



SERVING FUTURE TRANSPORTATION NEEDS:

Succession Planning for a State Department of Transportation Organization, Its People & Mission

Final Report

June 2011

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13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) This project will examine the employment of people who accomplish the work of the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (AKDOT&PF) – those who will serve the future transportation needs of Alaska. The study will focus primarily on professional personnel within AKDOT&PF, but will include consideration of vital support personnel as well. The proposed research is about getting and retaining a sufficient number of good people. The magnitude of "sufficient" changes with time. Therefore, the work will consider plausible future events that may cause large changes in staffing requirements. The project report will provide implementation recommendations that include the strategies, goals and tasks that AKDOT&PF can use to formulate an action plan to accomplish its mission in the future. The report will target a reading audience that includes AKDOT&PF Chief level managers and regional administrators, and Department of Administration personnel interested in successful long term development of AKDOT&PF's human assets.				
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alaska has a shortage of engineering and technical professionals. For example, at the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF), the vacancy rate for engineers is about 20%. Compounding this situation is the indication from our research that 43% of engineers and other technical professionals at ADOT&PF are very likely or somewhat likely to leave within the next three years. A literature search confirmed this tendency as a nationwide problem, but yielded few suggestions for improving retention that would be applicable to Alaska.

Our survey of ADOT&PF Engineers I and II indicated that about 52% of them are likely or somewhat likely to leave the department if a major development project, such as a natural gas pipeline, were to begin. Though all potential major projects in Alaska are tentative, ADOT&PF would need additional personnel to deal with this loss if such a project came to fruition.

In order to identify specific retention issues, we surveyed ADOT&PF managers, engineers, and other technical professionals. We then reviewed the results of those methods, formed conclusions, and suggested recommendations, including some implementation tools. Succession planning must address these retention issues and it must address recruiting, since the same issues affect both retention and recruiting.

A primary finding of our survey is that most engineers and other technical professionals at ADOT&PF are satisfied with their employment and likely to stay. However, some trends of dissatisfaction are evident. Among the findings are the following (not necessarily in order of importance):

1. A shortage of engineers and technical professionals exists and is becoming critical. Actions are needed to assure that ADOT&PF has sufficient technical personnel to carry on its mission. This requires attention beginning at the policy-making level and extending to line management.
2. Relevant job-skills training is lacking, especially training in soft skills such as communication and human relations. Many employees feel a lack of mentoring, the personal one-on-one transfer of knowledge from more-experienced personnel to less-experienced personnel. The responsibilities of a supervisor must include the training and professional growth of subordinate employees.
3. With respect to technical training, the training needs of such “line” positions as design and construction are different from the training needs of non-line professional support such as geotech, materials, environmental, and right of way. An analysis of these needs is recommended.
4. Nearly one-third of surveyed employees feel a lack of appreciation, acknowledgment, and sense of personal accomplishment at ADOT&PF, and report a deficiency in feedback and clear expectations. Some employees feel criticized by their supervisors, the public, and the legislature. This situation relates to human-relations training of supervisors and the need for department-wide appreciation initiatives.
5. Pay continues to be a large issue among the surveyed employees. Engineer I and II positions are not eligible for overtime pay, a matter that should be explored.

6. Concerns about Tier IV retirement were mentioned often in survey responses. Some Tier IV employees would prefer a return to a defined-benefit program. Additionally, some supervisory personnel believe that the Tier IV program provides no incentive for newer employees to stay. The effects of a defined-contribution type of retirement system must be considered as part of the entire recruiting and retention issue.
7. There is widespread agreement that many aspects of the ADOT&PF workplace are satisfactory. These positive aspects ought to be emphasized with both current and prospective employees. Although most employees are comfortable with their situations, some employees noted deficiencies with their physical work locations. Funds should be made available to improve these situations.
8. Though the prospect of a major development project in Alaska in the near future is uncertain, we recommend monitoring the situation, with the idea that planning and funds for the planning are made available to ADOT&PF before major private projects are actually approved—that is, during the pre-approval process, once the approval is expected.