



AFGE COUNCIL 220

SSA Employee Morale and Retention Research Report

Presented by

COOLEY PUBLIC STRATEGIES LLC

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CONFIDENTIAL

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RESEARCH ANALYSIS

Cooley Public Strategies conducted research to assess attitudes and opinions of Social Security Administration employees across the nation who are members of AFGE Council 220. The project was carried out in three phases: a written survey of members, one-on-one telephone interviews, and two virtual focus groups.

The survey was distributed Sept. 12-14 to 12,990 members of 35 affiliate AFGE Council 220 locals nationwide via email. The emails and survey link were distributed by Broadstripes, the Union's email service provider, and results were tabulated and analyzed by Brentwood, Tenn.-based Cooley Public Strategies, the Union's communications consultant.

The survey instrument was designed by CPS in conjunction with AFGE Council 220 leadership. CPS developed four separate surveys on distinct topics – Support/Training/Retention; Telework; Workforce Morale; and Health/Well-being. Each survey was distributed to one-quarter of randomly selected members. A total of 1,416 members completed a survey, a response rate of 11%.

The **one-on-one interviews**, which included 17 participants, were conducted by CPS staff between Oct. 3 and Oct. 12. Participants were selected from 800 AFGE Council 220 local affiliate members who indicated in their survey responses a willingness to be interviewed. They were randomly selected from members who represented the regional, gender, and office-type diversity of SSA workers.

Focus group participants were randomly selected using the same criteria. The focus group sessions, facilitated by CPS staff, were 90 minutes and covered a range of topics relating to the SSA work environment. The two sessions were conducted on Oct. 13 and Oct. 17.

Key Takeaway: There are serious issues affecting the overall effectiveness and morale of employees represented by AFGE Council 220 affiliate locals, and SSA can expect to face increasing challenges to retain adequate staffing levels.

Major Findings:

- Four out of 10 members surveyed are planning to some degree on leaving SSA within the next year.
- Management/employee relationships are severely strained.
- The lack of permanent flexible telework opportunities/policies is an overriding factor in employee discontent.
- There are strong across-the-board feelings that SSA offices are understaffed, that open positions remain vacant for extended periods, and that it is difficult to retain employees because of the workplace environment and low pay compared to similar job responsibilities at other federal government agencies.

- Staff training was heavily criticized, not only as part of the onboarding process but also in terms of the inadequacy of ongoing training.
- Insufficient time to complete non-public facing work means employees are unable to complete the public's cases in a timely manner.

Retention

A significant number of survey respondents (four in 10) indicated they are thinking to some degree about leaving SSA in the next 12 months, with about one-quarter saying they strongly agree that they are planning to do so. In conversations with employees and in the focus groups, it was clear that the desire to leave is deep, whether the respondents had served for a few months or a few decades.

I am making plans to leave SSA within the next year.

Strongly Agree	26%
Somewhat Agree	17%
Total Agree	43%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	26%
Somewhat Disagree	13%
Strongly Disagree	18%
Total Disagree	31%

In the one-on-one interviews and focus groups—when asked their views on why such a substantial number may be leaving the Agency—many individuals affirmed the survey results.

“I’m just waiting for this retirement date and I’m out the door.”

Veteran, Kansas City, MO

“God hasn’t opened a door yet. But when that opportunity comes, I am leaving.”

Atlanta, GA

"I told myself, I'm giving myself a five-month period to find other jobs outside of the Agency."

Philadelphia, PA

“The work is just piled on, piled on, piled on. It’s just frustrating that we get no relief.”

Atlanta, GA

Reasons for leaving provided in interviews and focus groups generally reflected survey findings. Employees described feeling micromanaged, being provided with inadequate time to complete tasks, a lack of compassion from managers, and a general lack of work balance.

Management/Employee Relations

There is a significant lack of confidence in members' ability to work collaboratively with managers/supervisors. Only about one-third believe managers care about their opinions and suggestions, seek member input, and can be trusted with personal/confidential information.

Micromanagement by leadership was an oft-cited complaint, and it was selected most by survey respondents ranking as a factor detrimental to worker morale, followed by lack of support.

	Agree	Disagree
My manager or supervisor seems to care about my opinions and suggestions.	37%	50%
My manager or supervisor seeks my input.	26%	59%
I can trust my manager when I share personal and/or confidential information.	37%	48%

Check the 5 factors that most **NEGATIVELY** impact your morale in the workplace:

Micromanagement	69%
Lack of support from management	61%
Insufficient telework/flexible schedule options	60%
Outdated and/or inefficient tech equipment	58%
Lack of work/life balance	51%

In interviews and focus groups, employees provided context to these views:

"I think the Agency has gotten away from the idea of managing people. They're more about managing work now."

Upstate NY

"When I complained to my boss, she spun things around so bad that I never went to her again."

San Francisco, CA

Employees expressed concerns that they aren't seen as human by their managers, but rather as cogs in a wheel. Many were hurt by a lack of compassion for those experiencing major life events, like the loss of a spouse or the mental health challenge of a child, feeling that policy was used as a weapon to enact force rather than a tool to manage the workforce.

Telework

The Agency's telework policy is also a wedge issue. Many employees contend they are much more efficient teleworking despite some of the advantages of working on-site in offices, and the research clearly shows most prefer full-time telework, and to a lesser degree, a flexible hybrid system. Much of this derives from experiences during the pandemic office closures and respondents' effectiveness in performing their jobs remotely.

Employees understand the challenge remote work presents in field offices but expressed confidence the Agency could implement best practices to make a hybrid schedule feasible.

	Agree	Disagree
I am much more efficient and productive teleworking.	91%	6%
I find that I have more distractions teleworking than in the office.	10%	86%
I understand that a one-size-fits-all approach to telework would be challenging for SSA.	51%	25%
I think it is possible to tailor a telework approach to a public-facing agency like SSA.	94%	3%

For example, several employees indicated they feel the current mail process system is not efficient. If the Agency fully implements centralized printing it would better streamline public service by maximizing both telework and in-office productivity. This simple step would aid in reducing public wait times both on the phone and with long waiting for in-person service.

“With telework, I’ve seen an improvement in customer service. Even appointments and limited capacity were wonderful because people could wait from the comfort of their homes instead of in line all day.”

San Francisco, CA

“We (SSA) have to compete with the private sector. And right now, the private sector is working from home.”

Seattle, WA

Employees are clearly watching other agencies in the federal government, as well as at the state and local level and in the private sector. They see the national trend toward telework and appear to perceive the Agency's desire to revoke the program as punitive rather than necessary. Many expressed in interviews and focus groups that they would immediately look for another job if telework is revoked.

Staffing/Pay

One overriding concern, survey respondents and interview/focus group participants said, is a continuing problem with adequate staffing to handle the workload. This is creating a feeling of frustration that individuals cannot perform their jobs effectively and cannot meet increasing expectations. Employees who complete their work efficiently often bear a greater load as work is redistributed, contributing to higher rates of burnout from constantly growing piles of work.

“I feel like you can’t be good at this job.”

Philadelphia, PA

Another area of discontent, which exacerbates low-employee morale, is the feeling that salary levels are lower than those offered by other government agencies for comparable job responsibilities and skill sets. Many cited the Veterans Administration as a glaring example of better pay for basically the same type of work. Several participants shared that the Agency does not pay them a living wage, and one even shared that she is disappointed in the benefits offered as there are [better benefits in some private sector jobs](#). To combat the emigration of staff from the Agency, SSA must raise wages to a competitive level, or at least ensure that they are sufficient to cover the costs of living.

