



National Weather Service

Organizational Health Action Plan



May 2020

Foreword

The health of an organization is closely tied to its ability to achieve its mission effectively, to cope with struggles and strains, to adapt over time, and to continually learn and grow with a shared sense of purpose. Underpinning those abilities is the essence of who we are - what we care about, how we treat one another, how we hold ourselves accountable, and what we commit to do for the greater good. Those elements define our culture.

The National Weather Service has a set of core principles that articulate our basis for organizational health:

- ***Our people drive our success;*** we are dedicated to our science-based service to the Nation.
- ***We provide the best forecasts possible,*** connecting them to decisions that reduce impacts.
- ***We cannot do it alone;*** teamwork and partnerships are essential for success.
- ***We strive for excellence,*** continuously improving our science and engineering for mission performance.

These principles are also foundational to how we operate. Our shared sense of purpose and appreciation for the entire team helps achieve our vision for a Weather-Ready Nation. From listening to you, the people of the National Weather Service, we have identified two key focus areas to further improve and sustain our organizational health going forward. They include the fundamental elements of Leadership and Professional Growth and Development. They go together. Our future success hangs on continued strong and capable leaders and managers throughout the organization who provide the environment for all to contribute to mission success. It also depends on our ability to train and develop a workforce that is adept and skilled in using the latest tools, from our foundational observing assets to the newest high performance computing technology to the ability to effectively communicate our messages that save lives and protect property.

As our Director, Louis Uccellini outlined in the NWS Strategic Plan:

“We will draw on the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the NWS employees who are among the most highly dedicated and motivated people in the Federal government, committed to realizing our mission of saving lives and property. In turn, we will support our workforce through more comprehensive training, streamlined hiring and development initiatives, and other activities that improve the employee experience at the NWS.”

We look forward to working with everyone to realize the potential of this plan and encourage your participation in seeing it through.

Thank you for all your feedback so far and keep it coming!

Peyton Robertson, Director, Office of Organizational Excellence
John Ogren, Chief Learning Officer



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About This Plan

The Organizational Health Action Plan is a game plan to help improve employee satisfaction and engagement within the workforce. Our desired outcome is to make the National Weather Service (NWS) the best place to work in the federal government.

The plan covers activities that will take place in fiscal years 2019-2022, some of which are already underway. It is a living document that will be modified and improved as we move forward. We have identified six sets of activities under two Development Areas:

Development Area 1: Leaders Lead

- A. Increase employee engagement through improved communication of agency goals and priorities and improve understanding of the cultural attributes to the workforce.
- B. Strengthen managers' leadership skills.
- C. Increase leader knowledge, awareness and support for healthy workforce programs, including improved access to information specific to NWS.
- D. Increase managers' knowledge of performance management and recognition.



Mary Erickson, Deputy Director, details the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan to employees at "The Forecast" event in the NOAA Center for Weather and Climate Prediction auditorium.



Team/Shift Leads match leave requests with the appropriate leave categories in the Field Operations Management course.



Brian Brong and Tom Dang, a mentor-mentee pair brought together during the pilot year of the NWS Mentoring Program, find an opportunity to meet in person

Development Area 2: Professional Growth and Development

- A. Increase overall awareness of career advancement needs and opportunities.
- B. Evaluate and strengthen training opportunities.

The Plan was developed by the NWS Employee Experience Team (EET), chartered to better understand and improve the overall experience of NWS employees. The EET includes representatives from the: Office of Organizational Excellence (OOE); Office of the Chief Learning Officer; Office of the Chief of Staff; Communications Division; Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management Division; Office of the Chief Financial Officer; and field delegates from the Southern Region and the National Centers for Environmental Prediction.



Alexandra Keclik as Executive Officer working with Director Louis Uccellini in Washington, D.C.

Warning Decision Training Division lab filled with participants for the Radar and Applications Course.



