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Description of document: Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Investigation Report on former U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) CEO Michael Pack 2021-2022

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Source of document: Attention: FOIA Request
1900 E Street, N.W.
OPIM/FOIA Room 5H35
Washington, D.C. 20415-7900
Email: FOIA@opm.gov

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UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

Merit System
Accountability and
Compliance

October 5, 2023

Via Electronic Mail

Re: Final Response to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request No. 23-MSAC-0546-F

This is the final response to your FOIA request to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received September 5, 2023, assigned tracking number 23-MSAC-0546-F. You requested:

The reports and findings of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regarding the personnel actions taken by former USAGM CEO Michael Pack and his senior advisors. These records may show whether Pack complied with the merit system principles and other federal laws and regulations governing federal employment. The Office of Special Counsel report on the activities of Michael Pack mentions that OPM conducted a review of USAGM's personnel actions on page 21.

Your request was processed under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

A search was conducted by the Agency Compliance and Evaluation (ACE) program office. A total of 27 pages of records responsive to your request were located. The records include information that originated with OPM but is of special interest to the United State Agency for Global Media (USAGM). Accordingly, OPM consulted with USAGM to obtain its views prior to disclosure of the records. Upon review, OPM has determined to partially withhold certain information, pursuant to FOIA Exemption 5 U.S.C. § 552 (b)(6) described below. Redactions have been placed on the withheld information and indicate the exemptions applied.

Exemption 6

Exemption 6 allows an agency to withhold "personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy." 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(6). The phrase "similar files" covers any agency records containing information about a particular individual that can be identified as applying to that individual. The privacy interest that would be affected by disclosure must be balanced against any public interest in the information. Under the FOIA, the only relevant public interest to consider is the extent to which the information sought would shed light on an agency's performance of its statutory duties or otherwise let citizens know what their government is up to.

The information that has been withheld under Exemption 6 consists of email usernames and a direct telephone number for individuals identified in the records. OPM has determined that the disclosure of this information would shed little or no light on the operations of the government. Because the harm to

personal privacy is greater than whatever public interest may be served by disclosure, release of the information would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy.

If you are not satisfied with OPM's determination in response to this request, you may administratively appeal in writing by email to OGCAttv@opm.gov or by mail to:

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of the General Counsel
1900 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20415

An appeal should include a copy of the initial request, a copy of the letter denying the request, and a statement explaining why you believe the denying official erred. Appeals must be electronically transmitted or postmarked within 90 days of the date of the response to your request. It is recommended that FOIA administrative appeals be submitted via email to avoid processing delays.

Additionally, you may contact the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) at the National Archives and Records Administration to inquire about the FOIA mediation services they offer. The contact information for OGIS is as follows:

Office of Government Information Services
National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road-OGIS
College Park, Maryland 20740-6001

or e-mail at ogis@nara.gov; telephone at 202-741-5770; toll free at 1-877-684-6448; or facsimile at 202-741-5769.

You may also contact OPM's FOIA Public Liaison, Camille C. Aponte-Rossini, at Camille.Aponte-Rossini@opm.gov or 202-606-1153.

If you need any further assistance or would like to discuss any aspect of your request, please do not hesitate to contact Tonya Carrington at Tonya.Carrington@opm.gov.

Sincerely,

**MICHAEL
QUINTO**

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MICHAEL QUINTO
Date: 2023.10.05
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Michael V. Quinto
FOIA Officer
Merit System Accountability and Compliance

Enclosures: Human Capital Management Evaluation of the U.S. Agency for Global Media,
June 6-17,2022 (27 pages)



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Washington, DC 20415

Merit System
Accountability and
Compliance

Mr. David Kotz
Director, Office of Human Resources
U.S. Agency for Global Media
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20237

Dear Mr. Kotz:

The enclosed report presents findings from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) evaluation of human capital management at the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). Ms. Stephanie Page of Agency Compliance and Evaluation, Central Group (ACE-Central), led the evaluation June 6-17, 2022. The evaluation covered several human capital program areas to include workforce planning, recruitment and outreach, engaged employees, and diversity and inclusion. Our purpose was to assess USAGM's strategic management of human capital, the efficiency and effectiveness of its human capital programs, and compliance with the merit system principles, laws, and regulations.

USAGM is making significant strides in improving human capital programs. Recent initiatives include the development of a human capital strategic plan, realignment of essential human capital programs under the Office of Human Resources, establishing a comprehensive leadership development program, and conducting outreach efforts and internal campaigns focused on diversity and inclusion. However, some programs lack data-driven measures and formal documentation to ensure effectiveness and consistency of program implementation. One key area of focus is assessing and documenting workforce competencies to ensure mission success and measure progress in closing staffing and skills gaps. Other key areas include ensuring recruitment strategies and hiring methods are supported by comprehensive guidance and meet program objectives; and reviewing the USAGM's awards program for opportunities to improve employee satisfaction with performance awards and recognition.

We identify in our report these and other areas where USAGM has opportunities to improve its human capital management programs and provide recommended actions USAGM can take to address them. A summary of those actions can be found in Appendix A. Please respond within 90 calendar days with steps taken or planned to address the actions presented in this report.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance provided by you and your staff during the evaluation. If you have any questions concerning this evaluation or need assistance in addressing our report findings, please contact Ms. Joanne M. Plasky, Group Manager, ACE-Central, at

(b) (6) @opm.gov or (b) (6)

Sincerely,

ANA MAZZI

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MAZZI
Date: 2022.09.22
08:47:30 -04'00'

Ana A. Mazzi
Principal Deputy Associate Director

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Kelu Chao
Chief Executive Officer and Director
U.S. Agency for Global Media
(b) (6) @usagm.gov

Mr. Christopher Luer
Office of Mission Support
U.S. Agency for Global Media
(b) (6) @usagm.gov

Ms. Jennifer Boswell
Talent/DE Program
Office of Human Resources
U.S. Agency for Global Media
(b) (6) @usagm.gov

Ms. Michelle Stewart
Performance Program
Office of Human Resources
U.S. Agency for Global Media
(b) (6) @usagm.gov

Ms. Karen Dupree
Employee Engagement Program
Office of Human Resources
U.S. Agency for Global Media
(b) (6) @usagm.gov

Sent by email to: (b) (6) @usagm.gov

No hard copy to follow.

Human Capital Management Evaluation
U.S. Agency for Global Media

June 6–17, 2021

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	3
Objectives.....	3
Methodology	4
Findings.....	4
Workforce Planning	5
Recruitment and Outreach.....	8
Delegated Examining	9
Merit Promotion	11
Engaged Employees	15
Figure 1: FEVS Global Satisfaction Index.....	20
Diversity and Inclusion	20
Conclusion.....	21
Appendix A: Summary of Required and Recommended Actions	22
Required Actions.....	22
Recommended Actions	22

Executive Summary

In FY22, OPM conducted an evaluation to determine the effectiveness of human capital management programs at the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). Multiple data sources were assessed to inform several human capital program areas to include workforce planning, recruitment and outreach, engaged employees, and diversity and inclusion. Where appropriate, we identified promising practices and/or ways to improve human resources (HR) systems and operations in support of the Agency's mission.

USAGM is taking positive steps by identifying workforce planning as a priority initiative in its *Human Capital Strategic Plan* and by enhancing programs to assess and address leadership gaps. OHR staff communicate the importance of continuous learning and foster an environment supportive of employee development, as evidenced by FEVS data and feedback from employee interviews. However, USAGM has no formal, consistent processes to conduct competency assessment throughout the Agency. Developing such a process and sharing the resulting data with stakeholders will ensure all segments of the workforce are assessed and results are used in human capital decision making.