“I cannot make a living off this. The money looks good on paper, but it is just not.”

Atlanta, GA

Employees expressed frustration at the slow process for replacing coworkers who leave. They also shared dismay at the number of positions left unfilled for months, if not permanently. The emphasis on meeting metrics with a depleted workforce and growing pool of claimants creates feelings of despair and anger from the employees who remain with the Agency, as they do not feel their interests and daily work environments are considered in higher levels of SSA.

Many also pointed to the low pay SSA offers, particularly in comparison to the pay for similar work at other federal agencies. Inflation, rising gas prices, and the cost of home internet to meet Agency requirements were examples given of expenses they are unable to meet.

Training

Many employees cited a lack of effective, ongoing training which, to some degree, exacerbates the problem of overall understaffing. Over the years, training has increasingly moved from in-person group and individual sessions to online training, which saves time for managers and supervisors. Many see this training as ineffective, mainly because of the complexity of SSA rules and policies.

Employees trained 20 to 30 years ago report far better training than those hired more recently. Trainees are pointed to several different people for feedback, each of whom have their own ways of doing things—meaning that trainees often receive conflicting feedback and cannot tell the truly correct way to do something. This is often a result of the dissolution of the mentoring aspect of training, as mentors are often absent or too busy to advise the new employees.

Once initial training is complete, employees point to the lack of ongoing training and updates beyond emails and staff meetings where managers read the policy change emails aloud. There is inadequate time allotted to employees to read and digest policy changes. Employees in the teleservice centers expressed that a simple increase from 15 to 30 minutes a day for time to read policy updates and changes would significantly improve their ability to gain the knowledge they need to better serve the public.

To address these flaws in the training policy, the Agency must recognize that everyone learns differently and take steps to return the training procedures to the effective ones of the past. Additionally, a true mentor program should be established to minimize the sources of feedback for new employees and support trainees throughout their onboarding and training process.

	Agree	Disagree
I received adequate training and policy overviews during my onboarding process.	33%	40%
I have received adequate ongoing training throughout my career.	26%	59%

“The self-guided training was horrendous.”

Atlanta, GA

“I spent the first 11 months watching videos. And then I was left to sink or swim.”

New York, NY

Workload Balance

One theme expressed by many employees was growing job fatigue because of the pressures to meet goals and provide the quality of service that the public needs and deserves. A case in point is the push to reduce the wait times on calls in the teleservice centers, which is one of the biggest complaints of the public that makes its way to Congressional eyes and ears. Although employees agree this is an important indicator of good customer service, they say that the expectations cause a ripple effect in which many do not have adequate time to do other parts of their jobs, e.g., paperwork on claims, etc., that do not require public-facing communication.

The elimination of dedicated adjudication time to complete this “back office” work compounds the already impossible expectations for the amount of work to be completed by one employee in a day. An employee who has worked for SSA for over 40 years explained this problem by citing advice a manager gave her early in her career, “You have to take care of your ‘back office’ work to be able to take care of your ‘front office’ work.” She went on to explain that if the non-public facing work is allowed to pile up and wait for a pause in calls and walk-in claimants, it will never be tended to, and clients will slip through the cracks and wait even longer for income which they often depend upon.

Employees need dedicated and protected time to manage their desk work without the interruption of walk-ins or calling claimants with new issues to handle. Reinstating the Wednesday adjudication time would immensely improve not only the productivity of individual employees, but also overall morale as employees are given greater opportunity to complete tasks and manage their ever-increasing workloads.

	Agree	Disagree
My workload keeps me from performing my job to the best of my ability.	76%	14%

One participant shared her frustrations, blaming management for their unrealistic expectations.

“There is no way you can get it all done because the people in the glass house are not giving us time. They want us to be on the phone no matter what.”

Conclusion

Underfunding aside, SSA is facing a different crisis of its own making. The Agency operates on archaic policies with no real updates to systems to expedite processes, does not accommodate its employees and the balance of their personal and professional lives, and is unwilling to take the necessary steps to improve training and management policies. As a result, it is facing critical retention issues that only serve to worsen the working environment for the staff that remains.

Several comments about the Agency overall vividly described the themes emerging from the survey, interviews, and focus groups:

“We are drowning in paper.”

Seattle, WA

“They keep giving us more work to do and less time to do it.”

Chicago, IL

“The days I go into the office I have to talk myself into it every time.”

Atlanta, GA

“I’m just waiting for this retirement date and I’m out the door.”

Veteran, Kansas City, MO

To address these problems, the Agency must begin to listen to their employees and implement changes to provide better working conditions and stem the flow of resignations. A long-term teleworking policy, robust training practices, better quality management, and more consideration for the day-to-day workloads of employees would all help to improve the hiring prospects of SSA. Once a job at the Agency is again something to be desired, a large wave of fresh employees could transform the working environment from one that employees flee to one that they strive for and value.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM SURVEYS

The following is an executive summary of topline results of an AFGE membership survey regarding workplace issues.

The surveys were conducted Sept. 12-14 via emails sent to 12,990 members nationwide. The emails were distributed by Broadstripes, the union's email service provider, and results were tabulated and analyzed by Brentwood, Tenn.-based Cooley Public Strategies, the Union's communications consultant. The survey instrument was designed by CPS in conjunction with AFGE Council 220 leadership.

CPS developed four separate surveys on distinct topics – Support/Training/Retention; Telework; Workforce Morale; and Health/Well-being. Each survey was distributed to one-quarter of randomly selected members. A total of 1,416 members completed a survey.

Key Takeaway: There are serious issues affecting the overall effectiveness and morale of AFGE 220 employees, and SSA can expect to face increasing challenges to retain adequate staffing levels.

Major Findings:

- Four out of 10 members are planning to some degree on leaving SSA within the next year.
- Management/employee relationships are severely strained.
- Lack of telework opportunities/policies is an overriding factor in employee discontent.

The following are topline summaries of the four memberships surveys:

Support/Training/Retention

Workloads and high employee turnover are by far the most significant concerns of respondents, with three-quarters citing those factors as the biggest impediments to job performance and meeting management goals.

- 54% strongly agreed that their workload prevents them from performing their job to the best of their ability, with 22% somewhat agreeing.
- 53% strongly agreed that turnover adversely impacts their ability to meet management's goals, with 22% somewhat agreeing.
- Half say they are only able to complete 25% or less of their daily workloads while working in the office; only 13% say they complete 75% to 100%.

Regarding changes SSA could make to improve their job performance, employees overwhelmingly cited more balanced workloads. Increased communication/guidance from management and training/continuing education were also substantially cited. Health/safety protocols and updated technology/equipment were the least cited improvements.

Respondents were given a list of 10 changes and asked to select the five that would most improve their performance. The totals reflect the percentage of respondents who included the response in their choice of five.

- 81% Better approach to balanced workloads
- 53% Increased communication and guidance from management
- 53% Increased training/continuing education
- 46% Increased mentorship/professional development opportunities
- 43% More freedom to take individual initiatives to get job done
- 43% Sharing of best practices across components
- 37% Development of transferrable job skills
- 34% Terminate hoteling
- 25% Improved communication on health/safety protocols
- 23% Updated technology and equipment

Employees were split on the adequacy of their training and policy overviews during onboarding, with 33% agreeing they did and 40% saying they did not receive adequate training.