The Importance of Organizational Health to the NWS

Goal 3 of the [NWS Strategic Plan](#) is to “*Evolve the NWS to excel in the face of change through investment in our people, partnerships, and organizational performance.*”

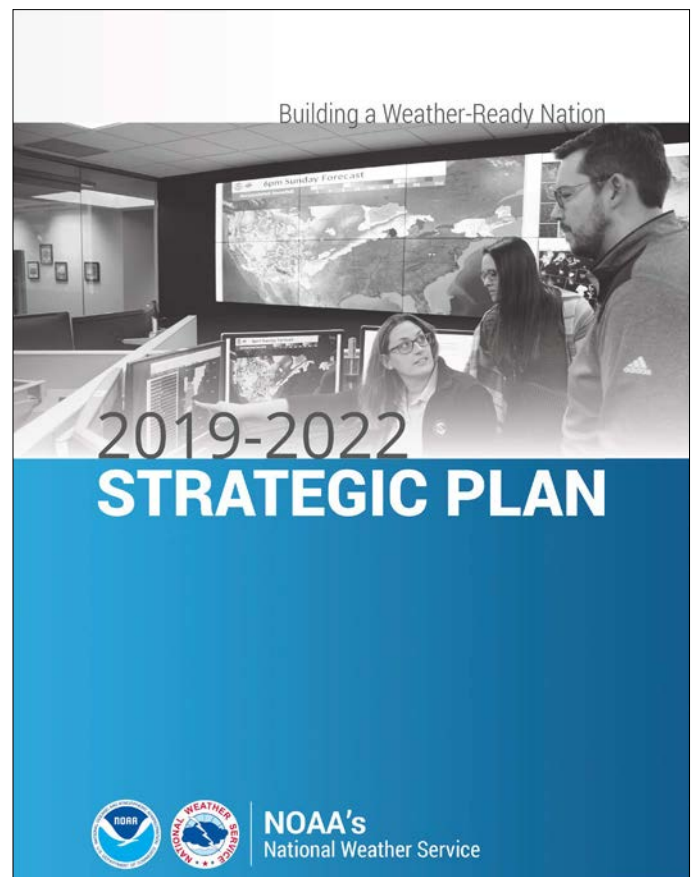
Under this strategic goal, the **Workforce for the Future** section includes these four objectives:

3.1 - Enhance the employee experience by increasing belonging, inclusion, and diversity in the workforce; promoting organizational health and culture initiatives to improve performance and employee satisfaction; cultivating continuous learning and professional development; and increasing the effectiveness of labor-management engagement.

3.2 - Implement a comprehensive workforce training and development plan to advance the expanding skillsets required for operational forecasting, including greater emphasis on impact based decision support services; ensure expertise in core mission support capabilities including engineering, technology, and administration; and strengthen efficiency and productivity with enhanced capabilities in project management, configuration management, and risk management.

3.3 - Sustain workforce capacity and skills that meet evolving mission needs, with outreach and strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of the best available talent, including those with STEM skillsets; implement hiring efficiencies and align hiring actions with workload needs; expand deployment-ready staff certified to support major events in collaboration with local and regional partners and across NOAA; and formalize knowledge transfer systems to sustain mission operations.

3.4 - Strengthen the skills of NWS leaders to be adaptive and lead change effectively.



These strategic objectives require a meaningful investment in organizational health initiatives that improve performance and employee satisfaction.

The NWS has used several different tools to better understand the overall health of the organization and the attitudes and experiences of its employees. This plan is based on the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) results from fiscal years 2018 and 2019. Additionally, in 2015 and 2017, NWS administered the Organizational Health Index assessment. The feedback and insights gained from these employee engagement activities informed leadership and helped identify areas where the organization can grow.



John Potts, Chief Financial Officer, talks to Philip Poyner, WFO Hastings Meteorologist-in-Charge, at the NWS Employee Engagement event during the 2019 National Weather Association conference.

