure of the EEI.

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statistically significant relationship with an individual's EEI across DHS or within any component, except within TSA.[25]

Most demographic variables were not drivers of the EEI across DHS and generally were not drivers within any component.[26] Specifically, after controlling for all variables, the following demographic variables did not have a substantive meaningful association with the EEI: tenure with the agency, military status, sex, race and ethnicity, education, supervisory status, and work location (field or headquarters). Respondents who answered that they intend to leave their job for a position outside the federal government, or who intend to leave their job for another unspecified reason were associated with an approximately 4 and 3 percentage point lower EEI, respectively than a respondent who answered they do not intend to leave their job.

Further, the relationship between senior leadership vacancies in an agency and employee engagement is not known. The OPM FEVS does not include any questions about employee perceptions of leadership

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[25]Within TSA, a positive response to the question "Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your pay?" was associated with a 0.5 percentage point increase on the EEI, controlling for other factors. This relationship is statistically significant, but does not meet our substantive threshold of 3 percentage points to determine the variable acted as a driver of engagement. Unlike the majority of DHS, TSA's pay structure does not follow the General Schedule.

[26]Most demographic variables did not have a substantive meaningful association with the EEI within any component. However, an employee's tenure with the agency had a substantive meaningful association with the EEI within the Secret Service, TSA, and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, controlling for other factors. Specifically, at the Secret Service, a respondent with an agency tenure of 1 to 3 years was associated with a higher EEI than a respondent with an agency tenure of more than 20 years. At TSA, a respondent with an agency tenure of 3 years or less was associated with a higher EEI than a respondent with an agency tenure of more than 20 years. At the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, a respondent with an agency tenure of either 4 to 5 or 15 to 20 years was associated with a higher EEI than a respondent with an agency tenure of more than 20 years. In addition, respondents identifying themselves as non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaskan Native were associated with a higher EEI within the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency compared to respondents identifying themselves as White, controlling for other factors. Also, respondents who identified themselves as non-Hispanic Hawaiian or Pacific Islander were associated with a higher EEI within the U.S. Coast Guard and lower EEI within the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency compared to respondents identifying themselves as White, controlling for other factors.

vacancies. Additionally, we have previously found that there is not a clear relationship between leadership vacancies and employee morale.[27]

DHS Has Implemented Employee Engagement Initiatives but Does Not Ensure Effective Action Planning

DHS Has Several Department-Wide Employee Engagement Initiatives

Employee and Family Readiness: As part of its efforts to support employees and their families and promote work-life balance, in 2019, DHS OCHCO developed the Employee and Family Readiness initiative. This initiative aims to promote family, financial, and personal wellness among the department's employees. An Employee and Family Readiness Council with representatives from each DHS component oversees the initiative. The DHS Human Capital Operational Plan states that the Employee and Family Readiness Council oversees 18 family resilience issues as part of the initiative including issues such as general stress, dependent childcare, personal relationships, mental health, and financial concerns. As part of this initiative, in January 2020, DHS launched a website that offers resources, information regarding employee benefits, and programs to employees and their families. Examples of resources on the website include those related to marriage and divorce, elder care, employee assistance programs, and retirement.[28] In addition to this website, DHS distributes a regular email digest with news, information, and resources from an Employee and Family Readiness blog. OCHCO collects data annually from the components on the utilization rates of employee assistance programs and tracks visits to the website.

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[27]GAO, *Inspectors General: Information on Vacancies and IG Community Views on Their Impact*, GAO-18-270 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 9, 2018).

[28]DHS Employee Assistance Program services include assessment, counseling, and referrals for employees and family members with personal or work-related concerns such as job stress, financial issues, legal matters, family problems, office conflicts, and alcohol and substance use disorders.

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Employee Engagement Steering Committee and Working Group:
Since 2014, DHS OCHCO has facilitated an Employee Engagement
Steering Committee composed of senior executives from each of the
major operational components and chaired by the DHS Under Secretary
for Management. The Employee Engagement Steering Committee
generally meets on a quarterly basis to discuss emergent issues related
to employee engagement, including components' progress on their
employee engagement action plans. OCHCO officials stated that the DHS
Chief Human Capital Officer or the Under Secretary for Management
determines the agendas for these meetings. OCHCO officials stated that
the agendas vary depending on where they are with analysis of the OPM
FEVS data. For example, some meetings involve preparing for and
communicating information related to the administration of the OPM
FEVS, whereas other meetings involve discussing emergent issues and
corresponding initiatives related to employee engagement. OCHCO
officials stated that OCHCO also convenes an Employee Engagement
Working Group that meets monthly and consists of action officers from
each of the components. These component representatives are
responsible for analyzing and sharing data from the OPM FEVS within the
components and for developing the action plans.

20-20-20 Initiative: Since 2018, DHS has also facilitated implementation
of the OPM government-wide 20-20-20 initiative from the President's
Management Agenda. This initiative seeks to identify the bottom scoring
20 percent of work units in each component and improve their EEI scores
by 20 percent by the 2020 administration of the OPM FEVS. According to
OCHCO officials, component officials used the Employee Engagement
Working Group and a designated 20-20-20 subgroup to discuss
implementation strategies, share tools and resources, and collect
information needed to report to OPM and the Office of Management and
Budget on the components' progress on the initiative.

DHS Leadership Survey: In fiscal year 2018, DHS developed a
framework for a survey that aims to assess the leadership of supervisors
and the climate of employees' work units or teams. DHS worked with
OPM to pilot the survey and determine the feasibility of administering it
across the department. TSA and USCIS participated in a pilot of this
survey to approximately 15,000 employees to supplement information
they receive from the OPM FEVS. For example, the pilot survey was
administered at selected locations for TSA, including the Los Angeles
International Airport and the Federal Air Marshals, as well as to USCIS's
Field Operations Directorate and Human Capital and Training units. TSA
officials stated that the Leadership Survey enables participants to provide

leadership feedback in an upward manner, which helps to address concerns they identified in their analysis of OPM FEVS data that identified leadership as a potential challenge that may contribute to employee engagement issues. Specifically, the Leadership Survey enables participants to provide leadership feedback for the three levels of supervision above them and provides actionable information for how leaders in their organization could improve. According to a 2019 OPM report on the DHS leadership survey, approximately two-thirds of employees who participated in the pilots of the survey recommended its wider administration. According to TSA officials, as of September 2020, TSA plans to administer the survey across additional airports.

Selected DHS Components' Action Planning Generally Aligns with OPM's Key Elements but DHS Has Not Taken Sufficient Steps to Ensure Such Planning is Fully Effective

Selected DHS components' action planning efforts generally align with OPM's action planning process, but components did not always incorporate all key elements into their action planning process. These components, in response to a requirement from DHS, develop annual employee engagement action plans as part of the action planning process.

We reviewed action plans for each of the five components we selected for the years 2018 through 2020 and met with officials from each component responsible for developing these plans to discuss their action planning process and efforts to improve employee engagement. Through our review of the action plans, and interviews with component officials who develop these plans, we determined the extent to which each of the components implemented OPM's key elements and documented their planning process in their employee engagement action plans (see table 4).

