

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-204](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

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.

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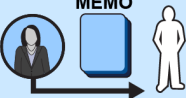
DHS EMPLOYEE MORALE

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

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.