



**PennState**  
University Staff  
Advisory Council

2024 Listening Session Report

Compiled March 2024

## Introduction:

On February 28 and February 29, 2024, the University Staff Advisory Council (USAC) held its third annual [Listening Sessions](#). The session was designed to gather feedback and input from staff across the institution about their diverse lived experiences, challenges and needs.

During the sessions, attendees provided written responses to a series of eight yes/no questions and then offered the opportunity to follow up with narrative responses. Most comments were collected via the Q&A function of the webinar, but a few were collected in advance of the session from those who were unable to attend.

On February 28, 2024, 131 staff members attended. On February 29, 2024, 89 staff members attended. This resulted in 218 unique attendees over two days.

The following report outlines summaries of the staff who attended, the responses given to the questions asked, common trends/findings, staff's perceptions of the experience, and recommendations for USAC and university leadership.

## Attendee Data

### Registered vs. Attendee Data (2023 and 2024)

USAC Listening Sessions	Total Staff Registered	Attended Listening Session (%)
February 2023	596	549 (92%)
February 2024	280	199 (71%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>748 (85%)</b>

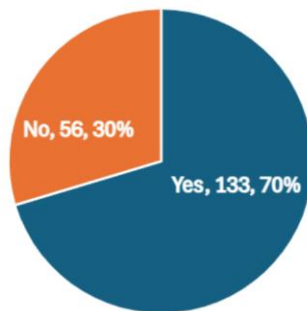
*\*76 of the 2024 attendees also attended one of the 2023 sessions.*

February 2023	Registration by Penn State Campus	February 2024	Registration by Penn State Campus
Abington	16	Abington	5
Altoona	5	Altoona	1
Beaver	4	Behrend	3
Behrend	15	Berks	7
Berks	3	Brandywine	5
Brandywine	6	Carlisle	3
DuBois	4	College of Medicine	4

Fayette, the Eberly Campus	2	DuBois	2
Great Valley	10	Extension	3
Harrisburg	19	Fayette, the Eberly Campus	9
Hazleton	4	Great Valley	4
Hershey	80	Greater Allegheny	9
Lehigh Valley	8	Harrisburg	11
Mont Alto	9	Hazleton	5
New Kensington	3	Hershey	4
Schuylkill	9	Lehigh Valley	14
Shenango	5	Mont Alto	6
University Park	370	New Kensington	7
Wilkes Barre	8	Schuylkill	8
World Campus	10	Scranton	8
York	1	Shenango	2
<i>Campus Field Blank</i>	5	University Park	137
		Wilkes Barre	4
		World Campus	7
		York	5
		<i>Campus Field Blank</i>	7

### Question 1:

Can you articulate the advantages and/or necessity of recent institutional changes?



## Follow Up Question: “Are there historical University practices, policies, and or traditions that are essential to maintain during institutional change?”

The 95 responses received indicated a strong desire for a balance between change and stability, with an emphasis on staff welfare, transparency, and the retention of the university's foundational values and mission.

### Common Themes:

- **Job Security and Stability:** A strong call for maintaining job security, with concerns about the frequency of change and its impact on employees' sense of stability.
- **Benefits and Compensation:** Repeated emphasis on the value of employee benefits such as healthcare costs, personal days, tuition discounts, and fair compensation, especially considering economic changes and inflation.
- **Transparency and Inclusion in Decision-Making:** There is a significant demand for transparency from the administration, especially regarding budget cuts and other major decisions, and for including staff in decision-making processes.
- **Respect for Staff:** Recognition of the importance of treating all staff with respect, valuing their contributions, and maintaining a shared sense of community.
- **Professional Development:** Continuous support for staff professional development is seen as crucial, with educational discounts and opportunities for growth highlighted as key to retain talent.
- **Preservation of Culture and Tradition:** Many respondents expressed a desire to preserve the university's core traditions and culture, such as events that bring the community together and land-grant mission values.
- **Importance of Commonwealth Campuses:** Acknowledgment of the critical role Commonwealth campuses play in the university system, with calls to ensure their continuous support and funding.
- **Work-Life Balance and Remote Work:** The current remote and hybrid work options were frequently mentioned as beneficial for work-life balance and staff well-being.
- **Equity and Recognition of All Roles:** Recognition that all roles, including those on Commonwealth and main campuses, are vital to the university's mission and should be treated equitably.
- **Student Focus:** A consensus that changes should not detract from the priority of providing excellent service to students and maintaining the quality of education.