OHR is committed to improving the Agency's delegated examining (DE) program and has made significant improvements to program guidance, processes, and outcomes since OPM's FY18 evaluation. The FY18 review of USAGM's DE operations identified significant programmatic and procedural issues impacting program compliance, efficiency, and effectiveness. For instance, in 2018, USAGM did not conduct job analyses, a critical step for validating assessment criteria needed upon entry into a position; certificates were improperly issued, resulting in the selection of non-veterans over veterans; and case files did not properly document the use of pay flexibilities. Since FY18, case files show improvement in each of these areas with a thorough job analysis and documentation process, updated guidance and quality control checklists, and well-supported decisions to use pay flexibilities.

Although we did not identify any illegal appointments or violations of veterans' preference in the case sample we reviewed, opportunities exist to strengthen the DE program and ensure operational consistency. For example, language requirements are not part of OPM's minimum qualification standards, yet USAGM includes language in the specialized experience requirement of job opportunity announcements (JOA). Instead, language requirements should be used as a selective placement factor, since a language is a competency that cannot be learned in a reasonable amount of time, and job functions cannot be performed without it. Using a selective placement factor would properly eliminate candidates who are unable to perform the basic duties of the position and provide applicants with an accurate reason as to why they were removed from consideration.

USAGM's merit promotion program presented several strengths, to include consistent documentation of clearing priority consideration eligible candidates, thorough job analyses aligned with assessment questionnaires, properly applied qualifications standards, and accurate processing of personnel actions. However, USAGM's merit promotion plan contains vague and inconsistent guidance for rating, ranking, and certifying eligible candidates. Additionally, rating and ranking procedures outlined in negotiated labor-management agreements were not followed

for bargaining unit positions recruited under merit promotion procedures. There was no evidence negotiated evaluation methods were applied by a ranking panel according to the established criteria, as stated in the collective bargaining agreement. With the current negotiated labor-management agreement aligned with the outdated merit promotion plan, the Agency will need to negotiate with union representation any changes made to processes impacting bargaining unit employees. This allows for accurate reconstruction in the event of third-party disputes and will help USAGM maintain compliance and transparency in processing merit promotions for bargaining unit positions.

In response to record low FEVS scores in 2020, OHR implemented a series of employee engagement initiatives to increase communication and address perceptions of senior leadership, as well as pursue training, development, and performance program improvements. The Agency developed an intranet site, increased frequency of town halls, and implemented listening sessions directly with the CEO. Survey and interview data indicate these initiatives are having a positive impact upon employee perceptions of leadership communication and transparency. While OHR has developed and implemented many valuable initiatives, the Agency does not currently use an advisory council to communicate with and collect feedback from the workforce. Enlisting an advisory council representative of program offices throughout the workforce to collect constituent feedback, share best practices, and recommend initiatives would assist USAGM in keeping a pulse on engagement and ensuring the most valuable strategies are implemented.

Diversity and inclusion initiatives are a clear area of strength at USAGM. Recruitment and outreach efforts are aimed at attaining a high-quality workforce representing both the United States and the vast number of nations and cultures the USAGM mission supports. Strategic planning goals, human capital objectives, special emphasis recruitment efforts, hiring practices, internal campaigns, training requirements, and employee engagement initiatives comprehensively support diversity and inclusion. Surveys and interviews at all levels indicate diversity and inclusion efforts are well recognized, supported, and appreciated throughout the workforce.

Human capital programs at USAGM align with applicable guidance and support the Agency's strategic planning objectives. Program initiatives implemented have had a positive impact upon not only operational compliance, but also the efficiency and effectiveness of program outcomes as evidenced by increased FEVS scores, staff appreciation for human capital services, and expanded opportunities for communication, development, and collaboration. Opportunities for improvement in various program areas are described throughout the report, with required and recommended actions aimed at operational consistency and continuous improvement.

Introduction

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Merit System Accountability and Compliance (MSAC), Agency Compliance and Evaluation, Central Group (ACE-Central) conducted an evaluation of the U.S. Agency for Global Media's (USAGM) use of personnel human capital management strategies and authorities. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with our statutory authority under 5 U.S.C. 1104, during the period of June 6-17, 2022. We assessed associated human capital policies, procedures, and personnel actions for compliance with merit system principles as well as efficiency and effectiveness in managing human capital. Where appropriate, we identified promising practices and/or ways to improve human resources (HR) systems and operations in support of the Agency's mission.

USAGM is America's civilian international media agency, encompassing the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, and Radio and TV Marti (under the Office of Cuba Broadcasting). USAGM is a networked global media enterprise that provides content in 58 languages to more than 100 countries on a wide range of broadcast and digital media platforms. In 2018, the Agency restructured and changed its name from the Broadcasting Board of Governors to the U.S. Agency for Global Media. USAGM's workforce is multifaceted, including 1,328 full-time and part-time; permanent and temporary; foreign service, general schedule (GS), and federal wage system (FWS); and personal service contractors. In FY20, USAGM identified five MCOs: 1) General Arts and Information (GS-1001); 2) Audiovisual Production (GS-1071); 3) Writing and Editing (GS-1082); 4) Information Technology (GS-2210); and 5) Broadcasting Equipment Operating (WG-3940), with 53 percent of the Agency's workforce in the General Arts and Information (GS-1001) series.

USAGM's Office of Management Services (OMS), Office of Human Resource (OHR) has restructured to increase and enhance the human capital services provided directly by OHR. Previously, some human capital programs were managed outside of OHR and have been realigned recently to support comprehensive services. In addition to the Director's Staff, OHR is comprised of five divisions: Operations, Labor and Employee Relations, Benefits and Administration, Information Systems, and Workforce Support and Development (OWSD). OHR provides comprehensive program services to include staffing, recruitment, classification, labor and employee relations, non-citizen advisory services, employee benefits, performance management, awards, employee counseling and assistance, and employee training and development. The feedback in this report will help build, develop, and engage a diverse and highly skilled workforce in support of future objectives and strengthen the effectiveness of OHR's human capital management programs.

Objectives

OPM's evaluation of USAGM covered the following human capital program focus areas: workforce planning, recruitment and outreach, employee engagement, and diversity and inclusion. For workforce planning, our objectives were to assess how USAGM identifies the human capital required to meet organizational goals; conducts analyses to identify competency and skill gaps; and develops strategies to close those gaps. We looked at the Agency's

recruitment plans to determine if HR staff and hiring managers partner to attract diverse and qualified candidates, and whether staffing policies and practices comply with applicable guidance and support Agency goals. Employee engagement program objectives included assessing how well USAGM leadership fosters engagement and provides employees with tools, resources, and support to contribute and feel connected to the Agency’s mission. Finally, diversity and inclusion program objectives were assessed to determine how Agency leadership develops and implements HR strategies to improve the effectiveness of efforts to recruit, hire, promote, engage, and develop a diverse and inclusive workforce.

Methodology

OPM conducted this evaluation by collecting and analyzing data captured from multiple sources to include USAGM’s FY18-22 Strategic Plan; human capital policies and guidance; reports and action plans from previous evaluations; and applicable Agency and regulatory guidance. Additionally, Enterprise Human Resources Integration (EHRI) Data Warehouse staffing and workforce data were reviewed to gather insight regarding the Agency’s positions, trends, and common appointing authorities. Results were compared from the 2020 and 2021 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) to identify patterns and trends.

