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DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL
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November 3, 2005

TO: Governor Christine O. Gregoire

FROM: Eva Santos
Director

SUBJECT: Employee Feedback Survey

At the August 10, 2005 GMAP forum on Government Efficiency, you assigned the Department of Personnel to collaborate with other agencies to determine a method for obtaining consolidated, consistent employee feedback on workplace and management practices.

Over 40 agencies responded to DOP's request for input on this issue. In addition, a small task force of agency representatives was convened to prepare recommendations for a uniform employee feedback process. Agency directors have reviewed these recommendations and have provided me with many thoughtful and useful comments to refine the recommendation.

Based on this research and agency input, I am providing you with the following information:

1. A summary of employee feedback practices among state agencies
2. The pros and cons of a uniform statewide employee survey
3. A recommendation for collecting consolidated, consistent feedback from state agencies

Employee feedback practices used in agencies
Most agencies use (or have used) some method of gathering agency-wide employee feedback. The frequency of acquiring that feedback varies widely from agency to agency. Some do it yearly, while others are less regular. The time of year that the feedback is acquired also varies from agency to agency.

- 26 agencies currently use, or have used, the electronic survey offered by DOP
- 16 agencies use another survey tool or method (e.g., employee interviews, focus groups)
- 7 do not gather employee feedback

Pros and cons of a uniform, statewide employee feedback approach
The following summary is based on our discussions with agency representatives and consultation with Nicholas Lovrich, PhD., an expert in governmental research and surveys at Washington State University.

Cons:

- Some agencies have indicated a preference for maintaining their current practice since they have historical data to track trends and progress. Some have made a substantial investment in their unique survey process and are reticent to replace a system that works well for them.
- Agencies that gather employee feedback do so at different times and at different intervals. To allow valid comparisons, a statewide survey would require uniform timing.
- A few agencies indicated that the cost of DOP's survey was a concern.

Pros

- A statewide approach would gather consistent performance measurement information for the state's Human Resource Report Card, would allow evaluation of statewide trends and cross-agency comparisons, and, most importantly, give the state standard data upon which to base improvement actions.
- A common set of survey questions conducted by all agencies at the same time is the most valid methodology for generating reliable and consistent data for enterprise analysis. Dr. Lovrich suggests allowing a survey window no longer than six-weeks.
- To maintain valid comparisons, the order in which the survey questions are asked is important. A statewide approach would ensure a uniform context for employees' responses.
- Employees often question the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses when a survey is conducted internally. The use of a third party to conduct the survey and process the data often calms those concerns. This has been a key advantage to using DOP's survey services in the past.
- A statewide survey, conducted electronically, is the most efficient tool for a gathering feedback. The Department of Personnel can conduct an enterprise-wide survey for a $1 per respondent or less. Some agencies pay significantly more for conducting their own survey.

Recommendation

Based on the above analysis, the following recommendation is presented:

- All agencies survey their employees at the same statewide window of time.
- All agencies use 12 standard questions, listed in uniform order. The 12 standard questions and rating scales have been drafted by DOP, in consultation with agencies, and have been validated by WSU.
- Agencies have three surveying options:

    1. Use the 12 question survey administered electronically by DOP;
    2. Use the 12 question survey administered electronically by DOP, and add agency-unique questions at the end of the standard 12; or,
    3. Conduct own survey, but must used the standard 12 questions at the beginning of the survey and must report the responses to those 12 questions to DOP.

- All surveying must be assured to be anonymous and confidential.

Timing

November:	Finalize the questions and survey process
December:	Conduct a limited pilot at DOP, DSHS and DOL.
January:	Apply lessons learned from the pilot
February:	Communication with employees about upcoming survey
March:	Launch survey (six-week window maximum)

I will be presenting this approach, including the mechanics of the survey and the draft 12 questions, to the Sub-Cabinet on Human Resources on November 14th. The proposal will then go to the Cabinet for review and decision.

cc: Robin Campbell