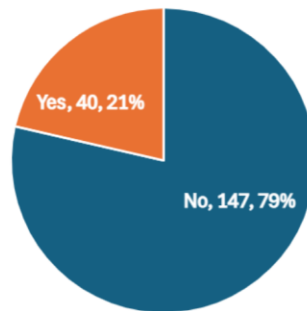
### Direct Quotes:

- "NEED job security, and stability over change. We're having too much change, too often."
- "Employee benefits has always been a highlight of working at Penn State."
- "We are an educational institution I would like to see the continued value of professional development and conferences."
- "Remote work has provided a work-life balance that I have never had before."
- "The land grant mission holds significant importance within Penn State's mission statement."
- "Staff are not interchangeable. We work where we work because we're drawn or passionate about those areas."

- "Maintaining the essential need for Commonwealth Campuses to be an integral part of what we bring and provide to local students."
- "The benefits, flexible work arrangements, holidays, the policy surrounding inclement weather and closings."

## Question 2:

### Do the recent institutional changes support your productivity and well-being?



### Follow Up Question: How have recent changes impacted your working conditions, productivity, and/or well-being?

The 136 comments received reveal a workforce grappling with the strain of increased responsibilities amid institutional uncertainty and seeking greater stability, recognition, and clarity from leadership.

#### Common Themes:

- **Job Security and Morale:** There is significant anxiety and stress over job security due to uncertainty and lack of concrete plans, causing low morale and contemplation of employment outside the university.
- **Work Overload:** Staff are experiencing burnout due to increased workloads without adequate compensation, as they're often required to cover multiple roles due to hiring freezes and staff departures.
- **Need for Recognition:** Employees express a desire for their additional efforts to be recognized and compensated, noting that the lack of acknowledgment contributes to a decline in well-being.
- **Communication and Transparency:** A common theme is the need for clearer, more timely communication and the inclusion of staff in discussions and decisions about changes.

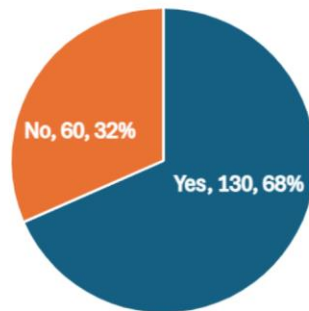
- Impact of System Changes: New administrative systems (SIMBA, WorkLion, LionPATH) have increased the complexity of tasks and stress levels, reducing productivity.
- Compensation and Title Changes: The Compensation Modernization (Comp Mod) initiative has left many feeling undervalued and stuck in their current positions with limited opportunities for advancement.
- Remote and Hybrid Work: While remote work is seen as a benefit by some, others point out its negative impact on student service and staff presence on campus.
- Equity Across Campuses: Concerns about the equity of remote work policies and fear of Commonwealth Campuses being disproportionately affected by budget cuts.
- Faculty and Staff Dynamic: There's a perceived divide in the treatment of faculty and staff, with staff feeling devalued.
- Concern for the Future: Ongoing changes and budget discussions are creating fears about job security and the future of individual campuses and departments.

**Direct Quotes:**

- "Job security, the stress of the unknown is not healthy."
- "By not hiring positions that are vacant, is very stressful."
- "The compensation modernization has hurt morale."
- "The unknown outcome of the changes not being communicated has caused a lot of unrest within the departments."
- "The announcements were made without a plan in place... It has left us with a feeling of uncertainty."
- "The ability to work remotely has had a positive impact in all 3 areas listed."

### Question 3:

Are you satisfied with Penn State's commitment to improving diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the workplace?



Follow Up Question: "What would increase your satisfaction with the University's efforts to improve DEIB?"

The 54 responses received suggest a desire for a more integrated, transparent, and action-oriented approach to DEIB initiatives within the university, with a focus on tangible outcomes and a true integration of these values into the everyday culture and practices of the institution.

#### Common Themes:

- **Authentic Commitment:** There is a desire for genuine and sustainable DEIB initiatives rather than what some perceive as superficial or "check-box" approaches. Employees wish to see a culture that authentically embodies these values.
- **Leadership and Oversight:** There is a need for effective leadership and oversight specifically dedicated to DEIB, ensuring that efforts are not just strategic projects but part of the university's culture.
- **Inclusive Decision-Making:** Respondents express a need for more inclusive decision-making processes where the voices of staff, faculty, and students are heard and considered.
- **DEIB Education and Training:** Suggestions include more in-person DEIB workshops, roundtable discussions, reading groups, and other interactive forms of engagement to deepen understanding and commitment.
- **Visibility and Action:** Employees are looking for visible action on DEIB, including better representation across staff and faculty, effective responses to incidents of discrimination, and the hiring of DEIB-focused roles on each campus.
- **Broad and Balanced Approach:** Some responses indicate a feeling of imbalance, where DEIB efforts may focus too narrowly on certain groups or issues, potentially causing division or overlooking other important areas.

