



Action Planning Guide – Team Edition

A guide to make the most of your APS Employee Census results



2026 APS
Employee Census

4 May–5 June

Table of Contents

Action Planning Guide – Team Edition.....	1
A guide to make the most of your APS Employee Census results.....	1
1. The purpose of action planning	3
2. Using this guide	3
3. Create your action plan	3
3.1 Raise awareness of action planning initiatives	3
3.2 Exploring your Employee Census data	4
3.3 Celebrate your successes.....	5
3.4 Identify areas of opportunity.....	6
3.5 Develop a sequence of steps toward each goal	7
3.6 Construct your roadmap to success	8
4. Assess your goals	9
4.1 Assess your goals	9
4.2 Check your goals are SMART	9
5. Safeguard your initiatives.....	10
6. Celebrate and share the success of your actions!	10
6.1 Evaluate your initiatives.....	10
6.2 Communicate the success of your agency's achievements.....	10
7. Action Planning Guide Template.....	11

1. The purpose of action planning

The APS Employee Census is a valuable window into the APS that provides insight into the experience of APS employees. APS Employee Census results are a rich source of workplace information that can be used to understand the organisation and inform workplace initiatives. Action planning is the means by which these results are mobilised into activities that target specific aspects of the workplace, including employee resilience, flexibility, and performance.

An action plan is a statement about what the organisation wants to achieve, created in a deliberative, consultative and transparent way. It will assist the agency or workgroup to focus on a desired end state and decide on the steps and resources required to achieve these outcomes within a given timeframe. Ultimately, providing APS employees with an enriching and enabling workplace creates greater capability for high performance, thereby improving outcomes for the Australian public.

2. Using this guide

This guide will assist your workgroup to make the most of their APS Employee Census results by consolidating the information collected about their workplace and turning it into actions and outcomes. This Action Planning guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the array of other Employee Census data and resources, including the Employee Census Dashboard, Highlights Reports, Flash Reports, Excel Heatmaps, and Employee Census Tip Sheets.

This guide will help you draw together these tools and apply them. It will show you how to raise awareness of the action planning process, explore Employee Census data, identify areas to target, develop the sequence of steps needed to achieve outcomes, and set safeguards to protect your goals. It will also ensure your goals are SMART, providing the best possible opportunity to deliver your agency and workplace outcomes.

3. Create your action plan

3.1 Raise awareness of action planning initiatives

Generate awareness by thanking employees

The first step in action planning is to let employees know that it will be happening. Use agency and team communications to thank employees for their participation in the APS Employee Census. Without their valuable contribution, Employee Census results and insights would not be available. Take this opportunity to show employees the important role the Employee Census plays in developing APS initiatives. Tell employees when Employee Census results are due to be released and that the action planning process is about to begin. Encourage them to contribute to their agency/workgroup's action planning.

TIP

Thank employees for having their say through the APS Employee Census and communicate how this contributes to APS wide initiatives. Encourage their contribution to the action planning process

This contribution will generate awareness and help them understand the importance of the actions your plan will develop. This will in turn help to motivate greater participation in the subsequent actions your plan develops.

Distribute Employee Census results

At the first available opportunity, distribute Employee Census results to staff at all levels within your organisation. Communication that uses a combination of different methods is known to work best. Take advantage of email, intranet and posters, as well as all staff, group, and team meetings. Encourage staff to explore Employee Census results for both their agency and their workgroup. Recommend that managers empower staff to read the results and contribute feedback towards the action planning process.

TIP

Communicate Employee Census results to all staff within your agency/workgroup through several different methods of communication

3.2 Exploring your Employee Census data

Explore the overall results

Take time to explore your results. The Highlights Report presents a summary of key results. This makes it a good place to start. Additional information can be gained from Excel Heatmaps and other Employee Census reporting products.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

How do your results differ from other agencies, groups, and units?

What are the highest scoring topics and questions?

What are the lowest scoring topics and questions?

How have results changed from last year?

Explore the Employee Census themes

The Employee Census asks a series of questions to understand employees' views on, and experiences of working in their agency and the broader APS. Individual census questions do not sit in isolation – most can be grouped with others to provide greater insight into specific topics. Many of these themes are identified in the highlights report. Take time to understand your agency's response to the various themes and digest the results. To investigate your agency response to individual questions, see the flash report.