RDML Tim Gallaudet, Deputy NOAA Administrator, and Peyton Robertson, Director, Office of Organizational Excellence, with the NRAP Culture Team at the Department of Commerce.



Headquarters-led Activities

Development Area 1: Leaders Lead

The activities in this Development Area focus on actions that improve the abilities of Managers, Supervisors, and Executives to impact the following:

Healthy Workforce: The NWS makes flexibility the norm, trains managers on how to address barriers, and encourages managers to role model flexible work behaviors

Workforce Motivation: Leaders effectively communicate agency goals and vision to the workforce, are held accountable for operationalizing the culture, and embed culture into work processes

Leadership Quality: Leaders embed ethics and integrity into their business units, mobilize resources to fully address organizational barriers to integrity, and are held accountable for ethical behaviors using observable practices

Performance Management: Creativity and innovation are rewarded; supervisors provide constructive feedback to employees to improve performance, deal with poor performance, and recognize performance differences in a meaningful way

COO John Murphy assumes the role of Governor of NC during an EHM exercise at the National Hurricane Center in Miami, FL.



Activities Within this Developmental Area:

- A. Increase employee engagement through improved communication of agency goals and priorities and improve understanding of the cultural attributes to the workforce.
- B. Strengthen managers' leadership skills.
- C. Increase leader knowledge, awareness and support for healthy workforce programs, including improved access to information specific to NWS.
- D. Increase managers' knowledge of performance management and recognition.

Brian Jackson, Communications Division, finishes an Office of Planning and Programming for Service Delivery leadership webinar for the NWS Insider, featuring Kevin Cooley, Michelle Mainelli, and David Michaud.



FEVS Questions associated with these categories include:

- 23. In my work unit, steps are taken to deal with a poor performer who cannot or will not improve.
- 53. In my organization, senior leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.
- 54. My organization's senior leaders maintain high standards of honesty and integrity.
- 56. Managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization.
- 61. I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders.
- 62. Senior leaders demonstrate support for Work/Life Programs.

Actions

A. Increase employee engagement through improved communication of agency goals and priorities and improve understanding of the cultural attributes to the workforce.

Clear, concise, and open communication is an essential ingredient to a healthy organization and to successful teams. More than half of NWS' most negative FEVS responses are focused on issues of communication. Many of the activities listed below concentrate on expanding the diversity, frequency, and meaningfulness of communication opportunities.

1. Draft a comprehensive NWS Communications Strategy that builds understanding of NWS goals and priorities while affording better means for employees to provide feedback and engage.
2. Develop stories on the NWS Insider to share local, regional, and national culture success stories and best practices.
3. Host/sponsor at least two Employee Engagement meetings per year to share strategic priorities and engage the workforce in a meaningful dialogue about our collective contributions to these priorities (*note recent examples at National Weather Association in 2019 and American Meteorological Society in 2020*).
4. Craft an intentional and purposeful strategy for two-way communication and engagement between employees and senior leaders. A member of the Executive Council and FMC leaders as appropriate, will visit and engage employees in all offices, including WFOs, RFCs, CWSUs, NCEP centers and portfolio offices, within (3-5 years), affording listening sessions and gathering feedback.



The NWS Employee Engagement event during the 2019 National Weather Association conference.



Senior leadership at the 2019 Fall Strategy Meeting.

5. Establish new opportunities for field employees to visit NWS Headquarters, including short term details, NOAA Rotational Assignment Program (NRAP) assignments, and other means to increase engagement and knowledge sharing between field and HQ (*note OOE NRAP Culture Teams*).
6. Continue to engage employees in the implementation of the NWS Strategic Plan. Link the NWS Strategic Plan to Annual Operating Plan (AOP) milestones and to day-to-day activities at the local office level to illustrate the future direction of the organization.
7. Establish new connections and collaborations related to employee engagement with the National Weather Service Employees Organization (NWSEO).
8. Work with the Evolve Program Management Office to consider recommendations of the Shift Work Team.
9. Evaluate employees' use and satisfaction of the current communication mediums (i.e., NWS Insider, Field Communications Network, Fireside Chat, etc.).
10. Identify consistent wording for items on the Evolve clock to ensure a common vocabulary and glossary for each of these items and share back with the NWS leadership team and workforce.
11. Develop communications (slide decks, fact sheets, etc.) with basic budget information and other important topics that Field Office leadership (Regional Directors, Center Directors, and the Office of Water Prediction/ National Water Center) can use in their briefings with staff (*An initial set of slides was recently provided to senior leaders at a bimonthly NWS Leadership Team meeting*)
12. Develop a Guide for New Managers.

Director Louis Uccellini hosts a Fireside Chat in August 2019.



The NWS Employee Engagement Session at the 2020 American Meteorological Society conference.



B. Strengthen managers' leadership skills.

NWS' leaders, from the newly minted Team Lead to the most experienced Senior Executive, must continue growing their managerial skills so they are as prepared as possible to lead in dynamic situations. Many of the activities described below are focused on identifying those most essential skills and the opportunities to improve them.

1. Conduct a gap analysis to evaluate the current NWS leadership training, determine if the course(s) are meeting the needs of the agency, and make necessary adjustments to current offerings.
2. Develop leadership training to meet agency needs from entry-level management to senior leadership (i.e., new managers, MIC/HIC/SOO/DOH/WCM/SCH, and SES).
3. Develop a leadership training matrix: identify leadership skills needed at the entry, middle, and senior levels and identify in-house and external development opportunities that link to those skillsets.
4. Build upon initial assessment of regional and NCEP leadership training programs by the OCLO Leadership Academy; based upon this assessment, develop recommendations and identify leadership training best practices.
5. Append senior leadership development activities (on leading change and other identified focus areas) to existing NWS meetings (*leadership training was recently provided at the December 2019 NWS Fall Strategy Retreat*).

Members of the Eastern Region Cultivating Leaders to Advance Science & Service (CLASS) leadership development program at the 2019 Kickoff Workshop.



C. Increase leader knowledge, awareness and support for healthy workforce programs, including improved access to information specific to NWS.

The activities identified below focus on modeling a healthy lifestyle at work and home and ensuring that employees are aware of and have access to the various programs and tools available to them.

1. Develop and/or gather resources to distribute to shift workers that provides guidance on health management, workforce flexibilities, and more.
2. Broadly share information with the workforce on Employee Assistance Program webinars and/or training on shift work related issues, i.e., battling burnout, sleep management, healthy eating, benefits of exercise, stress management, alternate or other types of flexible work schedules (*NWS is moving forward to hire a NWS Behavioral Health and Wellness Officer*).
3. Document and share regional best practices on new strategies to address shift work challenges.
4. Conduct an analysis of span of control and associated administrative responsibilities of senior managers; explore ways to reduce burdens and share the load.
5. Enhance office culture and create a healthy workforce by offering webinars and resources for managers on relevant topics (*note recent example of Family Leave webinar, now available on the Commerce Learning Center*).
6. Encourage managers and employees to exhibit healthy work balance through their daily routines and schedules.
7. Increase attention and programming to address Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment. Work closely with the NOAA Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Program Manager to extend appropriate bystander training and other tools to address this issue.

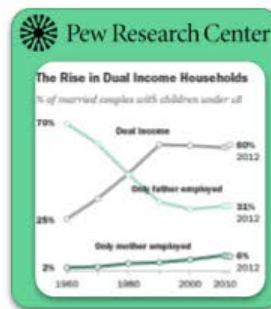
A slide on family leave policy and culture from the NWS Management & Supervision Webinar Series.

Why is this important?



Gartner survey

Taking parental leave was the 2nd most memorable employee experience.



The **number of dual income households with children** is increasing - childcare & parental leave is increasingly a dual responsibility.



Nature Study

Nearly half of females in the U.S. STEM workforce leave full-time science after their first child, compared to half that for men and child-free women.

