



# Maddie's Institute<sup>SM</sup>: Engagement Study

## Are Your Employees and Volunteers Engaged?

### Summary Report

September 2013

### What is engagement?

*Although complex, **engagement** can be described as the "...measurable degree of an employee's positive or negative emotional attachment to their job, colleagues and organization that profoundly influences their willingness to learn and perform at work."*

Scarlett Surveys International

**Why does it matter?** Research clearly links high engagement to high performance and productivity. Given how productivity is measured in animal shelters and rescues, one could hypothesize that more engaged employees or volunteers are capable of saving more lives, giving better care or – having a greater impact on their communities.

**How do we engage our workforce?** The truth is there's no exact formula. The factors which lead to high engagement may differ between organizations and

individuals. However, experts in the human resources field have pointed to a few key drivers, including – but not limited to – clear roles and adequate training, feelings of connection and contribution, quality peer and management relationships, learning and advancement opportunities as well as recognition. The first step is to find out what drives *your* workforce.

**Our work.** In the fall of 2012, Maddie's Institute<sup>SM</sup> conducted two online surveys of executive directors, staff and volunteers from animal shelters and rescues across the country. While the first survey assessed training and development practices (see summary and complete report [here](#)), the second asked individuals to think deeply about employee or volunteer engagement and its contributing factors.

The aim of this report is to:

- 1) Assess overall levels of engagement.
- 2) Investigate potential drivers which may contribute to engagement or disengagement.
- 3) Provide resources to enable organizations to improve engagement.

To see the complete report with resource links click [here](#).

*"The world's top-performing organizations understand that employee engagement is a force that drives business outcomes.*

*Research shows that engaged employees are more productive employees. They are more profitable, more customer-focused, safer, and more likely to withstand temptations to leave the organization."*

*Employee Engagement: What's Your Engagement Ratio?*  
Gallup, Inc.



## Our Findings The Engagement Process



**1) Evaluate staff and volunteer engagement.** Only 22% of executive directors of staffed organizations, 35% of full-time staff and 19% of part-time staff indicated that their organization had a formal process to evaluate staff engagement. Additionally, only 7% of volunteers reported having a formal process for evaluating volunteer engagement.

*“The first step to improving employee engagement in your [organization] is knowing where you stand.” – Carolina Business Journal*

Find out what drives engagement at your organization. Consider devising an annual or semi-annual engagement survey. Click to read about current engagement assessment programs like the [Shelter Diagnostic System from the Humane Society of the United States](#) or check out the engagement evaluation criteria used by [The Training Source](#) and [UNC’s Kenan Flagler Business School](#).

**2) Identify the key drivers in your organization and create a strategic plan.**

### What we found:

- **Clearly and consistently communicate core values and live by them.** An impressive 82% of employees and volunteers reported feeling connected to their organization’s mission. Fewer (64%), however, believed that their organization’s written values, principles or mission, truly guided decision-making and operations; sixty-two percent believed that their organization’s written values, principles or mission, were consistently and clearly communicated.

*“A values-based organization is a living, breathing culture of shared core values among all employees. In a values-driven culture, employees find alignment between their personal values and the organization’s values creating a unified and motivated workforce. Management and leadership set examples for their organizations and live the values they preach.”*

– Society for Human Resource Management

Check out this example [set of core values](#) and [workplace culture agreement](#) for great ideas.

- **Provide training and learning opportunities.** Volunteers may be more likely than employees to report having opportunities to learn and grow within their roles (68% and 54%, respectively).

*“Employee engagement increases when employees receive regular training... Ironically, when you provide employees with more qualifications to add to their resumes, they are more inclined to stay with your company.”– Profiles International, Inc.*

Check out these ideas on [employee learning objectives](#) or click for ideas on [volunteer training](#).



## What we found (continued):

- **Foster mentoring relationships.** Thirty-nine percent of executive directors of staffed organizations reported that leadership actively promotes mentoring relationships. Approximately 61% of volunteers, 52% of full-time staff and 43% of part-time staff reported being in a mentoring relationship – either playing the role of mentor or mentee; the majority of these relationships being informal in nature.

*“Management can create arrangements that help employees build relationships. Pairing new staff with long-timers provides an opportunity for veterans to share their knowledge and gives less experienced workers a mentor who can answer questions and offer advice.”*

– The Humane Society of the United States

Click to learn more about the [top 10 characteristics of a good mentor](#).

- **Provide advancement opportunities.** Volunteers may also be more likely than employees to report having opportunities for promotion or role advancement (50% and 41%, respectively). Sadly, 21% of staff expressed feeling that they are in a “dead-end” role.

*“Promoting from within is another way to create an atmosphere of respect – while also providing employees with a powerful motivator. Hosing down kennels, scrubbing cat cages, or picking up stray animals for hours on end may be a little bit easier for employees to bear if they’re aware of the potential for advancement and feel like they’re working toward something.”*

– The Humane Society of the United States

*“If opportunities for promotion in your organization are limited, consider offering star performers the chance to lead a special project, get them more involved in decision-making, and/or support their career development by sponsoring their application for a seat on a local board or commission.” – Philanthropy News Digest*

- **Build teamwork and trust.** Forty-six percent of executive directors of staffed organizations and 53% of employees reported that there has been noticeable tension between different organizational departments; tension between staff and volunteers was noted by 30% of volunteers. Furthermore, employee gossip was noted as a problem by 63% of executive directors of staffed organizations and 48% of employees.

*“While there is some natural tension with individuals on a team, a strong leader can help team members replace destructive habits, such as arguing, being disrespectful, or having unrealistic expectations of others... what they accomplish together is just as vital to the organization as what they accomplish as individuals.” – Dale Carnegie Training*

Check out these [recommendations to improve inter-departmental teamwork](#) and [ideas on volunteer practices that make for happy staff interactions](#).



### What we found (continued):

- **Recognize and reward good performance often.** Seventy-three percent of employees and 65% of volunteers reported the combined use of two or more of these recognition strategies: individual praise, "shout-outs" at meetings, awards/performance-based incentives (including "Employee or Volunteer of the Month" programs) and raises/promotions. Of those who reported some form of recognition at their organization, the most commonly utilized strategy was individual praise.

*"Recognizing – and rewarding – a job well done sends the message that performance matters and establishes a standard for others in the organization."*

– *Philanthropy News Digest*

Without those who work and serve in our organizations, we would not be able to achieve our shared mission of saving animal lives. Recognize good performance sincerely and consistently.

**3) Train managers in staff and volunteer engagement strategies.** Only 13% of executive directors of staffed organizations reported that their managers received training on how to increase staff engagement. Interestingly, 55% of employees and 56% of volunteers believed that organizational leaders were skilled at engaging the workforce.

*"[Leader and manager engagement-building] skill deficits are one of the most widely cited barriers to engagement, second only to the notion that leaders and supervisors are not held accountable for engagement."* – American Society for Training & Development

*"The attitude and actions of the immediate supervisor can enhance employee engagement or can create an atmosphere where an employee becomes disengaged."* – Dale Carnegie Training

After evaluating engagement at your organization, create an engagement strategy and give your managers the skills, ownership and confidence needed to execute on it.

### 4) Get out there and execute your strategic plan! (Lather, Rinse, Repeat.)

*"World-class organizations develop a formula for success by looking objectively and rigorously at the business problems they face and by focusing on finding the right employees and keeping them engaged. For these organizations, an employee engagement strategy is not only fundamental to the way they do business, it is critical to their success."* – Gallup Consulting

The best organizations know that there is always room for improvement. Don't allow your strategic plans to stagnate! Continuously upgrade your organization's plan with evaluation, identification and training.

