

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Our state employees are really smart people. They understand how government works. And they know better than anyone how it can work better. We need their good ideas, and then we need to put them into action.”

—Governor Bill Ritter, January 11, 2007

At a time when Colorado State Government is undergoing a transformation, state employees should be involved in making improvements and offering suggestions. Employee input must be valued in the process of improving both state jobs and services.

The Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA) recognized the value of employee input by sponsoring a series of employee feedback sessions facilitated by the Colorado Association of Public Employees—Service Employees International Union (CAPE-SEIU).

In every session, DORA employees demonstrated their commitment to improving the services they provide the public. Employees participated with the hope of seeing concrete changes emerge after offering their feedback. Many employees cited a difference in tone with the new Executive Director, and felt that these sessions were an indication of a “new day” at DORA, where employee input would be welcomed and valued. In a department that touches the lives of every Coloradan, any way to improve communication with the public is worth exploring.

DORA management also participated in this process in an open and encouraging way. Through seeing management’s support, employees felt more comfortable sharing ideas and speaking honestly.

Improving Communication at DORA

In order to improve communication, employees felt that five areas must be addressed:

- 1. Valuing employee input**
- 2. Enforcing consistent practices**
- 3. Providing necessary training**
- 4. Sharing of information**
- 5. Defining the identity of DORA**

Specific Recommendations

Employees came up with 25 concrete recommendations:

Phase I—Could be implemented in 1-2 months, with little or no cost to DORA

1. Create a booklet/list/guide of what each division's primary responsibilities are and the services the division provides.
2. Whenever possible, share updates/minutes from managerial meetings, as well as the monthly reports that the Division Directors provide DORA's Executive Director.
3. Send out emails consistently in all parts of DORA that address any changes to policies, procedures, paperwork or the website.
4. In divisions with long cues, establish specific times to shut off the phones at the end of the day.
5. Managers should spend time working alongside frontline employees to gain a better understanding of the realities of the job. New managers should meet with each member of their staff.
6. Employees should be notified of new hires and of employees leaving DORA.
7. Staff meetings should happen consistently and the Executive Director or other top management should occasionally attend.
8. Emails should be sent directly to all affected employees.
9. Create more opportunities for interaction between employees of different divisions.

Phase II—Could be implemented in 3-6 months. Would involve either some cost, structural change, or significant time commitment from DORA.

1. In divisions with high volumes of calls/walk-ins from the public, these job duties should be separated.
2. Implement more in-depth training for employees that answer phones throughout DORA so they can be more helpful to callers in answering their questions or expediting the assistance callers need.
3. Employees should have input to changes made to the DORA website and the technology used in their division. In addition, once there are changes, employees should be trained to use the new site.
4. Managers want and need standardized training to ensure the implementation of uniform policies throughout the department.
5. DORA should create opportunities for employees who do similar jobs to share best practices.
6. Create a newsletter or some form of online blog/posting to provide information to all DORA employees and offer opportunities for feedback.
7. When projects are finished, there should be an opportunity to debrief the results and summarize the lessons learned as part of a continuous improvement program.
8. Create an updated, user-friendly contact list for other state agencies.

Phase III—Will require a longer-term process of employee input and involvement in order to implement.

1. The department needs to set the tone that all divisions are a part of DORA, rather than individual agencies.
2. Field staff needs the appropriate tools in order to facilitate communication with the management and the public they serve.
3. DORA technology needs to be updated and in line with industry standards.
4. More front desk workers need to be hired in divisions with a high volume of calls and walk-ins.
5. DORA needs to have more feedback from the public on the services provided.
6. DORA should promote the positive work employees do in the media and with the public.
7. Management should have an open-door policy.
8. Ongoing opportunity for employee input.

These feedback sessions were well attended and well received by DORA employees. Over the course of 2 1/2 weeks, employees generated feedback and ideas that would greatly improve both jobs and services within DORA. However, the success of this type of session depends on the ability of the employees to see concrete changes occur. On employee feedback forms, comments included “I hope to see some good come of it,” “I hope this develops into results,” “I am concerned that these discussions and the resulting report will...result in activity to avoid action.”

In addition, most employees expressed the desire to be involved in future feedback sessions on additional topics—80% of surveyed employees said they “agree” or “strongly agree” that they would “participate in a feedback session in the future on a different topic.” A long-term, sustainable format for employee feedback in a safe environment will be crucial to the success of this project.

CAPE-SEIU is excited about the prospects of this process for making DORA a more effective agency, and is anxious to assist the director and staff in moving the process forward.