Juggling work and family responsibilities is particularly challenging for our operational shift workers.

NWS recognizes the value of a positive balance between personal and professional life. This needs to be reflected in our actions - from managers to employees.

D. Increase managers' knowledge of performance management and recognition.

Performance management is an ongoing process of regular communication between a supervisor and an employee. Many of the activities described below reflect NWS's commitment to ensuring its managers and supervisors have access to the best available training, tools, and support systems to develop and refine these skills.

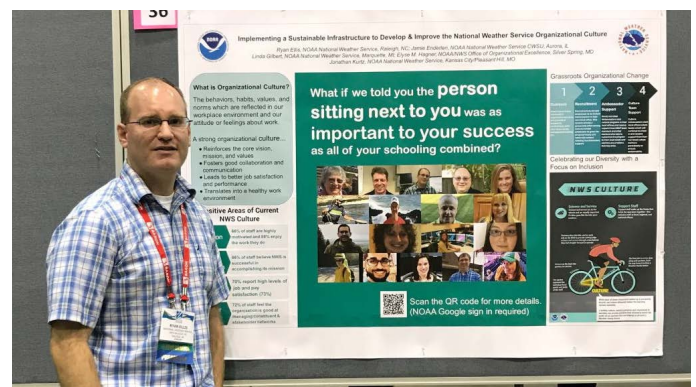
1. Work with NOAA and the DOC to develop and distribute a performance management toolkit/guide for managers.
2. Assemble an Awards Tiger Team to conduct a recognition gap analysis, streamline the nomination evaluation process, recommend changes to formal awards processes and create a handbook to aid supervisors in crafting NOAA/DOC award nominations (*the Tiger Team was formed and completed a comprehensive NWS Awards Handbook which has been distributed to managers*).
3. Market and distribute information on performance management and recognition webinars.
4. Encourage NWS leadership at all levels to continue to utilize informal forms of recognition (e.g., making impromptu calls, sending handwritten notes) to recognize offices and individual employees for their outstanding performance and accomplishment(s) (*NWS Thank You notes provided to all SES in FY19*).



Aubry Bhattarai and Barrett Smith are awarded NWS Challenge Coins by NWS Director, Louis Uccellini. Both volunteered for special assignments, helping out at NOAA Headquarters and a local forecast office respectively, during Hurricane Florence.



Mike Sowko, Operations Center Team Lead, was awarded the Silver Sherman Award for distinguished performance during Hurricane Dorian. John Murphy, Chief Operating Officer, presented the award.



Ryan Ellis presents at the 2019 National Weather Association conference on Organizational Culture.

Development Area 2: Professional Growth & Development

The activities in this Development Area focus on actions that improve employee access to:

Future Career Opportunities: Promotions are based on merit and career development programs/tools are available to the workforce

Training: The NWS assesses workforce needs and increases employee satisfaction with training for their current jobs

Activities Within this Developmental Area:

- A. Increase overall awareness of career advancement needs and opportunities.
- B. Evaluate and strengthen training opportunities.

FEVS Questions associated with these categories include:

- 18. My training needs are assessed.
- 22. Promotions in my work unit are based on merit.
- 67. How satisfied are you with your opportunity to get a better job in your organization?
- 68. How satisfied are you with the training you receive for your present job?



Chief Learning Officer John Ogren kicks off the 2019 SOO Development Course at the NWS Training Center.



Students in the NWS 101 - New Hire Orientation class work together to demonstrate every-level leadership.



Forecaster Aaron Mangels gets grilled in the hot seat by Public Affairs Officer Keli Pirtle as part of a media relations training day at WFO Hastings NE.

Actions

A. Increase overall awareness of career advancement needs and opportunities.

Many of the activities described below focus on the mentorship role of Supervisors by actively helping employees identify strengths, weaknesses, interests, and values; by maintaining an open line of communication; and by providing regular constructive feedback regarding their professional performance. These activities also acknowledge that career advancement is not limited simply to formal promotions, but also include informal opportunities for experience, exposure, and visibility.

1. Re-establish exit interviews to gather data and identify major contributors to turnover.
2. Evaluate the inaugural year of the NWS Mentoring Program and strengthen the program where necessary to ensure this activity's long-term positive impact.

3. Increase efforts around the NRAP, including a deliberate effort and use of resources to increase rotational assignments or temporary duties (TDYs) across local, regional, national, and other NOAA line offices.
4. Ensure employees recognize the increasing need for effective interactions with core partners, understand their unique role in helping to build a Weather-Ready Nation, and connect physical and social science, affording new opportunities for growth and development (*OOE worked with UCAR to develop and release a COMET module entitled: "The Weather, Water, and Climate Enterprise: Enhancing Science, Service and Partnerships for a Weather-Ready Nation"*).
5. Develop succession planning program guidance.

Participants in the NWS Mentoring Program live session held in Silver Spring, MD.



B. Evaluate and strengthen training opportunities.

The activities described below are focused on identifying training needs across all of NWS, identifying viable mechanisms for training delivery and advocating for necessary training resources with NOAA, and DoC leadership.

1. Use NWS OCLO Assessments to identify critical training needs for all managers and supervisors.
2. Ensure that Forecaster Development Training addresses core competencies of the Evolve GS 5-12 Met program, including Impact-based Decision Support Services (IDSS) training.
3. Target mid-career professionals for additional professional development and support in moving into management positions. Evaluate requirements and costs for providing refresher training for long term managers.
4. Develop prescribed training paths or curricula for each NWS job series.
5. Expand the means and methods of training a much larger target audience of leaders through the creative use of webinars, seminars, train-the-trainer, and teach-to-teach activities.
6. Offer development training to help employees understand themselves, others, and NWS past and present. The need for realizing the future depends on culture:
 - a. Offer people-skills training to the workforce and work this training into existing training courses (e.g., communications, conflict, unconscious bias awareness, emotional intelligence in a diverse workplace, etc.).
 - b. Use Belonging, Inclusion and Diversity training to ensure a successful whole office concept approach.

Deputy Director Mary Erickson and Brooke Bingaman (HQ Policy Advisor) quiz trainees Priscilla Farrar (WFO Caribou) and Jared Rackely (WFO Pittsburgh) during IDSS bootcamp.



Plan Implementation

The above activities were intentionally developed to reflect a broad and flexible approach for improving our Organizational Health and they will be implemented across the National Weather Service. This plan is focused on headquarters-led activities that will be deployed and tracked at the national level, progress will be measured by the regular survey of employee viewpoints and the routine assessment of NWS organizational health and its culture.

The focus areas currently identified in this plan are based on results from 2018 & 2019 NWS FEVS results (see Appendix) and may be modified based on future feedback and results from the following instruments:

- Future NWS Organizational Health and Culture Assessment*
- 2020 FEVS Results
- Focus Groups**
- Other information or assessments that may inform focus and direction

*Contingent on contract award

**Focus Groups may be held in the future for 2020 FEVS results.

Action Plans at Other Levels of the NWS

The Employee Experience Team and Organization and Management Division of the CFO will work with managers of smaller organizational units (regions, centers, and portfolios), to create supplemental action plans focused on the same developmental areas (Leaders Lead and Professional Growth & Development), appropriate to their organizational level and setting.

These plans should contain Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Based (SMART) goals. Regions, centers, and portfolio offices should consider engaging the Field Leadership Committee (FLC), NWS Employees Organization (NWSEO) representatives, and diversity focal points when creating these plans. Offices may also consider establishing employee advisory groups to craft meaningful actions at the regional, center, or portfolio level (this may include existing local office leadership/culture teams or similar groups).

Central Region employees attend the 2019 NWS La Crosse Leadership & Diversity Conference to share leadership and diversity tools, applications, and strategies with their peers.