About half of respondents feel that management has not created an open environment that encourages mentorship, while 29% agree that it has (10% strongly, 19% somewhat).

Even more so, 62% of employees surveyed feel the Agency has not provided adequate opportunities for growth and advancement (36% strongly). And 59% do not feel they receive adequate support from management to perform their job to the best of their abilities. Only 10% say they are encouraged to develop skills that could be used outside SSA.

Nevertheless, almost half (47%) say they feel a strong sense of pride in their employment with the Agency, with 34% disagreeing. Notably, 79% believe they are serving the American people through their work.

Respondents were split on access to adequate technology and equipment, with 43% agreeing they are adequately equipped (only 13% strongly agree) and 46% disagreeing they are (21% strongly).

Telework

Respondents overwhelmingly agree (91%) that they are more efficient and productive while teleworking, with 84% strongly agreeing. The biggest factor is the lack of distractions they have while teleworking compared to office work – only 10% say they have more distractions outside of the office. Likewise, 90% agree they are more focused while teleworking, and 85% say they can complete 75% to 100% of their daily workload ~~working remotely~~, which is significantly higher compared to the estimate for working in the office.

When asked their preference if they could choose their work location, 65% selected full-time telework, while 28% favored a hybrid schedule and only 5% would rather work full time in the office.

While half (51%) agree that it would be challenging for the Agency to implement a one-size-fits-all telework policy, 94% say that it is possible for SSA to tailor a telework approach to meet the diverse needs and situations of employees and the public.

Employees overwhelmingly say their technology and equipment are sufficient to meet their teleworking needs (92%), and only slightly fewer (80%) agree they have adequate managerial and technical support for telework. Three-quarters (76%) say management support is at the same level whether they are in the office or teleworking.

Missed opportunities for professional development and/or promotions while teleworking are not big concerns among employees; only 13% believe they have fewer opportunities.

Workforce Morale

There is a significant lack of confidence in members' working relationship with managers/supervisors. Only about one-third of respondents believe managers care about their opinions and suggestions (37%), seek member input (26%), and can be trusted with personal/confidential information (37%).

Just under half (44%) are confident in their ability to handle their current workload, with an extremely high number (79%) saying their work-related stress levels have caused problems in their personal/family life. More than half (57%) say that stress has caused them to seek therapy and/or take prescription medication, and 60% are generally unhappy when they come to work. Only 17% say they are either very happy or fairly happy on an average day.

Motivation levels are mixed; 54% expressed that they feel motivated on the job, but only 21% say they are highly motivated; 43% say they are either not very motivated (21%) or not motivated at all (22%).

Respondents were given eight factors that could have a negative impact on their morale in the workplace and asked to select the five that affected them most. The two most selected factors were micromanagement and lack of management support. Following is the list of the factors, with percentages reflecting the percent of respondents who included that response in their choice of five.

- 69% Micromanagement
- 61% Lack of support from management
- 60% Insufficient telework/flexible schedule options
- 58% Outdated and/or inefficient tech equipment
- 51% Lack of work/life balance
- 49% Lack of Training/ Mentorship
- 46% Insufficient Employee Pay/Benefits
- 39% Health/Safety concerns

Respondents were also given eight factors that could have a positive impact on their morale. By far, the factor most selected was to have increased telework/flexible schedule options, followed by management respect for employees. The list of the factors is below, with percentages reflecting the percent of respondents who included that response in their choice of five.

- 64% Increased telework/flexible schedule options
- 49% Management's respect for employees
- 43% Effective communication from management
- 42% Having input in my work
- 37% Updated technology/equipment
- 32% Time for communication/sharing best practices with co-workers
- 31% Effective training/mentorship opportunities
- 30% Increased emphasis on health/safety

The top reason employees cited for working at SSA is job security (37%), followed closely by pay and benefits (32%). Providing a public service was cited by only 17%. Other factors, such as flextime and telework, career development, leadership opportunities and the Union were selected by single-digit percentages (2 to 4%).

Health/Well-being

More employees than not (48% to 37%) feel their supervisor cares about their health and well-being, and a majority (57%) agrees their manager/supervisor trusts them to do their jobs as they were trained to do. However, the survey results show serious problems in overall employee-management relationships:

- 41% feel they have been bullied by a supervisor
- Only 26% agree they have received adequate ongoing training
- 52% say they are both micromanaged and excessively monitored
- 54% do not think management creates an environment conducive to asking questions

This overall disconnect between employees and management – and policies relating to career paths – has created the predominant feeling that there are not adequate opportunities for promotion (71% say there is not) and, more significantly, some degree of planning by almost half of those surveyed to leave SSA within the next year. (26% strongly agree they are making plans to do so, and 17% somewhat agree they are).

About nine of every 10 respondents say they know someone who has resigned or retired from the Agency because of work-related stress; 70% say they know a co-worker who has left because SSA does not provide telework options; 85% know a co-worker who has sought therapy/medication to deal with stress from work; 8% say they know a co-worker who committed suicide while working at SSA linked to work-related stress; 18% say SSA denied them a reasonable accommodation for a medically verified disability, and 12% were denied a temporary compassionate assignment to telework after a dependent family member was medically deemed a high risk for COVID.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS

Cooley Public Strategies conducted 17 phone interviews with AFGE Council 220 local affiliate members currently or formerly employed by the Social Security Administration.

The interviewees were a representative sample of gender, race, region employed by SSA, disability, and military experience.

Providing human context and experience to the survey results, respondents explained their perspectives on the Agency. Several reoccurring themes emerged, including staffing issues and inadequate training.

General Perceptions

Perceptions of SSA and its Mission

Positive	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SSA's mission is important• Can genuinely help those in need• Affects most American's lives at one point or another	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Struggling• Doesn't have enough employees• No longer aligns with its mission• Doesn't care about helping the public as much as it does numbers

Staffing

A recurring theme throughout the one-on-one interviews was the insufficient number of staff. When asked about the top three problems the Agency is facing, one employee with two decades of experience did not mince his words: "Staffing is the number one issue." He remembered a time when he first started at the Agency when the workload was manageable because there were enough employees to share it. Now, impossible amounts of work are passed onto fewer and fewer employees as their colleagues leave the Agency.

"There are just not enough customer service representatives and claims representatives to help all the people who need help. When I started, we had 72 people in our office and now we have about 44 or 45. Obviously the number of people making claims is not decreasing."

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this problem—closing offices to in-person service while the demand for SSA services increased. One employee shared her thoughts on the impacts of public pressure on the Agency saying, "There was a public cry about never being able to get people (at SSA) on the phone, so they pushed everybody to answer all the calls without hiring adequate staff to do that. I'm getting calls all day from people outside my area who are frustrated and angry." News articles about long lines and call waiting times frequented the national news cycle.

Congressional leaders pushed SSA to fix the problem without giving them the funding necessary to do so, resulting in insurmountable workloads. On top of this, adjudication time that had been reserved for the completion of “back office” work coming in from calls and online claims was eliminated. As a result, employees now must spend all their time actively serving claimants either at the window or over the phone and do not have adequate time to complete the paperwork and background work to solve their problems.

When coupled with the pre-existing policy and workplace conditions within the Agency, this amount of work deals a crushing blow to office morale. One participant stated, “There is just too much pressure on employees. They want us to do a certain number of cases in a certain amount of time and we don’t have the manpower.” The pressure to do impossible amounts of work in little time is ever-present at the Agency, with little pay and benefit incentive to do so. SSA needs to address its retention problems immediately, as the fall-out from the high numbers of employees leaving only serves to push others to leave the Agency as well.

“People are leaving because they are overworked and underpaid. A lot of people I’ve worked with have gone to the VA processing claims. They get higher pay doing similar work.”

At the same time SSA is dealing with low retention rates, it is also struggling to hire and train enough employees to replace those leaving. One respondent remarked, “They need to simplify the hiring process – assess that and turn it around to fill positions faster.” SSA cannot keep up with adequate staffing levels when they are hemorrhaging employees and struggling to attract replacements.

“We need more employees. And what goes along with it is we need employees treated correctly.”

Beyond simply hiring more people to share the responsibilities of the Agency, employees feel SSA also needs to take steps to be competitive in the job market—through treating employees with respect, paying higher wages, and updating benefits, policies, and personnel practices to better accommodate modern life.

Telework

One of the ways SSA can adapt to improve retention and be competitive in the job market is through a long-term telework policy. During the pandemic, when the Agency was forced to operate remotely, employees realized they can complete the same amount of work from home as from the office and want a sustainable telework option.

One reason many employees gave for their preference of telework over the traditional in-office model is the work-life balance that telework facilitates.

"[Teleworking] is a lot more of a work-life balance. I feel it just makes people happier – after you have experienced it. Don't have to commute, don't have to spend so much money on clothes."

Not only does telework afford employees the benefit of saving on transportation and clothing costs, but it can also be a better option for those dealing with mental health issues. One woman admitted that while she does not see a significant difference in her ability to complete her work between working from the office and working from home, going into the office is *draining for her mental health*.

As adults, employees should be trusted to weigh the potential benefits and drawbacks of their work model and choose it accordingly. Many interviewees shared this belief, stating that the decision is often a personal one, and would likely change from time to time depending on a variety of personal factors. One woman put it best, saying, "*It works for me, but it doesn't work for everybody*." Another saw the other side:

"It's difficult for me to work from home because I have little kids and it was hard to maintain a good work-life balance. But I know a lot of people who don't have kids prefer telework."

The Agency needs to realize that a one-size-fits-all model is no longer practical in the professional world. Employees have seen that the work-from-home model is possible, some even asserting that they are more productive when teleworking. SSA's claims that employees must return to the office to fix productivity issues are baseless, and one interviewee wasted no time in pointing this out:

"The Agency has still not released productivity statistics (for telework vs. in-office). It's only logical to think those numbers would hurt their rationale for keeping the current policy."

Ultimately, Agency leaders must acknowledge that its problems stem not from its employees working from home, but from a variety of other issues that they alone have the power to solve. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the retention rate and staffing difficulties. To stem the tide of resignations, it will be important for the Agency to adapt to modern life and develop a long-term flexible telework policy.

“Unless they can come up with a better telework policy, they are going to see a mass exodus. Right now, they have kicked the can to March [on a telework policy]. This has made employees more anxious and on edge.”

Management

When it came to general questions about management, opinions varied based on the member’s personal experiences:

“My supervisor is phenomenal. I feel she always has my best interests in mind, and she is always quick to respond. I’m confident in her.”

“I think the Agency has gotten away from the idea of managing people. They’re more about managing work now.”

“We have an open-door policy. I can come to my immediate supervisor and ask questions if I need help with something.”

“I don’t feel like I can go to my manager and say how I feel or about things in my personal life that may affect my work. I don’t think they care about that.”

“They’re [managers] getting exhausted also. It’s a numbers game.”

“I feel like managers aren’t being trained on how to manage people. A lot of what goes on is high school stuff and petty stuff and when investigations happen the same managers are there.”

“The Agency doesn’t [appear to] have the tendency to bring in the most experienced, best trained, superb employees for management. I feel like I know more than them.”

Training

Consequences of the shortage of employees bled into respondents' thoughts on their level of training as well. With the lack of time caused by the distributed workload, interviewees report that [a lot of training just doesn't happen](#). Another stated, "[...Honestly with the amount of work we have, we don't have dedicated time for training that is adequate for us.](#)"

Other perspectives on training ranged from adequate to insufficient:

["I believe there's been an adequate amount of training. But each situation may be different, and sometimes it's not something you can train for. "](#)

["My training was subpar."](#)

["They'll update a system and then three weeks later give us training on how we're supposed to use it."](#)

["We are not getting adequate training. I'm a mentor, I have a trainee and it is a disaster. Employees are probably going to quit before they finish training."](#)

["There are a lot of gaps in between training and that's why it takes so long for someone to understand this job. There are a lot of gray areas. I think it is very poor the way training is designed, and it is getting worse."](#)

["The type of training we get from the Agency is deficient. I find it insulting to some degree—they have people with college degrees watching cartoons."](#)

Recommendations

When asked what they would do to improve the Agency, respondents offered a variety of solutions. The interviewee mentioned earlier who stated that staffing is the number one issue with SSA said to ["Keep staffing where it should be."](#) He went on to explain that in his 20 years on the job he has never seen fewer people employed by the Agency.

Another employee felt that training should be the priority, stating that she would [put everyone back through training](#), regardless of their experience with the Agency. Several participants expressed the idea that SSA could be a great career if it corrected the "negative culture" born from agency leadership.

Overall, employees mainly seemed to want respect from the Agency above everything else.

"I think if the Agency would match its public mission with the way they treat their employees it would be a lot more successful. They want us to treat the public with dignity and respect, but they don't do that with their employees."

Key Quotes

A few statements seemed to encompass the overall sentiment of interviewees:

"I've been doing this job for 21 years and you know the one thing I have seen that is very discouraging is the emphasis now seems to be less on serving the public and more about meeting metrics."

"The Agency is stuck in the 1980s/90s way of doing things."

"The work we do is important, and I don't think the job is a terrible job by any means. They made it that way. [By building a negative workplace culture]."

"I feel like the Agency is very archaic in its policies."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

Cooley Public Strategies held two focus groups of survey respondents. Eleven field office employees comprised one group, while the other was made up of five teleservice center employees.

Each focus group lasted 90 minutes, with participation solicited from each member.

Field Offices

Eleven employees with a range of experiences at SSA participated in the field office focus group. To begin the discussion, participants were asked to describe their ideal manager. Then, they were told to describe their actual manager at the Agency. Their responses are below:

Management: Ideal vs. Reality	
<i>Ideal</i>	<i>Reality</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personable• Fair• Inspiring• Devoted• Humble• Supportive• Attentive• Cooperative• Respectful• Honest• Decisive• Clear	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Micromanager• Controlling• Combative• Supportive• Passive aggressive• Disinterested• Compassionate• Disorganized• Unfair• Absent• Irresponsible• Vindictive• Flighty• Confusing• Bully

A common theme emerged quickly: management at SSA is not ideal. One participant responded to another's statement that her manager prioritizes quantity over quality with this observation of her own supervisor,

“...for my manager it's more about his ego, it's about making sure his name doesn't get out to the media, to Congress.”