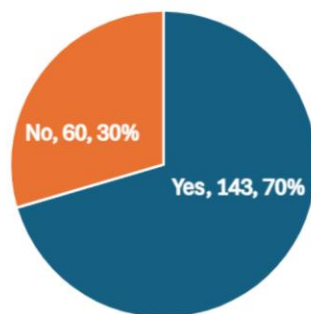
- **Resourcing and Support:** Calls for adequate resources and support for DEIB initiatives, including funding, staffing, and scholarship opportunities that align with these goals.
- **Community Engagement:** Encouragement for the university to work with local communities and businesses to foster a sense of belonging and extend DEIB efforts beyond campus borders.
- **Recognition of Efforts:** A desire for the university to recognize and highlight units or campuses that are making notable strides in their DEIB practices.
- **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Suggesting the creation or promotion of ERGs to strengthen the community among underrepresented groups and provide a platform for shared experiences and advocacy.

**Direct Quotes:**

- "DEIB should be treated as a culture... we need real leadership, oversight, expectations, and dedicated focus on building a better culture."
- "We need DEIB but do not need to be overwhelmed with it."
- "It's a good start, but I think that I would like to see leadership truly embody DEIB efforts more."

**Question 4:**

During your time at PSU, is there someone you've considered a "mentor" or a "mentee" (either formally or informally).



*\*Note: This pair of questions was drafted by HR's Mentoring Working group.*

**Follow Up Question:** "What helps professional mentoring relationships be successful?"



The 74 comments received illustrate that while structured programs have their place, the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship, characterized by respect, communication, and shared commitment, is crucial to the success of the mentoring process.

**Common Themes:**

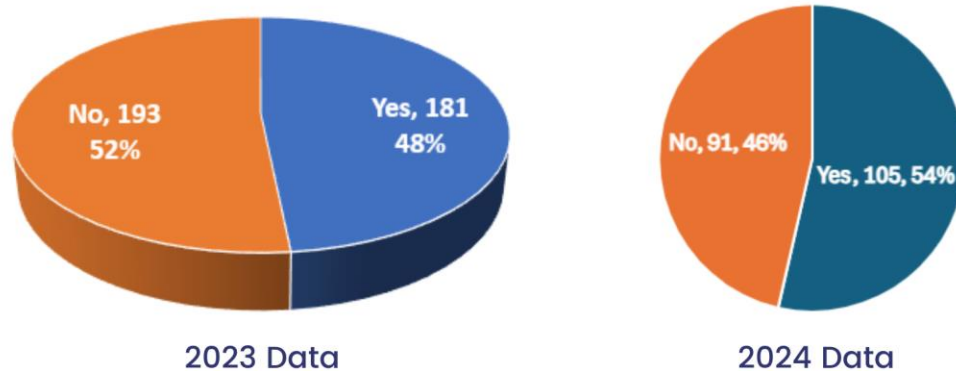
- **Regular and Meaningful Contact:** Consistent, scheduled meetings, like monthly lunches, enable mentors and mentees to stay connected and discuss various topics regularly.
- **Open Communication:** Honesty and openness in communication were highlighted as vital for a successful mentoring relationship. Being able to discuss both positive and negative issues openly is key.
- **Mutual Respect:** Respect between mentors and mentees is fundamental, along with a lack of "rankism," ensuring that both parties value each other's contributions.
- **Shared Experiences and Historical Knowledge:** Mentors with historical knowledge and experience provide invaluable context and guidance, which is highly appreciated.
- **Support and Encouragement:** Effective mentors are those who push mentees beyond their comfort zones and are committed to their professional development.
- **Direct and Accessible Contact:** Easy access to mentors, without having to navigate complicated bureaucratic paths, is important for fostering a reliable mentor-mentee relationship.
- **Allowance for Time by Management:** Management must support mentoring by allowing time for these activities within the work schedule.
- **Peer Learning Across Locations:** Particularly in smaller or more distributed campuses, being able to connect with colleagues in similar roles at other locations is beneficial.
- **Professional and Personal Growth:** A successful mentor not only aids in professional development but also supports personal growth and mental health.
- **Institutional Support for Mentorship:** The success of mentoring is enhanced when the institution provides a structured program and supports the participation of its staff.
- **Matching Values and Goals:** Mentoring is more effective when both parties share similar values and goals, which leads to more fruitful exchanges.
- **Diversity in Mentorship:** A good mentoring program should include a variety of mentors to accommodate different needs, experiences, and backgrounds.
- **Formal and Informal Opportunities:** While formal programs are beneficial, informal mentoring relationships that develop naturally are also valued.

