



Distance between best and worst agencies to work widens

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Overall employee satisfaction across government has changed little since 2005, but the gap between the best and worst agencies is growing, according to an assessment released Thursday.

Governmentwide employee satisfaction has decreased 0.4 percent since 2005, according to the 2007 Best Places to Work rankings issued by the Partnership for Public Service and American University's Institute for Public Policy and Implementation. Among the 55 agencies included in both the 2005 and 2007 rankings, more than twice as many declined in satisfaction over the two years than improved.

Since 2005, the gap between the first and last ranked agencies increased by 19 percent. And among the 26 agencies that have participated in all of the rankings since 2003, the spread has increased by 83 percent.

"The best are getting better, and the worst are getting worse," said Max Stier, president of the partnership. "That's a problem ... and it's something we obviously need to focus a great deal of attention on."

The rankings are based on the Office of Personnel Management's 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey. The organizations graded agencies on a number of qualities, as perceived by the 221,000 federal employees who completed the OPM survey. Those dimensions include leadership, teamwork and use of skills, family-friendly culture, strategic management and support for diversity.

The top five large federal agencies were the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Government Accountability Office, the Securities and Exchange Commission, NASA and the Justice Department. For small agencies, the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, the Merit Systems Protection Board, the Office of Management and Budget, the National Science Foundation and the Millennium Challenge Corporation held the top five spots.

The most improved large agency this year was the Social Security Administration, which had a 9.7 percent increase in employee satisfaction and placed 7th in the large agency rankings. Among the small agencies, the Federal Housing Finance Board and the Export-Import Bank of the United States both posted improvements of more than 17 percent.

The survey also found that women are slightly more satisfied than men, and employees under the age of 40 have higher satisfaction scores than those 40 and older.

"Not only do the ... rankings provide federal managers and government leaders with a road map for improving employee engagement and commitment, the rankings also raise red flags for areas of concern," Stier said.

The results indicate that one agency of particular concern is the Homeland Security Department, which came in 29th out of the 30 large agencies included. (The Small Business Administration finished last.) DHS also was the lowest-ranked agency in eight out of 10 workplace categories, including employee skills and mission match, leadership, work-life balance, teamwork and pay and benefits.

At a House subcommittee hearing Thursday, DHS Chief Human Capital Officer Marta Perez attributed many of the department's troubles to the fact that it is still young. She pointed to a review of DHS that found major mergers take about five to seven years to be successful. She added that the department is in a much better position now than it was when OPM's survey was conducted in 2006, largely because it has since implemented new training programs for managers.

But National Treasury Employees Union President Colleen Kelley called the Best Places rankings another "wake-up call" to DHS. "The considerable assets and dedication these employees bring to their jobs should be put to work in the service of our country," she said, "not treated as if they were irrelevant or counterproductive to the agency's mission."