To gather the most current perceptions of Agency programs, four surveys were administered to a random sample of different populations of the USAGM workforce, respectively:

- Hiring Officials
- New Hires
- Employees
- Supervisor/Managers

A sample of delegated examining (DE) and merit promotion recruitment actions were reviewed to gain an understanding of OHR’s hiring practices and measures for success during the review period of October 1, 2019-September 30, 2021. Evaluators reviewed job opportunity announcements, case file documentation, and eOPF recordkeeping for 12 DE cases and 10 merit promotion cases. Finally, we conducted interviews with HR leadership, program managers, and operations staff, to gain further insight regarding OHR’s programs, procedures, and recent initiatives. In order to further probe FEVS and evaluation survey results, several focus groups were held with a random sample of USAGM managers and supervisors as well as employees to gather perspectives on HR program successes and challenges.

Findings

USAGM is making significant strides in improving human capital programs. Recent initiatives include the development of a human capital strategic plan, realignment of essential human capital programs under OHR, the establishment of a comprehensive leadership development program, as well as conducting outreach efforts and internal campaigns focused on diversity and inclusion. However, some programs lack data-driven measures and formal documentation to ensure effectiveness and consistency of program implementation. One key area of focus is assessing and documenting workforce competencies to ensure mission success and measure

progress in closing staffing and skills gaps. Other key areas include ensuring recruitment strategies and hiring methods are supported by comprehensive guidance and meet program objectives.

Workforce Planning

An effective workforce planning program is one in which agency leadership identifies the workforce needed to meet current and future organizational goals. Agency leaders, guided by human resources experts, identify mission critical occupations (MCOs), and conduct analyses to identify competency and skills gaps; develop [strategies](#) to close identified gaps; and ensure the organization is structured effectively.¹ USAGM's *FY18-FY22 Strategic Plan* includes a series of human capital related objectives and performance goals. Recently, OMS and OHR partnered to develop the Agency's draft *Human Capital Strategic Plan*, outlining human capital program specific goals and strategies aligning with Agency objectives. This is particularly noteworthy, as USAGM is not required to have such a plan. Each goal within the plan contains several strategies for achievement. The development of a human capital specific strategic plan to support Agency goals is a vital step in workforce planning. To strengthen strategies to achieve each goal, the Agency should add metrics, timelines, and responsible parties for each strategy. For example, workforce planning objectives are identified under Goal 2: Develop and Retain Workforce. One of the associated strategies includes 2.1: Regular Strategic Workforce Assessment and Planning. In order to ensure goals are measurable, the Agency could identify the following metrics: 1) Percentage of MCO workforce with a documented competency assessment within the past two years (baseline metric); 2) Goal to increase percentage by a certain date (milestone metric); 3) Date for all MCO's to be assessed (target metric); 4) Parties responsible for conducting, documenting, and analyzing competency assessments; and 5) Timelines to discuss progress and adjust strategies as needed.

Recommended Action: Add metrics, timelines, and responsible parties for each strategy within the *Human Capital Strategic Plan*.

The nature of global broadcasting work is subject to rapid technological and procedural changes, making continuous forecasting essential for mission success. USAGM uses historical trends comparing the percentage of MCO workforce with the non-MCO workforce over time. However, the Agency is not forecasting short- or long-term workforce needs or collecting, analyzing, and monitoring the full range of workforce data. Workforce data, such as demographics, retirement eligibility, and turnover, should be analyzed with data on workforce management, such as recruitment and retention. This information is valuable in understanding the workforce and identifying trends impacting the workforce as a whole or in segments, based upon forecasted needs. It informs workforce and succession planning by providing a basis to address employment trends, which may impact future mission capabilities.

¹ <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/human-capital-framework/>

Recommended Actions:

Collect and analyze workforce data (i.e., retirement eligibility, retention, turnover, etc.) and develop reports to better inform short- and long-term workforce planning. Share data with key stakeholders to be used in human capital decision making at all levels.

Develop workforce planning documents as part of a forecasting process to project USAGM workforce supply and demands in the immediate future (e.g., 1-2 years) and in the long term (e.g., 3 or more years).

There are several methods used by USAGM to identify skill and competency gaps for both MCOs and non-MCOs. Recently aligned under OHR, OWSD has conducted focus groups and administered occupational surveys to identify competency gaps, with results used to tailor training curriculum available to the workforce. Additionally, OHR senior leadership meets regularly with senior leaders from the different broadcasting services to discuss staffing and competency gaps. However, USAGM has not conducted a formal assessment of the entire workforce.

While USAGM has tools and mechanisms in place to assess these gaps, the process is not formalized throughout the Agency to ensure all levels of the workforce are assessed on a regular basis. Agency supervisors and managers surveyed were asked a series of questions regarding how often competency and staffing gap assessments were conducted for both MCO and non-MCO positions. To each question in the series, more than 90 percent of respondents answered, “not sure” or “no assessments conducted.” Similarly, employees were asked “Have you completed a competency assessment for your position?” to which only 36 percent of respondents answered, “yes.” Employees were also asked, “How are your training needs and skills gaps assessed?” with opportunity to select all that apply. The most frequent responses included “Meeting with first level supervisor” at 50 percent, and “Training needs and skill gaps not assessed” at 37 percent.

While meeting with first-level supervisors is appropriate for individual and/or small team competency assessment, there is no process in place to communicate the results to senior leadership to inform Agencywide workforce planning efforts. Surveys and interviews of the general workforce indicated most staff are unaware of workforce planning and competency assessment initiatives. Therefore, in order to ensure a holistic representation of USAGM’s current competencies in both MCO and non-MCO positions, the Agency should communicate the importance of staffing and competency gap assessment to all staff levels to include benefits to the mission (i.e., mission success, increased performance, justification for increased staff to meet future needs, etc.), as well as benefits to individual employees (i.e., tailored training plans, career development, current technological skillsets, etc.).

Recommended Action: Develop and administer a formalized and documented competency gap assessment process Agencywide.

Notwithstanding inconsistent skills gap assessment efforts, USAGM has several processes in place to close the skill and competency gaps identified in workforce planning. OHR’s OWSD has developed and implemented a variety of targeted strategies to include updating training

policies; expanding leadership training opportunities and mentorship programs; linking FEVS items with targeted learning campaigns; and downloadable career path maps for career development. These efforts were overwhelmingly recognized as positive in supervisor and manager focus groups.

USAGM set strategic objectives and human capital strategic goals to increase development and training opportunities. It uses AgLearn, a learning management system with about 16,000 mandatory, technical, soft-skill and leadership trainings available. The system is managed by OHR's OSWD, and allows for tracking and monitoring training completion, course registration and communication, and feedback surveys. Notably, OSWD not only collects feedback from training participants, but it also administers surveys to the employee's first-line supervisor to ensure the training provided successful outcomes in work performance. This practice shows dedication to ensuring learning resources are a valuable return on investment in displaying positive performance outcomes.

How does your organization ensure employees are receiving the training they need to maintain essential competencies?

“Training classes are advertised regularly through agency announcements.”

“Staff that went through the mentoring found it very effective, they gained insight into other areas of the agency.”

“The training department is very responsive, if you need something they find a way to provide it.”

-USAGM Supervisor and Manager Focus Group

Additionally, USAGM has a plethora of training and development tools available and accessible to the workforce, and senior leaders meet frequently to identify and acquire mission specific training. However, survey data indicated employees still perceive a lack of job-specific training opportunities, with 35 percent responding, “the trainings allocated for accomplishing my job duties are insufficient.” Those respondents were asked “what areas would you like more training?” and 100 percent selected “technical training (job-specific).” In interviews, both employees and supervisors noted the availability of training, but stated time and limited staffing resources are significant barriers to participating in training.