TIP

We advise that a size difference – or + 5 percentage points is worthy of attention, but the size of the team is important. Interpret large differences in small teams with caution, as these results may be unreliable

Dive deeper into your results

There may be opportunities for deeper investigation of your results. For agencies and workgroups wishing to dive further into their results, the APS Employee Census is structured on an underlying occupational framework that links questions in separate sections of the survey. These underlying themes examine topics such as job control, role clarity, and supportive relationships, and may provide insight into strengths and areas of further opportunity within agencies and workgroups. More information about these themes can be found in the Employee Census Tip Sheets.

Agency census coordinators can also access the Employee Census Dashboard, which offers valuable resources to assist your action planning. This includes the ability to analyse questions at different team levels and filters. It also provides easy to understand graphs and the ability to download these products.

Talk about your results

Meet with your team to discuss your results and develop your action plan. Ensure your agency/workgroup is well represented in this discussion. The best and most effective action plans incorporate diverse views from all areas of the organisation, rather than just senior staff or majority groups. Lasting and beneficial change is more likely to be accepted and achieved when actions have been planned and contributed to by employees with wide ranging functions within the organisation.

TIP

The most effective action plans consolidate diverse views from all areas of the organisation

3.3 Celebrate your successes

Focus on your areas of strength

Identify areas where your agency or workgroup is doing well. This may be in contrast to previous Employee Census results, the APS overall, or other comparable agencies.

Communicate success stories to all in the agency/workgroup

Draw attention to these areas of strength by distributing news of your successes through email, newsletters, meetings, intranet, forums, and bulletin boards. Think about how you can learn from what your agency/workgroup does well to build upon these strengths.

TIP

Showcase your strengths by spreading word of what your agency/workgroup does well

3.4 Identify areas of opportunity

As a team, identify areas to target

As a team, identify the areas within your agency/workgroup that are action-planning opportunities. Consider the degree of risk associated with not addressing an issue (e.g., unacceptable behaviour), and also the resources and capacity that you have to act.

There may be differing views in your group about the relevance and importance of goals. If there is conflict about areas to prioritise, encourage team members to approach the issues as collaborators rather than opponents. It may also help to ask team members to view the issue through the eyes of their colleagues.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

What are the areas that could be improved?

What are these results saying about the agency/workgroup as compared to others?

Are there common themes between these areas?

Does there appear to be underlying issues?

Are there questions with high neutral scores that might easily be shifted to positive responses?

Are results similar for all employees or do they differ between groups?

TIP

Decide on the areas of main concern and then rank these issues as critical, important, or desirable

Agree on areas to prioritise

We recommend choosing up to three specific target areas for your planned actions to keep them achievable. Improvements made in these areas will flow on to others. A mix of short-term and longer-term goals will assist with motivating employees to achieve the chosen outcomes.

Goals should strive for the improvement the team desires whilst being realistic and attainable. This creates the right mix of interest, challenge, and confidence that they can be achieved.

TIP

Target the work itself but also look at job design, work environment, and working conditions

Turn your top three issues into specific goal statements

Discuss your three goals with your group and endorse or modify them to reach agreement. Where your goals are long term, identify attainable short and medium term steps within these. Turn your top three issues into specific goal statements. Use positive language in your goal statements. Framing your goal in a positive way is more likely to encourage people to act upon it whereas negative framing draws attention to the problem, not the solution.

Consider your agency's objectives as well as the purpose and values of the APS

Consider how your goals align with the broader APS purpose and values, as well as the agency's objectives. Discuss with your team how relevant the goals are and whether they are meaningful in the context of your agency and the wider APS. People are more likely to be motivated to take part when they can see a meaningful reason to act.

3.5 Develop a sequence of steps toward each goal

Next, you will need to decide on the practical steps needed to get each goal from start to finish.

Collect information to guide you

Find resources that provide guidance on achieving your goals. Examine each individual goal statement and research what practices have been found to be effective to change behaviour in this context. The information you collect will guide the processes and steps needed on the journey toward your chosen outcome.

TIP

Begin your research around each goal with resources found on the Employee Census Dashboard, Employee Census tip sheets, and APS and agency policies. Explore what else you have available that may assist your desired outcomes in your business context

Investigate the programs and practices your agency already offers that may support these goals. Consider if current programs can be tailored to better support your goals.

Build a learning culture

Consider what has not worked in this area for your agency/workgroup or others. There is much to be learnt from past failures to improve future performance. Analyse and dig down into these experiences to discover the wisdom they contain. Incorporate this learning into your action plan.