Table 4: Selected Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Selected Components' Alignment with Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Key Elements for Effective Action Planning, 2018–2020

DHS component agency	OPM Action Planning Step					
	Identify the Issues	Set Goals	Identify Staff	Develop Plan	Implement Plan	Monitor Results
Transportation Security Administration (TSA)	●	●	●	●	●	●
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)	●	●	●	●	●	●
U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)	●	●	●	●	◑	◑
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)	◑	●	●	●	●	◑
U.S. Secret Service	◑	●	●	●	●	◑

Legend:

○ The component did not take the step in any of the 3 years (2018–2020).

◑ The component took at least some parts of the step in at least one year.

● The component took and documented the action planning step each year.

Source: GAO analysis of TSA, USCIS, CBP, ICE and U.S. Secret Service action plans and OPM action planning guidance to improve Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Scores.| GAO-21-204

Identify the Issues: As we previously recommended in 2012, DHS components should identify the root causes of their employee engagement challenges and link these root causes to their employee engagement action plans.[29] In 2015, when we identified the key drivers of employee engagement across the federal government, we also reported that because these drivers are the strongest predictors of the EEI, the drivers, along with the root causes for employee engagement challenges, could be starting points for all agencies aiming to improve employee engagement.[30] Some of the selected components have consistently aligned their action plans to the root causes affecting their employee engagement, but other components have not. Specifically, three components—USCIS, TSA, and CBP—consistently leveraged information from their focus groups and results from the OPM FEVS to identify root causes and linked root causes to their action plans.

[29]GAO-12-940.

[30]GAO-15-585.

However, the remaining two selected components—Secret Service and ICE—did not consistently identify and align their action plans to root causes each year. ICE included root causes in its 2020 action plan but did not align the actions in its plan to these root causes. The Secret Service identified root causes in its 2018 action plan and aligned multi-year initiatives to these root causes. Although the Secret Service continued to include these initiatives in its 2019 and 2020 action plans, these plans did not include a discussion of previously identified root causes of employee engagement.

An important part of this key element of the employee engagement action planning process, is collecting data in addition to the OPM FEVS.[31] The components that we selected have used a variety of data collection methods, including focus groups and pulse surveys, to identify information to supplement and interpret results from the OPM FEVS.

- *Focus groups:* Some of the selected components have implemented focus groups to supplement the data they receive from the OPM FEVS. For instance, since 2016, TSA has contracted with a third-party vendor to conduct focus groups that allow TSA to identify the root causes of employee engagement challenges at particular work sites (e.g., an airport). In response, the TSA site subsequently develops a local action plan to address the results of the focus group. Similarly, in 2019, ICE developed a pilot program that involves conducting focus groups to assist them in determining the root causes of employee engagement challenges. Upon completing the focus groups, ICE officials stated that another group of employees collectively identifies and prioritizes a list of actions to be reviewed by senior leadership and potentially implemented to address employee morale challenges. In addition, officials from USCIS and Secret Service stated that these components also conduct focus groups at the individual office level to assist local leadership in identifying areas for improvement. Lastly, officials from CBP stated that they have also conducted focus groups as part of the 20-20-20 initiative, which focuses on improving employee engagement at the agency's lowest scoring work units.

- *Pulse surveys:* Some of the selected components also conduct pulse surveys to determine employee perspectives at a given point in time or about a particular office. For instance, TSA administered at least ten pulse surveys related to employee morale between 2018 and 2020, including a recent survey on the effects of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on the workforce. The Secret Service also recently

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[31]GAO-15-585.

hired a data scientist to assist with the administration and analysis of pulse surveys. Similarly, USCIS supplements data from the OPM FEVS by conducting local pulse surveys to monitor changes in employee engagement over time. According to ICE officials, ICE used a pulse survey within its human capital office to collect information on a program developed in response to employee engagement focus groups.

- *Input from unions and employee groups:* A 2015 OPM memorandum states that representatives from employee labor groups can also provide valuable insights throughout the employee engagement action planning process and assist in collecting employee commitment and input. At the Secret Service, for example, its Leadership Development Council represents employees and reviews the annual employee engagement action plans.

Set Goals: Each of the selected components set goals either broadly to improve its scores on the OPM FEVS, or more specifically, to improve certain categories or questions within its scores. For example, TSA's 2020 action plan states that it will target enterprise-wide improvements in TSA's most challenged areas on the OPM FEVS. Similarly, ICE's 2020 action plan states that its focus is improving employee engagement across ICE. In addition, CBP's 2020 action plan focuses on more specific areas of improving communication, increasing employee motivation, and providing a higher level of recognition for employee contributions and performance.

Identify Staff and Budget Resources: Each of the selected components in our sample identified designated officials and offices with responsibilities for developing and providing input for the annual action plan. For example, USCIS developed the Senior Engagement Council, which is composed of volunteer members of the Senior Executive Service and aims to provide strategic guidance and oversight for employee engagement efforts within the agency. According to USCIS officials, members of the Senior Engagement Council act as an advisory body to advise USCIS senior leadership regarding how to improve employee engagement within the agency. The Secret Service developed a similar group, the Leadership Development Council, which includes a range of representatives from non-supervisory employees through employees in the Senior Executive Service. The purpose of this council is to represent the needs of the representatives' communities through the action planning process, and advise Secret Service leadership. In addition, the council developed a competency-based leadership development system for all occupational groups and grade levels across the Secret Service.

Components may also identify whether additional resources are needed to implement their action plans. For some initiatives that may not need additional resources, components designated existing offices to oversee implementation. For example, in their 2020 action plan, USCIS tasked its Senior Engagement Council with holding leadership panels to promote organizational transparency. Other initiatives may require additional resources, such as obtaining the services of an external contractor to conduct focus groups. For example, TSA officials stated that TSA works with an external contractor to conduct focus groups at different airports.

Develop the Action Plan: According to OCHCO officials, component action plans guide the action planning process to improve component scores on the OPM FEVS. Each selected component developed an annual plan that included actions to respond to the OPM FEVS scores each year from 2018 through 2020. According to OCHCO officials, the components are to submit draft action plans to OCHCO each year in February.[32] After OCHCO reviews the plans and provides feedback to the components, component officials determine whether and how to incorporate OCHCO's feedback as they finalize the plans. According to OCHCO officials, they prefer that the heads of the components review and approve their component's action plans; however, this is not currently a requirement and does not always occur. According to OCHCO officials, component leadership approval of the action plans is important because offices from across the component frequently are responsible for implementing the action plans, not solely the human capital offices that develop the plans. In addition, it is unclear whether components incorporate OCHCO's feedback because OCHCO does not require components to resubmit the plans to OCHCO for approval prior to finalizing the plans at the component level. We have previously reported, as part of our work monitoring the *Strengthening DHS Management Functions* high-risk area, that top leadership support and demonstrated strong commitment are essential elements needed to address high-risk issues.[33] Approval from both OCHCO and component leadership for the annual engagement action plans would help ensure both component and

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[32]Because of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic during the time frame that the annual DHS action process typically occurs, the 2020 process was delayed, according to OCHCO officials. As a result, the components finalized their 2020 action plans in late summer 2020 whereas the goal is to finalize plans in March or April, according to OCHCO officials.

