

## Agricultural Research Service

### Organizational Climate Assessment for the Human Resources Department

#### NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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#### Report Overview

As one of 17 agencies that comprise the United States Department of Agriculture, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) serves as the Department's in-house research agency. The ARS mission is to lead the nation to a better future through agricultural research and information. The Agency's approximately 6,000 employees and 2,000 scientists work in more than 90 research locations across the country.

In 2018, ARS asked the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) to conduct an independent, comprehensive climate assessment of the units that provide human resource (HR) services to the Agency and three other research agencies at the Department: Human Resources Division (HRD) employees; and human resource employees in ARS's three Business Service Centers (BSC) located across the country. These units are part of the ARS Administrative and Financial Management (AFM) organization.

This report was prepared by an Academy study team with the oversight of a three-person Expert Advisory Group of Academy Fellows. The Academy study team conducted both in-person and telephone interviews, as well as an online survey option, to collect employee feedback on the organizational climate in HRD and the BSCs.

Feedback overwhelmingly pointed to several significant and challenging shortfalls within HRD and AFM regarding the workplace climate. While much less prominently observed, employees did note positive points on organizational climate. Notwithstanding the challenges found by the study team, employees believe in the importance of the ARS mission and carry out their roles with pride.

This report provided ARS with a review of leadership qualities considered in research literature as best practices for high performing teams. These best practice qualities provide insights into what changes must be observed in senior leaders to improve the organizational climate. The report also speaks to the important role that all HR employees can have in enhancing the organizational climate.

The study team used these leader best practice characteristics to guide preparation of a menu of actions to be taken by leaders and all HR employees to transform the HR climate at ARS. The report concluded with high level guidelines on how ARS should approach implementing recommendations. The report surfaced sensitive matters that merit careful deliberation and engagement by top leaders of the Agency. As such, devising an action plan to address these challenging topics will be critical to improving delivery of HR services and to enhancing the organizational climate in HR. Successful implementation also provides an opportunity to further the essential work of those scientists and other mission-facing employees who advance this critical mission to our nation.

## **EAG**

**Ellen Tunstall**,\* Senior Advisor, Federal Management Partners, Inc.; Adjunct Staff, RAND Corporation; Secretary/Treasurer, Board of Directors, National Older Worker Career Center. Former Director & Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Workforce Issues and International Programs, Defense Secretary's Office, U.S. Department of Defense; Former positions with U.S. Office of Personnel Management: Deputy Associate Director, Talent and Capacity; Program Manager, Office of Insurance Programs. Former Division Chief, Civilian Assistance and Re-Employment Division, Defense Civilian Personnel Management Service; Senior Policy Specialist, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Office, Civilian Personnel Policy.

**John Palguta**,\* Vice President, Policy and Research, Partnership for Public Service; Adjunct Professor, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University. Former positions with U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board: Director, Policy and Evaluation; Deputy Director, Policy and Evaluation; Supervisory Research Analyst. Former positions with U.S. Office of Personnel Management: Branch Chief, Personnel Office; Personnel Management Advisor, Bureau of Personnel Management Evaluation.

**Basil Gooden**,\* Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Commonwealth of Virginia. Former State Director, Rural Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture; Chief Deputy Director, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, Commonwealth of Virginia; Coordinator of Outreach and Community Relations, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University; Extension Specialist, Virginia Cooperative Extension.

## **PROJECT STAFF**

**Brenna Isman**, *Director of Academy Studies*

**Roger Kodat**, *Project Director*

**Diane Irving**, *Senior Advisor*

**Kate Connor**, *Research Analyst*

**\*Academy Fellow**