She went on to admit that she often must manage his public relations fears on top of her already daunting workload. Other participants shared their experiences, from office “naughty lists” to

supervisors that were fair and decent but under too much pressure from their own managers to be good leaders.

Focus group attendees ranged from almost new hires to seasoned veterans with over 40 years of experience. A common sentiment regardless of experience was the serious nature of SSA's staffing shortage. One woman from the Atlanta region shared that her office lost about 50% of its staff last summer and are now an office of primarily trainees—spurring an animated conversation on the lack of adequate training for new employees.

Participants who had been with the Agency longer reported that the previous procedures were far more effective:

“When I started with the Agency back in 2009, I had in-person training. I was there from 8:00-4:30 every day for nine weeks. This new online training that they’re doing is just garbage.”

It is widely recognized within the Agency that new employees require two years of training to be proficient. This training traditionally included classroom training, shadowing, and extensive work with a mentor. Over the years, training has devolved into self-directed modules over the computer and is significantly truncated.

Multiple participants reported they were not afforded the time nor the opportunity to achieve proficiency before they were thrust into day-to-day operations and held to the same standards as their seasoned coworkers. An employee who has only worked with the Agency for 2 to 5 years in the Atlanta region was told to work a window on her second day of the job. Another employee felt that he was left to “sink or swim” after 11 months of video training and no hands-on instruction. Both indicated that they are actively looking for a new job.

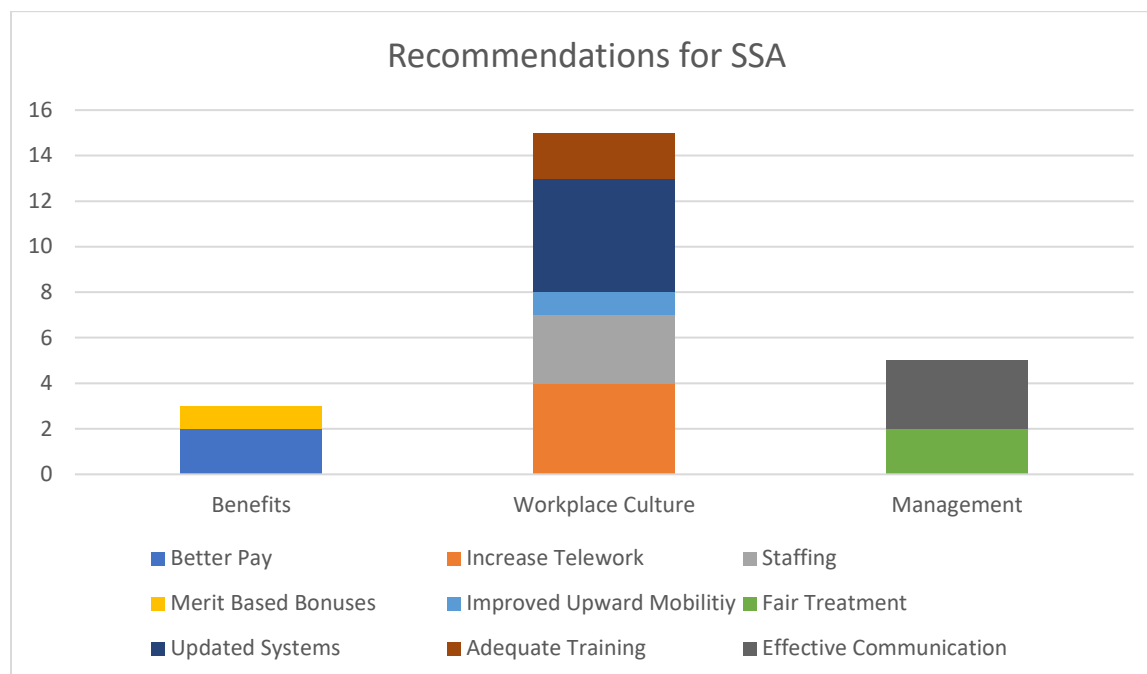
“It was almost like the Agency hired [disabled veterans] only to find a way to turn around and fire them. They don’t care about the health and safety of employees.”

Philadelphia, PA

Much of the conversation centered around the Agency's retention problems. Participants expressed frustration at the inefficiency of the offices, from field offices dealing with a high volume of calls that should be directed to the 1-800 number to managers failing to communicate when the office would undergo construction and be closed to employees. The loss of adjudication time to complete non-public facing work was another common theme, as this exacerbates the problems offices face with workloads, staffing, training, micromanagement, and the individual stress levels of employees.

Several participants even noted that they were actively seeking other employment because of the poor work environment. Others made it clear that if they should leave, their workload would only be redistributed among the remaining staff, with the trusted, efficient employees bearing a disproportionate share of the extra burden. Also, because it takes two years to fully train a replacement, this hole in the workforce is not something that can be easily or quickly mended.

To conclude the focus group, participants were asked to recommend three things that the SSA could implement to improve retention and their jobs overall:



Suggestions largely pertained to the workplace, with the same concerns around training and staffing appearing in several lists. Employees also felt that the Agency could be overall improved with more fair treatment and effective communication from managers and with better incentives like pay and merit-based bonuses. Specific ideas for policy changes ranged from allowing the Agency to use records that other government entities already have and share for proof of residency and age, to simply acknowledging to staff that the Agency is understaffed and that there is a plan to address the issue.

Teleservice Centers

Five people participated in the second focus group representing teleservice centers. Several issues that arose in the field-office focus group also appeared among teleservice employees, including understaffing and poor management.

When presented with the same prompt as the first group, respondents generated a similar table:

Management: Ideal vs. Reality	
<i>Ideal</i>	<i>Reality</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competent• Confident• Amicable• Personable• Advocate• Reliable• Honest• Supportive• Compassionate• Understanding• Team player	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Micromanager• Taskmaster• Dependent• Robotic• Supportive• Authoritative• Inflexible• Dominating• Learning• Fake

One participant shared that she moved from Atlanta, Georgia to Albuquerque, New Mexico for a job in a teleservice center, calling it [the worst mistake of her life](#). Another felt that her manager tried to be supportive of his employees, but in the end, he would always [cave to the people in the ivory tower](#).

The group also agreed that management does not handle compassionate requests and TCAs (Temporary Compassionate Assignment) correctly. When one participant was dealing with repeated break-ins to her home and a death in her family, she applied for both and reported,

[“It took them a week to deny the hardship request and only 48 hours to deny the compassionate request.”](#)

In commiseration, another stated,

[“I’ve dealt with that across the board. Everyone is going to get denied. Regional said no so they’re going to say no and that’s it.”](#)

After the last few years of a global pandemic and transformation in the structure and culture of American office work, stringent and inflexible rules surrounding work-life balance are increasingly unpopular. Beyond just extenuating circumstances where an employee may apply for TCA or something similar, employees feel the Agency should also allow flexible telework policies to better accommodate its workforce.

Although the teleservice centers currently operate on a majority telework schedule, employees question the necessity of working in the office at all. Participants in the teleservice center focus group noted that they are more productive when teleworking, and that the only benefit to working in the office is access to printers and ease of mailing documents. One woman even stated that if the Agency were to eliminate telework, she would leave her job.

Not even full-time telework is enough to compensate for what many see as excruciating conditions resulting from an ever-increasing workload and a continually shrinking staff. One woman from San Francisco noted, “Whenever someone quits, that work just gets redistributed onto other overworked people.”

