



Australian Government

Australian Public Service Commission

APS Employee Census

Explanatory guide

2026 APS
Employee Census

4 May–5 June



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Overview

The APS Employee Census is an annual employee perception survey of the Australian Public Service workforce that has been conducted since 2012. The APS Employee Census collects employee opinions and perspectives on a range of topics, such as employee engagement, leadership, communication, innovation, and wellbeing. It is an opportunity for employees to share their experiences of working in their agency and the APS.

The Census Team within the Australian Public Service Commission (the Commission) administers the Census in conjunction the external service provider, Ipsos.

In 2026, 187,816 employees from 113 APS agencies were invited to participate in the Census. A total of 149,668 responded, yielding a response rate of 80% per cent. This response rate is encouraging given the size of the APS workforce, the number of participating agencies, and that the Census has been administered annually for some time. This response rate is also strong when compared with similar surveys in other jurisdictions:

- [NSW People Matter Employee Survey \(2025\)](#) – 52%
- [QLD Working for Queensland Survey \(2025\)](#) – 55%
- [VIC People Matter Survey \(2025\)](#) – 33%
- [NT People Matter Survey \(2025\)](#) – 48%
- [SA Your Voice Survey \(2024\)](#) – 35%
- [WA Public Sector Census \(2023\)](#) – 29%
- [TAS State Service Employee Survey \(2024\)](#) – 26%

Timing

The Census opened on **Monday 4 May** with the email delivery of survey invites to employees staggered over the week. The survey closed on **Friday 5 June 5:00pm AEST**.

Questionnaire

All respondents to the Census are asked a standard set of questions. This approach is taken to generate APS level results and benchmarks for comparison purposes. While a standardised questionnaire is employed, larger agencies have the option of asking their employees up to 15 agency-specific questions.

Data collection

The Census is an online survey. Respondents are invited to participate via email and are provided with a unique link to access the survey.

Participation in the Census is entirely voluntary. To submit a response, respondents need to complete four mandatory demographic questions (gender, age, state/territory, and current classification). They are then free to skip any other question they cannot or may not want to answer.

The de-identified data that are released are outlined in the [Participant Information Sheet](#) and the [APSC Privacy Policy](#). No identifying information (e.g. email address) is made available and a respondent's full individual response will not be provided to anyone in their agency. There are strict filters in place so that when there are fewer than 10 responses (or 30 responses for free-text questions) from a unit, no data will show through any reporting products..

2026 Participating agencies and entities

APS Agencies

Aboriginal Hostels Limited	Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Regulator	Department of Education
Administrative Review Tribunal	Australian Office of Financial Management*	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission	Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority	Department of Finance
Asbestos and Silica Safety and Eradication Agency	Australian Public Service Commission	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Attorney-General's Department	Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency	Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
Australian Bureau of Statistics	Australian Research Council	Department of Home Affairs
Australian Centre for Disease Control	Australian Skills Quality Authority	Department of Industry, Science and Resources
Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research	Australian Submarine Agency	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission	Australian Taxation Office	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care	Australian Trade and Investment Commission	Department of Social Services
Australian Communications and Media Authority	Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre	Department of Treasury
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission	Australian Transport Safety Bureau	Department of Veterans' Affairs
Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission	Australian War Memorial	Digital Transformation Agency
Australian Digital Health Agency	Bureau of Meteorology	Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Commission
Australian Electoral Commission	Cancer Australia	Fair Work Commission
Australian Energy Regulator	Clean Energy Regulator	Federal Court of Australia Listed Entity
Australian Financial Security Authority	Climate Change Authority	Food Standards Australia New Zealand
Australian Fisheries Management Authority	Comcare	Future Fund Management Agency
Australian Human Rights Commission	Commonwealth Grants Commission*	Geoscience Australia*
Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies	Commonwealth Ombudsman	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Australian Institute of Family Studies	Defence and Veterans' Service Commission	High Speed Rail Authority
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Defence Housing Australia	Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority
Australian Law Reform Commission	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	IP Australia*
Australian National Audit Office	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water	Murray–Darling Basin Authority
Australian National Maritime Museum	Department of Defence	National Anti-Corruption Commission
		National Archives of Australia

APS Agencies

National Blood Authority
National Capital Authority
National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People
National Disability Insurance Agency
National Emergency Management Agency
National Film and Sound Archive of Australia
National Health and Medical Research Council
National Health Funding Body
National Indigenous Australians Agency
National Library of Australia
National Museum of Australia
National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority
National Portrait Gallery of Australia
NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
Net Zero Economy Authority
Office of National Intelligence
Office of Parliamentary Counsel
Office of the Australian Information Commissioner
Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (Cth)
Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman
Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care
Office of the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security
Office of the Special Investigator
Organ & Tissue Authority

APS Agencies

Parliamentary Workplace Support Services
Productivity Commission
Professional Services Review
Royal Australian Mint*
Safe Work Australia
Screen Australia
Services Australia
Sport Integrity Australia
Tax Ombudsman
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
The Museum of Australian Democracy at Old
Parliament House
Torres Strait Regional Authority
Workplace Gender Equality Agency

Non-APS Agencies

Australian Maritime Safety Authority
Australian Securities and Investments Commission
Civil Aviation Safety Authority
Department of Parliamentary Services
Department of the House of Representatives
Department of the Senate
National Gallery of Australia
Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General
Parliamentary Budget Office

** Indicates the entity engages staff under the Public Service Act 1999 but are not APS agencies as defined by the Act.*

Note:

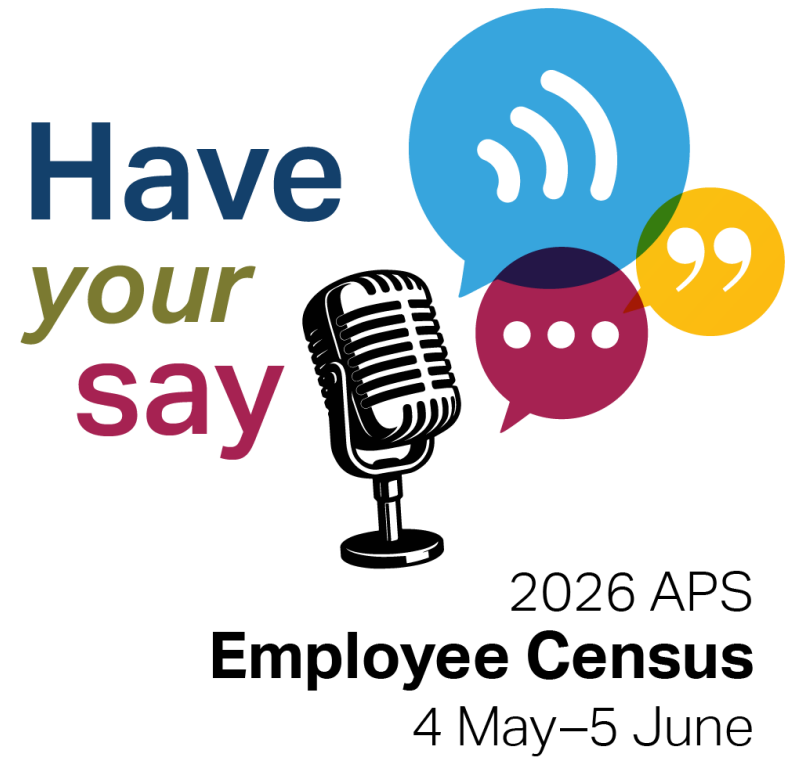
Agencies can opt to invite non-APS employees to participate in the Census. Any responses from respondents who identify as “Non-APS” are excluded when calculating APS overall results. This includes responses from non-APS agencies.

The number of APS employees invited to participate in the Census differs from the size of the APS workforce officially reported in the APS Employment Data releases. These differences are for several reasons. It is up to agencies to set their own eligibility criteria, however:

- Employees who are very new to an agency (commenced within three weeks of the Census period) are typically excluded from the survey as it is assumed they have not had sufficient exposure to the agency.. This also means that APS staff who have moved between APS agencies during this period may be excluded.
- Employees on leave for the entire period of the Census administration period are typically excluded from the survey as it is assumed that they are not at work to complete a work activity.

Additionally, some agencies specifically choose to invite their non-APS employees or, intermittent/irregular (casual) APS employees to participate.

The questionnaire



Development

The 2026 APS Employee Census questionnaire includes 63 individual questions grouped into 14 sections.

Each year the content of the Census questionnaire is reviewed to ensure that each question has value and meets a specific purpose. In 2021, a new underlying framework was applied to better align core sets of questions and harness greater value from results. In 2026, the APSC has continued to improve the questionnaire through:

- Broad consultation with subject matter experts from within the APSC and other APS agencies to seek their input to question design and information requirements for supporting APS-level policies and programs.
- Ongoing research to better understand contemporary workforce issues and options that relate to questionnaire content.
- Listening to and incorporating agencies' feedback.

The questionnaire covers numerous themes and measures. Central to these are six indices addressing Employee Engagement, Immediate Supervisor, SES Manager, Communication, Enabling Innovation, Wellbeing Policies and Support, and Speak Up Culture.

Framework

The APSC employs the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) as the underlying framework for the 2026 APS Employee Census questionnaire.

The JD-R is a well-validated theory of occupational stress and engagement that has been applied across a broad range of fields (e.g. Christian et al., 2011¹; Demerouti et al., 2001²; Lesener et al., 2019³). The JD-R proposes that the interaction between two sets of work conditions (job demands and job resources) contribute to work outcomes.

Job demands refer to the organisational, social, and physical aspects of a job that require extended effort (mental or physical) to cope with.

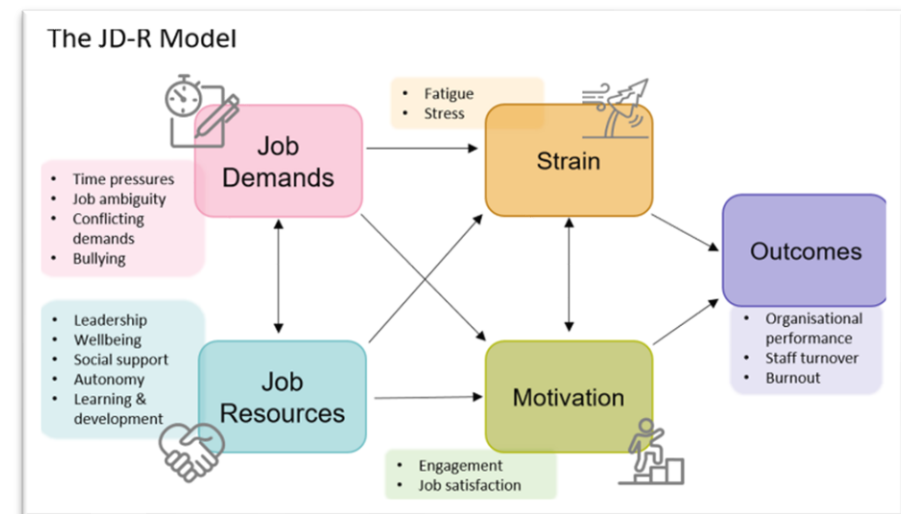
Job resources are the aspects of a job that assist in achieving work goals, reducing job demands, and facilitating personal growth and development.

Job demands and resources interact in two ways. Strain and reduced employee wellbeing result when employees are required to cope with high job demands for extended periods and which exceeds their ability to adapt or cope.

Alternatively, greater employee motivation occurs when employees are provided with sufficient resources (e.g. support) and they are able to better engage with their work.

Importantly, all these elements interact, resulting in positive and negative outcomes for the employee and organisation. An example of a positive outcome is high levels of work performance, while a negative outcome is employee turnover.

The APSC first piloted the JD-R in the 2020 APS Employee Census. This framework has since been expanded and applied to the 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026 Employee Census questionnaires. As an underlying framework, the JD-R informs the questions that are included within the APS Employee Census questionnaire and how results are reported and interpreted.