[33]GAO-19-157SP.

departmental leadership commitment to the initiatives in the plans and for improving employee engagement.

Implement the Action Plan: Most of the selected components established output-based performance measures, set target dates, and documented progress in implementing elements of their action plan. For instance, in its 2020 action plan, TSA provided detailed information about planned actions to address emerging causes related to COVID-19. As part of this action plan, the agency identified output measures and set a target completion date, toward which TSA has made some progress. ICE's 2020 employee engagement action plan identifies the planned expansion of ICE's internal coaching program as one of its planned actions. For each of its planned actions, ICE listed target completion dates and the current status of the action. For example, the plan lists the current number of clients each ICE coach had at the time the plan was developed. ICE also included output-based performance measures to track implementation of the planned actions in its 2020 plan. CBP also detailed specific actions to address issues relating to employee engagement, such as administering a pulse survey to generate employee motivation and encouraging increased leadership communication. However, CBP did not include target dates for progress or completion of the actions in its 2020 action plan. Some action plans identify actions in sustainment and track their continued implementation. For example, the Secret Service's 2018 employee engagement action plan stated that the performance plans of all Secret Service senior executives and supervisors were to include at least one measurable element related to employee engagement. The Secret Service 2018 and 2019 employee engagement action plans included target dates for completion and once this action was in sustainment, the 2020 action plan continued tracking its implementation.

Monitor and Evaluate the Results of the Implementation: Most selected components did not track implementation results over time. Furthermore, across the 3 years of plans reviewed, three out of the five selected components did not consistently establish and set targets for outcome-based performance measures that would enable the component to evaluate whether a specific initiative in its plan effectively contributed to improving employee engagement. Without outcome-based performance measures to track the results of the component initiatives over time, it is not possible to assess what, if any, progress its initiatives are making toward improving employee engagement.

- TSA consistently included at least one outcome-based performance measure related to employee engagement in each of its action plans from 2018 through 2020. In 2018 and 2019, TSA aligned its action plan initiatives to root causes identified through focus groups discussions. TSA's action plans for these years identified measures of success for these initiatives. In 2018, TSA developed an outcome-based performance measure to track the results of local action planning on FEVS scores and set a target for this measure. In 2019, TSA included and set a target for an outcome measure on the results of its employee coaching program. In its 2020 action plan, TSA incorporated targeted outcome-based performance measures to track what effect, if any, their initiatives were having on measures of employee engagement.

- USCIS developed and defined how it would measure short, middle, and long-term measures of success for initiatives in its 2020 action plan, including outcome-based performance measures to track progress toward improving employee engagement, and set targets for what constitutes success for these outcome-based performance measures. In its 2018 and 2019 action plans, USCIS included an outcome-based performance measure to track the results of leadership initiatives.

- ICE did not consistently use outcome-based performance measures to set targets and track the progress of its initiatives from 2018 through 2020. ICE included at least one outcome-based performance measure related to employee engagement in each plan from 2018 through 2020. ICE set targets for one outcome-based performance measure related to improving employee engagement in its 2019 and 2020 plans, however, ICE did not set targets for any of the outcome-based performance measures related to employee engagement in 2018.

- The Secret Service consistently developed outcome-based performance measures to track the progress of their initiatives in relationship to improving employee engagement, however, the Secret Service did not set targets for these measures. According to Secret Service officials, beginning in 2015, the Secret Service undertook efforts to improve employee engagement, which included prioritizing their leadership team's commitment to employee engagement. Specifically, the Secret Service has tracked its progress with EEI subindices—such as those related to leadership and intrinsic work experience—to determine the success of its actions over multiple years. In its 2019 employee engagement action plan mid-cycle update, the Secret Service reported an increase of 7 percentage

points in its overall EEI score, 10 percentage points in the leadership subindex, and 6 percentage points in the intrinsic work experience subindex. The Secret Service credits these increases to its action plan initiatives related to enhancing employee professional growth, leadership accountability, and enhancing agency communications.

- CBP also leveraged questions from the OPM FEVS to serve as measures of success for initiatives in its action plans each year from 2018 through 2020. CBP included at least one question from the OPM FEVS with the stated purpose of measuring success in its 2018 and 2019 action plans, but did not set targets for what constitutes success using these measures. For example, in 2019, CBP included an OPM FEVS question that relates to training as a unit of measurement for its planned employee training initiatives. The plan did not include CBP's starting score for that OPM FEVS question or a target score for the question. However, the plan did include objectives that CBP would like to meet in this area, such as increasing the number of mentors and mentees in CBP's mentoring program by 1 and 3 percent, respectively. The plan also did not state what, if any, progress CBP made since 2018 on the identified measures. CBP officials stated that they have not collected data on the results of their initiatives listed in their action plans but stated they intend to collect these data in the future.

Our prior reports and guidance have stated that performance measurement should evaluate both processes (outputs) and outcomes related to program activities. Specifically, we have noted that output measures address the type or level of program activities conducted and the direct products or services delivered by a program, such as the number of trainings given, while outcome measures address the results of products and services, such as changes in engagement or a driver of engagement. Output measures, along with targets, provide an indication of the status of program implementation—step five in OPM's action planning cycle. Outcome measures can help in assessing the results of a program, identifying areas that need improvement, and ensuring accountability for end results—step six in OPM's action planning cycle.[34] Specifically, with respect to employee engagement initiatives, outcome measures can help assess whether the initiatives implemented are increasing employee engagement.

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[34]GAO-18-205, GAO-14-207, GAO-12-208G, GAO-11-646SP, GAO/NSIAD-99-169, and GAO/GGD-96-118.

As of November 2020, OCHCO has not provided components with written guidance on steps the components should take to develop and document their employee engagement action plans that they submit to OCHCO for review. Specifically, OCHCO has not directed the components in writing to include root causes, output-based performance measures, and outcome-based performance measures in their employee engagement action plans and has not required component leadership to approve the plans each year. OCHCO officials said they provide informal verbal guidance early in the annual action planning cycle but noted that this informal guidance has not been sufficient to ensure components consistently submit high-quality plans for OCHCO's review. In addition, officials from one of the selected components concurred with OCHCO and stated that it would be beneficial for OCHCO to provide consistent information on what to include in their action plans.

OCHCO officials stated that they plan to develop written guidance and several template options for components to use for action planning, and they anticipate issuing this guidance early in 2021. However, until such guidance is developed, it is not clear whether these templates will require components to address all the key elements of action planning, including assessing the root causes of employee engagement as well as identifying and defining how to measure output and outcome-based performance measures. By including this information in the anticipated written guidance, DHS could better ensure that the components design action plans to track initiatives and results over time, which would enable effective performance measurement. Guidance requiring components to review information such as the key drivers of engagement to identify the root causes of engagement challenges, set output-based implementation targets, and set goals through outcome-based performance measures could enable components to better plan and prioritize engagement efforts and establish a framework to monitor the progress toward these goals. Requiring OCHCO and component leadership approval of the employee engagement action plans would help ensure agreement and commitment to the component efforts to improve employee engagement. In addition, by approving the final employee engagement action plans, OCHCO could ensure that the components meet the requirements of OCCHO's written guidance.