The comprehensive AgLearn system has tools for the creation of Individual Development Plans (IDPs). IDPs benefit organizations by aligning employee training and development efforts with mission, goals, and objectives. When using an IDP, supervisors develop a better understanding of their employees' professional goals, strengths, and development needs, resulting in more realistic development plans. Employees take personal responsibility and accountability for their career development, acquiring or enhancing the skills they need to stay current in required skills. However, while training is encouraged, development planning is often left up to the individual employee. Survey and interview data both indicate IDPs are not used widely throughout the workforce. In interviews, employees were unclear on how an IDP can be developed and used

and stated managers are not encouraging use of the tool. In the evaluation survey, supervisors and managers were asked to select various statements describing their use of IDPs with their subordinates. The most frequent response at 53 percent was “I do not use IDP’s in my organization.” USAGM should ensure development planning is a collaborative effort between employees and supervisors and develop a system in which development planning is documented Agencywide to better inform competency and skill gap closure efforts.

Recommended Actions:

Develop and administer training to both supervisors and employees on Agency tools to assess training needs and develop documented training plans with staff to close competency gaps using the available tools.

Establish accountability measures to ensure supervisors are assessing training needs and providing staff guidance and resources to advance their competencies.

USAGM is making strides in identifying workforce planning as a strategic objective, enhancing programs to address leadership gaps, and providing tools and resources for competency development. Formalizing the elements, developing a comprehensive process, and sharing data with stakeholders will ensure all segments of the workforce are assessed and the data collected is used strategically. These actions will better posture the Agency to develop and implement talent management plans to close staffing and competency gaps, manage staffing surpluses, maintain the strengths of the existing workforce, and mitigate risks.

Recruitment and Outreach

The Agency recently shifted outreach responsibilities from collateral duties to full time efforts for several staff members, showing dedication to continued program improvement. Outreach efforts are an area of strength for USAGM, as it develops multiple recruitment plans aimed at promoting and achieving a quality and diverse workforce. The Agency uses a great variety of outreach platforms to include USAJOBS, internal announcements, intranet, intern sites, and social media platforms. Outreach efforts include various ongoing and single event outreach efforts both in person and virtual settings. USAGM also uses an intern recruiting program called the Handshake Tool through which they have accounts with 250 colleges and universities for locating talent, announcing opportunities, and searching for potential candidates. OHR has participated in 15 on-site and/or virtual career fairs and seminars in FY20-22, which is impressive, especially through the pandemic.

While outreach efforts are broad and plentiful, potential candidates may lose interest in positions with the Agency due to the length of time it takes to complete the recruitment and placement process. While some of the factors impacting time-to-hire may be out of OHR’s control, there are opportunities to streamline and clarify some of the recruitment processes to keep candidates interested. Detailed findings and recommendations for the Agency’s DE and merit promotion staffing programs discussed in the following sections will assist OHR in identifying barriers, streamlining processes, and ensuring transparency and timeliness throughout the recruitment process.

Delegated Examining

USAGM is committed to improving its DE program and has made clear improvements since OPM's FY18 evaluation. That review of USAGM's DE operations uncovered significant programmatic and procedural issues. For instance, USAGM did not conduct job analyses, a critical step for validating assessment criteria needed upon entry into a position; issued certificates improperly, resulting in the selection of non-preference eligibles over preference eligibles without proper pass over procedures; and did not document properly the use of pay flexibilities in accordance with Agency policy. Since FY18, USAGM has shown improvement in these areas; however, opportunities exist to strengthen the DE program. While we found no illegal appointments, information in JOAs and the application of OPM's *General Schedule Qualification Standards* remain a concern. Steps to improve quality control mechanisms would support the efficiency and effectiveness of USAGM's DE operations.

In 2018, OHR did not have an adequate job analysis process. However, USAGM has made commendable progress in this area. Review of various recruitment actions revealed USAGM thoroughly documented job analyses for all DE vacancies within our case sample. OHR now uses a complete job analysis process, which not only documents a clear relationship between the tasks performed on the job and the competencies required to perform the tasks but also allows for positions to be filled with employees who are best qualified. This process supports efforts to identify quality candidates for current vacancies and allows managers to fill the same and similar positions in the future.

Although there has been much progress in USAGM's use of job opportunity announcements (JOAs), it remains an area of concern. In interviews, HR staff noted JOA templates are being used more frequently and are updated to reflect common Agency JOA requirements. Templates were created and updated for regularly announced positions in December of FY21. Using templates to post JOAs can ensure the inclusion of all language required by law, rule, and regulation. However, as found in our FY18 evaluation, more recent JOAs reflect missing language and inconsistencies. For example, the overview section of several JOAs state a security clearance is not required; however, the "conditions of employment" section, states, "Suitability Determination: If selected, you will be subject to a security investigation to establish your suitability for Federal employment. The security investigation will include, among other aspects, a review of your credit and legal history." This can be confusing to applicants and should be clarified to state a selectee will be subject to a background investigation.

Another example of conflicting information is the verbiage in the "required documents" and "additional information" sections of many JOAs. The "required documents" section requires candidates with veterans' preference to submit a DD-214, an SF-15, and a VA disability letter, depending on the preference they are claiming. Also, the "additional information" section describes the option of submitting a statement of service for active-duty military members who have yet to receive their DD-214. To make JOAs more streamlined and less confusing to applicants, this information should be consolidated into one section. JOAs had a few other minor issues, such as missing language for serving a probationary period. New Federal employees are required to serve a probationary period during their first year of service in accordance with 5 CFR 315.801(a). This language should be added to the JOA to give applicants an accurate preview of the job requirements.

Recommended Actions:

Update JOA templates to clarify any conflicting or inconsistent language.

Periodically review templates to ensure the most recent updates to law, rule, and regulation are adhered to and implemented correctly.

Several JOAs stated there was only one vacancy available for the specified location, yet more than one selection was made. Case files contain an approved justification for the additional selections, which shows progress from our previous evaluation. However, JOAs are missing a statement that additional selections may be made from the announcement. Agencies must give an accurate representation about the number of vacancies they are planning to fill since this affects eligibility and consideration for the appointment. An exact number is not required, but in instances where the final number of vacancies to be filled is uncertain, agencies should incorporate the use of descriptive words such as “few” or “many” into their policies and procedures. Not only is this information required by law, but by including this information, USAGM may entice more highly qualified candidates to apply since they have a higher probability of being selected.

Required Action: Include an accurate representation of the number of vacancies available in each job opportunity announcement. [5 CFR 330.104(a)(5)]

For actions involving a language requirement, the requirement is incorporated into the specialized experience statement. However, since language is not a part of OPM’s minimum qualification standards, it should not be included with the specialized experience requirement. Instead, language requirements should be used as a selective placement factor, since a language is a competency that cannot be learned in a reasonable amount of time, and job functions cannot be performed without it. In addition, notifications sent to applicants, who did not possess the language requirement, stated they did not meet education/experience requirements for the position. Using a selective placement factor would properly eliminate candidates who are unable to perform the basic duties of the position and provide applicants with an accurate reason as to why they were removed from consideration.

Required Action: Discontinue using language requirements as a minimum qualification requirement in accordance with OPM’s *General Schedule Operating Qualification Standards* and instead list them as selective factors. [5 CFR 338.301]

To apply veterans’ preference laws properly, a certificate of eligibles must list preference eligibles ahead of non-preference eligibles within the same quality category in which they were assigned based upon the job-related assessment tool. Veterans’ preference indicators are required to be on the certificate sent to hiring managers. This is to ensure preference eligibles are selected over non-preference eligibles. Even when no preference eligibles are on a certificate, veteran’s preference indicators must still be included. Many certificates audited during the review period were missing veterans’ preference indicators next to the applicants’ names, as required. Omitting veterans’ preference indicators on the certificate makes it difficult to audit the certificate properly and increases the likelihood of mistakes that could violate veterans’ preference laws, resulting in an improper selection.