**Some direct quotes that reflect these sentiments include:**

- "The people I have met have, for the most part, been very helpful in showing me the ropes."
- "...in 7 years I've not had one person (supervisor or other) formally or informally be a mentor."
- "PSU has had no impact on establishing, fostering, or maintaining the mentoring relationship I have. It is something that I had to develop on my own."
- "If I can compare the differences between mentor/mentee relationships between staff vs. faculty, one big difference is that faculty are expected to form that relationship and support the person as they move through tenure. Staff don't have a similar system and since we never stop being evaluated, it's hard to develop relationships when you're competing for the same jobs."

## Question 5:

### Has your unit taken steps to address/improve employee morale?



*\*This question was asked in order to track progress since it was first asked during the 2023 Listening Sessions. The above graphic provides this year's data along with last year's, as a source of comparison.*

### Follow Up Question: "In what ways could University/ unit leadership better address and/or improve morale?"

The 121 responses received point to a need for a more holistic approach to staff management, with genuine efforts to engage with and support staff, recognition of their contributions, and a focus on creating an environment where every staff member feels valued and secure.

#### Common Themes:

- **Compensation and Workload:** There is a clear call for appropriate compensation for additional tasks and equitable pay that reflects the workload, with many feeling undervalued.
- **Transparency and Communication:** A strong desire exists for more transparent and clear communication from the university leadership, particularly about changes and the future.
- **Recognition of Staff Contributions:** Staff feel a need for their contributions to be recognized publicly, such as in Penn State News, and through formal staff development programs.
- **Support for Professional Development:** There is a need for a budget to support staff development opportunities, including professional training and self-care initiatives.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Suggestions include more flexibility with remote work opportunities and scheduling to allow focus on work and personal well-being.
- **Improved HR Communication:** Respondents seek clearer explanations from HR regarding job titles, roles, and opportunities for advancement.

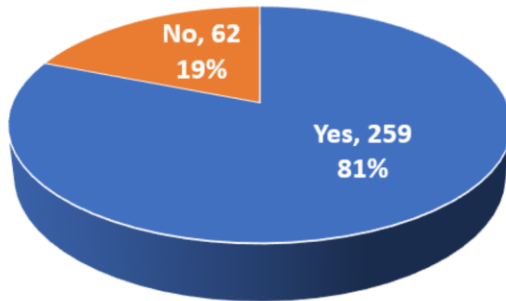
- Addressing Staff Concerns: Staff want their concerns to be escalated and addressed effectively, rather than being left unresolved or ignored.
- Senior Leadership Engagement: There is a call for senior leadership to engage more with staff at all levels, offering town halls, and Q&A sessions that aren't scripted.
- Inclusiveness in Decision-Making: Staff express a need to be included in decisions that affect their work and the university.
- Equity Across All Roles: Some responses highlight a perceived bias favoring faculty over staff, leading to morale issues.
- Morale-Boosting Activities: Suggestions for morale-boosting activities that are meaningful and desired by staff, rather than top-down planned events that may not address staff interests or needs.
- Visibility and Access to Leadership: Staff desire more visibility and accessibility of leadership, both at the university and unit levels.
- Proactive Approach to Staff Concerns: An emphasis on proactive rather than reactive approaches to staff morale, with regular check-ins and authentic engagement.

**Direct Quotes:**

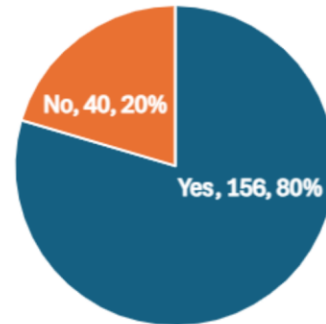
- "Clearer communication. A better plan when sharing information."
- "The University needs to quit taking Staff so clearly for granted and just seeing us all as just another cost."