In addition to taking steps to ensure the employee engagement action plans include important elements such as root causes and performance measures, it is critically important that OCHCO is well-positioned to direct DHS-wide progress in improving employee engagement. However, OCHCO does not monitor whether components' efforts are effective.

Specifically, OCHCO does not ensure that components review and assess the results of their actions and then use this information to adjust, reprioritize, and identify new actions needed to improve employee engagement. Although employee engagement at DHS has improved in recent years, further progress in improving employee engagement is needed as DHS has the lowest EEI of any large or very large federal agency. Through our work monitoring the *Strengthening DHS Management Functions* high-risk area, we developed, and DHS concurred with, specific outcomes that DHS must address to make progress in addressing the high-risk designation. One of these outcomes requires DHS to make further progress toward increasing its employee engagement scores.[35] In addition, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* state that management should establish and operate monitoring activities to monitor the internal control system and evaluate results.[36]

DHS has delegated employee engagement action planning efforts to its components, but OCHCO also plays an important role in ensuring component efforts are effective in making progress toward this DHS-wide outcome. As previously discussed, OCHCO oversees the component action planning process by reviewing draft action plans and collects mid-cycle status updates. However, OCHCO does not provide feedback to components on their mid-cycle status updates or use this process to drive improvements in implementing and reviewing the results of the action plans. OCHCO officials stated that they have not monitored component implementation of their action plans and whether the components collect data on the results of their efforts, in part, due to staffing constraints within the office.

OCHCO officials stated that they hired additional officials to work in the employee engagement office from 2017 through 2019, and as of October 2020, they were in the process of hiring one additional person. OCHCO officials said this would allow OCHCO to have greater capacity to monitor action plans implementation and results going forward. With the information collected through the employee engagement steering committee, working group, and annual reviews of component action

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[35]The outcome related to employee engagement requires that DHS improve its EEI past the 2010 benchmark year for two years and reduce the gap between DHS's average EEI and the government-wide average EEI. Although DHS has increased its EEI from 2015 to 2019, DHS's EEI remained below its 2010 level until 2019. In addition, DHS's 2019 EEI remains 6 percentage points below the government-wide average EEI.

[36]GAO-14-704G.

plans, OCHCO is in a unique position to monitor the implementation and results of the component action planning process and provide feedback to components on any areas where components have not achieved intended goals for employee engagement. Monitoring the components' implementation of OPM's action planning cycle to ensure the components review and assess the results of their actions and use this information to adjust, reprioritize, and identify new actions needed could help ensure components' efforts are effective at improving engagement. This would contribute to meeting the DHS-wide outcome that is necessary for improving DHS's human capital management and making progress toward addressing the high-risk area.

Conclusions

While DHS has made some progress improving employee engagement from 2015 through 2019, additional steps and sustained management attention will be essential to DHS continuing its progress. Although DHS employees can face challenges such as difficult working conditions, DHS and its major operational components face the same drivers of employee engagement as the rest of the federal government. Because these drivers are components of effective organizational management and are associated with significant increases in employee engagement, addressing these drivers of engagement could result in notable improvements in overall engagement.

DHS components have used their annual employee engagement action planning process to identify and undertake efforts to improve employee engagement. However, DHS does not provide components with written guidance on what steps components should take to develop and document this process in their employee engagement action plans and components do not consistently undertake key elements of the process. Providing written guidance on the action planning process and monitoring to ensure that the components review and assess the results of their actions and to adjust, reprioritize, and identify new actions to improve employee engagement would better position DHS—through its components—to make additional gains in employee engagement. As part of establishing the requirements for this process through such guidance, requiring approval from OCHCO and component leadership would help ensure department-wide commitment to improving employee engagement. Continuing to make progress in improving employee engagement is essential, particularly given the importance of DHS's missions and the impact of employee engagement on agency performance.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making a total of three recommendations to DHS:

DHS OCHCO should, through its planned written guidance to components on the employee engagement action planning process, establish the elements required in component engagement action plans, including leveraging information such as their key drivers to identify root causes, setting output-based implementation targets, and setting goals through outcome-based performance measures. (Recommendation 1)

DHS OCHCO should, through its planned written guidance to components on the employee engagement action planning process, require the approval of OCHCO and the heads of the components to finalize the employee engagement action plans. (Recommendation 2)

DHS OCHCO should monitor components' implementation of the OPM action planning cycle to ensure the components review and assess the results of their actions to adjust, reprioritize, and identify new actions needed to improve employee engagement. (Recommendation 3)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DHS and OPM for review and comment. In its comments, reproduced in appendix IV, DHS concurred with our three recommendations and described actions planned to address them. DHS also provided technical comments, which we incorporated into this report, as appropriate. OPM had no comments on the draft report. We also provided a draft of Appendix II to the Departments of Justice, Commerce, and Transportation. The Department of Transportation had a technical comment, which we incorporated into Appendix II. The Departments of Justice and Commerce had no comments on the draft appendix.

With regard to our first recommendation, that DHS OCHCO should, through its planned written guidance, establish the elements required in component employee engagement action plans, DHS responded that it plans to use the written guidance to components to establish the elements required in component employee engagement action plans. These actions, if implemented effectively, should address the intent of our recommendation. DHS estimated that it will issue this written guidance and complete these actions by March 31, 2021.

With regard to our second recommendation, that DHS OCHCO should, through its planned written guidance, require the approval of OCHCO and the heads of components to finalize the component employee engagement action plans, DHS responded that it plans to require such

approvals through its planned written guidance on component engagement action plans. These actions, if implemented effectively, should address the intent of our recommendation. DHS estimated that it will complete these actions by March 31, 2021.

With regard to our third recommendation, that DHS OCHCO should monitor components' implementation of the OPM action planning cycle to ensure the components review and assess the results of their actions to adjust, reprioritize, and identify new actions needed to improve employee engagement, DHS responded that it plans to include guidelines for how OCHCO will monitor action plan progress in its planned written guidance for components. DHS estimated that it will complete these actions by March 31, 2021. After OCHCO issues such guidelines, it will be important for OCHCO to use those guidelines to monitor the employee engagement action planning cycle to ensure the components review and assess the results of their actions. These actions, if implemented effectively, should address the intent of our recommendation.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security and the Director of the Office of Personnel Management, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at 404-679-1875 or curriec@gao.gov. Contact points for our Office of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of our report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix V.

Sincerely yours,

Chris Currie
Director, Homeland Security and Justice

Appendix I: Analysis of the Drivers of Employee Engagement at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

To identify the key drivers of employee engagement at DHS and determine how they compare to government-wide engagement drivers we analyzed Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (OPM FEVS) data from the 2019 administration of the survey.

