

HOW DEPARTMENT LEADERS CAN IMPROVE THE WORK EXPERIENCE FOR REGIONAL TEAM MEMBERS

Jefferson City is often seen as the center of State government. But in reality, 70% of State team members work elsewhere. Outside of Jefferson City, State team members have a lower quality work experience. This is a big problem. Lower quality work experience affects turnover, motivation, and productivity. These factors can ultimately affect the service we provide to our citizens. Generally, all regions outside Jefferson City share this challenge. We focused on St. Louis as a starting point due to its size - around 6,000 team members and well over 2 million citizens.

FINDINGS

We uncovered several key drivers of lower quality work experience in St. Louis:

Engagement. Many department leaders need to better engage with their St. Louis teams. To many St. Louis team members, department leaders seem distant and don't understand their regional challenges. Additionally, many departments have a communications gap between Jefferson City and St. Louis. Most departments communicate with their regional team members through all-department emails, town hall meetings, and visits from department leaders. But many communications fail to connect with their St. Louis team members. For example, St. Louis team members are less likely to understand their department's strategic vision. And some team members receive irrelevant emails about events happening in Jefferson City that have nothing to do with them.

Safety Concerns. Many St. Louis team members work in unsafe environments. Sometimes this depends on the location of their office. Some State office buildings are in high-crime areas, and safety is a legitimate concern. Over 750 team members work in the field, sometimes in dangerous neighborhoods. For example, a DSS colleague had to escape out of a window to avoid gunshots during a home visit.

Higher Cost of Living. Pay matters, and a dollar in St. Louis does not go as far as a dollar in Jefferson City. Team members in St. Louis face a higher cost of living, and over 2,200 are subject to a 1% local earnings tax. Focus groups made clear that this is a primary issue.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Engagement. Department leaders must engage with their regional teammates through intentional interactions and communications.

- Know your department's footprint – how many of your team members work in St. Louis, where do they work, and what type of work do they do?

- Job shadow St. Louis team members in their day-to-day work to better understand and appreciate their unique challenges and identify tailored solutions. Your presence shows support for front-line team members.
- Division leaders should hold skip-level meetings with regional front-line team members (i.e. without their direct supervisors) to instill accountability and identify disconnect with supervisors. This would create a forum for team members to express concerns without fear of retaliation from supervisors.
- Build role clarity at every level of the org chart. Department leaders should ensure that regional supervisors have clarity on their roles and make direct ties between the department's strategic vision and each front-line team member's work.
- Public Information Officers (PIOs) should develop a regular, intentional internal communications plan to improve connection with regional team members.

Address Safety Concerns in a Targeted Way. Each department, division, and team has different safety concerns based on their locations and types of work. Thus, addressing safety concerns requires a targeted approach.

- Assess and address regional safety concerns by (1) conducting team member surveys or focus groups to identify safety concerns, (2) confirming whether concerns are valid, and (3) addressing accordingly.
- When team members serve citizens in dangerous neighborhoods, consider using a “buddy system” that provides at least two team members.

Explore Creative Solutions to Higher Cost of Living.

- Determine whether certain team members can be relocated from St. Louis City to avoid the local earnings tax.
- Departments with direct care staff in St. Louis should consider applicable lessons from the Missouri Veterans Commission's (MVC's) initiative to increase worker pay and schedule flexibility. MVC's initiative has reduced nursing turnover by more than 70%.
- Consider a proposed amendment to the locality pay statute, which prohibits pay variance by geographic area.

St. Louis Team Members Should Engage with Each Other. Regional leaders and team members should explore ways to create a shared identity within and across teams.

- Form a St. Louis Regional Lead committee across departments. This committee can identify shared issues and exchange best practices within the region.
- Front-line team members can take initiative by instigating social events, ranging from cross-department lunch groups to teams for charity 5k events. Such efforts can build a shared identity within and across departments.