Not only is the work redistributed onto the remaining employees, but it is disproportionately given to those who have been with the Agency longer because of the difficulty of comprehensive training in this environment. Although the employees in the focus group overall agreed that they were sufficiently trained, most felt that they were not given enough time to complete their training properly. One woman even shared that she was encouraged to use her breaks and lunch hour to review training materials. A participant in the Dallas region then pointed out the conflicts she noticed in her own training, “[The experienced staff mentors] want you to do it how they want you to do it, but they all have different ways of doing it.”

The ambiguous nature of these training practices leads to frustration and feelings of defeat in new employees. A young woman from the Philadelphia region glumly stated,

“I feel like you can’t be good at this job.”

The other four participants nodded in agreement, and the conversation turned to discussion of the apparently common problem that if an employee chooses to offer quality customer service and help people navigate the problems they encounter, the employee can’t please management with his/her numbers at the end of the day. If the employee instead chooses to cater to management’s expectations, he/she cannot offer true assistance to the public. One member of the group shared that she has extensive experience working in a variety of government offices but that [her experience with her TSC \(Teleservice Centers\) broke her confidence](#).

Focus group participants believe this is because call times are closely monitored, and employees are expected to communicate complex policies and procedures over the phone to populations that may not have the educational background to fully comprehend what they are saying. Instead of feeling free to relate to their callers on a human level and truly help them in their time of need, employees are forcefully encouraged to limit calls to just nine minutes, often getting questioned or disciplined if they go beyond that boundary. One focus group participant surmised, “The Agency isn’t being fair to the public or to the employees.”

Metrics-driven policies like these, especially when combined with the staffing shortage, create immense pressure on remaining employees and contribute to the Agency's persistent retention problems. Employees know their metrics-driven mandate directly contradicts the stated mission of the Agency to assist America's most vulnerable populations. A 15-minute window to review emails and policy changes is not enough. Participants unanimously indicated that even 30 minutes a day for this work would be transformative for their productivity and stress levels.

In addition to the other issues raised with the Agency, one participant from the Atlanta region stated that the job's [benefits and compensation look good on paper, but they just aren't](#), adding that she saw better benefits outside of the government. When asked why she is still with the Agency she simply replied, ["God hasn't opened a door yet. But when that opportunity comes, I am leaving."](#) As the costs of home internet, health insurance, and just about everything else have increased, employees are struggling to make ends meet. Although this participant shared that she grosses \$1,900 a month, she only brings home \$1,700 of that—which is not enough to support herself or her family.

When asked for suggestions on improvements that the Agency could make, answers largely centered around the workplace, management, and compensation. Multiple respondents agreed that they primarily want effective communication and management that treats them like adults—with trust and compassion. Even without better pay and benefits, these suggested improvements seemed to elicit a far more positive outlook on the Agency than the existing circumstances.

Comparisons

When evaluating the focus group conversations among field office employees and teleservice employees, several similar themes emerge. Both groups reported widespread issues with retention driving increasingly unreasonable individual workloads. Training was another subject both groups mentioned, and unreasonable expectations from a lack of compassion by managers haunt both groups.

Staffing discrepancies manifest differently in teleservice centers and field offices. In teleservice centers, a shortage of employees leads to stricter time management policies, limiting the amount of time to help each caller and the amount of time employees can use to respond to emails and complete paperwork. In field offices, staffing problems are far more visible. Fewer employees mean fewer windows available to service the public, leading to longer lines and extended wait times for claimants. Additionally, customers unable to resolve their issues on the 1-800 line due to the 9-minute call limits and high call-wait times are directly calling local field offices for support — contributing to their backlog. As a result, both offices experience additional pressure from the public, management, and even Congress to produce a large volume of work with a shrinking number of staff.

Participants in both focus groups mentioned the prevalence of micromanagers in the Agency. From call-time scrutiny to impossible workloads, employees of both office types agree that this management style is inefficient, abrasive, and disrespectful. While field office employees were largely concerned with accountability in management and fair and equal treatment in the office, teleservice employees seemed to mainly take issue with the managerial approach to TCAs and compassionate requests. This could be a result of the work styles of the two offices, with the teleservice centers teleworking four days a week and only in-office for one, therefore far less exposed to their coworkers and management's treatment of them.

Attitudes about training received from the Agency differed between the field office group and the teleservice group. Teleservice employees received in-person training before the pandemic, and even through and now after COVID-19, the TSC training program is longer and more hands-on than that of the field offices. Field office employees are instructed to watch videos about policies and procedures with the promise of in-person reinforcement from a mentor—but with the persistent staffing issues, this often is overlooked. Employees also expressed frustration that mentors do not have the time or training to successfully teach new employees.

TSC employees, on the other hand, receive training through a hybrid model, although a few did note that the hybrid model does not give trainees enough time to fully internalize the information. Overall, the group of TSC employees agreed when one participant commented, “My training was great.”

Field office employees seem to notice and resent this discrepancy,

“We have a lot of folks in our office from TSC and they get wonderful training. There is no comparison between the two types of training.”

One participant from the field office group even admitted that she transferred from a TSC to a field office when she first started at the Agency, and she will regularly reach out to her former coworkers if she needs assistance instead of another field office employee or even her assigned mentor. Multiple field office participants recounted stories of absent and inattentive mentors, saying that trainees quickly learn who in the office to go to for help and who to avoid. This phenomenon leads to even more work on the efficient and competent employees as they are then expected to compensate for the Agency's ineffective training procedures.

Finally, it is important to note that 60%-80% of participants in both groups admitted they were actively seeking a different job. Job seekers cited poor management, lack of benefits, uncertainty of telework, and unreasonable workloads as some of the reasons for seeking new work.

Takeaways

It is obvious that the Agency is facing a crisis. These conversations add human context to grim survey results and expand on the despair shared in many interviews. At present, SSA is not operating in a way that best serves the public nor their employees. In fact, the ongoing problems with retention, outdated technology and policy, and abrasive workplace conditions do the opposite.


If the Agency does not take steps to mitigate these factors, it will continue to hemorrhage employees to the private sector and other government agencies.

SURVEY DATA

Survey 1 Toplines: Support/Retention/Training

n = 353

1. I received adequate training and policy overviews during my onboarding process.

Strongly Agree 12%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 31%	43% 

Neither Agree/Disagree 18%

Somewhat Disagree 22%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 18%	40%

2. My workload keeps me from performing my job to the best of my ability.

Strongly Agree 54%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 22%	76%

Neither Agree/Disagree 11%

Somewhat Disagree 8%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 6%	14%

3. High employee turnover harms my ability to meet management's goals.

Strongly Agree 53%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 22%	75%

Neither Agree/Disagree 15%

Somewhat Disagree 5%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 5%	10%

4. My managers create an open environment that encourages mentorship.

Strongly Agree 10%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 19%	29%

Neither Agree/Disagree 20%

Somewhat Disagree 18%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 33%	51%

5. The Agency provides employees adequate opportunities for growth and advancement.

Strongly Agree 4%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 16%	20%
Neither Agree/Disagree 19%	
Somewhat Disagree 26%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 36%	62%

6. I am encouraged to develop skills that can be utilized in workplaces outside of the Agency.

Strongly Agree 3%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 7%	10%
Neither Agree/Disagree 26%	
Somewhat Disagree 22%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 42%	64%

7. I have a strong sense of pride in my employment at the Agency.

Strongly Agree 21%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 26%	47%
Neither Agree/Disagree 19%	
Somewhat Disagree 18%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 16%	34%

8. I am serving the American people through my work.

Strongly Agree 53%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 26%	79%
Neither Agree/Disagree 12%	
Somewhat Disagree 5%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 3%	8%

9. I receive enough support from my managers to perform my job to the best of my ability.

Strongly Agree 7%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 18	25%
Neither Agree/Disagree 16%	
Somewhat Disagree 28%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 31%	59%

10. I have access to adequate technology/equipment to do my job properly.

Strongly Agree 13%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 30%	43%
Neither Agree/Disagree 11%	
Somewhat Disagree 25%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 21%	46%

11. The following are some changes that could be made by SSA. Please Select the five that would most improve your performance at work:

Totals reflects the percent of respondents who included the response in their choice of five.

