

2008 Smithsonian Employee Perspective Survey

Office of Policy and Analysis

Smithsonian Institution

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1 Interpretation of Results

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2004 mandated that all federal government agencies administer an annual survey of employee opinions with questions prescribed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) (5 CFR Part 250). OPM does not aggregate responses to these annual surveys across agencies. Every two years, OPM administers a Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) to a sample of federal employees. The government-wide results of these surveys are reported by OPM. The 2008 FHCS results became available before this Smithsonian report was prepared; consequently, the results of both the 2006 and 2008 FHCS are used in this report as benchmarks to compare Smithsonian employee perspectives with federal employees working in other agencies.

Interpretation of results of the 2008 Smithsonian Employee Perspective Survey (2008 SEPS) is based on favorable responses to survey questions. The favorable score is the combined percentage of responding Smithsonian employees who indicated that they “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with a survey item. Employees who felt that they did not have an opinion were combined with those who disagreed in computing the favorable score. The Smithsonian Institution has been moving through a transition in senior leadership during the past 18 months. Two months before the 2008 Smithsonian Employee Perspective Survey (2008 SEPS) was administered, Secretary G. Wayne Clough succeeded Acting Secretary Cristián Samper, who had succeeded former Secretary Lawrence Small a year earlier. All Under Secretaries (Art, History, and Culture; Science; Finance and Administration) and the President of Smithsonian Enterprises were acting appointments at the time of survey administration. Employees who felt that they had insufficient information to evaluate leaders reduced the favorable scores for the acting and new leadership team. Nevertheless, employees generally rated Smithsonian leaders, ventral and unit, comparably with federal agency leadership in 2006 and 2008, and their unit director higher.

Overall employee job satisfaction continued the increase from 2007 after Secretary Small resigned, with a six percent increase from 72 percent to 78 percent, ten points above the government-wide levels in 2006 and 2008. Employee responses were generally somewhat stronger than, or comparable to opinions in 2007. Areas with the most favorable scores included many questions about job satisfaction, the employee’s immediate working team, and relations with supervisors. For example, the survey question with the highest favorable rating was “The work that I do is important to the Smithsonian,” with which 49 percent of

all Smithsonian employees strongly agreed and 41 percent agreed. The third most favorable rating was recorded for, “I like the kind of work I do,” with 42 percent strongly agreeing with this statement and 44 percent agreeing. Communications from senior leaders and the Regents about the transitions and what is going on at the Smithsonian have improved and become more transparent. Smithsonian scores were more favorable on many of these survey questions than FHCS scores.

At the same time, two areas continued to receive weak response: (1) communication across the Smithsonian and across departments within units; and (2) recognition and rewards. In both areas, Smithsonian employees rated the Institution substantially lower than other federal employees. Four of the questions with the lowest approval scores were: “There is adequate cooperation and communication across units in the Smithsonian,” “Smithsonian leaders and managers promote communication and cooperation across units in the Smithsonian,” “Individual pay raises depend on how well individual employees perform their jobs,” and “Employees who provide high quality services and products to customers are rewarded in meaningful ways.”

In addition, some Smithsonian senior leaders received low favorable scores. As noted earlier, most were acting, or brand new in the case of Secretary Clough. In some cases as many as three-quarters of employees working in units under their authority checked either “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” or “Do Not Know / Not Applicable.” Both of these responses, reflecting unfamiliarity with the leader being rated, are considered unfavorable responses in the methodology mandated by the Office of Personnel Management.

2. How the survey was conducted:

The 2008 SEPS was administered online with web-based software to all full-time Smithsonian employees with Smithsonian issued email accounts.

Some Smithsonian employees do not have Institution-issued email accounts, including security officers below the rank of corporal and Smithsonian enterprises retail staff. Paper questionnaires were provided to these employees. Some facilities maintenance employees also do not have Smithsonian issued email addresses. These employees were provided an opportunity to participate online at Office of Facilities Maintenance and Renovation sites.

The survey period began on August 22, 2008, and ended on September 30, 2008.

3. Description of sample:

All federal, trust, and Smithsonian Enterprises employees who were employed as of July 17, 2008, were given an opportunity to participate in the 2008 survey (contractors, research

associates, fellows, and other non-employees were not included). The results reported here do not include employees at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) who work under Panamanian law or employees of the Friends of the National Zoo (FONZ), an independent non-profit organization that supports the Smithsonian National Zoo.

4. Survey items and response choices:

The survey questions are presented in the accompanying tables. Respondents could choose one of six choices from the web survey: (1) Do not know or not applicable; (2) Strongly disagree; (3) Disagree; (4) Neither disagree nor agree; (5) Agree; and (7) Strongly disagree. Some respondents did not answer some questions. These responses were considered “Non responses.” They were deleted in calculating favorable scores.