Appendix

Background: 2018/2019 FEVS Results

In June 2018, the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) was open to all eligible National Weather Service (NWS) employees. We received responses from 1,594 NWS employees, resulting in a response rate of 34.5%; those results were distributed in the fall of 2018. Likewise in 2019, the FEVS was administered to all eligible employees in June 2019; we received responses from 1,729 employees, resulting in a response rate of 41%.

NWS also conducted a comparative analysis of the FEVS results for NWS and for NOAA at large between the years 2018 and 2019 to identify and analyze areas where Positive Ratings increased. This analysis identified promising trends, including:

- For 69 out of 71 questions, NWS Positive Ratings increased.
- For 48 out of 71 questions, NWS Positive Ratings increased by at least two percentage points.
- For 70 out of 71 questions, NWS positive ratings demonstrated greater growth than NOAA Positive Ratings (as measured by percent point increases between 2018 and 2019).

The NWS Employee Experience Team (EET) reviewed and analyzed results from the FY2018 and FY2019 FEVS to identify high impact focus areas for action planning. The EET was focused on areas where NWS trailed the federal average by the widest margin. The following areas were identified:

- Work-Life Program Support
- Workforce Motivation
- Leader Integrity

The EET also used the [Gartner Ignition Guide to FEVS Action Planning](#) with the 2018 results. We identified challenge areas by assigning strategic rankings of 1-5 to the NWS scores for each FEVS question. Low strategic rankings were assigned to questions in which the NWS has consistently scored high, and high strategic rankings were assigned to questions in which the NWS has consistently struggled. Additionally, the [President's Management Agenda](#) and the 2019-2022 [NWS Strategic Plan](#) were reviewed to determine which agency goals correlated to FEVS questions. If there was a correlation, a higher strategic rating was assigned. When the 2019 NWS FEVS results were received, we re-applied the new scores to the Gartner instrument; factoring in historical scores and strategic goals.

Based on the findings, we determined that the previously identified themes and focus areas are still applicable. The order of the challenge areas changed slightly, but the questions with the highest percent negative rankings re-appeared in 2019.

Background: NWS Organizational Health/FEVS Surveys

June 2015	May 2016	July 2016	February 2017	May 2017	May 2018	May 2019
Organizational Health Index	Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey	Organizational Culture Inventory	Organizational Health Index Pulse	Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey	Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey	Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey
McKinsey & Co. 2,162 Respondents	OPM 538 Respondents	Human Synergistics 112 Respondents from SR and HQ Staff	McKinsey & Co. 1953 Respondents	OPM 542 Respondents	OPM 1594 Respondents	OPM 1729 Respondents

Employee Engagement Index

OPM uses an Employee Engagement Index (EEI) that NWS has focused on over the years. The EEI uses questions from the FEVS to measure conditions that can lead to employee engagement. This Index is comprised of three sub-indices, including: Leaders Lead, Supervisor, and Intrinsic Work Experience.

For this plan, we have focused on one sub-index, Leaders Lead. NWS continues to maintain very positive numbers on the other two indices. The Leaders Lead sub-index reflects employees' perceptions of leadership integrity, as well as behaviors such as communication and workforce motivation. OPM identified five FEVS questions that are related to the Leaders Lead sub-index, questions 53, 54, 56, 60, and 61. All but one question was maintained in our planning; question 60 was not included based on recent positive scores. Additionally, we expanded on the sub-index and included two other FEVS questions, question 23 and 62. Recent FEVS feedback and rankings received via the Gartner planning process provided the bases for including these questions under the Leaders Lead focus area.



Attendees from the Western Region New MIC Workshop, Belongingness Inclusion and Diversity Workshop, and the ROC gather for dinner at the Blue Iguana.



NWS Phoenix, Western Region, and Southern Region Host Eighth Biennial Southwest Aviation Weather Safety Workshop in Tempe AZ.