Consider if your goal is realistic

TIP

The best goals for creating change are ones that are challenging yet achievable

Consider whether your agency/team has the skills and capability to deliver these outcomes. If not, can this capability be developed or acquired? The best action plans are realistic about what they can deliver.

Define your measure of success

Decide exactly what success looks like and how you will measure it. It is important to define this step well, as this is the key to measuring your progress. If your measure is the next Employee Census, there may be value in setting multiple indicators. Consider pulse surveys or measures specific to your goal that can be evaluated more regularly. Feedback from short-term measures is a valuable tool to encourage longer-term changes in behaviour and sustain your achievements over time.

Give each step a timeframe

Set timeframes for each step as well as the end goal. Decide at which point you will monitor each goal and check in with your progress. Be sure to set times to share action plans with employees and leaders as well as regular updates of progress along the way. The recognition of small wins can keep you moving in the right direction.

Establish ownership of the process

Nominate an action planning facilitator(s). This person(s) will be responsible for overseeing and monitoring the project's planned actions. Nominate responsible employees to take ownership of and be accountable for each stage on the timeline. Larger projects may need to nominate ownership of tasks within each step.

3.6 Construct your roadmap to success

Document your process

Once you have a clear picture of what needs to occur and the timeframes this will occur in, document the process toward your achievements. Ensure you:

- List the type and frequency of communications to distribute results and promote awareness of Employee Census action planning
- Plan how you will celebrate your team's areas of strength
- List your three goals
- List your measure(s) of success for each goal
- Outline each step in the journey for each goal
- List the tasks/actions that are involved within each step

- Nominate who is responsible for each step/task
- Define what success at each stage looks like

TIP

When new information comes to hand, be sure to re-evaluate and adjust goals to incorporate it into the plan and timeline

4. Assess your goals

4.1 Assess your goals

Check to see that your steps align with your original goal statements. Look at your overall statement of goals. Ensure they are as concrete as possible.

SMART GOAL TEMPLATE

Our goal is to [objective] by [timeframe]. [Key players or teams] will accomplish this goal by [outlining the steps you'll take]. Accomplishing this goal will result in [outcome]

4.2 Check your goals are SMART

If you have completed each action-planning step, each goal should now be SMART and set you on your way to delivering results.

SPECIFIC

What do you want to accomplish?

Why do you want to do it?

Where will it be?

What is in your way?

MEASURABLE

What metrics will you use to determine if you are meeting/approaching your goal?

This is your measure of progress

ACHIEVABLE

Are your plans realistic?

Do you have the skills and capability?

If not, how or where can you get it?

RELEVANT

Do your goals make sense to the workforce and fit within broader APS and agency objectives?

TIME BOUND

When will or should each step within your goal be achieved?

5. Safeguard your initiatives

You will need to identify potential obstacles along the way. The best way to deal with barriers to your action plan is to prepare for them. Even well-thought-out plans can fail if you encounter barriers that are not planned for. To improve your chances of success, make a list of obstacles to your goal. Encourage each person in the group to contribute their ideas and discuss any risks that they can see in the project. Brainstorm a solution that can be implemented for each obstacle. These intentions will safeguard your plans so that if these situations do occur, your progress forward will continue and not stall or stop completely.

Make a list of safeguard actions that can be implemented to keep your project on track should each obstacle occur

6. Celebrate and share the success of your actions!

6.1 Evaluate your initiatives

Evaluate the success of your actions. Take stock of what your planned actions have achieved and notice if these improvements have flowed onto other areas of your organisation. Take time to celebrate your success! If you are not moving toward your goal, don't be discouraged. Consider why this may be the case. Check your planned actions to identify where weaknesses may exist.

6.2 Communicate the success of your agency's achievements

Take pride in your implemented actions and spread the word to employees through as many communication channels as possible (e.g. email, newsletter, meetings, intranet, forums, bulletin boards). Thank them for their contribution to the initiative. Ensure you explicitly link your actions and outcomes to the Employee Census survey findings to encourage their participation in your next action plan!

Email the Employee Census team APSsurveys@apsc.gov.au so we can share your success throughout the APS

7. Action Planning Guide Template

Target areas	Goals	Action steps	Potential Obstacles	Resources to use	Due date	Person responsible for actions	Person responsible to review	Sign-off complete
1.		1. 2. 3. 4. ...						
2.		1. 2. 3. 4. ...						
3.		1. 2. 3. 4. ...						