In addition, several case files contained category rating certificates with numerical scores listed. This practice should be discontinued for two main reasons. First, USAGM’s DE implementation guide states numerical scores should not be used for category rating. Second, including numerical scores on a category rating certificate could confuse hiring managers into thinking the candidate with the highest score should be selected. However, any of the candidates in the top category can be selected as long as veterans’ preference laws are followed.

Additionally, in most cases, certificates were not audited timely. Survey responses from supervisors and managers revealed they believe this was attributed to a lengthy security clearance process after EOD. However, other staff members believe it was an oversight caused by staffing shortfalls. Per guidance in OPM’s *Delegated Examining Operating Handbook*, it is essential to audit certificates prior to EOD so potential errors will be caught early enough to correct hiring commitments that may have been made improperly.

Required Action: Conduct timely audits of certificates of eligibles and document certificates properly including veterans’ preference indicators to ensure selections are appropriate. [5 CFR 250.101]

Notifications of results were not sent to applicants timely. There were many instances in our case sample where the final disposition was issued to those not selected months after a selection was made. Notifying applicants timely during key touch points in the process helps keep applicants informed and provides transparency in the hiring process. OHR leadership stated there was a delay in notifications being sent because HR was short staffed during the period of review. While this may be the case, issuing notifications can be done quite quickly and simply via the automated staffing system. Additionally, USAGM policy states these notifications must be sent upon the issuance of the selection certificate. Quality controls measures should be implemented to ensure specialists generate notifications in accordance with applicable policy and the *Presidential Memorandum – Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process, dated May 11, 2010*.

Required Action: Issue timely notifications to applicants at key stages of the recruitment and hiring process. [*Presidential Memorandum – Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process, dated May 11, 2010*]

USAGM has made strides to improve DE staffing programs. Within the review period, employee records were accurately maintained in eOPF. A few cases were missing documents such as SF-144, SF-61, and a signed OF-306; however, they were provided upon request and uploaded into the correct file. Furthermore, a quality control checklist has been put into place to reduce errors and eliminate missing documentation during the staffing process. Pay flexibilities were accurately and thoroughly documented, which is a significant improvement from our previous evaluation. USAGM has made significant improvements thus far and has processes in place to continue process improvement efforts into the future.

Merit Promotion

USAGM’s merit promotion program presented several strengths, such as consistent documentation of clearing priority consideration eligible candidates, thorough job analyses

aligned with assessment questionnaires, properly applied qualifications, and sufficient processing of personnel actions. OHR implementation of quality control processes and procedures was evident. While previous evaluations have focused primarily on DE accountability, USAGM's corrective actions have managed to aid the Agency's effort to maintain compliance and efficiency of merit promotion staffing operations. However, review of USAGM's merit promotion program revealed vague or inconsistent guidance and processes for rating, ranking, and certifying eligible candidates. Implementing the following recommended actions will better posture the Agency to administer a more transparent program.

USAGM established a new merit promotion plan in April 2022, as OHR stated the merit promotion plan in place during the review period was outdated and not being followed. Despite revising policies and procedures to formalize new guidance, the newly implemented merit promotion plan is not without issues. The new plan does not contain clear procedures or criteria for which candidates are to be rated and ranked, which perpetuates the issue of not being able to sufficiently reconstruct promotion actions. Merit promotion plans with definitive rating and ranking criteria ensures the agency is administering a program with a systematic means of selection for promotion based on merit and job-related criteria. As a regulatory requirement, this allows for reconstruction of the promotion action for transparency in the event of an employee grievance or for auditing purposes. Well defined rating and ranking criteria will help clarify procedures for specialists, ensure transparency and consistency in recruitment actions, and ensure accountability for the merit promotion program.

Agency merit promotion plans serve as the guide for how specialists process promotion actions. When the agency does not adhere to its own plan, it can conflict with other established policies and procedures. Implementing the new merit promotion plan was intended to bring the merit promotion program in alignment with modern practices. However, USAGM did not address any changes with union representation to determine how the new policies and procedures will affect bargaining unit positions. In USAGM's case, the negotiated labor-management agreement contains evaluation methods, similar to those found in the outdated merit promotion plan. The recruiting process in the agreement describe use of a rating and ranking panel in which points are assigned for various rating factors to include experience, performance ratings, and awards. In reviewing merit promotion actions for bargaining unit positions recruited within the review period, there was no evidence these evaluation methods were applied by a ranking panel according to the established criteria, as stated in the collective bargaining agreement. With the current negotiated labor-management agreement aligned with the outdated merit promotion plan, the Agency will need to negotiate with union representation any changes made to the plan, which may result in new revisions. This ensures bargaining unit employees agree with the revisions and will help USAGM maintain compliance in processing merit promotions for bargaining unit positions.

Required Action: Update the merit promotion plan to establish clear procedures and criteria for rating and ranking candidates to allow for reconstruction of promotion actions. [5 CFR 335.103(b)(5)]

As an important part of the recruitment process, classification provides the foundation for describing work in the Federal Government and qualifications required in identifying candidates who can successfully perform the work. Misclassified position descriptions can lead to employee

grievances, classification appeals, and ineffective position management. By acting in an advisory capacity, HR specialists who specialize in classification can assist management with resolving potential classification issues before the hiring process begins. In many of the cases reviewed, position descriptions presented inconsistencies and errors to include missing point values and evaluative statements, wrong formats in terms of supervisory and non-supervisory positions, and OF-8s containing coding discrepancies with series and bargaining unit determinations.

Fortunately, these findings did not impact grade determinations or negatively affect the recruitment process, but they demonstrate the need for oversight of classification processes. As noted in interviews, OHR expressed concerns regarding the impact classification has on their recruitment process and the need for a classification specialist. Devoting resources to prioritize the classification function of the recruitment process will allow the Agency to provide the necessary oversight in eliminating errors, ensure position descriptions are appropriately classified, and further enhance the timeliness and efficiency of the recruitment process.

Recommended Action: Devote resources to classification to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the recruitment process.

While USAGM’s merit promotion plan provides parameters for what to include in JOAs, our findings revealed many inconsistencies with who can apply for both internal and Governmentwide merit promotion vacancies. For internal merit promotion vacancies, JOAs are confusing in how priority consideration candidates may apply. Three of the four internal merit promotion announcements reviewed do not include eligibility for the Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP) in the assessment questionnaire as required. However, the content of the JOAs reference CTAP eligibility in the required documents and additional information sections. Oppositely, one case included CTAP eligibility in the assessment questionnaire, but the JOA does not reference how CTAP eligibles could apply. One JOA includes information for ICTAP eligible candidates and references information on claiming veterans’ preference, which can be confusing to applicants, as neither apply in internal merit promotion.

For Governmentwide merit promotion vacancies, one JOA includes all the proper eligibilities, but the clarification section only specifies “status candidates.” While this term is synonymous with current or former Federal employees who have worked in the competitive service, the Agency should avoid using the term to better distinguish all eligibilities that can apply. Even though selected as applicable within the automated staffing system, one JOA does not include CTAP/ICTAP eligible candidates and acceptance of applications for VRA or 30 percent or more disabled veterans. Another announcement does not contain any clarification on the area of consideration. And although current and former Federal employees, CTAP/ICTAP, Schedule A, veterans, and Peace Corps/Vista were selected in the automated system, the JOA should also include clarification for VEOA and 30 percent or more disabled veterans, as they are both used in the assessment.