¹ Christian, M. S., Garza, A. S., & Slaughter, J. E. (2011). Work engagement: A quantitative review and test of its relations with task and contextual performance. *Personnel Psychology*, 64, 89–136. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6570.2010.01203.x

² Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86, 499–512.

³ Lesener, T., Gusy, B., & Wolter, C. (2019). The job demands-resources model: A meta-analytic review of longitudinal studies. *Work & Stress*, 33, 76–103. doi:10.1080/02678373.2018.1529065

Employee Engagement Index

Employee engagement has been thoroughly researched over a number of decades. High levels of employee engagement is associated with positive benefits such as increased performance and productivity.

Employee engagement is more than simply job satisfaction or commitment to an organisation. It is the extent to which employees are motivated, inspired and enabled to improve an organisation's outcomes. Engagement requires a two-way relationship between an employee and their organisation.

The APSC employs a model of employee engagement developed by the external service provider, Ipsos. This model addresses three attributes associated with employee engagement and measures the emotional connection and commitment employees have to working for their organisation. In this model, an engaged employee will “say”, “stay” and “strive”:

- **Say** – the employee is a positive advocate of the organisation
- **Stay** – the employee is committed to the organisation and wants to stay as an employee
- **Strive** – the employee is willing to put in discretionary effort to excel in their job and help their organisation succeed

The Say, Stay, Strive model of employee engagement is flexible and the APSC has tailored the questions for the APS context. The questions that address each attribute and contribute to the index score for employee engagement are presented to the right.



- I am proud to work in my agency
- I would recommend my agency as a good place to work
- Overall, I am satisfied with my job
- I believe strongly in the purpose and objectives of my agency



- I feel a strong personal attachment to my agency
- I feel committed to my agency's goals



- I suggest ideas to improve our way of doing things
- I am happy to go the 'extra mile' at work when required
- I work beyond what is required in my job to help my agency achieve its objectives
- My agency really inspires me to do my best work every day

Leadership indices

Strong leadership is vital to high performance in the workplace. High quality leadership has been shown to boost positive workplace outcomes such as productivity, engagement and innovation. Strong leadership also supports times of high demand and contributes to lower employee turnover.

[The APS Leadership Capability Framework](#) (VICEED) identifies six key capabilities that are critical for success:

- Visionary
- Influential
- Collaborative
- Entrepreneurial
- Enabling
- Deliver

Immediate Supervisor Index

The Immediate Supervisor Index assesses how employees view the leadership behaviours of their immediate supervisor in line with [the APS Leadership Capability Framework](#). The questions that form the Immediate Supervisor Index are:

- My supervisor engages with staff on how to respond to future challenges
- My supervisor can deliver difficult advice whilst maintaining relationships

- My supervisor invites a range of views, including those different to their own
- My supervisor encourages my team to regularly review and improve our work
- My supervisor is invested in my development
- My supervisor ensures that my workgroup delivers on what we are responsible for

SES Manager Leadership Index

The SES Manager Index assesses how employees view the leadership behaviours of their immediate SES manager in line with [the APS Leadership Capability Framework](#). The questions that form the SES Manager Index are:

- My SES manager clearly articulates the direction and priorities for our area
- My SES manager presents convincing arguments and persuades others towards an outcome
- My SES manager promotes cooperation within and between agencies
- My SES manager encourages innovation and creativity
- My SES manager creates an environment that enables us to deliver our best
- My SES manager ensures that work effort contributes to the strategic direction of the agency and the APS

Wellbeing Policies and Support Index

The APS has long been focused on the wellbeing of its employees. As employers, APS agencies have obligations under Work Health and Safety legislation. Together with these obligations is an acknowledgement that high performance of employees and organisations cannot be sustained without adequate levels of employee wellbeing.

The Wellbeing Policies and Support Index included in the Census measures both the practical and cultural elements that allow for a sustainable and healthy working environment.

The questions that form the Wellbeing Policies and Support Index are:

- I am satisfied with the policies/practices in place to help me manage my health and wellbeing
- My agency does a good job of communicating what it can offer me in terms of health and wellbeing
- My agency does a good job of promoting health and wellbeing
- I think my agency cares about my health and wellbeing
- I believe my immediate supervisor cares about my health and wellbeing

Communication Index

Effective communication is vital for a positive workplace. A communicative workforce fosters collaboration, networking and diverse thinking while improving outcomes. It is also known that effective communication can prevent and buffer issues in the workplace.

The Communication Index measures communication at the individual, group and agency level.

The questions that form the Communication Index are:

- My supervisor communicates effectively
- My SES manager communicates effectively
- Internal communication within my agency is effective

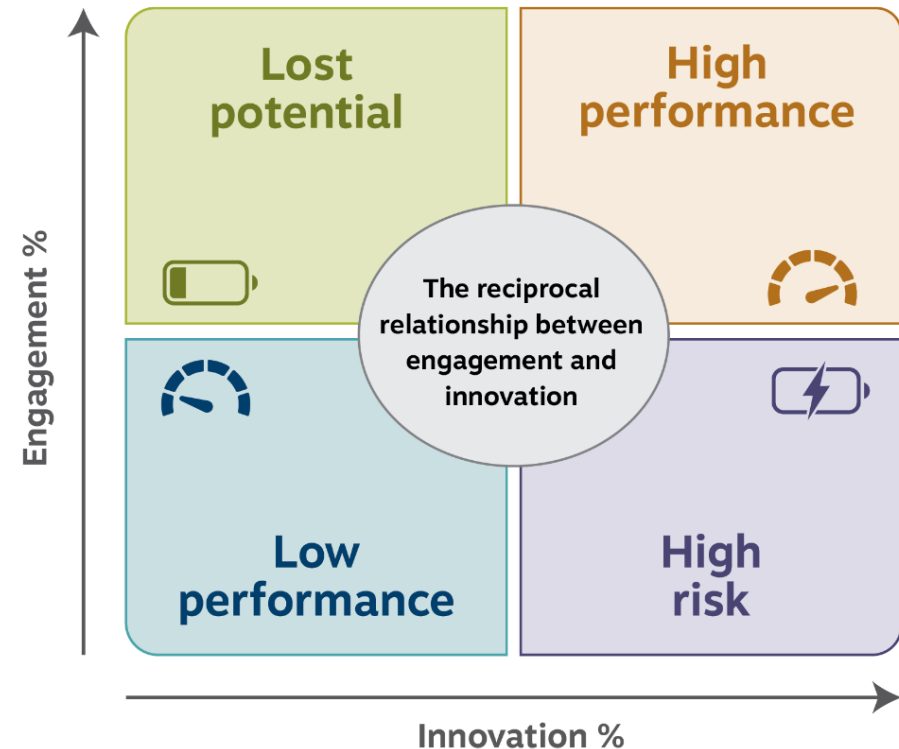
Enabling Innovation Index

Innovation is a particular focus for the APS as it can drive improved performance, productivity and work outcomes. Innovation and employee engagement are also linked, such that innovation can drive engagement, and innovation can flourish where employee engagement is high. The reciprocal relationship between employee engagement and innovation is summarised in the graphic to the right.

In part, the 2026 APS Employee Census addresses innovation through a set of dedicated questions that contribute to an index score. This Innovation Index score assesses both whether employees feel willing and able to be innovative, and whether their agency has a culture which enables them to be so.

The questions that form the Enabling Innovation Index are:

- I believe that one of my responsibilities is to continually look for new ways to improve the way we work
- My immediate supervisor encourages me to come up with new or better ways of doing things
- People are recognised for coming up with new and innovative ways of working
- My agency inspires me to come up with new or better ways of doing things
- My agency recognises and supports the notion that failure is a part of innovation



Speak Up Culture Index

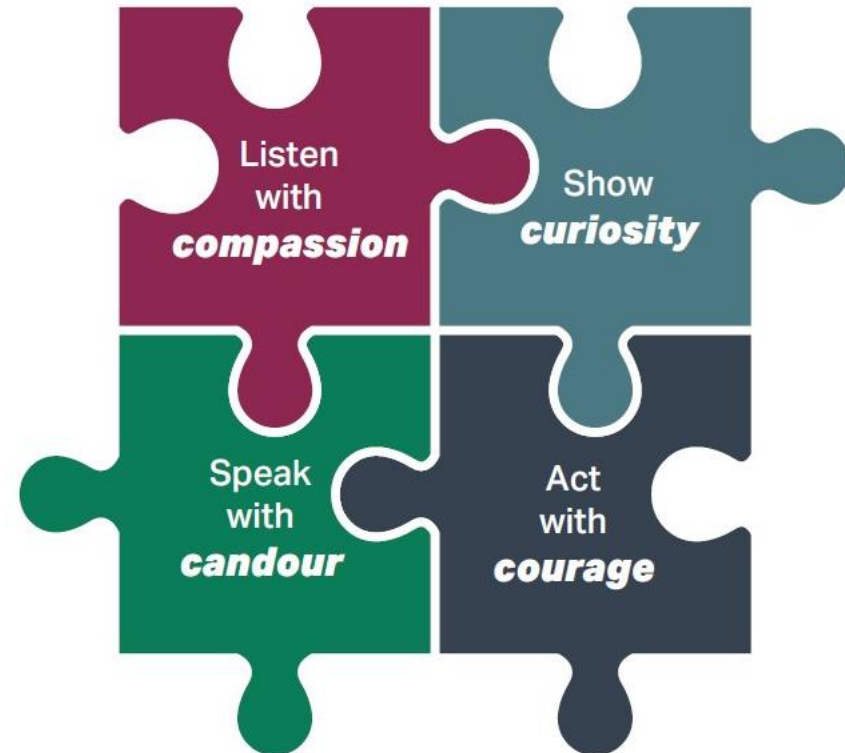
The APS Employee Census has an underlying framework that identifies and considers conditions within workplaces that influence employee and workgroup performance.

In 2026, the following questions relate to employee perceptions of speak up culture in their workplace.

- The people in my workgroup value others' individual skills and talents.
- People in my workgroup are comfortable checking with each other if they have questions about the right way to do something.
- If you make a mistake in my workgroup, it tends to be held against you (reverse scored).
- The people in my workgroup are able to bring up problems and tough issues.

Speak up culture refers to someone's perception that they can openly share ideas, ask questions, or admit mistakes without fear of embarrassment or punishment. It focuses on fostering trust, respect, and open communication within teams.

In workplaces, speak up culture might mean staff feel confident proposing new ideas in a meeting or speaking up if something isn't working. This is essential for encouraging innovation, and collaboration, ultimately improving integrity culture.



Calculating and interpreting index scores

Index scores are not percentages. Index scores have been calculated to take the strength of each individual's responses into account.

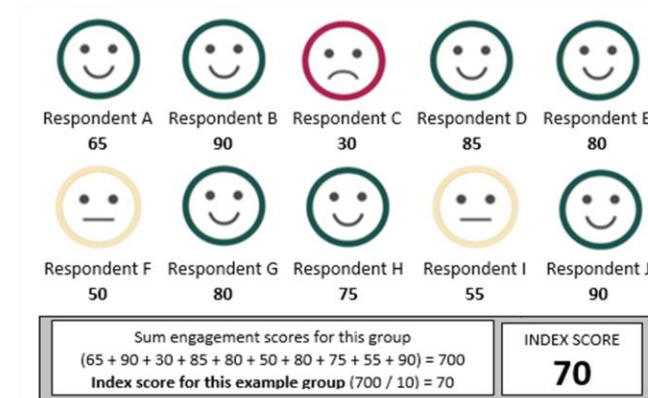
The questions that comprise each index are asked on a five-point scale. To calculate the index score, each respondent's answers are recoded to fall on a scale between 0 and 100 (i.e. coded as 0, 25, 50, 75 or 100).

