



# BEST PLACES TO WORK IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT®

## DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION

**68.3**

2019  
GOVERNMENT-WIDE SCORE

The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® Teamwork category measures the extent to which employees believe that their colleagues work together effectively, creating a friendly work atmosphere and producing high-quality work products.

### Corresponding Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Questions

- The people I work with cooperate to get the job done. (Q. 20)
- Employees in my work unit share job knowledge with each other. (Q. 26)
- Managers promote communication among different work units (for example, about projects, goals and need-ed resources). (Q. 58)

The best performing agencies have leaders who communicate effectively with their teams, ensure that employees feel valued and heard, and empower staff to collaborate with their colleagues to tackle agency challenges. With staff working remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, fostering teamwork is important as ever. Not surprisingly, the top-ranked agencies in the Best Places to Work rankings all have high Teamwork category scores. Based on our research and discussions with agency leaders, the Partnership and Boston Consulting Group have identified steps agencies can take to strengthen teamwork.

## EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS



### Flatten hierarchy and make decision-making inclusive

At agencies where teamwork is strongest, all employees feel like they have a say in decisions that affect their work.

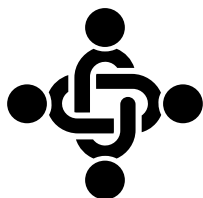
#### Agency Example

The National Science Foundation has seen its Teamwork category score increase or stay the same every year since the 2012 Best Places to Work rankings. During that time, the agency has worked to foster an inclusive culture where all employees feel heard and valued.

NSF has a diverse workforce with a large cadre of senior executives, and many employees who hold Ph.Ds. However, referring to team members as “doctor,” “sir” or “ma’am” is uncommon, and the informality encourages collegiality across the agency. During the hiring process, feedback on job candidates is solicited from a range of employees, including those who may report to the interviewee. And IT staff, rather than making new purchases in a vacuum,

solicit ideas from employees across the agency to understand their challenges and make informed decisions about the technology that might help.

“A significant barrier [to teamwork] can be accepting that everyone has an important voice,” said Rockea Lawson, branch chief at NSF. “Too often in government, it’s ‘I’m a GS 15 and you’re a 10, or I’m a fed and you’re a contractor so our voices carry different weight.’ That mentality can really get in the way of accepting that everyone has something to contribute and everyone’s opinion is valuable.”



### **Create opportunities for employees to collaborate across the organization**

Organizational units within the same agency often work in isolation from each other at great cost to creativity and efficiency. Creating opportunities for employees to collaborate with co-workers from other work units can spur new ideas, help tackle tough challenges and improve agency outcomes.

#### **Agency Example**

At the nation’s intelligence agencies, work is underway to make mobility less bureaucratic by allowing employees to obtain new job assignments more easily. When teams at the National Security Agency encounter a challenge, they can petition their colleagues for help on a jobs board for short term assignments. Ultimately, the intelligence community hopes to replicate the NSA example across all its components, allowing staff to rotate into other work units in need of help for a period of 30, 60 or 90 days before returning to their home unit.

“We really want our talent to be able to surge to where the problem is,” explained Sherry Van Sloun, chief human capital officer at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.



### **Build the team by recognizing employees for good work**

Recognizing employees for doing good work can boost morale and help build a unified team, yet it’s an area where government struggles. According to the 2019 Best Places to Work data, just over half of employees feel recognized for doing high-quality work. Fortunately, recognizing employees does not need to be costly, and can be done in-person as well as virtually. While it’s important for supervisors and senior leaders to acknowledge the good work of their employees—including working effectively as a team—agencies should also encourage peer-to-peer recognition.

#### **Agency Example**

In 2013, the Small Business Administration launched “Kudos for You,” an ongoing initiative that enables SBA employees to recognize their colleagues for their achievements. When an employee is recognized, the individual’s name and accomplishment is listed in the SBA Daily, the agency’s electronic newsletter. “Kudos for You” builds comradery among coworkers and it’s easy to administer. There is no selection process; anyone who wishes to recognize a colleague may do so, and all submissions appear in the daily newsletter. Since 2013, the SBA’s “Performance-Based Rewards and Advancement” category score has improved by 7.5 points and has increased in each of the past four years.

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## Leadership sets the tone

Building and sustaining a workplace where teamwork thrives depends on all employees, but leaders should play an outsized role. By communicating frequently and effectively with employees through multiple channels, particularly during times of heightened uncertainty, holding staff accountable for working together as a team, and setting a good example by being collaborative in their own work, leaders set the tone.

### Agency Example

At the National Science Foundation, many employee performance plans include elements of teamwork or collaboration. This sends a message to staff that it is an area where they are expected to excel and holds them accountable for doing so. NSF also uses multiple platforms to communicate with employees, including videos posted on the website, newsletters, an intranet that's regularly populated with new information, townhalls, TV screens in the hallways and flyers and posters on the wall. In the COVID-19 mandatory telework environment, NSF had to be creative. To keep employees informed, the agency added a COVID-19 section to its intranet. Content includes FAQ documents, messages from HR and resources for staff, including how to maintain a healthy work-life balance while teleworking. NSF leadership has hosted several townhalls to enable two-way communication with employees, and some leaders hold weekly Zoom meetings to check in, make sure everyone is coping well, and keep the team connected. While business is discussed, employees are also invited to share personal updates, including their weekend plans. Finally, in the spirit of openness and to better facilitate collaboration, NSF employees make their Outlook calendars visible to their colleagues as appropriate.

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### Additional Resources

For more information about the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government rankings, see [bestplacestowork.org](https://bestplacestowork.org).

For more information about the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government categories, including Teamwork, see [bestplacestowork.org/analysis/categories](https://bestplacestowork.org/analysis/categories).