Our findings also revealed other inconsistencies to include missing statements indicating a probationary period may be required, information in the required documents section found in the additional information section, repetitive content, lack of clarification in supporting documentation, and use of language such as “under competitive service,” which can be confusing for applicants not familiar with Federal hiring. The array of findings present in both

types of merit promotion JOAs can create confusion and deter individuals from applying. When announcements clearly state all the eligibilities for which individuals can apply and all the information needed when applying, it ensures those who are eligible do not miss opportunities for which they may qualify. Standardized JOA templates can be helpful in creating consistency in the appearance and content of announcements and help eliminate confusion for applicants. In addition, creating quality assurance checklists specific to each type of merit promotion action can help provide oversight for specialists to include all the necessary eligibilities and content. OHR indicated there are continuing efforts to revise templates, as they are aware of these inconsistencies.

Recommended Actions:

Develop and maintain standardized templates to create consistency in the appearance and content of job opportunity announcements for merit promotion vacancies.

Use quality assurance checklists specific to each type of merit promotion action to increase efficiency when processing merit promotion actions.

As required in both USAGM’s outdated merit promotion policy and the negotiated labor-management agreement, the evaluation method used to assess applicants involved analysis of performance ratings. A composite score was awarded, and additional points added according to various factors, such as level of performance ratings, additional awards, and trainings. As indicated by discussions with OHR, for some time, the Agency had not been using the addition of points added for performance appraisals as it was considered outdated. They stated performance appraisals are used to ensure current Federal employees are at the “fully successful” rating. In looking at JOAs for both internal and Governmentwide merit promotion vacancies, both included inconsistencies regarding performance appraisals as a required document.

With internal merit promotion vacancies, JOAs did not include performance appraisals as a required document. As our review period included the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, OHR revealed employees were unable to access their electronic personnel files. Specialists were able to access employees’ records through electronic official personnel files (eOPF) and verify eligibility for those who did not submit it with their application. They clarified for JOAs for Governmentwide vacancies, performance appraisals are a required document. However, our review indicated JOAs were inconsistent in clearly stating this requirement. Because specialists cannot access eOPFs for Federal employees outside USAGM to verify the “fully successful” requirement, there is no way to verify applicants’ eligibility unless they submit the performance appraisal as supporting documentation. Without this clarification, it can create confusion for applicants and result in incomplete applications. Making performance appraisals a required document for both internal and Governmentwide merit promotion vacancies will streamline content for both types of vacancies and help specialists’ efficiency when building JOAs.

Recommended Action: Clarify language in JOAs to ensure performance appraisals are a required document for both internal merit promotion and Governmentwide vacancies.

Both the newly implemented and previous version of USAGM’s merit promotion plan include limited information on certificates of eligibles. While the previous plan contains specifics

regarding the number of applicants referred on certificates, it simply states personnel will prepare a listing of all eligible candidates from those who have applied or have been recommended by management who meet the minimum qualification requirements. It does not mention any details regarding how to issue certificates. Certificates are issued with no clear indication of how candidates appeared on certificates, specifically with Governmentwide merit promotion vacancies. Rather than making distinctions between competitive and non-competitive applicants, the Agency separated competitive candidates into groups, such as current Federal employees, transfers, and reinstatements. This created overlap where candidates appeared on several different certificates. In one instance, USAGM combined Schedule A with VEOA, transfers, and reinstatements, rather than being referred on a separate certificate. In addition, a candidate eligible for lateral assignment was not referred separately, as stated in the negotiated labor-management agreement.

The updated merit promotion plan also lacks specification regarding certification of eligibles, as it provides less guidance than the previous plan. OHR indicated they are aware of these inconsistencies and noted efforts are being made to streamline this process. Creating clear parameters and standard operating procedures for how to issue certificates will provide specialists with the guidance they need in creating consistency during this part of the process. It also will help hiring managers become more efficient in making selections by eliminating review of unnecessary certificates.

Recommended Action: Formalize guidance on how to issue various merit promotion certificates based on hiring eligibilities.

Engaged Employees

OPM defines engagement as, “*An employee’s sense of purpose, which is evident in their display of dedication, persistence, and effort in their work or overall attachment to their organization and its mission.*” Fully engaged employees exceed workplace satisfaction with feelings of pride, loyalty, passion, and commitment to organizational outcomes. In turn, the most engaged employees generate higher productivity, profitability, and customer service, while contributing to lower turnover, absenteeism, and safety incidents. Dedication to engagement reaps benefits in terms of employee motivation, dedication, trust, performance, competency, and work quality.

According to 2020 FEVS results, evaluation survey, and interview data, USAGM’s workforce faced a period of significant uncertainty and diminishing morale in 2020. Prior to mid-2020, it did not have an appointed CEO for more than three years. When the CEO was appointed in June of 2020, the workforce observed and experienced rapid changes in the Agency’s executive leadership and operational guidance, impacting employee engagement. The Agency’s FEVS results reflected this tumultuous period when its Employee Engagement Index score hit a three year low at 60 percent in 2020, lagging the Governmentwide score by 12 percent. After a series of executive leadership changes, efforts to increase transparency and communication, as well as OHR’s engagement initiatives in 2021, the Agency’s engagement score increased significantly to 70 percent. Not only did USAGM raise the engagement score by 10 percent but, as of 2021, it is now within one percent the Governmentwide score, showing efforts are positively impacting employee engagement.

Aligning with employee engagement goals established in the *FY18-22 Strategic Plan* and in response to record low FEVS scores in 2020, OHR recently implemented a series of employee engagement initiatives to increase communication and address perceptions of senior leadership, as well as pursue training, development, and performance program improvements. In order to increase engagement with human capital programs and services, OHR launched a series of virtual events over the past two years in which attendees can not only learn about the topic but also collaborate on the subject by asking questions and sharing experiences in an open forum. Staff in focus groups at all levels expressed appreciation and enthusiasm for these events.

OHR is making significant strides in engaging the workforce to address the human capital programs impacting employee engagement. While individual programs impacting engagement are steadily improving, most staff are unaware of the specific organizational outcomes to be expected as engagement increases. The evaluation survey asked supervisors and managers, “Have you received training on the links between employee engagement and organizational outcomes, such as employee recruitment, absenteeism, and retention; customer and constituent service; and work quality and productivity?” to which 72 percent of respondents answered “no.” Similarly, when asked “Have you been trained and/or coached on employee engagement strategies?” to which 78 percent of respondents answered “no.” In order to continue enhancing employee engagement throughout the Agency and ensure positive participation at all levels, leaders and managers should understand the expected benefits and outcomes associated with the program and receive training specifically on implementing intervention strategies based upon data.

Recommended Actions:

Develop and administer training for leaders and managers to communicate links between employee engagement and organizational outcomes, such as employee recruitment, absenteeism, and retention; customer and constituent service; and work quality and productivity.

Develop a leadership engagement advisory board or council to share experiences, positive outcomes, assessment processes, intervention strategies, and best practices.

USAGM has seen a significant increase in positive perceptions of leadership, raising its subindex score by 16 percent from 2020 to 2021. As a result of the data from the FEVS surveys, USAGM established and implemented strategies for improvement to include: an intranet site entitled, “Workplace,” as a method for USAGM management to communicate with employees; increased frequency of Agency Town Halls to communicate objectives; and began “Listening Sessions with Acting CEO Kelu Chau,” where the CEO would engage directly with employees. Survey and interview data indicate these initiatives are recognized and having a positive impact upon employee perceptions of leadership communication and transparency.

The lowest 2021 FEVS item pertaining to leadership engagement was question 32, “In my organization, senior leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment to the workforce,” to which only 48 percent answered positively. To continue improving and sustain efforts over time, withstanding administration changes, priority fluctuations, competing demands, external factors, and tight budgets, USAGM must capitalize on the increase in

engagement efforts among leaders to institutionalize emerging engagement practices. As a model practice, agencies are encouraged to document the roles, responsibilities, communication mechanisms, data sources, intervention strategies, and cyclical engagement practices that, in tandem, support on-going efforts of career staff, political appointees, managers and employees.