An individual's recoded responses is then averaged across all questions in that index to provide the index score for that respondent. For the Engagement Index, this is 10 questions, for the Communication Index this is three questions, for the Speak Up Culture Index this is four questions, and for the other indices it is five questions.

The table below shows how an individual may receive an index score of 65 for an index with five questions.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	SCORE
Value	100	75	50	25	0	
Question 1		✓				75
Question 2		✓				75
Question 3			✓			50
Question 4				✓		25
Question 5	✓					100
Individual respondent index score (sum of scores / number of questions) (325/5)						Respondent A Index Score: 65

For a group of people, each individual's index score is then combined and averaged to form a group score, as seen in the image below.



Note, an individual's response is only incorporated to calculate the overall index score if the respondent has provided an answer to all the contributing questions. Therefore, if a respondent doesn't answer all questions in the index, their response isn't included in the calculation.

An index score on its own can provide information about the group to which it relates. Index scores, however, have the most utility when they are compared with scores over time or between hierarchy units, agencies, and demographic groups.

Variation of indices

There is usually a lot less variation in the index scores than the % Positive scores for individual questions between each Census. The individual questions show the change in the percent of people who responded positively (i.e. selected Agree or Strongly Agree) and don't incorporate the neutral and negative responses in their calculation, like the indices do.

Definitions

The Census uses specific definitions for some questions including gender, cultural background, disability, carer responsibilities, discrimination, bullying and harassment, and corruption.

Gender

Gender refers to current gender, which may be different to sex recorded at birth and may be different to what is indicated on legal documents.

Cultural background

Your cultural background is the cultural/ethnic group(s) to which you feel you belong or identify. This background may be the same as your parents, grandparents, or your heritage, or it may be the country you were born in or have spent a great amount of time in, or feel more closely tied to.

The cultural background categories align with the [Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups](#). If you are unsure as to how your cultural background falls within these categories, please consult the lists available within this [document](#). Note that not all cultural or ethnic groups may be explicitly identified.

Carer responsibilities

For the purpose of this question, carer responsibilities are not limited to those in receipt of carer payments, and do include parental responsibilities.

Disability

For the purposes of this survey, a person has a disability if they report that they have a limitation, restriction or impairment which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least 6 months and restricts everyday activities. This includes:

- loss of sight (not corrected by glasses or contact lenses)
- loss of hearing where communication is restricted or an aid is used
- speech difficulties
- difficulty learning or understanding things
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties that restrict everyday activities
- blackouts, seizures or loss of consciousness
- chronic or recurrent pain or discomfort that restricts everyday activities
- incomplete use of arms or fingers
- difficulty gripping or holding things
- incomplete use of feet or legs
- restriction in physical activities or in doing physical work
- disfigurement or deformity
- nervous or emotional condition that restrict everyday activities
- mental illness or condition requiring help or supervision
- memory problems or periods of confusion that restrict everyday activities
- social or behavioural difficulties that restrict everyday activities
- head injury, stroke or other acquired brain injury with long-term effects that restrict everyday activities
- receiving treatment or medication for any other long-term conditions or ailments and still restricted in everyday activities
- any other long-term conditions resulting in a restriction in everyday activities.

Discrimination

Discrimination happens when a person, or a group of people, is treated less favourably than another person or group because of their background or certain personal characteristics. It is also discrimination when an unreasonable rule or policy applies to everyone but has the effect of disadvantaging some people because of a personal characteristic they share.

Bullying and Harassment

Bullying: A worker is bullied at work if, while at work, an individual or group of individuals repeatedly behaves unreasonably towards the worker, or group of workers of which the worker is a member, and that behaviour creates a risk to health and safety. To avoid doubt, this does not apply to reasonable management action carried out in a reasonable way.

Harassment: Workplace harassment entails offensive, belittling or threatening behaviour directed at an individual or group. The behaviour is unwelcome, unsolicited, usually unreciprocated and usually, but not always, repeated. Reasonable management action carried out in a reasonable way is not workplace harassment.

Bullying and harassment can involve:

- Physical behaviour
- Cyberbullying (e.g. harassment via IT, or the spreading of gossip/materials intended to defame or humiliate)
- Verbal abuse (e.g. offensive language, derogatory remarks, shouting or screaming)
- 'Initiations' or pranks
- Interference with your personal property or work equipment

- Interference with work tasks (e.g. withholding needed information, undermining or sabotage)
- Inappropriate and unfair application of work policies or rules (e.g. performance management, access to leave, access to learning and development)
- Deliberate exclusion from work-related activities

Harassment also **includes sexual harassment** and can involve:

- Unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing
- Staring or leering
- Suggestive comments or jokes
- Sexually explicit pictures, screen savers or posters
- Unwanted invitations to go out on dates or requests for sex
- Intrusive questions about an employee's private life or body
- Unnecessary familiarity
- Insults or taunts based on your sex
- Sexually explicit emails or SMS messages
- Accessing sexually explicit internet sites
- Behaviour which would also be an offence under the criminal law, such as physical assault, indecent exposure, sexual assault, stalking or obscene communications.

Further information about sexual harassment can be found on the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#) website.

Corruption

Consistent with the [National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022](#) and the [Commonwealth Fraud and Corruption Control Framework](#), corruption is defined within this survey as conduct where a public official (definition below) intentionally abuses their office, misuses official information, breaches the public trust or adversely affects the honest or impartiality of another public official.

Abuse of office - Where a public official intentionally engages in improper acts or omissions in their official capacity, to gain a benefit for themselves or another person, or to cause a detriment to another person.

Misusing official information - Where a public official misuses information that they have obtained in their official capacity.

Breaching public trust - Where a public official exercises power or performs a function for a use that is improper.

Adversely affecting the honesty or impartiality of a public official – Where a public official causes another public official to behave dishonestly or in a biased way when they carry out their official duties.

Examples of ‘corrupt conduct’:

- A public official obtains a favourable outcome for a friend during an official process such as a government tender or procurement.
- A public official awards a contract to a company in which they or their family has a substantial interest.

- A public official appoints or promotes a family member or friend to a position in their agency inconsistent with merit.
- A public official uses their systems access to get another person’s sensitive information when there is no business need to do so.
- A public official is offered a bribe or bribes another public official to secure a favourable decision.

Examples of conduct that is likely not ‘corrupt’:

- Poor work performance or management.
- A person committing a crime that has nothing to do with their official duties.
- Incompetence.
- An incorrect decision.

Public Officials

For the purposes of this survey, a public official is an APS employee or staff member of a Commonwealth agency, or anyone acting on their behalf. A staff member of a Commonwealth agency may include an agency head, an individual engaged to assist a Commonwealth company or entity, a contractor, or anyone who provides goods or services related to a Commonwealth contract.

Topics addressed in the APS Employee Census

The Census addresses a broad range of topic areas. These topic areas and the questions that relate to them can change between years depending on priorities and areas of focus for the APS.

Each of the major topic areas addressed in the 2026 APS Employee Census are listed below.

Work-related demographics

The Census includes questions about work-related demographics such as location, classification, tenure and employment category.

Flexible work arrangements

The Census includes questions about flexible work arrangements to enable agencies and the APS to better understand both the type of work arrangements and proportion of employees who work from home on a regular and irregular basis.

Diversity details

The Census includes questions about diversity, including identification as an Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person, cultural and linguistically diverse, with an ongoing disability, neuro-divergent, LGBTIQ+ and carer responsibilities.

Job family

The Census includes a question asking respondents to choose an option that best describes the type of work they do. The response options

presented at this question correspond with the job families within the [APS Job Family Framework](#).

General impressions: Agency

Respondents are asked for their attitudes towards their current agency. All questions within this set contribute to the Employee Engagement Index.

General impressions: Current job

Respondents are asked for their attitudes towards their current job. Four questions within this set contribute to the Employee Engagement Index.

General impressions: Immediate workgroup

Respondents are asked a number of questions about the people they work with on a daily basis as well as the resources their workgroup need to perform well. Four questions within this set contribute to the Speak Up Culture Index.

General impressions: Immediate supervisor

Respondents are asked for their attitudes towards their immediate supervisor. Six questions within this set contribute to the Immediate Supervisor Index and one question contributes to the Communication Index.

General impressions: Senior Executive Service

Respondents are asked for their attitudes towards their SES manager as well as their thoughts on the SES cohort within their agency. Six questions

within this set contribute to the SES Manager Leadership Index and one question contributes to the Communication Index. For the purposes of the Census an immediate Senior Executive Service (SES) is a Line/Branch/Group manager or equivalent.

Work environment

Respondents are asked for their attitudes towards their work environment as well as their thoughts on their reasons for staying in the APS. One question contributes to the Communication Index.

Innovation

Respondents are asked for their attitudes towards innovation. All questions within this set contribute to the Enabling Innovation Index.

Wellbeing

Respondents are asked for their attitudes towards wellbeing as well as their thoughts on their health, if their work is emotionally demanding, if their work is stressful, and if they feel burned out by their work. Five questions within this set contribute to the Wellbeing Policies and Support Index.

Ways of working

Respondents are asked for their attitudes towards performance, workloads, and barriers to performing their best.

Developing capability

Respondents are asked for their attitudes towards skills or capability gaps within the immediate workgroup, formal learning, and performance discussions.

Retention

Respondents are asked for their attitudes towards their intentions regarding staying in their current position.

Concluding questions

Respondents are asked to provide responses to three questions:

- What is one thing your agency is doing really well?
- If you could change one thing to improve the effectiveness of your workplace, what would it be?
- I am confident my agency will act on the results of this survey.

Reporting rules

The APSC employs specific rules around how results are reported. Such rules protect the privacy of respondents and individual agencies' results.

De-identification of data is undertaken in accordance with guidance provided by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.

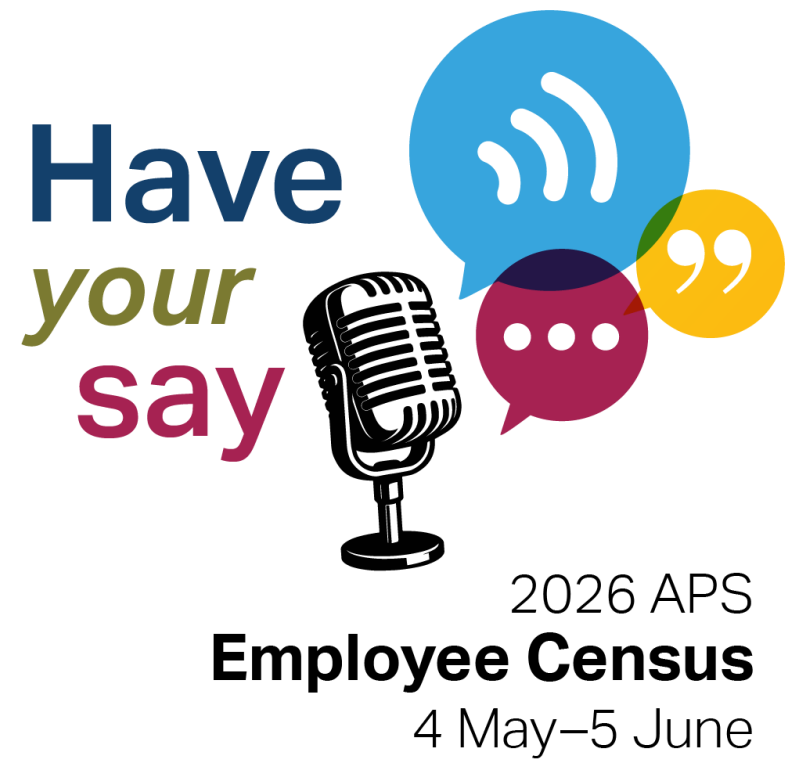
The APSC and the external service provider, Ipsos, report Census results and make these available to agencies and other parties. Results are reported for groups of respondents. Groups can be formed by a combination of demographic information (such as gender, age, state/territory, and current classification) and/or where the respondent is within the hierarchy.