**Question 6:**

## Have you experienced or witnessed rankism in the Penn State workplace?



2023 Data



2024 Data

*\*This question was asked in order to track progress since it was first asked during the 2023 Listening Sessions. The above graphic provides this year's data along with last year's, as a source of comparison.*

**Follow Up Question: "In what ways does rankism affect work culture, morale, and collective leadership at Penn State?"**

The 65 responses received reveal a perception that rankism at Penn State creates a divisive and hierarchical work culture where staff feel underappreciated and undervalued, leading to decreased morale and commitment.

### Common Themes:

- **Communication Barriers:** Staff feel unable to ask open questions and dialogue freely, unlike faculty who enjoy more open communication channels.
- **Privilege and Perceived Inequality:** There is a sentiment that faculty enjoy privileges denied to staff, leading to a feeling of rankism within the university.
- **Differential Value Perception:** Commonwealth Campuses and their staff feel less valued compared to University Park (UP), highlighting a division in rankism across locations.
- **Morale and Dedication Impact:** Employees report feeling devalued and voiceless, leading to reduced work dedication and increased turnover, particularly when they perceive faculty as being treated more favorably.
- **Flexible Work Policies:** Staff observe rankism in the flexibility allowed to faculty over staff for work arrangements, negatively impacting staff morale.
- **Resentment and Discord:** Rankism is said to breed resentment among co-workers, with a snowball effect over time that damages team cohesion.
- **Inequitable Recognition:** Faculty are viewed as "Gods" and irreplaceable, whereas staff feel treated as disposable, undermining their worth and contribution.
- **Administrative Attention:** Higher-level administration is seen as disregarding the importance and replaceability of staff, contributing to a culture of rankism.

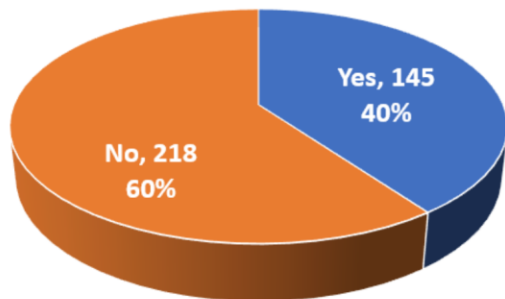
- Faculty-Staff Disparity: There's a clear division in respect and expectations, with faculty presumed to have a higher status over staff, which affects the ability to address their lack of performance or incorrect behavior.
- Hierarchical Dynamics: Experiences of rankism vary, with some staff feeling overlooked or underappreciated based on their position within the academic hierarchy.
- Collective Decision-Making Exclusion: Staff report feeling excluded from making consequential decisions, whereas faculty and administration are involved, reinforcing feelings of rankism.
- Impact on Teamwork and Environment: The responses suggest rankism undermines effective teamwork and creates an uncomfortable work environment, impacting collective morale and leadership.
- Systemic Issue: Rankism at Penn State is described as a systemic issue, affecting faculty, staff, and potentially the union environment, with a need for cultural change to improve faculty-staff relations and overall staff morale.

**Direct Quotes:**

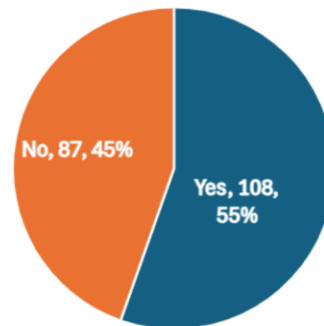
- "I am upset that faculty get to ask open questions and speak with one another. And instead as staff we are only able to answer yes/no questions here and nobody to answer our questions."
- "Faculty will always enjoy privileges that staff are denied."
- "There is rankism between UP and the Commonwealth Campuses. The campuses are seen as less valuable."
- "It leaves employees feeling devalued and voiceless. This leads to a lack of dedication to their work and higher turnover."
- "Faculty is most important and staff is lower class - I think this has improved some from last year doing this, but it is definitely still there."
- "Faculty are treated as Gods. Staff are treated as disposable."

**Question 7:**

## Do you feel supported by University/unit leadership?



2023 Data



2024 Data

*\*This question was asked in order to track progress since it was first asked during the 2023 Listening Sessions. The above graphic provides this year's data along with last year's, as a source of comparison.*

**Follow Up Question: "In what ways can university/unit leadership more effectively support staff?"**

The 137 comments received reveal the sentiment that staff at Penn State desire a workplace culture that acknowledges their worth through better pay, opportunities for growth, meaningful engagement with leadership, and the fostering of a work environment that is both flexible and respectful of their contributions.