Recommended Action: Develop a documented set of engagement practices informed by feedback from all staff levels, identifying responsibilities, and signed by senior leadership to ensure continuity of engagement efforts moving forward.

In an engaged workforce, employees not only understand how their work relates to the mission, but they have the resources they needed to perform their work successfully. In the evaluation survey, 45 percent of employee respondents stated, “the resources (e.g., time, personnel, equipment, supplies, etc.) allocated for accomplishing my duties are insufficient.” This sentiment was mirrored in interviews, where staff consistently identified a lack of personnel as a barrier to participating in or taking advantage of some of the human capital programs and tools available to the workforce, such as competency assessment and development planning, training participation, etc. Similarly, only 46 percent of surveyed supervisors and managers responded positively to the statement, “I have sufficient time in my work schedule to properly evaluate the performance of subordinates.” The Government often experiences mission changes, budget restrictions, and hiring freezes outside of the Agency’s control. Acknowledging this, senior leaders must communicate and collaborate to ensure the most efficient and effective use of available resources.

Another important aspect of employee engagement is workforce perceptions of the agency’s performance system. OHR’s performance management team provides training to rating officials through the Foundations of Leadership course, annual performance cycle training, refresher training every three years, monthly workshops, and a series video recording accessible to the workforce at any time through the Agency’s workplace site. This type of collaboration between offices to develop cost-effective products for use throughout the Agency is a commendable practice and supports the spirit and intent of employee engagement. All supervisors and managers in interviews were appreciative of the performance team’s efforts and agreed there has been a positive impact in managing performance.

What training did you receive on the performance appraisal process?

“We received great training! They follow up and answer questions.”

“Performance training is available and effective.”

“There is on demand training, open sessions monthly, and required training is extensive.”

-USAGM Supervisor and Manager Focus Group

Over the past three years, USAGM FEVS scores regarding meaningful performance recognition have improved by 15 percent, showing efforts to improve the program are having an impact. While this area is steadily improving, 47 percent of FEVS respondents still do not believe their performance system makes meaningful distinctions. The evaluation survey specifically asked employees, “do you feel USAGM’s award system properly recognizes differences in performance?” to which 53 percent of respondents answered “no.” In order to keep the workforce engaged, employees should not only understand how their work contributes to the Agency’s goals and objectives but should feel their efforts are adequately recognized and rewarded as part of USAGM’s success.

Training on the performance appraisal process is thorough and extensive, yet the workforce lacks understanding of the regulatory and internal guidance governing the monetary award system. For example, in surveys and interviews, employees expressed an expectation that any employee can and should be able to receive a quality-step increase; however, regulatory guidance restricts eligibility to those achieving the highest level of the rating system. Identifying monetary award limitations for employees in training and guidance can increase transparency and create more realistic expectations from staff at all levels.

Recommended Action: Provide training to the USAGM workforce clarifying internal and external regulatory restrictions regarding the monetary award system to provide transparency and ensure realistic expectations.

Collecting feedback from the workforce regarding their non-monetary award preferences guides the agency in designing an effective program and employees feel more engaged when they can participate in decisions impacting their work experience. Surveyed employees were asked “how have you been recognized in the past performance year?” with only 10 percent of respondents indicating they received a time-off award. However, in interviews, employees indicated they really appreciate time-off awards, given the nature of the work they do, noting long distances to visit family. The survey results were corroborated in supervisor and manager interviews, where we heard managers state employees certainly deserve time off awards, yet they refrain from awarding them due to personnel shortages. USAGM leadership should ensure supervisors and managers have the resources available to implement the monetary and non-monetary award systems properly and survey the workforce for options supporting performance recognition throughout the Agency.

Recommended Action: Assess USAGM’s awards program, including feedback from all levels of the workforce to identify strategies to ensure the program provides for adequate performance reward and recognition.

Notably, recent FEVS results regarding training were assessed and OHR developed an action plan to focus and enhance leadership training specifically for broadcasting team lead positions. So, they can develop those managerial skills as they advance their career. This process of developing improvement strategies based upon data such as FEVS results is commendable, and survey and interview data indicate a positive impact on employee perceptions of development throughout the Agency.

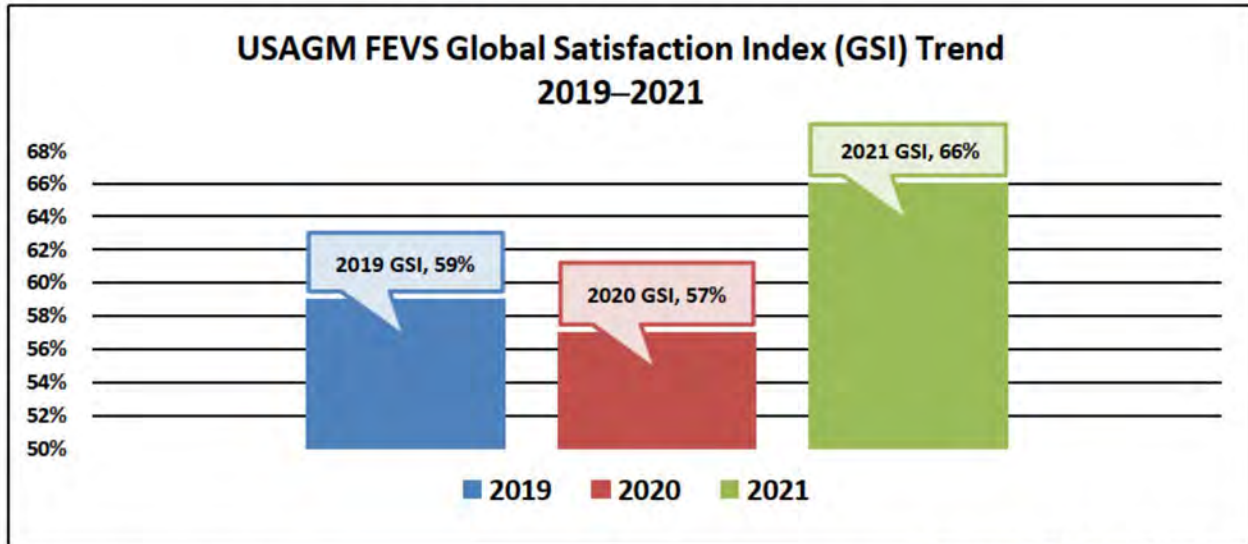
While FEVS scores related to engagement are discussed and analyzed at the leadership level, interview responses indicate FEVS results are not always communicated effectively to the employee level. Surveyed employees were asked, “In the last two years, have you been asked to provide feedback about engagement strategies/activities?” to which only 23 percent responded “yes.” The most effective engagement strategies are those in which employees are aware of and participate in the effort from identifying areas of concern, providing recommendations for improvement, and providing feedback on outcomes. As a common best practice, and recommended by staff in the evaluation survey, USAGM would benefit from a group of employees representing their respective organizations in developing and implementing initiatives to bolster engagement.

Recommended Action: Establish an employee engagement council or advisory committee comprised of non-supervisory employees representing all segments of the workforce to market engagement initiatives, analyze FEVS results, collect feedback from the areas they represent, and recommend strategies for improvement based upon more targeted feedback.

As agencies continue to recognize, strategize, and capitalize upon the proven benefits of employee engagement, USAGM should remain focused on formalizing engagement practices throughout the agency. A rapidly evolving work environment has increased the ease in which employees can choose to serve elsewhere should they feel unengaged. After a period of decreased morale, the Agency is gaining ground in building a positive engagement culture and ensuring it can attract, develop, and retain a high-quality workforce. The FEVS contains three questions in which respondents indicate their level of satisfaction with their job, their pay, and their organization. USAGM has seen a significant increase in overall satisfaction, increasing the score by nine percent since 2020, and even surpassing the 2021 Governmentwide score by two percent (Figure 1 below).