There are filters in place so that when fewer than 10 employees respond, no data is displayed in an agency's online Census reporting portal. Free-text comments will only be attributable to particular groups where there are 30 or more comments from members of that group. For example, if a work unit has fewer than 30 respondents the free text questions will not be shown for that work group. More information is available in the [Participant Information Sheet](#).

The APSC may provide agencies and external parties with de-identified Census datasets. As outlined in the [APSC Privacy Policy](#), responses within these datasets will not be reasonably attributable to any specific individual.

De-identified datasets are uploaded to data.gov.au in accordance with the [Australian Government Public Data Policy](#).

Using the results



Interpreting survey results

Most items in the Census ask respondents to rate the level of agreement regarding, or satisfaction with, workplace matters on a five-point, ordinal scale. The scales are generally balanced, allowing respondents to express one of two extremes (for example, satisfaction and dissatisfaction) and with a midpoint that allows respondents to enter a 'neutral' response. When reporting, the five points can be collapsed into three: agree/satisfied, neutral, and disagree/dissatisfied. Therefore, the neutral category refers to responses that reflect a 'neither agree nor disagree' sentiment.

When interpreting item responses, it is important to realise there is only an ordinal relationship between points in a scale. The strength of opinion to shift a respondent from 'neutral' to 'satisfied' may be much smaller (or larger) than the strength required to shift a respondent from 'satisfied' to 'very satisfied'.

Although it can be a valuable resource and evidence base, it should be remembered that the Census is an employee perception survey. Respondents are asked to provide their opinions and perceived experiences.

As with any survey, the Census can involve error, both predictable and unpredictable. For example, respondents may provide a socially acceptable answer rather than their true attitudes.

Additionally, although all APS employees are invited to participate, not everyone chooses to do so. Even with a strong response rate at the APS overall level, there is a chance that non-respondents are different from those who completed the Census.

At the APS level, four demographics are checked to ensure respondents are representative of the broader APS workforce.

These demographics are gender, age, state/territory, and current classification. While each year there are no considerable differences in demographics among those who did and did not respond to the survey, some caution may be required when interpreting results from groups with lower response rates.

Differences between employee perception survey results and data from human resources information systems

Responses to the Census as an employee perception survey may differ to data held within human resources information systems. This is particularly true for demographic and diversity-related information.

There are numerous reasons for these differences. Some characteristics are not always permanent and impact an employee for a certain period of time (e.g. disability). Some employees also may not want to officially disclose and record some information on their agency's human resources information systems.

Where to begin – Highlights Reports

In 2026, highlights reports will include some additional information to support agencies and teams to most effectively utilise their Census results.

Highest positively and negatively scored questions

In 2026 a new page was introduced to include the top five attitudinal questions that received the highest proportion of positive scores, as well as the highest proportion of negative scores.

These will assist agencies to make targeted action plans and enable them to take effective next steps upon receiving highlights reports. These questions spotlight strengths and areas to improve.

Most and least improved questions

Another new page for 2026 displays the top five questions with the largest and least increase in favourable scores since the previous year.

This page shows how the results compare to the previous year, and displays the attitudinal questions that have seen the highest or lowest change in the % positive score. For example, where a question had a 90% positive score last year but this year had a 75% positive score, the 15 percentage point decrease might display as the lowest change.

Agency Index Scores

In 2026, a table displaying the spread of agency scores across the seven indices and the APS overall score has replaced individual graphs.

The methodology applied for the rankings is as follows:

- only APS agencies with 10 or more respondents are included (non-APS agencies have not been included),
- all respondents (including non-APS employees) from APS agencies are included,
- ranking takes into account decimals.

Scales

There are different scales used throughout the questionnaire. Listed below are the different scales and example questions for each. Most 2026 questions are asked on a 5 point scale (Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree). For reporting purposes, the scale is reduced to 3 points, where respondents who provide a favourable response to the question are grouped and respondents who provide an unfavourable response are grouped.

The blue score represents a positive or favourable response and the red score represents a negative or unfavourable response.

This is the case even when a question is worded negatively, e.g. “I feel burned out by my work”. The scale is reversed, however the blue score still represents a positive or favourable response (Strongly Disagree + Disagree) and the red score represents a negative or unfavourable response (Agree + Strongly Agree).

Table 1: Example of negatively worded questions in the 2026 APS Employee Census.

Examples of negatively worded questions	Positive	Neutral	Negative
34 - I feel burned out by my work	<i>Strongly Disagree + Disagree</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Agree + Strongly Agree</i>
33 - How often do you find your work stressful?	<i>Never + Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often + Always</i>

Table 2: Example questions for each type of scale used in the 2026 APS Employee Census.

Example question from this scale category	Positive	Neutral	Negative
18a - I feel a strong personal attachment to my agency	<i>Strongly agree + Agree</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Disagree + Strongly disagree</i>
30b - I have a choice in deciding how I do my work	<i>Always + Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely + Never</i>
31 - In general, would you say that your health is:	<i>Excellent + Very Good + Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>
35 - In the last month, please rate your workgroup's overall performance	<i>Excellent + Very Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Below Average + Well Below Average</i>
37a - Barrier to you performing at your best: Lack of clarity around my role and responsibilities	<i>Not at all + Very Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>To a great extent + To a very great extent</i>
32 - To what extent is your work emotionally demanding?	<i>To a very small extent + To a small extent</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>To a large extent + To a very large extent</i>

Rounding

Results for the Census are typically reported as whole numbers for ease of reading. Values from x.00 to x.49 are rounded down, while values from x.50 to x.99 are rounded up. Any rounding is performed at the last stage of calculation to maximise accuracy of the reported results.

In some instances, results may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Rounding may also mean that reported figures may not be identical to those calculated manually. Any differences, however, would not be more than one percentage point.