### Common Themes:

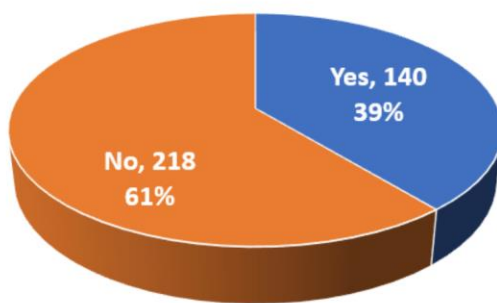
- **Recognition and Respect:** Many staff members feel that their contributions go unnoticed and unappreciated, especially when successful events are attributed only to higher-ranking individuals.
- **Communication and Transparency:** A clear desire for open, two-way communication channels with leadership was expressed, as well as a call for leaders to genuinely listen to staff feedback and actively seek it out.
- **Appropriate Compensation and Career Development:** Staff indicated a need for fair compensation, reflecting their workload and inflation, and clearer pathways for career advancement and development opportunities.
- **Improved Evaluation Processes:** There were concerns about the ineffectiveness of current evaluation processes, with a call for more meaningful assessments that truly impact raises and acknowledge exceptional performance.
- **Flexibility and Work Environment:** The responses highlighted a need for continued flexibility in work arrangements, such as remote work options, which were seen as beneficial during the pandemic.

**Direct Quotes:**

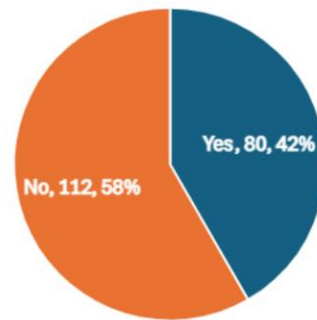
- "Admin staff are treated like the lowest on the totem poll. Even though everyone says admin is the backbone, we are not treated the same."
- "Leadership tend to go to employees they perceive as being of higher rank to lead projects instead of turning to employees with specialized knowledge in those areas."
- "Comp Mod is a perfect example of staff not feeling supported by University Leadership. HR spoke at a meeting saying managers had a voice or say in the comp mod, which did not occur."

**Question 8:**

## Do you feel valued, appreciated, and recognized in your work at Penn State?



2023 Data



2024 Data

*\*This question was asked in order to track progress since it was first asked during the 2023 Listening Sessions. The above graphic provides this year's data along with last year's, as a source of comparison.*

**Follow Up Question: "What types of recognition are most meaningful to you?"**

The 168 responses received indicate staff at Penn State find recognition most meaningful when it is personal, fair, and reflective of their actual contributions to the university. They value transparent communication, fair compensation, genuine appreciation, and professional development opportunities.

**Common Themes:**

- **Appreciation of Effort and Skills:** Many staff members feel underappreciated when only those in higher positions or with advanced degrees are recognized, especially when lower-level staff contribute substantially to successful events or regular operations.

- **Genuine Listening and Feedback:** There's a desire for leadership to truly listen to staff needs and provide opportunities for feedback, suggesting that annual reviews of unit heads by staff could improve understanding and support.
- **Transparency and Engagement:** Calls for more direct interaction with leadership rather than just directors, as well as greater visibility and information sharing from the top, were common. There is also a suggestion for leaders to understand the unique challenges of different units.
- **Compensation and Career Growth:** Many responses highlight the importance of fair compensation, especially when additional responsibilities are picked up. There's frustration over the Compensation Modernization Project, feeling it hasn't been effective or fair.
- **Recognition and Morale:** Responses indicated that simple acknowledgments like "thank you" are meaningful but also pointed out that more substantial recognitions, such as salary adjustments and public acknowledgment of staff achievements, are needed to boost morale.
- **Work-Life Balance:** The flexibility gained from remote working arrangements during the pandemic was greatly valued, and there's a strong desire to retain this flexibility. Suggestions include shorter workdays, mental health days, and remote workdays to improve work-life balance.
- **Training and Development:** Investment in staff training and opportunities for professional growth were also seen as forms of recognition, indicating staff want to feel their development is valued by the university.

#### **Direct Quotes**

- "The top leaders of colleges should be seeking feedback on all unit heads each year."
- "A simple 'thank you' or 'great job' from leadership would go a long way."
- "Investing in staff training and opportunities for professional growth were also seen as forms of recognition."

#### **Misc. Feedback:**

When asked for any additional feedback staff had to provide administration, we received 44 responses.

