



Results for America (RFA) and Trailhead Strategies, an RFA contractor, are pleased to share the following mini-case study, based on information published by [Polco](#), creator of the Employee Engagement Survey, and publicly available information provided by Avi, Michigan. The information included is for learning purposes only. Specific questions regarding the details of the work should be directed to the point of contact found at the bottom of this document.

Understanding Staff Perspectives in Local Government - Job Design in Action City of Avi, Michigan

The Starting Point

The pandemic and the Great Resignation triggered retirements, resignations and workforce shortages across the country, Novi, Michigan was not immune to these trends. Novi is a vibrant suburb of Detroit, located about 25 miles outside of the City center, and home to roughly 66,000 people. City leadership shared, through their [annual reports](#) and public meetings, that the City historically sees about 11 employees resign on average per year over the last ten years, along with eight retiring a year. Since the pandemic, the trend has shifted with 15 employees on average resigning annually and six retiring, or nearly 8% of the City's roughly 279 staff.

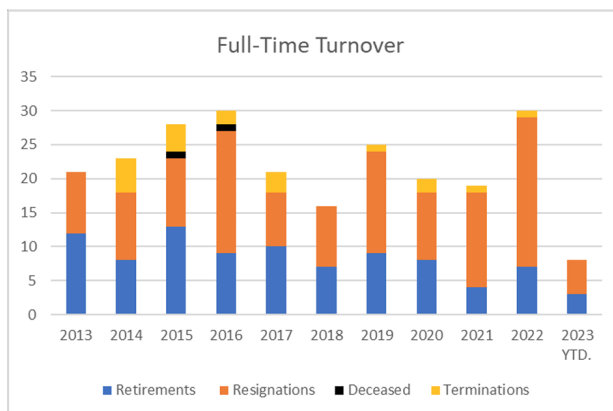


Figure from 2023-2024 Playbook Report

These pandemic and the great resignation trends have influenced both the perceptions and experiences of workers as well as underscored the need for leadership to listen to employees in new ways.

Understanding Worker Needs and Perceptions

In order to remain competitive, and proactively address talent attraction and retention issues, in 2021, the City decided to undertake an employee survey which would gauge employee satisfaction using

General Fund dollars. The City wanted to better understand workers to identify areas of improvement, increase retention and improve recruiting. To do so, the City used the National Employee Survey (The NES) by Polco to gather insights on staff opinions toward their work. The NES investigates employee job satisfaction and key characteristics of their work environment. “We wanted to do The NES to see where employees stand, and to get a baseline for our culture and hopefully try to start building on that,” said Victor Cardenas, Novi Assistant City Manager at the time.

What is the The National Employee Survey (The NES)?

The NES is an assessment tool developed by Polco, a company founded by prior public servants, to help local governments answer tough questions about the workplace. Polco provides survey, polling and crowdsourcing expertise as well as strategic planning, performance measurement and budgeting support. The tool is built on statistical collection and analysis methods and is customizable, based on the needs of the government agency. For example, output can be segmented by departments, tenure, exemption status and more, to provide a detailed picture of employee opinion.

Survey results are presented across ten dimensions of employee experience. Results can also be benchmarked against other government agencies to help leadership not only understand the major issues facing employees but also how these issues compare to those experienced across the country. Agencies can then use the results to inform changes in internal management and recruiting practices as well as organizational policy.

To learn more about the tool, and how other communities have used it, check out these [case studies](#).

All City of Novi employees were mailed a postcard with a link inviting them to take the anonymous survey online. Out of 516 invitations, 179 Novi employees completed the survey, a 35% response rate. The data were weighted to give a more accurate portrait of the entire staff. The survey results prompted officials to host focus groups to learn more about what could be done to improve internal services.

Survey results highlighted that 80% of employees said they are satisfied with their jobs, 95% said they have good friends at work, and 94% said the City provided a safe and secure work environment for people of all backgrounds. All three ratings are higher than the national average. Only 54% reported positive ratings for human resource services, and 65% said they feel positive about benefits overall, both lower than the national average¹.

Based on the results, the City identified the human resources department as an area of improvement and hosted focus groups to get more context and hear potential solutions from employees themselves. Additionally, the City determined that it would evaluate the compensation packages it offers to current and potential employees to ensure it was remaining innovative and flexible as it relates to pay². The City also began bolstering employee retention by increasing its 457 contributions based on how many years employees have worked with the City.

Learning and Growing

Deployment of the NES survey provided an important opportunity for learning. Beyond the survey

¹ <https://blog.polco.us/employee-survey-novi-job-satisfaction>

² <https://Cityofnovi.org/services/finance/budget-and-multi-year-financial-plan/budget-2023-2024-adopted.aspx>

results, the process highlighted key lessons such as:

Lesson 1: Benchmarking provides useful insights to understand your starting point

Local governments and organizations all over the country conduct The NES, so anyone who completes the assessment can compare their results to the national average and see how they measure up. Gaining insight from other high performers on The NES enables a government agency to explore the implementation of similar leading practices for cultivating high employee job satisfaction rather than starting from scratch.

Lesson 2: Consistency is key

Worker's needs, perspectives and experiences evolve based on their own lived experience, organizational dynamics and larger environmental factors. While point in time data is useful, it is important to regularly collect and engage employees directly in the work. The City of Novi plans to conduct The NES every two years to gauge the City's progress in creating a healthy work environment for staff.

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