



City of Portland Environmental Services
Strategic Planning:
Employee Survey Results

March 1, 2017

Employee Survey Introduction and Response Rate

Catalysis LLC, an independent strategic planning firm, conducted an online survey for BES employees. The survey was made available to employees from December 5 through December 19, 2016. The survey was confidential and anonymous, and results were compiled and analyzed by Catalysis consultants.

There were 441 responses, a 75% response rate. This is considered a very high response rate (average for internal surveys tends to be 30-40%). Below is the response by workgroup. This was a relatively balanced sample, although slightly over-sampled for Engineering Services and slightly under-sampled for Pollution Prevention.

Business Services	n=37	74% response rate
Director's Office	n=18	75% response rate
Engineering Services	n=153	84% response rate
Pollution Prevention	n=54	58% response rate
Wastewater Group	n=127	74% response rate
Watershed Services	n=49	71% response rate

Overview

The survey covered three main areas: BES Now, Future Opportunities and Challenges, and Supporting Our Employees. Broad patterns emerged across all three question areas:

- Desire for a unified BES: “one BES” or “reduce siloes”
- Be proactive rather than reactive in approach
- Improved communication internally and across a variety of sectors and stakeholders
- Focus on equity, diversity, and engaging ALL communities – especially those historically underserved
- A need to critically evaluate and prioritize structures, procedures, processes, resources for:
 - Efficiency, staffing needs, meeting CIP goals and timelines
 - System preparedness and resiliency, addressing future challenges
 - Involving and engaging the community
 - Employee retention, education, training, mentoring, and career advancement

BES Now

The first section of the survey asked how effective BES is in providing “core services” and what could be done to improve delivery of core services. “Sewage Treatment” and “Sewage Collection and pumping” were the most highly rated as effective while “System resiliency and response” was rated the lowest. *Note, with the 1 to 5 rating scale, it’s common to see a large number of 3.x ratings because people without strong opinions either way tend to choose the middle option.*

In your opinion, how effective is BES in providing the following core services on a scale from 1 to 5 where “1” is “not at all effective” and “5” is “very effective.” (n=409)		
Item	Response Count	Mean Score
Watershed, river and stream protection and restoration	n=408	3.9
Pollution prevention/source control	n=409	3.9
Sewage collection and pumping	n=407	4.2
Sewage treatment	n=406	4.4
Stormwater management	n=400	3.7
System development/development services	n=405	3.6
System resiliency and response	n=404	3.3
Education, public involvement and stewardship	n=406	3.6

BES Now

The survey allowed employees to provide open-ended responses suggesting what could be done to improve delivery of core services. Some broad themes that emerged from these responses:

- Improve communication with public, other bureaus, and within BES
 - Strong opinion among respondents that public/ratepayers do not know what BES does
- Teamwork and collaboration
 - Foster collaboration, reduce siloes, eliminate duplication, and build relationships
- Critically evaluate BES and assess structure, processes, and resources
 - Prioritization essential, less bureaucracy, less micromanagement, determine staffing needs
- Work culture and professional support
 - Recognize successes, professional growth, culture of trust, inclusion and respect across BES
- Update and innovate
 - Address technological infrastructure, greener systems, natural disaster preparation
- Prioritize a focus on equity/diversity
 - Internal and external, build expertise in engaging with community

Future Challenges & Opportunities

Employees were asked to identify the importance of various challenges to BES over the next 10 years. Survey respondents identified “Maintenance and stewardship of existing assets” as the most important concern over the next 10 years.

In your opinion, how important is each challenge for BES over the next 10 years? Please rank each of the following using a scale from 1 to 5 where “1” is “not a concern” and “5” is “major concern.” (n=388)		
Item	Response Count	Mean Score
New and/or additional regulations	n=384	3.4
Maintenance and stewardship of existing assets	n=385	4.3
Demands for additional infrastructure or greater levels of service	n=387	3.9
Technology and information management needs	n=385	3.7
Emergency preparedness	n=386	4.0
Employee turnover and retirements	n=384	3.5
Employee diversity	n=384	3.0
Employee satisfaction	n=385	3.8
Rate payer satisfaction	n=384	3.8
Relationships among Bureau workgroups	n=383	3.7
Relationships with regulators	n=383	3.3
Relationships with external partners (other Bureaus, etc.)	n=386	3.6

Future Challenges

In open-ended responses, employees identified additional potential challenges to BES in the future, including:

- Changing political climate, especially related to recent presidential election and changes at the local and state level (such as election of new mayor)
- Advancements in technology – BES needs to update accordingly at the same rate
- Employee retention and loss of institutional knowledge due to employee turnover and retirements, alongside challenges in attracting new talent
- Climate change and shifting weather patterns
- Population growth and increasing population density due to rapid growth of the city – including overwhelming number of new construction projects
- Public distrust and ratepayer lawsuits
- Evolving regulations and permitting processes
- Diversity and equity
- Instability in economic environment which causes threats to funding and resources
- Need to update system and infrastructure
- Potential consequences if BES is unable to accomplish CIP on schedule
- Increased pollution

Future Opportunities

In open-ended responses, employees identified existing or potential opportunities that BES could leverage for improving success. Suggestions included:

- Build new partnerships and strengthen existing partnerships
 - Local schools, other bureaus, community non-profits, PUB
- City-wide and regional projects
 - Portland Building Project: Project could prompt new thinking (e.g., work environment, innovative work spaces, flexible and alternative work schedules)
 - HERON Project: Foster bureau-wide coordination and as way to organize efforts with other bureaus
 - Lents Stabilization Project: Continue to leverage partnership with Oregon Solution for opportunities to reach and engage with underserved communities
- Employee retirements/turnover
 - Consider as opportunities to gain new ideas, try new things, shift BES culture, diversify skill sets and work force
- COPPEA Contract Negotiation
 - Contract negotiation process offers a chance to gather employee input, ensure employee satisfaction, discuss telecommute options
- Leverage successes of other bureaus
 - Evaluate structure, processes/procedures, leadership, communication tools of other bureaus
 - Use successes as models for potential change within BES (e.g., SOAKED onboarding program)
- New local political climate (new mayor, commissioner)
 - Use as opportunity for transparency, educating on BES issues/challenges, and needs
 - Potential for new regulations (e.g., environmental protection regulations)

Supporting Our Employees

Respondents indicated their level of agreement with a number of concepts related to success and satisfaction. Findings suggest that employees generally understand the priorities of their immediate work group. However, they have limited awareness of the priorities of other work groups.

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Use a scale from 1 to 5 where “1” is “strongly disagree” and “5” is “strongly agree.” (n=383)		
Item	Response Count	Mean Score
I understand the City/internal career paths available to me in my current position.	n=383	3.1
I can easily reach out to co-workers in other Work Groups to solve problems.	n=383	3.6
I understand the current priorities of BES.	n=383	3.2
I can anticipate the challenges I will face in getting my job done.	n=382	3.7
I understand the priorities of my immediate work team.	n=381	4.1
I am familiar with the priorities of other Work Groups (not my own).	n=383	2.7
I have the training and mentoring I need to be successful in my position.	n=381	3.4
I have the resources and tools (data, data systems, technology) I need to be successful in my job.	n=383	3.4
I have the flexibility I desire in my position.	n=382	3.5

Supporting Our Employees

Employees were asked to identify the level of importance of a variety of professional development opportunities. Employees rated the following as of the greatest importance to them: “Leadership development,” “Cross-training across Work Groups,” and “Process improvement training.”

How important would these professional development opportunities be to you? Please use a scale from 1 to 5 where “1” is “not at all important” and “5” is “very important.” You may also indicate if you already receive adequate training.		
Item	Response Count	Mean Score
Leadership development	n=378	3.9
Change management training	n=377	3.4
Equity and diversity training	n=380	3.0
Project management training	n=380	3.6
Communication skills training	n=380	3.7
Risk management training	n=379	3.4
Team management training	n=379	3.7
Cross-training across Work Groups	n=377	3.8
Process improvement training	n=381	3.8

Supporting Individual Employees

Employees were asked for ideas on how BES can support *individual employees*. The major themes that emerged were:

- Improve and develop better mechanisms for communication
 - Improve communication from the top down
 - Foster two-way communication
- Offer more and better professional learning opportunities
 - Provide better training for new hires by improving onboarding experience
 - Provide training on technical skills, leadership and management, communication
 - Create a supportive environment for training
 - Develop BES mentoring program
- Provide more career advancement opportunities and better dissemination of information about these opportunities:
 - Consider one-on-one career coaching to providing information about opportunities for growth and advancement
 - Clarify or codify pathways to leadership/management positions
- Improve leadership and management
 - Improve delegation, trust and management accountability
- Improve work culture
 - Create a cohesive environment: “we are all under the same umbrella”
 - Modify the work environment to encourage collaboration and team work
 - Provide opportunities for “cross-training” across work groups
 - Flexible work schedules, telecommuting
 - Recognize and share accomplishments

Supporting Teams

Finally, employees were asked for ideas on how BES can support *teams*. The major themes that emerged were:

- Create a culture of trust across BES
 - Annual team retreats
 - Joint trainings
- Value and empower employees from both leadership level and middle management
 - Recognize employee success and areas of expertise
 - Transparent and joint decision-making
 - Elicit employee input
- Better training for management and leadership on fostering team work and collaboration
- Facilitate more collaboration and cross-training among work groups and divisions
- Model collaboration from top-down:
 - Eliminate “turf battles”
 - Demonstrate a feeling of “One BES” and bureau-wide unity
- Consider tangible supports for encouraging collaboration and teamwork
 - Work spaces designed for collaboration and shared space or conference room for meetings
 - Computer and screen in conference rooms for working on shared documents
 - Tablets for groups during off-site meetings, field trips, conferences

Using BES Employee Survey Results

The BES employee survey provides valuable information for the development the Strategic Plan. The level of detail and thoroughness of the respondents provides not only clear broad themes, but also is a wealth of specific, actionable suggestions. To ensure results and findings are considered, Catalysis LLC recommends the following approaches:

- 1) Make the findings available to all employees.
- 2) Facilitate and encourage employee discussion and consideration of results.
- 3) Consider the survey findings in all BES strategic planning meetings. Refer to employee survey results when developing strategic initiatives and implementation plans.
- 4) Update any strategic planning work conducted prior to the employee survey to ensure that themes from the employee survey findings are addressed.
- 5) If needed, Catalysis will provide more details on the recommendations provided by survey respondents, while maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of employees.