Scope and Data Source

The scope of our analysis included all DHS employees who completed the OPM FEVS. The 2019 OPM FEVS was conducted as a census administered to approximately 182,000 DHS employees. In 2019, the DHS response rate was approximately 42 percent.

Using record level OPM FEVS 2019 data, we then used multiple linear regression analysis to assess the correlation between the driver questions and the Employee Engagement Index (EEI), controlling for other factors such as component and employee characteristics.[1] Because of the number of missing responses to the OPM FEVS questions, we also included a category for missing for each of the OPM FEVS questions in the model. In addition to the model for all DHS employees, we ran separate models for each of the components with more than 1,000 employees who responded to the OPM FEVS to examine the relationship between the key driver questions and the EEI within each component. These eight components included more than 95 percent of the DHS employees who responded to the OPM FEVS.

While OPM calculates the EEI and its component scores at the group level, we used data from OPM to recalculate the EEI for each individual. The individual level calculation is scaled between 0 and 100 and is based on the proportion of each individual's positive responses to the 15 constituent EEI questions.

Identification of OPM FEVS Questions

To determine the OPM FEVS questions to include in our statistical models, we leveraged our prior work from 2015 that identified potential drivers of employee engagement and OPM FEVS questions that serve as proxies for those drivers.[2] Our prior work reviewed relevant literature and interviewed knowledgeable researchers, government officials from the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia responsible for the comparable public-sector employee survey, and consultants on employee engagement to identify potential drivers of employee engagement. We

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[1]We controlled for the following demographic variables: supervisory status, agency tenure, location (headquarters or field), veteran's status, age, sex, education, reported likelihood of leaving their job in the next year, and race and ethnicity.

[2]GAO-15-585.

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then selected at least one OPM FEVS question as a proxy for each of the potential drivers that we identified as shown in table 5. The questions that we selected were those we determined to be the most actionable by managers and representative of the potential driver. We also selected three drivers and questions for other public policy considerations.

Table 5: Potential Drivers and Corresponding Selected 2019 Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (OPM FEVS) Questions Included in GAO's Statistical Model

Potential Driver Identified in Engagement Literature	2019 OPM FEVS Question Selected for Model as Proxy for Potential Driver	2019 OPM FEVS Question Number
Career development and training	I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.	1
Communication	How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization?	64
Coworkers and teamwork	The people I work with cooperate to get the job done.	20
Diversity and inclusion	Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds.	55
Employee empowerment and involvement	I believe the results of this survey will be used to make my agency a better place to work.	41
Employee empowerment and involvement	How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?	63
Fair and equitable treatment[a]	I can disclose a suspected violation of any law, rule or regulation without fear of reprisal.[a]	17
Fair and equitable treatment[a]	Arbitrary action, personal favoritism and coercion for partisan political purposes are not tolerated.[a]	37
Fair and equitable treatment[a]	Prohibited Personnel Practices are not tolerated.[a]	38
Innovation	Creativity and innovation are rewarded.	32
Mission/job/skills match	My work unit has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals.	29
Pay and benefits	Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your pay?	70
Performance management	My supervisor provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my job performance.	46
Physical work environment	Physical conditions allow employees to perform their jobs well.	14
Recognition	In my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way.	24
Resource and information access	I have sufficient resources to get my job done.	9
Work-life balance	My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues.	42
Workload	My workload is reasonable.	10

Source: GAO analysis of employee engagement literature and the OPM FEVS. | GAO-21-204

[a]Potential driver and question were selected for public policy considerations.

Given the large number of cases in our DHS-wide analysis, many of the coefficients on the drivers in the model were statistically significant.

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Accordingly, we incorporated a substantive threshold in our determination of whether an independent variable acted as a driver. We considered variables to be drivers of engagement if they had a coefficient that rounded to 3 or above, indicating that on average, each increase in positivity of responses was associated with a 3 percentage point increase in the 0 to 100 measure of engagement. In other words, a coefficient of 3 implies that, compared to a respondent who did not answer positively to a given driver question, a respondent who answered positively would have a predicted engagement score 3 percentage points higher.

The results for our DHS and component models appear in tables 8 and 9 in appendix III. They demonstrate that while almost all of the questions we tested attained statistical significance, a subset of questions could be considered drivers in that they had statistically significant coefficients that rounded to 3 or above.

Limitations

The potential drivers we considered in our models were selected based on an extensive review of academic, government, and policy-related literature and a logical assessment of the particular concepts with which they related. However, researchers may disagree over which of the OPM FEVS questions provide the best and most actionable proxies for the drivers we identified. Had we selected different questions as proxies for drivers found in the literature, our results may have been different.

The OPM FEVS was not initially designed with the express purpose of measuring engagement or of identifying factors related to engagement. To the extent policymakers seek to use data to assess drivers of engagement, best practices suggest designing a survey or questions to align expressly with the concepts of interest.

Our models are not causal assessments of the relationship between the specific OPM FEVS questions included in our models and increased engagement. While our results identify some areas that might relate to increased engagement, we cannot be certain that an investment in a specific driver will result in increases in employee engagement. However, our results do confirm a general consistency of which drivers of the EEI, as measured by questions currently available in OPM FEVS data, appear to be statistically and substantively significant across DHS and many of its components.

Appendix II: Resources for Addressing the Key Drivers of Employee Engagement

The key drivers of employee engagement at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are (1) holding constructive performance conversations, (2) career development and training, (3) work-life balance, (4) inclusive work environment, and (5) communication from management. These are also among the top drivers of employee engagement across the federal government. We met with officials from the Departments of Justice, Commerce, and Transportation based on similarities these departments share with DHS and discussed actions these departments have taken related to the key drivers of employee engagement. In addition, through our prior work identifying the key drivers of employee engagement across the federal government, we identified examples of actions federal agencies have taken to address the key drivers. We have also previously reported guidance and leading practices for how agencies can effectively address these drivers. Table 6 summarizes each of these resources.

Table 6: Resources for Addressing the Key Drivers of Employee Engagement and Examples of Actions Federal Agencies Have Taken to Address These Key Drivers

Key driver	Resources for addressing the key driver
Constructive performance conversations	• We have previously reported that candid and constructive feedback helps individuals maximize their contribution and potential for understanding and realizing the goals and objectives of an organization.[a] • In our prior work discussing the key drivers of employee engagement across the federal government, we reported that the Department of Education (Education) implemented a process to help ensure that constructive performance conversations regularly occur. In addition to department-wide requirements for supervisors to hold two performance conversations a year, one office within Education, the Office of the Chief Information Officer officials said that they required all supervisors to offer their employees optional quarterly conversations. These quarterly performance conversations were guided by a set of specific topics that supervisors and employees developed together to ensure that employees received consistent and regular constructive feedback and coaching.
Career development and training	• We have previously reported that training and development programs assist an agency in achieving its mission and goals by improving individual and, ultimately, organizational performance.[b] • Officials from the Department of Justice discussed a recent expansion of their department-wide employee mentoring program in an effort to encourage participation across grade levels and work location. Officials from the Department of Transportation also discussed the recent implementation of a department-wide mentoring program.

