WHAT ABOUT STAFF? – Including Staff Voices for Program Improvement

Purpose: Staff are key to program effectiveness. Through relationships, staff are on the front line for observing and understanding what is going on with families and communities and seeing the direct and indirect impacts of programs. Still, many programs do not have systematic ways of collecting and using staff suggestions to improve programs. Staff input can also support evaluating organizational values, program goals, and staff satisfaction for attracting and retaining the best staff. These are some of our favorite ideas for incorporating staff voices into your programs and organizations.

More emPower Tools
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*thecapacitycollective.org/
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See also: ***Create a Data Culture: Engaging Your Staff*** and ***Collect Meaningful Data: Survey Design Basics*** emPower Tools.

1   Cultivate a Culture of Staff Reflection

The following aspects of organizational culture can contribute to including the voices of staff for program improvement. How is your organization doing? What ways could these aspects be strengthened?

Organizational Values & Goals
Staff are:
- engaged in and committed to organizational goals.
- involved in evaluating organizational values & goals.
- invited to reflect on better incorporating values.

Leadership Commitment
Leaders are:
- open to learning about their team.
- open to receiving "bad news".
- committed to quickly responding to staff feedback.
- committed to improve internal communication.

Active Learning
Staff and leadership:
- encourage asking questions.
- willingly share feedback with each other.
- share and promote Innovations and new solutions.
- take active responsibility for personal development.

Recognizing Successes
- Staff recognize and value their own development trajectory.
- Successes are recognized and shared.
- Value is placed on staff who learn new knowledge and skills.
- Staff collect and share their own micro-successes to help them recognize, label and share these moments.

Valuing Growth
- Staff feel safe acknowledging problems.
- Mistakes and failures are valued as learning opportunities.

2   Create Spaces for Reflection

There are different ways to open spaces for reflection and collect feedback. Which one(s) fits best with your organizations?

→ Implement a **Staff Survey**
  (See the Survey Design Basics emPower Tool)
→ Conduct a **Focus Group**
  (See the Collecting Qualitative Data emPower Tool)
→ Create an anonymous **Suggestion Box** so everyone has an opportunity to candidly share an idea or concern.
→ Carry out regular **360 Degree Feedback** Evaluations
→ Schedule time during **Supervision Meetings** to reflect.

Areas of Staff Reflection
- **Satisfaction** with job, compensation, resources, caseloads, benefits, etc.
- **Organizational Identity**: Engagement with Mission, vision & program goals.
- **Management:** Direct and upper.
- **Personal Growth:** Personal and professional goals & accomplishments.
- **Work Environment**
- **Data Culture**: Data collection, data entry, database, dissemination, etc.
- **Processes:** Sharing job tips and tricks and getting input on process improvement.

(see the Improve Your Workflow emPower Tools).

③ Make a Plan

Consider the following questions when making a plan for gathering staff feedback…

What is the goal?
Determine the reason WHY you are asking for staff feedback. Knowing what you are looking for will help you figure out how to best ask the right questions.

What are you trying to measure?
You can measure your goals by setting the right indicators. Choose to measure what you are looking to achieve. This practice will let you make targeted improvements and address issues you wouldn't otherwise find.

What are your current mechanisms?
Consider current staff feedback practices that work well or that could be improved. How can you build on what you are already doing?

How will you manage staff expectations?
Ask about things you are prepared to hear and can act upon (changes you can really make).

How will you respond to staff feedback?
Take feedback seriously. Plan for how to implement changes and integrate staff feedback.

Who will participate?
Who will receive the results?
Identify the stakeholders involved in the feedback process.

How will you share the results of staff feedback?
Consider including results in your news and staff meetings.

④ Ask for Feedback

These tips will help ensure you gather high quality staff feedback…

→ Make it easy
- Make sure feedback is as easy to complete and return as possible.
- Consider what mechanisms will be easiest for staff given their work dynamic.
- Try to answer your own questions and see how simple it is for you to actually write an answer.

→ Feedback Cycle
- Set a schedule (monthly, quarterly, yearly) for staff feedback, analysis and change implementation. Communicate results.
- Carve out work time for staff to step back, take stock and reflect.

→ Keep it clear
- Ask specific questions.
- Be sure the question does not bias the response. Use neutral language when framing questions.
- Address one subject per question.
- End with an open-ended question asking for any additional comments not covered.

→ Keep it short
- Keep questions to a minimum.
- Give respondents something interesting to answer early to engage their interest.
- Let staff know the time commitment (example: This survey will take about 10 min).

→ Encourage Completion
- Consider incentivizing feedback completion with gift cards or PTO. Set team completion goals.
- Designate a completion deadline and clearly communicate it. Recurring dates are helpful.
- Send a reminder with adequate time to respond thoroughly.