GUIDELINE OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT:
EMPLOYEE EXIT FEEDBACK

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Guideline of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment – Employee Exit Feedback

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Who is covered by this guideline? This Guideline is intended as a Whole of Government Policy for South Australian public sector agencies as defined by the *Public Sector Act 2009* and may be adopted and applied by individual agencies. For further information, see section 3.2 of this document.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

A strong public sector is vital to delivering the strategic and economic priorities of the South Australian (SA) Government. These priorities set clear expectations for what the Public Sector does and how we do it.

Employee turnover is inevitable and while as a public sector we want to encourage an agile and adaptable workforce, where employees are encouraged to move around to further develop skills and expertise, losing valuable employees can have a significant impact on the agency's ability to deliver on business outcomes. It can decrease productivity, increase recruitment and training costs and vital corporate knowledge can be lost. Capturing employee exit feedback may assist agencies to develop strategies to avoid losing high performing employees in the future.

Understanding why people leave is critical in managing staff turnover and assisting with workforce and succession planning initiatives, and engagement and retention strategies.

Effective and robust feedback mechanisms are key to the SA Public Sector and its agencies meeting community expectations and delivering services effectively and efficiently. The SA Public Sector is committed to attracting and retaining high performing employees to deliver these services. Capturing and utilising exit feedback is a core business process that is a mechanism for assessing the environment and culture, employee engagement, health and safety measures and overall employee satisfaction within each agency and broader public sector.

The Guideline provides a basis for each agency to develop its own approach to best suit its own context and people and to integrate the employee exit feedback system with existing systems.

Under Section 14(1)(d) of the *Public Sector Act 2009* (PS Act) the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment may issue Guidelines relating to public sector employment matters.

This Guideline should also be read in conjunction with the *Premier's Direction: Employee Exit Feedback* issued pursuant to Section 10 of the PS Act which prescribes minimum standards SA public sector agencies[1] must follow.

2. WHAT IS EMPLOYEE EXIT FEEDBACK?

Exit feedback is captured when an employee leaves an agency, this can be captured in a number of ways, including face-to-face, over the phone, in a form or an online survey.

Exit feedback is a useful tool which assists agencies to identify:

- why an employee is leaving;
- what the agency is doing well;
- areas for improvement within the agency;
- how the agency is tracking against health and wellbeing initiatives;
- how engaged employees are within an agency;
- the overall culture within an agency.

3. WHY CAPTURE EMPLOYEE EXIT FEEDBACK?

The strategic intent of capturing employee exit feedback is to provide agencies with information from departing employees, which can assist the agency to improve and enhance overall performance through an engaged workforce. However this is only one mechanism to capture employee feedback, other strategies should be put in place to capture and utilise employee feedback information such as climate and engagement surveys.

Good exit feedback focuses on getting information which will inform improvements to the working environment, culture, systems and processes, leadership and developmental opportunities. It is critical that once this information is captured it is reviewed, analysed and action is taken to address the areas for improvement and issues raised.

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[1] With the exception of the Courts Administration Authority, the Legal Services Commission, the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption and Office for Public Integrity.

This information can be used to:

- improve future experiences of employees;
- identify any trends requiring attention, either at a team, division, agency or public sector level;
- identify any opportunities for improving the agency's performance and culture;
- identify any opportunities to respond to employee issues;
- continuously improve and develop workforce strategies including recruitment, induction, retention, job design, career development, and health and wellbeing initiatives.

It also creates the opportunity for employees to raise unresolved issues and achieve a positive "closure" on the employment relationship.

3.1 Principles

Exit feedback should be an integral part of the employment cycle. Understanding why employees leave an agency is integral to good management practices. Effective exit feedback is only possible if employees feel that they can be open and honest about their experiences. To enable meaningful information to be collected from employees who are leaving the agency, participation must be voluntary and confidential, and employees need to be confident that the information they provide will be used to drive improvements. This guideline recommends an approach to employee exit feedback processes which are based on the following principles:

Voluntary

Whilst employees are to be encouraged and supported to participate in an exit feedback survey, it must be voluntary.