Key driver	Resources for addressing the key driver
	• In our prior work discussing the key drivers of employee engagement across the federal government, we reported that at the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA), another of our past case study agencies, officials said the agency focused on providing training for employees throughout their careers. For example, NCUA required each employee to develop an individual development plan. For employees new to credit union examining—a majority of employees— NCUA had a standardized 18-month training program that combined classroom and practical work. New examiners were required to complete a core set of courses and were also able to choose additional elective courses. NCUA officials said that they constantly assessed formal and informal training for entry-level employees to identify areas to improve the curriculum and instruction. For more experienced examiners, NCUA provided continuing training and development, according to these officials.
Work-life balance	• We have previously reported that increasing the awareness of available work-life programs, tailoring benefits and incentives to employees' needs, and addressing barriers to telework are key strategies for managing the current and future federal workforce.[c]
	• Officials within the Departments of Transportation and Commerce stated they have adopted and expanded work-life balance flexibilities such as the ability for eligible employees to telework and adopt flexible work schedules, respectively.
	• In our prior work discussing the key drivers of employee engagement across the federal government, we reported that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) implemented an outreach strategy to inform staff about child and elder care resources after learning that employees were not aware of the services or did not know that they qualified for these services. Officials said employee knowledge of and agency commitment to these kinds of programs enhanced supervisor support for work-life balance. Similarly, to support work-life balance, as part of its engagED initiative, Education revised telework policies, provided training for managers and employees on the new polices and on working in a telework environment, and improved infrastructure to make telework as effective as time spent in the office, according to Education officials.
Inclusive work environment	• We have previously reported the importance of agencies developing supervisors and managers who have effective managerial, communication, and interpersonal skills to supervise most effectively in a workplace with diverse employees.[d]
	• Officials from the Department of Commerce identified diversity and inclusion councils within each of the department's bureaus as a tool to improve employee engagement.
	• In our prior work discussing the key drivers of employee engagement across the federal government, we reported that the FTC established an agency-wide Diversity Council to develop comprehensive strategies to promote understanding and opportunity throughout FTC. FTC officials said that employees of all levels were interested in forming such a council. This included employees who experienced firsthand the diversity issues as well as managers who could address those issues. The goal of FTC's Diversity Council—composed of representatives from each bureau and office—was to engage employees and supervisors across the agency, make recommendations for improving diversity, and foster the professional development of all agency employees, according to these officials.

Key driver	Resources for addressing the key driver
Communication from management	• We have previously reported that management should communicate throughout an agency the information needed to achieve its objectives.[e]
	• Officials from the Department of Transportation attributed an increase in scores on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey to a cultural change where department leadership ensured opened lines communication with employees. These officials stated that holding senior executives within the department accountable for organizational morale through their performance plans assisted with this cultural change. Officials from the Department of Transportation also discussed their "Idea Hub" that enables employees across the department to submit ideas for how to improve the organization. Department of Transportation officials stated that the department reviews each submission and tasks the office overseeing that area of responsibility to review the submission and provide a response. Officials stated that each submission receives a response regardless of whether the department undertakes changes in response to the submission. Officials from the Federal Highway Administration, which operates within the Department of Transportation, stated the process of responding publicly to each idea acts a mechanism to communicate directly with employees about programs and initiatives that may be ongoing or under consideration at the department.
	• In our prior work discussing the key drivers of employee engagement across the federal government, we reported that NCUA officials stated that the head of the agency and its senior leaders communicated with line employees (who were mostly in the field) through quarterly webinar meetings. The meetings were scheduled to accommodate the field employees' frequent travel schedules and generally started with any "hot topics" and continued with discussion of agency efforts to meet mission goals. The agency head took questions in advance and during the webinar and, when needed, participants researched and shared responses with agency employees. According to NCUA officials, these regular, substantive conversations demonstrated top leadership's commitment and respect for all employees as valued business partners.

Source: GAO analysis of interviews with agency officials and agency documents. | GAO-21-204

Note: In 2015, we reported the key drivers of employee engagement across the government. See GAO, Federal Workforce: Additional Analysis and Sharing of Promising Practices Could Improve Employee Engagement and Performance, GAO-15-585 (Washington, D.C.: July 14, 2015).

[a]GAO, *Results-Oriented Cultures: Creating a Clear Linkage between Individual Performance and Organizational Success*, GAO-03-488 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 14, 2003).

[b]GAO, *Human Capital: A Guide for Assessing Strategic Training and Development Efforts in the Federal Government*, GAO-04-546G (Washington, D.C.: March 2004)

[c]GAO, *Federal Workforce: Key Talent Management Strategies for Agencies to Better Meet Their Missions*, GAO-19-181 (Washington, D.C.: March 2019).

[d]GAO, *Diversity Management: Expert-Identified Leading Practices and Agency Examples*, GAO-05-90 (Washington, D.C.: January 2005).

[e]GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO-14-704G (Washington D.C. September 2014).

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Using record level data from the 2019 Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (OPM FEVS), we then used multiple linear regression analysis to assess the correlation between the driver questions and the Employee Engagement Index (EEI), controlling for other factors such as component and employee characteristics. OPM's 2019 FEVS was conducted as a census administered to approximately 182,000 DHS employees. In 2019, the DHS response rate was approximately 42 percent.

In addition to the model for all DHS employees, we ran separate models for each of the components with more than 1,000 employees who responded to the OPM FEVS to examine the relationship between the key driver questions and the EEI within each component, those results are listed in tables 8 and 9.

The coefficients listed for the OPM FEVS questions in tables 7 through 9 indicate the magnitude of the positive association with the EEI when a survey respondent provides positive response to the question serving as a proxy for that driver compared to a respondent who does not provide a positive response. A positive response includes "strongly agree" or "agree" responses to an OPM FEVS question. A non-positive response includes "neutral," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" responses to an OPM FEVS question. Because of the number of missing responses to the OPM FEVS questions, we also included a category for missing for each of the OPM FEVS questions in the model. The coefficients for missing responses listed for the OPM FEVS questions in table 7 indicate the magnitude of the association with the EEI when a survey respondent does not provide a response to the question compared to a respondent who provides a negative response. For example, missing a response to question 46 was associated with a 6 percentage point increase in EEI compared to responding negatively to question 46. The coefficients listed for the demographic variables in the table indicate the magnitude of association with the EEI compared to the identified reference variable. Given the large number of cases in our DHS-wide analysis, many of the coefficients on the drivers in the model were statistically significant. Accordingly, we incorporated a substantive threshold in our determination of whether an independent variable acted as a driver.