Figure 2: Example of how rounding as applied to Census results.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Number of responses	151	166	176	96	24	613
Percentage	24.63%	27.08%	28.71%	15.88%	3.92%	100%
Rounded percentage	25%	27%	29%	16%	4%	101%



	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Number of responses	151 + 166 = 317	176	96 + 24 = 120	613
Percentage	51.72%	28.71%	19.58%	100.01%
Rounded percentage	52%	29%	20%	101%

Rounding issues with numbers

In some instances, data may be displayed to one decimal place. In instances where there is only one decimal place, users should be cautious of rounding to whole numbers, especially where the number is close to x.5. This is because of the way numbers round up or down to a whole number.

For example, a response may be 2.4999 which when rounded to a whole number, is 2%. However the percentage may appear as 2.5% in reports. When rounding 2.5 it will round to 3%. When analysing data, it's recommended to use two decimal places or stick to whole numbers to avoid this rounding error.

Rounding errors when comparing scores

Rounding can also produce errors when calculating the difference between two scores. For example, in the below example the change in scores is -0.86% which rounds to a -1 percentage point change. However if you try to calculate the change using the rounded percentage it will appear as no change, or a change of "0". This is not correct.

Figure 3: Demonstration of rounding as applied to Census results.

	2025 score	2026 score	Variance
Percentage	76.55%	77.41%	-0.86%
Correct rounded variance	77%	77%	-1
Incorrect rounded variance	77%	77%	0

Comparisons and internal benchmarks

Time series comparisons

Results for the Census are compared with those from previous years wherever possible. This provides a source for trend comparisons and a benchmark for assessing whether results have changed.

The questions included within the Census can change between years. While most questions are retained without change, new questions are added, others removed and some are reworded. Results are typically only compared between years if the same question wording was used in each year. Changes in wording can alter the meaning of a question and change how it would be answered by respondents.

Internal APS benchmarks

Reporting of agencies' Census results primarily focus on comparisons with internal APS benchmarks.

Where an agency has opted to include an organisational hierarchy and have results reported for individual work units, comparisons between work units can be another source of information.

Results for the APS overall provide the most common comparator for individual agencies' results. Agencies are further grouped by size and function to provide other benchmark scores for comparisons.

Differences in size and function

There may be variability in results across the size of agencies, as well as the functions that agencies perform (e.g. regulatory, specialist, operational). Therefore, any comparison across agencies should also take into consideration other factors, such as size and function. More information about size and function can be found on the APSC's [website](#).

Comparisons with external benchmarks

While comparisons of results between years, APS agencies and work units are often the focus of analysis, comparisons with external organisations can also provide valuable information. Accepting that different organisations are likely to ask different questions of their employees, comparisons with external benchmarks are not as rigorous as time series or internal comparisons. External benchmarks, however, can provide indications of how an agency's results compare to those from similar organisations and jurisdictions.

When comparing results to external benchmark scores, it is important to consider how well the Census and benchmarked questions match. While it is usually preferred that questions being compared have identical wording, it is sometimes reasonable to compare questions that are worded differently.

When comparing the results for questions with different wording, it is important to consider whether the questions measure the same thing in the same context. Differences can certainly be accommodated, but likely weaken any direct comparisons between the results.

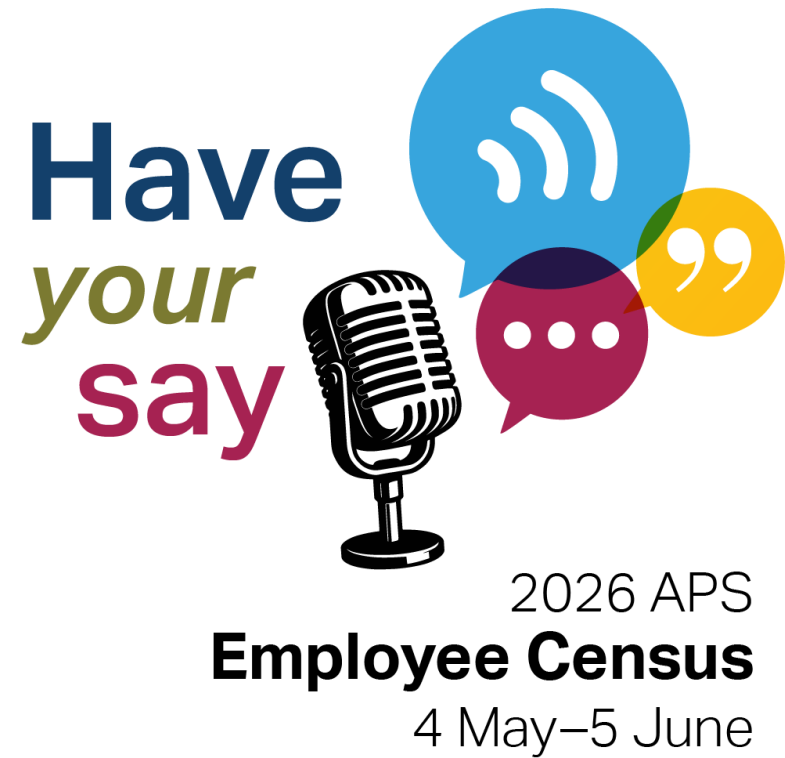
For instance, the two questions below are similar, but are not directly comparable. The first is a question from the Census and the second is an example of an external question:

- Overall, I am satisfied with my job.
- I like the work I do in my current position.

While both questions seem to address how much a respondent likes their job, the first addresses general job satisfaction, while the second focuses more on how much the person likes the work they are asked to do in their job. Both concepts are similar, but not the same. Depending on the reasons why external benchmarks are required, it may still be appropriate to compare the results for these questions.

Additional external benchmarks may be self-sourced from other comparable jurisdictions and organisations.

Further information



Further information

To access further information regarding the APS Employee Census and reported results, please go to the APSC [website](#).

State of the Service Reports can be found on the APSC website.

To access APS Employee Census de-identified datasets, please go to data.gov.au.

To request further information about the APS Employee Census please contact the APS Employee Census team from the APSC at APSSurveys@apsc.gov.au or on 1800 464 926.