

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Using surveys and interviews, the team of graduate students from the University of Illinois at Chicago approached all agencies in the Chicago federal community to participate in a survey. The two main lines of business addressed were emergency preparedness and human capital readiness. After distributing the survey, a 50 percent response rate was achieved. A third component was addressed because the Federal Executive Board (FEB) wanted to know what additional initiatives it could promote for the benefit of the regional federal community.

Survey Results

General Results

- Ninety-three percent of respondents indicated the FEB effectively communicates its programs and initiatives to its members. The most frequent form of communication is e-mail.
- The community was least aware of two programs: Emergency Preparedness for Employees with Disabilities and the Shared Neutrals Program.
- The FEB's website was cited as the communication advisory alternative most often used by the federal community. The telephone hotline and direct communication with FEB staff were also popular choices.
- Finally, we asked what factors most impact participation in FEB meetings or events. Not surprisingly, topic or content was the most important participation factor. An event's location and time were also important factors.

Emergency Preparedness

- Forty-six of our 83 respondents (55 percent) indicated their agency had a completed emergency preparedness plan – 33 had tested their plan.
- Over half conveyed an interest in receiving collaborative assistance from both the Chicago FEB and other federal agencies on emergency preparedness planning issues. There was little support for assistance from non-profit and private sectors.
- One identified training/educational program the FEB can develop for the federal community is Employee Response Planning and Emergency Preparedness at Home. Others, specifically Documentation of Emergency Plans and Procedures and Development of Training Programs, also received a high-level of interest from the community.
- In order of popularity, interest in programs covering terrorist attacks, pandemic, fire, hazardous materials and tornados are desired. When asked which of several educational programs in emergency preparedness would be most beneficial to their office, disaster readiness emerged as the most popular choice.

Human Capital Readiness

- Eight-six percent of respondents indicated a concern in anticipated turnover rates due to retirement over the next one to three years. Two strategies emerged as choices to deal with an aging workforce. The first utilizes the existing workforce at the organization to handle the

changes, while the second involves designing and completing a new workforce plan for the organization.

- The most critical human capital management challenge facing the federal sector is succession planning. The role the FEB can play in assisting agencies confront this concern is mixed. The survey returned two ways the FEB can help. The first involves creating a “best practices” program, which probes agencies that have successfully implemented a succession plan and sharing lessons learned, best practices, effective programs and so forth. The second action the FEB can pursue is in the arena of recruitment. Information on getting interns or creating an internship program was requested most by the survey respondents. Recruitment through job fairs was also popular amongst the respondents.
- Only two topics received more than 50 percent support in the “interested” and “very interested” categories: Supervisory and/or Management Training Programs (59 percent) and general Employee Development Programs (54 percent). Two other topics received support from 44 percent of respondents (Pay for Performance and Employee Recognition programs), but there was not a lot of support for training programs in the human capital management arena.

Interview Results

- Most respondents had favorable opinion about the FEB.
- Most respondents agreed that the FEB communicates their programs and initiatives effectively. E-mail is the preferred way of communication to the majority of the participating agencies. Some of the respondents suggested restoring the FEB’s web site as soon as possible.
- The majority of respondents did not participate in FEB training seminars and other programs. Reasons include distance from the downtown area, long commuting times, training sessions that the FEB offers duplicate trainings offered by their headquarters and irrelevant programs and training seminars.
- In order to increase participation rates, interview respondents suggested the following: identify specific agency needs, introduce outreach programs and bring training seminars to suburbs.
- In terms of emergency preparedness, respondents suggested agencies share information on their own emergency preparedness, providing information on what services one agency can offer to other agencies during emergencies. However, almost all of the respondents agreed that the FEB should not interfere with official emergency preparedness protocols in regards to the involvement of the Homeland Security Department (DHS), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Federal Investigations Bureau (FBI).
- Respondents agreed that the FEB could facilitate communication during a disaster as long as they are working with FEMA, DHS and the FBI.
- Almost all respondents believed that the FEB should facilitate opportunities for agencies to share best practices. However, what works for one agency might not work for another. The FEB should also look to define the term best practices.
- Finally, the FEB should put more efforts into getting agencies outside downtown more involved. The FEB could serve as a panel for discussing sound ideas of the other directors – experiences, new initiatives and lessons learned.

Recommendations to the Federal Executive Board

General Recommendations

- Promote the Emergency Preparedness for Employees with Disabilities and the Shared Neutrals Program.
- Host meetings and offer programs outside of downtown to promote participation of agencies headquartered in suburban communities.
- Explore the use of technology to promote participation of inactive agencies.
- Develop a formal outreach program to introduce new or unfamiliar federal executives to the FEB, its services and programs.
- Divide regional agencies and representatives into audiences with similar needs and target communications, services and programs accordingly. For example, target emergency planning information to those who have an interest in the topic and target human capital readiness information to those dealing with human capital issues.
- Implement a survey of the federal community every 12 to 24 months to determine their needs of the FEB.

Emergency Preparedness

- Target emergency preparedness training for agencies that have not completed an emergency preparedness plan or are in the process of revising their plans (44.6 percent of respondents).
- Create or enhance existing opportunities for interagency collaboration, particularly for agencies working on their plans, including the creation of work groups on particular emergency planning topics.
- Offer annual informational sessions or emergency planning on the following topics: emergency planning in the home, human capital contingencies and disaster readiness.
- Create and maintain a website that provides emergency planning resources and discussion boards.
- Consider probing agencies further about their interest in an emergency planning awareness week.

Human Capital Readiness

- Provide a series of informational sessions on human capital readiness. The first session in the series dedicated to constructing a definition of the term, "human capital readiness".
- Assist agencies in identifying supervisory, management training, employee development and training resources.
- Offer best practice sessions on workforce and succession planning.
- Explore with agencies the utility of and their interest in a human capital readiness FEB committee.