Table 7: Department of Homeland Security Regression Results

Question/Variable	Coefficient	Standard error
Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey question included in GAO model		
Question no. 46: My supervisor provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my job performance.	0.137**	0.001
Question No. 1: I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.	0.099**	0.001
Question No. 42: My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues.	0.091**	0.001
Question No. 55: Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds.	0.088**	0.001
Question No. 64: How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization?	0.076**	0.001
Question No. 63: How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?	0.055**	0.002
Question No. 17: I can disclose a suspected violation of any law, rule or regulation without fear of reprisal.	0.054**	0.001
Question No. 29: My work unit has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals.	0.049**	0.001
Question No. 32: Creativity and innovation are rewarded.	0.047**	0.002
Question No. 41: I believe the results of this survey will be used to make my agency a better place to work.	0.041**	0.001
Question No. 20: The people I work with cooperate to get the job done.	0.031**	0.001
Question No. 37: Arbitrary action, personal favoritism and coercion for partisan political purposes are not tolerated.	0.024*	0.001
Question No. 24: In my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way.	0.023*	0.001
Question No. 10: My workload is reasonable.	0.023*	0.001
Question No. 38: Prohibited Personnel Practices are not tolerated.	0.021*	0.002
Question No. 9: I have sufficient resources to get my job done.	0.021*	0.001
Question No. 14: Physical conditions allow employees to perform their jobs well.	0.016*	0.001
Question No. 70: Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your pay?	NS	NS
Missing responses		
Question 46	0.061**	0.005
Question 1	0.057**	0.005
Question 42	0.062**	0.005
Question 55	0.037**	0.003
Question 64	0.049**	0.007
Question 63	0.042**	0.007
Question 17	0.018*	0.003
Question 29	0.01*	0.004

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Question/Variable	Coefficient	Standard error
Question 32	0.029*	0.003
Question 41	0.021*	0.002
Question 20	NS	NS
Question 37	0.019*	0.003
Question 24	0.017*	0.003
Question 10	NS	NS
Question 38	0.007*	0.002
Question 9	NS	NS
Question 14	-0.018*	0.006
Question 70	NS	NS
Supervisory status		
Nonsupervisor	Ref.	
Supervisor	-0.005*	0.001
Missing	-0.018*	0.007
Sex		
Male	Ref	
Female	0.016*	0.001
Missing	NS	NS
Education level		
No college	Ref.	
Some college	NS	NS
Bachelor's degree	-0.006*	0.002
Post-graduate degree	-0.008*	0.002
Missing	NS	NS
Agency tenure		
Less than 1 year	0.009*	0.004
1 to 3 years	0.011*	0.002
4 to 5 years	0.006*	0.003
6 to 10 years	NS	NS
11 to 14 years	NS	NS
15 to 20 years	-0.005*	0.002
More than 20 years	Ref.	
Missing	NS	NS
Work location		
Headquarters	Ref.	
Field office	NS	NS
Missing	0.021*	0.006

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Question/Variable	Coefficient	Standard error
Age		
Under 40	Ref.	
40 or older	0.004*	0.001
Missing	NS	NS
Military Service Status		
Prior military service	-0.008*	0.001
No prior military service	Ref.	
Missing	0.000*	0.008
Intent to leave		
Yes, to retire	-0.012*	0.003
Yes, to take another job within the Federal government	-0.029*	0.001
Yes, to take another job outside the Federal government	-0.038**	0.003
Yes, other	-0.033**	0.002
No	Ref	
Missing	NS	NS
Race and Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	0.007*	0.001
Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native	NS	NS
Non-Hispanic Asian	0.009*	0.002
Non-Hispanic Black	0.005*	0.002
Non-Hispanic Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	NS	NS
Non-Hispanic 2 or more races	NS	NS
Missing race or ethnicity	NS	NS
Non-Hispanic White	Ref.	
Component		
U.S. Customs and Border Protection	Ref.	
U.S. Coast Guard	0.046*	0.003
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services	0.011*	0.002
Federal Law Enforcement Training Center	0.028*	0.007
Science and Technology Directorate	0.035**	0.011
Office of Operations Coordination	NS	NS
Federal Emergency Management Agency	0.018*	0.003
Office of the Under Secretary for Management	0.014*	0.006
Office of the Secretary	NS	NS
U.S. Secret Service	0.023*	0.003
Office of the Inspector General	NS	NS
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement	0.007*	0.002

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Question/Variable	Coefficient	Standard error
Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency	0.009*	0.004
Transportation Security Administration	0.018*	0.001
Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office	NS	NS
Other	0.027*	0.006

Legend: * = 95 percent confidence interval does not cross zero, ** = meets the substantial threshold of 0.03, NS = not significant; R2 = 0.796; Number of observations = 76,882

Source: GAO analysis of 2019 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Data. | GAO-21-204

Notes: Model is an ordinary least squares regression with the GAO-constructed employee engagement index as the dependent variable and linear specifications of drivers with variables for each question for missing responses. Positive coefficients reflect increases in positivity. We incorporated a substantive threshold in our determination of whether an independent variable acted as a driver. We considered variables to be drivers of engagement if they had a coefficient that rounded to 3 or above, indicating that on average, each increase in positivity of responses was associated with a 3 percentage point increase in the 0 to 100 scale.

Table 8: GAO's Regression Model Results for the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Potential Driver Coefficients Only)

Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Question	CISA	CBP	FEMA	ICE
Question no. 46: My supervisor provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my job performance.	0.123**	0.133**	0.111**	0.137**
Question No. 1: I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.	0.091**	0.108**	0.102**	0.107**
Question No. 42: My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues.	0.107**	0.094**	0.092**	0.104**
Question No. 55: Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds.	0.110**	0.081**	0.099**	0.098**
Question No. 64: How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization?	0.073**	0.082**	0.066**	0.075**
Question No. 63: How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?	0.073**	0.057**	0.080**	0.059**
Question No. 17: I can disclose a suspected violation of any law, rule or regulation without fear of reprisal.	0.053**	0.059**	0.064**	0.050**
Question No. 29: My work unit has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals.	0.066**	0.046**	0.053**	0.044**
Question No. 32: Creativity and innovation are rewarded.	0.059**	0.051**	0.051**	0.046**
Question No. 41: I believe the results of this survey will be used to make my agency a better place to work.	0.052**	0.042**	0.030**	0.046**
Question No. 20: The people I work with cooperate to get the job done.	0.035**	0.032**	0.037**	0.031**
Question No. 37: Arbitrary action, personal favoritism and coercion for partisan political purposes are not tolerated.	NS	0.027*	NS	0.026*

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Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Question	CISA	CBP	FEMA	ICE
Question No. 24: In my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way.	NS	0.027*	0.019*	0.023*
Question No. 10: My workload is reasonable.	0.022*	0.029*	NS	0.016*
Question No. 38: Prohibited Personnel Practices are not tolerated.	NS	0.008*	0.036**	0.023*
Question No. 9: I have sufficient resources to get my job done.	NS	0.023*	0.020*	0.023*
Question No. 14: Physical conditions allow employees to perform their jobs well.	NS	0.023*	NS	0.011*
Question No. 70: Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your pay?	NS	NS	NS	NS
R2	0.809	0.795	0.808	0.796
Number of observations	1,974	16,450	2,485	8,171

Legend: * = 95 percent confidence interval does not cross zero, ** = meets the substantial threshold of 0.03, NS = not significant

Source: GAO analysis of 2019 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Data. | GAO-21-204

Notes: For each of these estimates, the 95 percent confidence interval ranged from 0.0006 to 0.1476 across all components. Model is an ordinary least squares regression with the GAO-constructed employee engagement index as the dependent variable and linear specifications of drivers with variables for each question. The model includes demographic variables and variables for missing responses but the coefficients for those variables are not listed in this table. Positive coefficients reflect increases in positivity. We incorporated a substantive threshold in our determination of whether an independent variable acted as a driver. We considered variables to be drivers of engagement if they had a coefficient that rounded to 3 or above, indicating that on average, each increase in positivity of responses was associated with a 3 percentage point increase in the 0 to 100 scale.