- 81% Better approach to balanced workloads
- 53% Increased communication and guidance from management
- 53% Increased training/continuing education
- 46% Increased mentorship/professional development opportunities
- 43% More freedom to take individual initiatives to get job done
- 43% Sharing of best practices across components
- 37% Development of transferrable job skills
- 34% Terminate hoteling
- 25% Improved communication on health/safety protocols
- 23% Updated technology and equipment

12. What percentage of your daily workload are you able to complete while working in the office?

Less than 10%	27%
Approximately 25%	23%
Approximately 50%	25%
Approximately 75%	12%
75%-100%	13%

13. What is your age?

Under 35; 8%
35-44; 33%
45-54; 36%
55+; 23%

14. What gender do you identify with?

Woman	71%
Man	25%
Transgender Woman	<1%
Transgender Man	--
Non-Binary	<1%
Agender/ I don't identify with any gender	<1%
Gender not listed	<1%
Prefer not to state	2%

15. Which of the following best describes you?

Asian or Pacific Islander	2%
Black or African American	25%
Hispanic or Latino	17%
Native American or Alaskan Native	3%
White or Caucasian	48%
Multiracial or Biracial	3%
Race/ethnicity not listed here	2%

16. How long have you worked for SSA?

Less than 2 years	3%
2-5 years	15%
6-10 years	19%
11-15 years	23%
More than 15 years	39%
Not sure/Other	--

17. In which of the following regions are you employed?

Boston	6%
New York	14%
Philadelphia	6%
Atlanta	24%
Chicago	18%
Kansas City	2%
Dallas	14%
Denver	2%
San Francisco	10%
Seattle	5%

18. Do you have a disability that requires workplace accommodations?

Yes	26%
No	66%
Decline	8%

19. Have you ever served in the U.S. Military?

Yes	20%
No	79%
Decline	2%

20. AFGE Council 220 is using a third party to conduct phone interviews and focus groups to better understand our members' priorities and the issues they face. Would you consent to sharing your contact information with a third party solely for the purpose of this project?

Yes	55%
No	45%

Survey 2 Toplines: Telework

n = 445

1. I am much more efficient and productive teleworking.

Strongly Agree 84%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 7%	91%
Neither Agree/Disagree 4%	
Somewhat Disagree 2%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 4%	6%

2. I find that I have more distractions teleworking than in the office.

Strongly Agree 7%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 3%	10%
Neither Agree/Disagree 4%	
Somewhat Disagree 4%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 82%	86%

3. I understand a one-size-fits all approach to telework would be challenging for SSA.

Strongly Agree 24%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 27%	51%
Neither Agree/Disagree 25%	
Somewhat Disagree 11%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 14%	25%

4. I think it is possible to tailor a telework approach to a public-facing agency like SSA.

Strongly Agree 84%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 10%	94%
Neither Agree/Disagree 2%	
Somewhat Disagree 1%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 2%	3%

5. **I have sufficient technology and equipment to meet my needs when teleworking.**

Strongly Agree 78%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 14%	92%
Neither Agree/Disagree 2%	
Somewhat Disagree 4%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 3%	7%

6. **I have sufficient managerial support to meet my needs when teleworking.**

Strongly Agree 62%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 18%	80%
Neither Agree/Disagree 9%	
Somewhat Disagree 6%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 4%	10%

7. **I have sufficient technical support to meet my needs when teleworking.**

Strongly Agree 70%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 18%	88%
Neither Agree/Disagree 3%	
Somewhat Disagree 6%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 3%	9%

8. **I prefer to work in the office.**

Strongly Agree 4%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 3%	7%
Neither Agree/Disagree 7%	
Somewhat Disagree 16%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 71%	87%

9. **There are fewer opportunities for professional development and/or promotion when I telework.**

Strongly Agree 8%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 5%	13%
Neither Agree/Disagree 25%	
Somewhat Disagree 11%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 51%	62%

10. The support I get from management is the same level in the office as it is while teleworking.

Strongly Agree	59%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	17%	76%
Neither Agree/Disagree 10%		
Somewhat Disagree	8%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	7%	15%

11. I am more focused when teleworking.

Strongly Agree	82%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	8%	90%
Neither Agree/Disagree 8%		
Somewhat Disagree	2%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	3%	5%

12. What percentage of your daily workload are you able to complete remotely?

Less than 10%	<1%
Approximately 25%	1%
Approximately 50%	2%
Approximately 75%	11%
75%-100%	85%

13. If you could determine your work location, which of the following would you choose?

Telework full-time	65%
Work from office full-time	5%
Hybrid work: some in office, some telework	28%
Not sure/Undecided	1%

14. What is your age?

Under 35	6%
35-44	38%
45-54	38%
55+	18%

15. What gender do you identify with?

Woman	73%
Man	22%
Transgender Woman	--
Transgender Man	--
Nonbinary	<1%
Agender	--
Not listed	<1%
Prefer not to say	3%

16. Which of the following best describes you?

Asian or Pacific Islander	2%
Black or African American	26%
Hispanic or Latino	20%
Native American or Alaskan Native	1%
White or Caucasian	46%
Multiracial or Biracial	2%
Race/ethnicity not listed	2%

17. How long have you worked for SSA?

Less than 2 years	3%
2-5 years	17%
6-10 years	16%
11-15 years	27%
More than 15 years	38%
Not sure/Other	<1%

18. In which of the following regions are you employed?

Boston	3%
New York	13%
Philadelphia	9%
Atlanta	26%
Chicago	16%
Kansas City	4%
Dallas	12%
Denver	2%
San Francisco	10%
Seattle	5%

19. Have you ever served in the U.S. Military?

Yes	18%
No	82%
Decline	<1%

20. Do you have a disability that requires workplace accommodations?

Yes 23%
No 68%
Decline 9%

21. AFGE Council 220 is using a third party to conduct phone interviews and focus groups to better understand our members' priorities and the issues they face. Would you consent to sharing your contact information with a third party solely for the purpose of this project?