All respondents were asked two questions regarding Secretary Clough: (A) “I have a high level of respect for Secretary Clough”; and “The Secretary generates high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.” The same two questions were asked referring to the employee’s unit director. Many Smithsonian units report to an Under Secretary or another leader responsible for several units. Employees were asked the same two questions about these leaders, based on their unit reporting relationships. The appropriate leaders were identified by name and position, an change that was not possible in the 2007 online survey.

5. Employee cooperation rate:

Of the 6047 Smithsonian employees invited to participate, 3036 began the survey (50%). 315 employees answered fewer than 50 questions and were excluded from the analysis. Thus, the final cooperation rate was 45 percent, substantially lower than the 59 percent cooperation in the 2007 SEPS.

6. Response weighting:

The set of respondents displayed response biases when compared with a profile of all Smithsonian employees provided by the Office of Human Resources. Among those biases were proportionately fewer black respondents, fewer males, and more higher pay grade employees than shown in the profile. Consequently, the survey respondents were post-weighted so that the analysis data set accurately reflects the relative proportions of demographic categories. All percentages (except cooperation rates) were calculated using weighted data. All “counts” in the accompanying tables were calculated using unweighted data to show the distribution of responses across answer choices.

Table 1
Comparison of 2008 Smithsonian-wide Employee Perspective Survey
Favorable Scores with 2007 SEPS and
2006 and 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) Scores
(Questions ordered from highest 2008 SEPS Favorable Ratings to Lowest)

SEPS Question	2008 Favorable Ratings	2007 Favorable Ratings	2008 SEPS minus 2007 SEPS	2008 FHCS	2006 FHCS
4. The work I do is important to the Smithsonian.	91%	89%	1%	91%	90%
29. I have a high level of respect for the Director of External Affairs.*	88%	na	na	52%	49%
3. I like the kind of work I do.	86%	86%	0%	84%	83%
86. I know how my immediate work unit's work relates to my Unit's goals and priorities.	83%	83%	0%	84%	83%
55. I know how my work relates to my Unit's goals and priorities.	82%	81%	1%	84%	83%
84. My immediate work unit has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals.	82%	85%	-3%	74%	74%
16. I know how my work relates to the Smithsonian's goals and priorities.	80%	85%	-5%	84%	83%
45. In my Unit, employees are protected from health and safety hazards on the job.	80%	79%	2%	76%	75%
68. My supervisor treats me as a trusted, professional and skilled employee.	80%	77%	3%	na	na
66. My supervisor supports my need to balance work and family issues.	79%	78%	1%	75%	78%
83. The people in my immediate work unit cooperate to get the job done.	79%	82%	-3%	84%	83%
64. My supervisor respects and values differences among individuals (for example, gender, race, national origin, religion, age, cultural background, disability).	79%	na	na	na	na
81. I am encouraged to achieve positive results.	79%	77%	2%	82%	79%
1. Overall, I am satisfied with my job.	78%	72%	6%	69%	68%
56. I can be honest and talk freely to my supervisor.	77%	75%	2%	na	na
2. My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.	77%	80%	-3%	73%	73%

* 2006 FHCS benchmark, "I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders."

** Color Coding: Green; 2008 SEPS Exceeds 2007 SEPS by 3% or more; Red, 2008 SEPS is lower than 2007 SEPS by 3% or more; Yellow, 2008 SEPS is within 3% of 2007 SEPS ; and "na", no comparison.

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62. Discussions with my supervisor about my performance are worthwhile.	66%	65%	1%	56%	56%
59. My supervisor gives me ample time and encourages me to participate in job enrichment opportunities (seminars, on- and off-site training opportunities, etc.).	66%	66%	1%	65%	64%
65. My supervisor is committed to a workforce representative of all segments of society.	66%	na	na	57%	54%
72. My supervisor provides constructive suggestions to improve my job performance.	65%	62%	3%	58%	58%
77. My workload is reasonable.	64%	59%	5%	60%	59%
33. I have a high level of respect for my Unit's Director.*	64%	56%	9%	52%	49%
76. My performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my performance.	64%	68%	-4%	63%	64%
37. My Unit's Director communicates the goals and priorities of our Unit.	64%	55%	9%	60%	58%
70. My supervisor resolves problems and follows up to make sure that solutions are working.	64%	61%	2%	na	na
10. I am satisfied with the information I have received about transitions in the Smithsonian's senior leadership and changes in Smithsonian policies.	63%	61%	2%	na	na
36. My Unit's Director communicates the goals and priorities of the Smithsonian.	63%	54%	9%	60%	58%
78. I am satisfied with my involvement in decisions that affect my work.	63%	59%	3%	53%	54%
53. My division manager/department head effectively relays information from my Unit's Director.	62%	60%	2%	na	na
47. My Unit has prepared employees for potential security threats.	60%	54%	7%	74%	73%
35. My Unit's Director reviews and evaluates the Unit's progress toward meeting its goals and objectives.	60%	55%	5%	58%	56%