Confidentiality

The information collected must not be used in any way which can identify individual employees, other than what is required by law or where appropriately authorised.

Continuous Improvement

Information is captured, reviewed, analysed, actioned and reported for the purpose of continuous improvement of organisational performance.

3.2 Minimum standards

In line with the *Premier's Direction: Employee Exit Feedback* all public sector chief executives or agency heads, must ensure their agency implements an employee exit feedback system to capture feedback from employees separating from the SA Public Sector (through resignation or retirement) that incorporates:

- the reason(s) for leaving employment in the agency;
- overall satisfaction in respect of employment in the agency;
- their assessment of the work health and safety measures in the agency; and
- their assessment of the agency's environment and culture.

Whilst each agency may develop its own approach to best suit its context and people, and to integrate the employee exit feedback system with existing systems, all public sector agencies subject to this direction must have regard to and apply the relevant Guideline of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment, where practicable.

3.3 Components and elements

Capturing employee exit feedback may comprise a variety of processes and methods. While the minimum standards apply for employees leaving the SA Public Sector, agencies should make every effort to capture exit feedback from employees transferring to other agencies. This Guideline provides an overview of good practice components that comprise a system in line with the *Premier's Direction: Employee Exit Feedback.*

Table 1 provides an overview of elements for deliberation and decision making.

Table 1. Components and elements of an effective system

Components	Elements
Leadership and direction *Well prepared, informed, consistent and active support by the organisation's chief executive or agency head and senior management*	Agencies should: • ensure the system is directed towards advancement of the objects of the PS Act and observance of the public sector principles, as outlined in the Act; and the Code of Ethics for the SA Public Sector; • ensure the system is integrated with the agency's employment cycle processes; • consider how the employee exit feedback process aligns with the agency's ability to deliver on the agencies goals, priorities, outputs and outcomes; • consider how the employee exit feedback process will reinforce the SA Public Sector Values and contribute to the development and continuous improvement of the agency's culture.
Process design *Definitive procedural framework*	Agencies should: • utilise the statistical workforce data (quantitative data) that is widely available through payroll systems such as age, classification, gender, diversity, time employees have stayed in roles and length of service in the context of exit feedback information; • utilise an exit feedback survey to capture information (qualitative data) such as the reason for leaving, experiences within the work group and agency, and any other comments or free text fields.
Support mechanisms *Appropriate resources and support structures in place to enact, monitor, maintain, review, evaluate and adapt the employee exit feedback system and processes*	Agencies should: • ensure appropriate (or access to appropriate) resourcing and expertise for the review, analysis, actioning and reporting of information to enable continuous improvement.

3.4 Determining an agency approach

Employee exit feedback may be achieved through a variety of processes and methods. The specific design of employee exit feedback processes should take into account the business needs, functions, workforce and culture of an agency. Where a diversity of business functions or professional disciplines are present in an agency, for example, one approach to capturing exit feedback in all parts of the organisation may not be appropriate.

The choice of approach to exit feedback is the decision and responsibility of the chief executive or agency head, advised and supported by human resource management expertise and senior managers. It is essential for management to encourage all exiting employees, including employees transferring to another agency, to undertake the employee exit feedback process.

It is recommended that a survey is utilised, which can be used for any collection method, with standardised questions which ensures that consistent data is collected.

To increase employee participation in providing exit feedback a number of options should be made available to exiting employees, including a face-to-face discussion, an online survey, or paper-based form with the option to remain anonymous.

The process should be simple and not take more than fifteen (15) minutes, if completing online or in a paper form.

The focus of the information collected should be qualitative data and capture the reason(s) for leaving and other information which will provide agencies with information they need to drive improvement. It should not be necessary to collect workforce information that is widely available through payroll systems such as age, classification, gender, diversity and years of service.