Yes 63%
No 37%

Survey 3 Toplines: Workforce Morale

n = 370

1. My manager or supervisor seems to care about my opinions and suggestions.

Strongly Agree 14%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 23%	37%

Neither Agree/Disagree 14%

Somewhat Disagree 17%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 33%	50%

2. My manager/supervisor seeks my input.

Strongly Agree 10%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 16%	26%

Neither Agree/Disagree 15%

Somewhat Disagree 21%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 38%	59%

3. I can trust my manager when I share personal and/or confidential information.

Strongly Agree 18%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 19%	37%

Neither Agree/Disagree 15%

Somewhat Disagree 16%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 32%	48%

4. I am confident in my ability to handle my current workload.

Strongly Agree 23%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree 21%	44%

Neither Agree/Disagree 11%

Somewhat Disagree 21%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree 24%	45%

5. **My stress level from work has caused a negative impact on my personal/family life.**

Strongly Agree	53%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	26%	79%
Neither Agree/Disagree 11%		
Somewhat Disagree	4%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	5%	9%

6. **My stress level from work has caused me to seek therapy and/or take prescription medication.**

Yes	57%
No	33%
Decline	11%

7. **In general, how happy are you to come to work on an average day?**

Very Happy	2%	<u>Happy</u>
Fairly Happy	15%	17%
Neither Happy/Unhappy 22%		
Fairly Unhappy	28%	<u>Unhappy</u>
Very Unhappy	32%	60%

8. **Check the 5 factors that most NEGATIVELY impact your morale in the workplace:**
Totals reflects the percent of respondents that included the response in their choice of 5.

69% Micromanagement
61% Lack of support from management
60% Insufficient telework/flexible schedule options
58% Outdated and/or inefficient tech equipment

51% Lack of work/life balance
49% Lack of Training/ Mentorship
46% Insufficient Employee Pay/Benefits
39% Health/Safety concerns

9. **Check the 5 factors that have the most POSITIVE impact on your morale in the workplace:** *Percentage reflects the percent of respondents that included the response in their choice of 5.*

64% Increased telework/flexible schedule options
49% Management's respect for employees
43% Effective communication from management
42% Having input in my work

37% Updated technology/equipment
32% Time for communication/sharing best practices with co-workers
31% Effective training/mentorship opportunities
30% Increased emphasis on health/safety

10. **What is your age?**

Under 35	6%
35-44	35%
45-54	41%
55+	19%

11. **What gender do you identify with?**

Woman	71%
Man	25%
Transgender Woman	--
Transgender Man	--
Non-Binary	<1%
Agender	<1%
Gender not listed	<1%
Prefer not to state	4%

12. **Which of the following best describes you?**

Asian or Pacific Islander	4%
Black or African American	22%
Hispanic or Latino	25%
Native American or Alaskan Native	2%
White or Caucasian	40%
Multiracial or Biracial	2%
Race/ethnicity not listed here	4%

13. **How long have you worked for SSA?**

Less than 2 years	5%
2-5 years	16%
6-10 years	14%
11-15 years	28%
More than 15 years	36%
Not sure/Other	<1%

14. In which of the following regions are you employed?

Boston	5%
New York	14%
Philadelphia	8%
Atlanta	23%
Chicago	16%
Kansas City	4%
Dallas	12%
Denver	2%
San Francisco	13%
Seattle	4%

15. Have you ever served in the U.S. Military?

Yes	19%
No	81%
Decline	<1%

16. Do you have a disability that requires workplace accommodations?

Yes	25%
No	69%
Decline	6%

17. AFGE Council 220 is using a third party to conduct phone interviews and focus groups to better understand our members' priorities and the issues they face. Would you consent to sharing your contact information with a third party solely for the purpose of this project?

Yes	50%
No	44%
No answer	6%

Survey 4 Toplines: Health/Well-being

n = 248

1. I feel my supervisor cares about my health and well-being.

Strongly Agree	22%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	26%	48%
Neither Agree/Disagree 15%		
Somewhat Disagree	14%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	23%	37%

2. I feel I have been bullied by a supervisor.

Strongly Agree	21%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	20%	41%
Neither Agree/Disagree 15%		
Somewhat Disagree	7%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	38%	45%

3. I have received adequate ongoing training throughout my career.

Strongly Agree	6%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	20%	26%
Neither Agree/Disagree 15%		
Somewhat Disagree	28%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	31%	59%

4. I feel my supervisor micromanages me.

Strongly Agree	31%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	21%	52%
Neither Agree/Disagree 16%		
Somewhat Disagree	14%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	17%	31%

5. **I feel my supervisor or manager monitors me excessively.**

Strongly Agree	27%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	25%	52%
Neither Agree/Disagree 17%		
Somewhat Disagree	13%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	19%	32%

6. **Management creates an open and comfortable environment to ask questions.**

Strongly Agree	12%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	19%	31%
Neither Agree/Disagree 15%		
Somewhat Disagree	24%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	30%	54%

7. **I feel my manager and supervisor trust me to do my job as I was trained.**

Strongly Agree	23%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	34%	57%
Neither Agree/Disagree 16%		
Somewhat Disagree	15%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	12%	27%

8. **I feel there are enough promotional opportunities at SSA.**

Strongly Agree	3%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	9%	12%
Neither Agree/Disagree 17%		
Somewhat Disagree	24%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	47%	71%

9. **I am making plans to leave SSA within the next year.**

Strongly Agree	26%	<u>Agree</u>
Somewhat Agree	17%	43%
Neither Agree/Disagree 26%		
Somewhat Disagree	13%	<u>Disagree</u>
Strongly Disagree	18%	31%

10. I know a co-worker that has resigned or retired from SSA due to work-related stress.

Agree	87%
Disagree	13%

11. I know a co-worker that retired or resigned from SSA because SSA does not offer telework or remote work options.

Agree	70%
Disagree	30%

12. I know a co-worker that has sought therapy or medication to deal with work-related stress.

Agree	85%
Disagree	15%

13. I have a medically verified disability and I was denied a reasonable accommodation based on the reason of undue hardship to the agency.

Agree	18%
Disagree	82%

14. I know a co-worker that has committed suicide while working at SSA and it can be linked to work-related stress.

Agree	8%
Disagree	92%

15. I have a dependent family member located in my household that was deemed high-risk for COVID by a medical provider and the agency denied my temporary compassionate assignment (TCA) to telework from my alternate duty station.

Agree	12%
Disagree	88%

16. What is your age?

Under 35	8%
35-44	33%
45-54	40%
55+	19%

17. What gender do you identify with?

Woman	78%
Man	20%
Transgender Woman	--
Transgender Man	--
Nonbinary	--
Agender	<1%
Not listed	--
Prefer not to say	2%

18. Which of the following best describes you?

Asian or Pacific Islander	4%
Black or African American	30%
Hispanic or Latino	19%
Native American or Alaskan Native	<1%
White or Caucasian	42%
Multiracial or Biracial	2%
Race/ethnicity not listed	2%

19. How long have you worked for SSA?

Less than 2 years	6%
2-5 years	18%
6-10 years	24%
11-15 years	20%
More than 15 years	31%
Not sure/Other	<1%

20. In which of the following regions are you employed?

Boston	4%
New York	13%
Philadelphia	6%
Atlanta	25%
Chicago	18%
Kansas City	2%
Dallas	14%
Denver	2%
San Francisco	11%
Seattle	4%

21. Have you ever served in the U.S. Military?

Yes	20%
No	80%
Decline	<1%

22. Do you have a disability that requires workplace accommodations?

Yes 36%
No 58%
Decline 6%

23. AFGE Council 220 is using a third party to conduct phone interviews and focus groups to better understand our members' priorities and the issues they face. Would you consent to sharing your contact information with a third party solely for the purpose of this project?

Yes 61%
No 39%