#### **Common Themes:**

- **Concerns Over Work Allocation and Recognition:** Staff members are concerned about the lack of clarity in using work time for initiatives and a sense that all employees receive the same raises regardless of individual effort.
- **Compensation and Professional Growth:** There's a call for leadership to acknowledge and address the implications of the Compensation Modernization (Comp Mod), suggesting that it has demoralized staff by not accurately reflecting their work and levels. Staff express a desire for a clear and fair promotion process and an evaluation system that reflects the actual value and contributions of staff members.
- **Work Culture and Communication:** A significant concern is the perceived "us vs. them" culture between different campus locations and administrative levels. Staff members feel that certain campuses are not given enough attention or resources. There's also a plea for a



more efficient performance review cycle and meaningful recognition that goes beyond token gestures.

- Work-Life Balance: 40% of respondents expressed gratitude for and a desire to maintain flexible work arrangements, tuition discount, and vacation policies. There were additional requests for longer parental leave and acknowledgment of the staff's year-round contribution by aligning benefits like Spring and Fall breaks with academic breaks.
- Transparency and Decision-Making: Staff want more transparency and involvement in decision-making, especially regarding budget cuts and resource allocation that affect their workload and opportunities.
- Remote Work and Equality: There's a call for more remote work opportunities, fair treatment regardless of position, and attention to salary competitiveness to prevent the need for job-hopping for salary increases.

#### **Direct Quotes:**

- "Why push to work hard for Penn State when everyone gets the same raise."
- "The work/life balance that is offered across the board is not what it could be, considering the workloads many of us carry."
- "I would like HR to own up to the fiasco and unfairness of Comp Mod. Period. The fact that they stick employees in a level below where they work and are to the top now of the band... means they want these employees to leave on their own. Admit it. Own it. Fix it."
- "The university keeps repeating 'Sustainable Business Model' but yet there is a large population of employees that are 'untouchable' in the right sizing of the budget which is tenured-faculty."
- "Many great staff members have quit. Understanding staff job responsibilities and compensating for the work performed."

## **Summary of Findings:**

The staff feedback indicates a need for systemic changes in leadership engagement, recognition practices, compensation structures, and work-life balance policies. The overarching narrative suggests that while staff are committed to their roles and the University's mission, there's a crucial need for the institution to reciprocate this commitment by addressing the concerns raised, thus fostering a more appreciated and valued workforce.

#### **Key Findings:**

- Leadership Engagement:
  - Staff expressed a desire for more direct, authentic engagement with leaders.
  - There's a perceived disconnect between university leadership decisions and staff experiences.
  - Suggestions were made for leaders to engage with staff on an individual level, especially on smaller campuses.
- Recognition:
  - Personal acknowledgment from immediate supervisors and leaders is highly valued.
  - Staff seek meaningful recognition aligned with their contributions, preferring actions that reflect genuine appreciation over routine gestures.

- Consistent praise for performance, transparency about paths to advancement, and equitable compensation were emphasized as forms of meaningful recognition.
- Compensation and Morale:
  - The Compensation Modernization initiative received significant criticism for failing to meet expectations and contributing to low morale.
  - There is a call for compensation that keeps pace with living costs and inflation.
  - Staff feel the reward system is inadequate, noting that salary increases often do not match the levels of responsibility or effort.
- Work-Life Balance and Policies:
  - The current state of work-life balance policies was critiqued for not effectively considering staff needs.
  - There were requests for more flexible work arrangements, including telecommuting options, and reconsideration of work hours.
  - Parental leave policies and the general approach to time off were noted as areas for improvement.
- Communication and Transparency:
  - Staff reported a need for clearer, more transparent communication from the University leadership.
  - There is a sense that staff input is not sufficiently sought or valued in decision-making processes.
  - The feedback loop between staff and leadership appears to be broken or ineffective.
- Cultural and Institutional Considerations:
  - A pervasive 'Us vs Them' (Staff vs. Leadership) sentiment was identified, with calls to address the perceived divide between different campus entities and staff levels.
  - Concerns were raised about the sustainability of Commonwealth campuses and the distribution of resources.
  - Staff expressed a need for the University to prioritize its workforce as much as other areas, such as infrastructure and athletics.

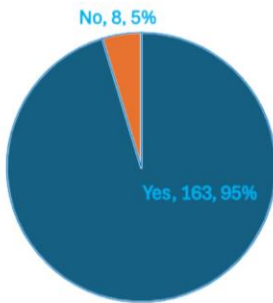
## Experience Survey Results:

At the end of each session, we surveyed attendees to get their feedback on the Listening Session and their experience as attendees.