Employee exit feedback should be managed within an agency's human resource unit in recognition of the confidentiality aspect of the process. Any information gathered relating to specific individuals should be treated with the utmost confidence, except if the employee has authorised for the information to be divulged to that individual or where there is an obligation under ICAC, WHS or similar to report such information. The Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector applies: "Employees will also ensure that the privacy of individuals is maintained and will only release information in accordance with relevant legislation, industrial instruments, policy, or lawful and reasonable direction."

To ensure confidentiality, employee exit feedback should not be stored on personal files. Agencies should consider the most appropriate way to store employee exit feedback.

Agencies need to ensure that they have systems in place to effectively utilise the information collected. This may include a quarterly analysis of the data and it is important that both the quantitative and qualitative responses are considered and acted upon.

The employee exit feedback process should align to other exit processes, such as returning property and any payroll paperwork.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Commissioner for Public Sector Employment	• Issue and maintain Determinations and Guidelines relevant to Public Sector employment. • Monitor compliance with the requirement for agencies to implement an employee exit feedback system. • Collate agency reports and review the employee exit feedback information provided from across the Public Sector to determine if there are any high level whole of public sector trends.
Chief executives and agency heads	• Establish and maintain an effective agency employee exit feedback system, advised and supported by human resource management expertise and senior managers. • Report on the employee exit feedback captured in their agency and report to the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment.

Executives and senior managers	• Promote and encourage all exiting and transferring employees to provide exit feedback. • Be available to conduct an employee exit feedback interview at the request of a direct line report or a direct line report's direct line report. • Ensure employee exit feedback processes are conducted in a confidential and ethical manner.
Line managers/supervisors	• Promote and encourage all exiting and transferring employees to provide exit feedback. • Be available to conduct an employee exit feedback interview at the request of a direct line report or a direct line report's direct line report. • Ensure employee exit feedback processes are conducted in a confidential and ethical manner.
Employees	• Voluntarily participate in employee exit feedback process when transferring to another Agency or exiting the Public Sector. • Provide honest and open feedback. • Ensure that the feedback provided is not of a frivolous or vexatious nature. • Be aware that the exit feedback system is a mechanism to provide meaningful and useful feedback, both positive and negative, however it is not the appropriate mechanism to make allegations against individuals. Any complaints or allegations should be made by following the appropriate process / procedure within the agency.
Executive or senior manager responsible for human resources	• Support the chief executive or agency head in the design and implementation of an employee exit feedback system. • Provide executives, managers and employees with confidential support, advice and guidance in relation to the employee exit processes. • Implement a process to analyse the employee exit feedback captured and develop strategies to address issues and trends. • Report on the uptake of employee exit feedback processes and analysis of data captured in their agency, in line with reporting requirements and to the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment. • Ensure employee exit feedback processes are conducted, analysed and stored in a confidential and ethical manner. • Support the periodic review and evaluation of their agency's employee exit feedback system.

5. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The Office for the Public Sector (OPS) will be responsible for monitoring compliance with the requirement for agencies to implement an employee exit feedback system.

Section 19 of the PS Act enables the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment to require agencies to provide statistical reports on public sector employment matters at specified intervals.

As such, the Commissioner requires all public sector agencies to submit reports on an annual basis with information and commentary resulting from the employee exit feedback regarding:

- the number of employee departures;
- the number of employees participating in the employee exit feedback process;
- the reasons for employees leaving the SA Public Sector;
- the reasons for employees transferring to other agencies within the SA Public Sector;
- the departing employees assessment of:
  - the work health and safety measures in the agency;
  - the overall satisfaction in respect of employment in the agency; and
  - the agency's environment and culture.
- a summary of any actions or interventions taken during the year on the basis of employee exit feedback.

6. ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Quantitative data	Are measures of values or counts and are expressed as numbers for example demographic or workforce data.
Qualitative data	Are measures that are not in numerical form like, open-ended questionnaires, and unstructured interviews that are harder to analyse.