Table 9: GAO's Regression Model Results for the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the U.S. Secret Service (Secret Service), and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) (Potential Driver Coefficients Only)

Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Question	USCG	USCIS	Secret Service	TSA
Question no. 46: My supervisor provides me with constructive suggestions to improve my job performance.	0.126**	0.124**	0.125**	0.143**
Question No. 1: I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.	0.088**	0.103**	0.106**	0.083**
Question No. 42: My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues.	0.118**	0.101**	0.119**	0.080**
Question No. 55: Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds.	0.093**	0.089**	0.084**	0.086**
Question No. 64: How satisfied are you with the information you receive from management on what's going on in your organization?	0.065**	0.065**	0.058**	0.076**
Question No. 63: How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?	0.064**	0.054**	0.060**	0.045**
Question No. 17: I can disclose a suspected violation of any law, rule or regulation without fear of reprisal.	0.057**	0.051**	0.046**	0.052**

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Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Question	USCG	USCIS	Secret Service	TSA
Question No. 29: My work unit has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals.	0.059**	0.051**	0.045**	0.050**
Question No. 32: Creativity and innovation are rewarded.	0.046**	0.040**	0.034**	0.046**
Question No. 41: I believe the results of this survey will be used to make my agency a better place to work.	0.025*	0.042**	0.036**	0.043**
Question No. 20: The people I work with cooperate to get the job done.	0.046**	0.030**	0.040**	0.026*
Question No. 37: Arbitrary action, personal favoritism and coercion for partisan political purposes are not tolerated.	0.022*	0.026*	NS	0.023*
Question No. 24: In my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way.	NS	0.019*	0.030**	0.026*
Question No. 10: My workload is reasonable.	0.013*	0.017*	0.014*	0.027*
Question No. 38: Prohibited Personnel Practices are not tolerated.	0.027*	0.018*	0.030**	0.030**
Question No. 9: I have sufficient resources to get my job done.	0.013*	0.022*	0.022*	0.021*
Question No. 14: Physical conditions allow employees to perform their jobs well.	0.013*	0.012*	0.031**	0.013*
Question No. 70: Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your pay?	NS	NS	NS	0.005*
R2	0.792	0.795	0.794	0.784
Number of observations	3,120	11,406	2,749	27,356

Legend: * = 95 percent confidence interval does not cross zero, ** = meets the substantial threshold of 0.03, NS = not significant

Source: GAO analysis of 2019 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Data. | GAO-21-204

Notes: For each of these estimates, the 95 percent confidence interval ranged from 0.0006 to 0.1476 across all components. Model is an ordinary least squares regression with the GAO-constructed employee engagement index as the dependent variable and linear specifications of drivers with variables for each question. The model includes demographic variables and variables for missing responses but the coefficients for those variables are not listed in this table. Positive coefficients reflect increases in positivity. We incorporated a substantive threshold in our determination of whether an independent variable acted as a driver. We considered variables to be drivers of engagement if they had a coefficient that rounded to 3 or above, indicating that on average, each increase in positivity of responses was associated with a 3 percentage point increase in the 0 to 100 scale.

Homeland
Security

December 18, 2020

Chris Currie
Director, Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Re: Management Response to Draft Report GAO-21-204, "DHS EMPLOYEE
        MORALE: Some Improvements Made, but Additional Actions Needed to
        Strengthen Employee Engagement"

Dear Mr. Currie:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of
Homeland Security (DHS or the Department) appreciates the U.S. Government
Accountability Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing
this report.

The Department is pleased to note GAO's positive recognition of efforts over the last
several years to address issues related to employee morale, as shown by improved annual
Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey scores. Improving employee engagement at a
department as large and diverse as DHS takes long-term, strategic, and concerted efforts.
We also note the draft report acknowledges the importance of a structured action
planning approach that builds in accountability at the highest levels and, as such, the
importance of the action plans, and support for further strengthening those plans to
continue to build on success. DHS remains committed to listening to employee feedback
and taking appropriate action to make positive change.

The draft report contained three recommendations with which the Department concurs.
Attached find our detailed response to each recommendation. DHS previously submitted
technical comments addressing several accuracy and contextual issues under a separate
cover for GAO's consideration.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.

Sincerely,

JIM H CRUMPACKER
Digitally signed by JIM H CRUMPACKER
Date: 2020.12.18 12:36:30 -05'00'

JIM H. CRUMPACKER, CIA, CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Attachment

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**Attachment: Management Response to Recommendations
Contained in GAO 21-204**

GAO recommended that the DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO):

Recommendation 1: Through its planned written guidance to components on the
employee engagement action planning process, establish the elements required in
component engagement action plans, including leveraging information such as their key
drivers to identify root causes, setting output based implementation targets, and setting
goals through outcome-based performance measures.

Response: Concur. DHS OCHCO will ensure that the written guidance to components
on the employee engagement action plans includes all established requirements. OCHCO
estimates the final guidance will be issued in March 2021 and will not only establish the
elements required in the action plans, but the approval process as well. Estimated
Completion Date (ECD): March 31, 2021.

Recommendation 2: Through its planned written guidance to components on the
employee engagement action planning process, require the approval of OCHCO and the
heads of the components to finalize the employee engagement action plans.

Response: Concur. DHS OCHCO estimates the final guidance that will be issued in
March 2021 will also require the approval of DHS OCHCO, as well as the heads of
components, prior to finalizing the employee engagement action plans. ECD:
March 31, 2021.

Recommendation 3: Monitor components' implementation of the OPM action planning
cycle to ensure the components review and assess the results of their actions to adjust,
reprioritize, and identify new actions needed to improve employee engagement.

Response: Concur. The written guidance to components on the employee engagement
action plans which OCHCO is currently developing will also include guidelines for how
DHS OCHCO will monitor action plan progress. ECD: March 31, 2021.

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Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgements

GAO contact	Chris Currie, (404) 679-1875 or CurrieC@gao.gov.
Staff Acknowledgements	In addition to the contact named above, Alana Finley (Assistant Director), Mara McMillen (Analyst-in-Charge), Mariel Alper, Ben Crossley, Nina Daoud, David Dornisch, David Hooper, Shirley Hwang, Zina Merritt, SaraAnn Moessbauer, Shannin O'Neill, Kevin Reeves, and Rebecca Shea made significant contributions to this report.