

# Making the Grade: The Story of an Increasingly Well-Educated Federal Workforce

2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Results

A Special Report from the  
Office of Personnel Management



# Overview

The 2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) provides valuable information about how employees feel about their jobs, their ability to advance, their training opportunities and their sense of empowerment in the workplace. This year, for the first time, the OPM-administered survey gathered information about the level of education employees have attained, which made it possible to provide insights into how people progress educationally during their careers in Federal service.\*



**\*About This Report:** This report was made possible by new data from this year's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. OPM asked employees to report their current level of education for the first time, in addition to reporting other types of demographic data that they've been asked about in the past. OPM's Office of Planning and Policy Analysis used the survey data, combined with information from the Enterprise Human Resources Integration Statistical Data Mart (EHRI-SDM), to identify trends in education acquisition in the Federal workforce from 2005 to 2014.

We found that many Federal employees are looking for opportunities to improve their skills by continuing their education while they build careers in public service.

**Of the survey respondents who entered the Federal workforce a decade ago, 39 percent have increased their education.\*\* For those who started with a high school diploma as their highest degree (about a quarter of the workforce), the vast majority—86 percent—improved their educational status.**

Their progress ranged from obtaining a certificate in a particular skill area to completing a college degree—an associate's, a bachelor's or a post-graduate degree.

By helping Federal workers go on for more education, the Federal government is making an investment in its employees that yields a solid return. Employees develop critical skills that the government needs, giving them potential to increase their responsibilities and expand their roles in their organizations. And, they are more likely to feel vested in their organizations and motivated to continue their service to the American people. OPM's data shows that employees who advance their education also fare better financially as they accept new challenges and greater responsibilities.



\*\*To calculate this percentage, we extracted from the 2014 FEVS data the employees with approximately 10 years of Federal service and compared their indicated education level in 2014 to the level of education that was reported in the 2005 EHRI-SDM database.

# The Story of Maria

Let's take a look at a composite Federal employee who typifies the education findings in an OPM analysis of the FEVS and other agency data. We'll call her Maria.

When Maria joined the Federal service in 2005, she had a high school diploma and was earning the average wage that new employees with her education received.

**As Maria began to build her career, she had some decisions to make. Should she continue her education? And if so, how far?**



Maria talked with her supervisor, who concluded that continuing her education would be a benefit to her department as well as to her. The manager made use of an authority under the Chief Human Capital Officers Act of 2002 that allowed the government to pay for some of her education expenses, knowing that in return the department would have a more skilled and engaged employee. In the FEVS, nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents said their supervisors support employee development.

In addition to boosting her skills and contributions to her workplace, Maria's chances of moving up the career ladder also would improve as she continued her education. For example, with a bachelor's degree Maria might qualify for positions in which she could develop new or additional skills. Her accruing experience and skill set could put her on a track to move up to become a team leader or a supervisor.



The data show that if Maria remained at a high school level education or got an associate's degree, she would have a 15 percent chance of becoming a manager or supervisor by 2014. If she went on to receive a bachelor's degree, her chances for promotion and advancement increase to 18 percent.

If she obtains a post-bachelor's degree, she has a 23 percent probability of moving into the supervisory ranks in her first decade in Federal service.

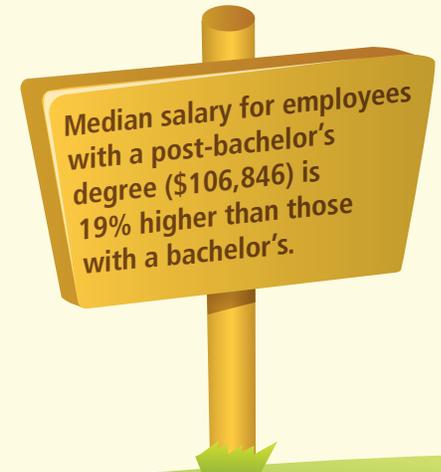


Going on for more education could have an impact on Maria's future earnings as well. For example, if Maria earned a certificate or associate's degree by 2014, her salary could be 4 percent more than if she chose not to continue her studies. If she continued her studies and received a bachelor's degree, her earning potential could increase by

18 percent. And, if Maria decided to go on for an advanced degree, her earning potential could increase by 29 percent.

If high school graduate Maria continued her education and received a post-graduate degree by 2014, she could conceivably double her salary from the time she entered Federal service.

In short, the decisions made by Maria and her manager about her education could prove to be wise and fruitful career decisions for both her and her agency.



# A Well-Educated Workforce

The FEVS data also provides a window into the levels of education Federal workers have attained broken down by race, ethnicity and sex. It also shows which agencies have the highest-educated workforce. (See table.) About two-thirds of people join Federal service having obtained a level of education beyond high school.

There is not a large disparity among race and ethnic groups when it comes to Federal employees with bachelor's degrees. A slightly higher proportion of whites and Hispanics in government have bachelor's degrees (35 percent) than African Americans (30 percent). Gaps are slightly more pronounced among employees with post-bachelor's degrees. Thirty-six percent of whites have a post-bachelor's degree, compared to 28 percent for both African Americans and Hispanics.

There were also some differences in education levels between men and women in Federal service.

About **5%** more men have bachelor's degrees than do women.

The gap was **3%** when it came to post-bachelor's degrees.

	Agency	Percent of Employees with Post-Bachelor's
# 1	Office of Management and Budget	87.6%
# 2	US Agency for International Development	78.4%
# 3	Federal Trade Commission	75.4%
# 4	Securities and Exchange Commission	65.8%
# 5	National Labor Relations Board	64.7%
# 6	Federal Energy Regulatory Commission	61.6%
# 7	Environmental Protection Agency	58.2%
# 8	Federal Communications Commission	56.3%
# 9	National Science Foundation	56.0%
# 10	Department of Education	55.9%

# Helping Employees Help Themselves

“We know that workforce development is the critical link in our ability to recruit, to retain and to recognize our employees.”

—Katherine Archuleta, Director, OPM

Agency leaders government-wide are working to help Federal employees fulfill their goals of higher education.

The 2002 CHCO Act gave agencies the authority to help employees pay the costs of advancing their educations. Agencies have the flexibility to design programs that include paying the costs of tuition, books and supplies. These programs not only help employees advance their educations, they assist agencies in fulfilling their missions and strategic goals.

OPM earlier this year launched a new 25-percent discount on out-of-state tuition at the University of Maryland University College. As of October, nearly 800 Federal employees and family members had taken advantage of the UMUC discount, saving more than \$350,000 since the summer of 2014. OPM is working with several other universities to provide discount tuition choices for Federal employees.

“From resumé to retirement,  
I want to make sure that we  
provide the tools that employees  
need to develop and to succeed.”

—Katherine Archuleta, Director, OPM

OPM also pioneered HRU, which provides online training for human resources specialists across government. The agency is expanding this resource to include government-wide training in other areas. Employees are encouraged by OPM to take advantage of mentoring programs and rotational opportunities, including the President’s Management Council Interagency Rotation, which matches high-potential employees with six-month interagency assignments that enable them to expand their management skills.





The FEVS shows us that employees want more ways to develop their skills and are hungry for more educational opportunities. Such initiatives pay off—in employees’ paychecks and in their sense of accomplishment. OPM continues to look for new and creative ways to help them realize those goals, working with agencies to expand government-wide training and educational opportunities. Why? Because the results are a win-win: Helping our employees further their training and education increases their knowledge and skills. And the American people benefit from the continued excellent service these committed and engaged employees provide each and every day.

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