To capitalize on this wave of increased satisfaction, USAGM should institutionalize engagement strategies able to withstand rapidly changing internal and external factors affecting the workforce. Ensuring consistency and continuity of engagement efforts throughout the agency is crucial in meeting mission objectives, improving agency performance, and attracting and retaining highly skilled and diverse talent in competitive civil service and private sector job markets.

Figure 1: FEVS Global Satisfaction Index



Source: FEVS Data Explorer

Diversity and Inclusion

USAGM is committed to advancing and embedding DEIA throughout its workforce. The Office of Civil Rights and OHR work collaboratively to develop and implement DEIA initiatives, with Agency plans to hire a Chief Diversity Officer as part of the FY22 strategy. While outreach efforts to expand opportunities in support of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are abundant throughout the Agency, OHR has taken notable action to increase opportunities for candidates with disabilities as well as candidates from underserved communities. Historically, the Agency’s internship program only provided unpaid opportunities. USAGM recognized the vast majority of applicants could afford to work unpaid and it didn’t provide the best opportunity for those in underserved communities who may be less able to work unpaid. Upon recommendation by OHR, the Agency has agreed to establish paid internship positions to expand openings to those who may otherwise be unable to take advantage of the internship opportunities. This initiative shows the USAGM is not only looking for candidates from various populations, but ensuring the presented opportunities allow for maximum participation from targeted groups.

USAGM seeks candidates with disabilities in various ways, to include a Schedule A hiring list, which is provided to managers seeking candidates. Additionally, the Agency took a non-recruitment-based approach to increasing employees with self-identified disabilities by establishing a campaign to reduce the stigma surrounding the identification of a disability. Workshops and guidance provided included leadership openly identifying their own disabilities and encouraging the workforce to embrace and acknowledge their own. OHR provided disability data revealing that prior to the disability campaign in 2020, only one percent of the workforce had self-identified a disability. After those efforts, USAGM recorded over nine percent of the workforce with self-identified disabilities showing OHR’s actions paid off.

The USAGM workforce recognizes its unique mission to establish and maintain a workforce representative of America as well as the various nations it services. Staff commented the Agency

“culturally prides themselves on diversity; the mission lends itself to diverse viewpoints from around the world.” FEVS scores show significant improvement in this area, with 78 percent positive response to question 26, “My supervisor is committed to a workforce representative of all segments of society,” a record high for the Agency, increasing 18 percent over the past five years. Staff expressed awareness of USAGM’s diversity and inclusion goals and felt training provided regarding DEIA in the workplace were valuable. All available data sources indicate diversity and inclusion are at the forefront of the Agency’s mission, planning, recruitment, and employee engagement objectives, showing dedication to these values in support of USAGM’s workforce and its constituents.

Conclusion

USAGM is making positive strides in improving its human capital programs, such as the development of the *Human Capital Strategic Plan*, enhancing leadership development programs, increasing communication, FEVS action planning, and conducting outreach and internal initiatives focused on diversity and inclusion. In each of the program areas, the Agency would benefit from formalizing and documenting processes and procedures to ensure consistency and effectiveness at all staff levels throughout USAGM offices and organizations. Formal, documented procedures for competency assessment and gap closure would ensure key stakeholders are consistently informed, while documenting development plans at the individual level increases participation in and accountability for gap closure. Well documented criteria for assessing candidate qualifications will better posture the Agency to support hiring decisions, ensuring the highest quality applicants are referred for selection. Documenting action plans, FEVS analysis, best practices and proven strategies provides institutional knowledge to be used in future human capital planning.

Also essential for improving each of the reviewed program areas, is the addition of qualitative and quantitative data sources to identify and focus process improvement efforts, measure progress, and establish baseline and target milestones. For instance, adding recruitment, retention, and retirement eligibility data to the workforce planning program would improve USAGM’s ability to forecast staffing and competency needs. Additionally, tracking and monitoring time-to-hire data would improve OHR’s ability to identify barriers to timeliness for targeted process improvement efforts. Documented processes, procedures, and analysis coupled with various data sources to set targets and measure progress would complement the many program initiatives already in place. The required and recommended actions provided in this report will assist USAGM in their continuous human capital program and process improvement efforts.

Appendix A: Summary of Required and Recommended Actions

Required Actions

1. Include an accurate representation of the number of vacancies available in each job opportunity announcement. [5 CFR 330.104(a)(5)]
2. Discontinue using language requirements as a minimum qualification requirement in accordance with OPM's *General Schedule Operating Qualification Standards* and instead list them as selective factors. [5 CFR 338.301]
3. Conduct timely audits of certificates of eligibles and document certificates properly including veterans' preference indicator to ensure selections are appropriate. [5 CFR 250.101]
4. Issue timely notifications to applicants at key stages of the recruitment and hiring process. [*Presidential Memorandum – Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process, dated May 11, 2010*]
5. Update the merit promotion plan by establishing clear procedures and criteria for rating and ranking candidates to allow for reconstruction of promotion actions. [5 CFR 335.103(b)(5)]

Recommended Actions

1. Add metrics, timelines, and responsible parties for each strategy within the *Human Capital Strategic Plan*. Collect and analyze workforce data (i.e., retirement eligibility, retention, turnover, etc.) and develop reports to better inform short- and long-term workforce planning. Share data with key stakeholders to be used in human capital decision making at all levels.
2. Develop workforce planning documents as part of a forecasting process to project USAGM workforce supply and demands in the immediate future (e.g., 1-2 years) and in the long term (e.g., 3 or more years).
3. Develop and administer a formalized and documented competency gap assessment process Agencywide.
4. Develop and administer training to both supervisors and employees on Agency tools to assess training needs and develop documented training plans with staff to close competency gaps using the available tools.
5. Establish accountability measures to ensure supervisors are assessing training needs and providing staff guidance and resources to advance their competencies.
6. Update JOA templates to clarify any conflicting or inconsistent language.
7. Periodically review templates to ensure the most recent updates to law, rule, and regulation are adhered to and implemented correctly.
8. Devote resources to classification to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the recruitment process.
9. Develop and maintain standardized templates to create consistency in the appearance and content of job opportunity announcements for merit promotion vacancies.
10. Use quality assurance checklists specific to each type of merit promotion action to increase efficiency when processing merit promotion actions.

11. Clarify language in JOAs to ensure performance appraisals are a required document for both internal merit promotion and Governmentwide vacancies.
12. Formalize guidance on how to issue various merit promotion certificates based on hiring eligibilities.
13. Develop and administer training for leaders and managers to communicate links between employee engagement and organizational outcomes, such as employee recruitment, absenteeism, and retention; customer and constituent service; and work quality and productivity.
14. Develop a leadership engagement advisory board or council to share experiences, positive outcomes, assessment processes, intervention strategies, and best practices.
15. Develop a documented set of engagement practices in partnership informed by feedback from all staff levels, identifying responsibilities, and signed by senior leadership to ensure continuity of engagement efforts moving forward.
16. Provide training to the USAGM workforce clarifying internal and external regulatory restrictions regarding the monetary award system to provide transparency and ensure realistic expectations.
17. Assess USAGM's award program, including feedback from all levels of the workforce to identify strategies to ensure the program provides for adequate performance reward and recognition.
18. Establish an employee engagement council or advisory committee comprised of non-supervisory employees representing all segments of the workforce to market engagement initiatives, analyze FEVS results, collect feedback from the areas they represent, and recommend strategies for improvement based upon more targeted feedback.