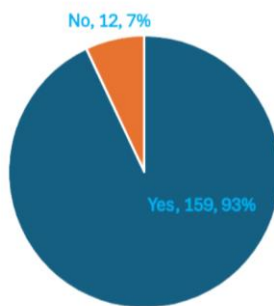
On February 28, 102 individuals (out of 131, 78% of attendees) completed the survey. On February 29, 69 individuals (out of 89, 78% of attendees) completed the survey.

Below is a summary of their combined responses.

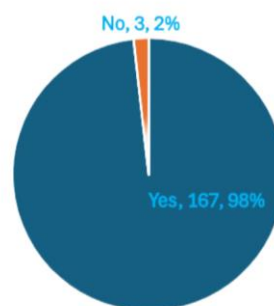
Did you feel comfortable providing your feedback in this format?



Do you view these listening sessions as an effective way of gathering staff feedback?



Should USAC host additional sessions like these in the future?



## Follow Up Survey Results

After the sessions wrapped, the Listening Session Planning group analyzed the data gathered to identify the 10 issues most commonly mentioned over the course of both days. Those ten topics were then sent broadly to staff (via Microsoft Form) with the following request:

*Below is a list of needs as identified by Penn State staff during our recent listening sessions. While we will continue to advocate in all these areas, we are asking for your input to determine **three** priority areas of advocacy for USAC's 2024/2025 term.*

*\*Please note this list provides general goals rather than specific outcomes and action steps, which will be identified after priority issues have been determined.*

*In the 2024/2024 academic year, USAC should prioritize advocacy for (pick 3):*

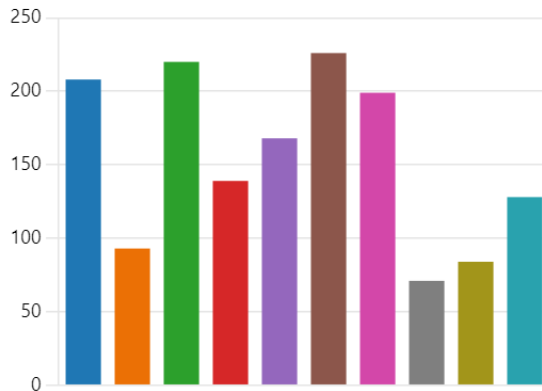
- 1. Improved communication and engagement from all levels of leadership*
- 2. Increased inclusion of staff from all campuses/levels in decision-making*
- 3. Meaningful recognition of staff at the unit level*
- 4. Greater access to and support for (time and financial) professional development*
- 5. More transparent pathways for career advancement*
- 6. Improved work-life balance and employee well-being*
- 7. Inclusive practices that foster welcoming and diverse work environments*
- 8. Solutions to address/combat rankism in the workplace*
- 9. Greater oversight and accountability of mid-level leadership by senior administrators*
- 10. Equitable distribution of resources to support commonwealth campus staff*

## Below are the Survey Results Based on 512 Responses:

1. In the 2024/2024 academic year, USAC should prioritize advocacy for (pick 3):

[More Details](#)

● Improved communication and e...	208
● Greater oversight and accounta...	93
● Increased inclusion of staff from...	220
● Meaningful recognition of staff ...	139
● Greater access to and support f...	168
● Transparent pathways for career...	226
● Better work-life balance and inc...	199
● Inclusive practices that foster w...	71
● Solutions to address/combat ra...	84
● Equitable distribution of resourc...	128



## Recommendations:

University Administrators should partner with USAC to collaboratively develop strategies and approaches to support staff and strengthen Penn State. We recommend the following strategies:

- Initiate regular, structured dialogue sessions between staff and leadership.
- Overhaul recognition and reward systems to better reflect staff contributions.
- Review and adjust compensation practices to align with market standards and living costs.
- Reform work-life balance policies to offer greater flexibility and support.
- Establish clear, transparent communication channels and decision-making processes that include staff input.
- Cultivate an inclusive institutional culture that bridges divides between campuses and staff levels, promoting a unified, team-oriented environment.

USAC will develop a strategic plan for the 2024-2025 term around the 3 areas staff have asked us to prioritize:

1. Transparent pathways for career advancement
2. Increased inclusion of staff from all campuses/levels in decision-making
3. Improved communication and engagement from all levels of leadership

Goals for the year will be reported to staff in early fall 2024 and progress updates will be delivered to administrators and staff quarterly.

Finally, USAC will continue to provide opportunities for staff to provide feedback on an ongoing basis.