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73. I receive the everyday guidance and assistance that I need to perform my job from my supervisor.	59%	55%	4%	na	na
11. I am satisfied with the information I receive from the Smithsonian's senior leaders on what's going on in the Smithsonian.	58%	49%	9%	48%	47%
49. I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my Unit.	58%	56%	1%	64%	62%
13. I am satisfied that governance changes and priorities implemented by the Regents, Secretary, and Acting Secretary will strengthen the Smithsonian in the future.	58%	63%	-5%	na	na
85. My immediate work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills.	56%	56%	0%	45%	44%
38. I am satisfied with the information I receive from my Unit's Director on what's going on in the Unit.	56%	49%	6%	48%	47%
34. My Unit's Director generates high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.**	53%	44%	9%	40%	38%
54. My division manager/department head effectively relays staff concerns to my Unit's Director.	53%	51%	2%	na	na
5. Overall, I am satisfied with my compensation.	52%	49%	4%	60%	61%
60. My supervisor regularly evaluates my training needs for my present job.	52%	50%	2%	53%	51%
79. I am satisfied with my choices of Smithsonian provided training to improve my performance in my present job.***	52%	na	na	na	na
39. I am satisfied with the policies and practices enacted by my Unit's Director (as distinguished from SI and Federal policies and practices).	52%	45%	7%	42%	41%
27. I have a high level of respect for the Director of OFEO.*	51%	na	na	52%	49%

* 2006 FHCS benchmark, "I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders."

** 2006 FHCS benchmark, "In my organization, leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment

*** 2006 FHCS benchmark, "How satisfied are you with the training you receive for your present job?"

Training opportunity question was inadvertently omitted for some web surveys by a software problem.

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8. I have a high level of respect for the Smithsonian's Secretary.*	51%	49%	3%	52%	49%
17. I have a high level of respect for the Acting Under Secretary for Art, History and Culture.*	51%	na	na	52%	49%
32. The Director of Communications generates high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.**	50%	na	na	40%	38%
50. Managers promote communication among different work units (for example, about projects, goals, needed resources).	50%	na	na	55%	53%
23. I have a high level of respect for the Acting President of Smithsonian Enterprises.*	48%	na	na	52%	49%
80. I am satisfied with the quality of Smithsonian provided training to improve my performance in my present job.***	48%	48%	0%	55%	54%
25. I have a high level of respect for the Chief Financial Officer.*	48%	na	na	52%	49%
61. My supervisor takes steps to address a poor performer who cannot or will not improve.	48%	44%	4%	30%	29%
46. My Unit's employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes.	48%	44%	4%	44%	42%
12. I am satisfied with the policies and practices enacted by the Smithsonian's senior leaders (Secretary, Under Secretaries, and Board of Regents).	44%	32%	12%	42%	41%
28. The Director of OFEO generates high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.**	44%	na	na	40%	38%
48. Recognition and awards (monetary or non-monetary) in my Unit depend on how well employees perform their jobs.	42%	49%	-6%	41%	40%
51. There is adequate cooperation and communication across divisions and departments within my Unit.	41%	38%	3%	55%	53%

* 2006 FHCS benchmark, "I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders."

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41. Creativity and innovation are generally rewarded in my Unit.	40%	43%	-4%	40%	39%
7. I am satisfied with my opportunity to get a better job in the Smithsonian.	38%	34%	4%	39%	37%
42. In my Unit, positive and negative individual performances are recognized in a meaningful way.	38%	39%	-1%	31%	30%
9. The Smithsonian's Secretary generates high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.**	37%	31%	6%	40%	38%
21. I have a high level of respect for the Acting Under Secretary for Finance and Administration.*	37%	na	na	52%	49%
18. The Acting Under Secretary for Art, History and Culture generates high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.**	36%	na	na	40%	49%
24. The Acting President of Smithsonian Enterprises generates high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.**	36%	na	na	40%	38%
40. Grade promotions in my Unit are based on merit.	34%	35%	-1%	35%	34%
19. I have a high level of respect for the Acting Under Secretary for Science.*	31%	na	na	52%	49%
44. Employees who provide high quality services and products to customers (visitors, researchers, funding sources, other employees, etc.) are rewarded in meaningful ways.	30%	30%	0%	46%	45%
22. The Acting Under Secretary for Finance and Administration generates high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.	30%	na	na	40%	38%
26. The Chief Financial Officer generates high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.**	29%	na	na	40%	38%

* 2006 FHCS benchmark, "I have a high level of respect for my organization's senior leaders."

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15. Smithsonian leaders and managers promote communication and cooperation across units in the Smithsonian.	29%	na	na	53%	53%
43. Individual pay raises (excluding cost of living adjustments (COLA)) depend on how well individual employees perform their jobs.	29%	30%	-1%	26%	22%
14. There is adequate cooperation and communication across units in the Smithsonian.	26%	na	na	53%	53%
20. The Acting Under Secretary for Science generates high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.**	19%	na	na	40%	38%

** 2006 FHCS benchmark, "In my organization, leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment