

Climate Study Action Team Trust Sub-Team Report

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Membership

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Objectives

NMSU's Survey of Employees Engagement (2019)¹ showed low scores on the organization's internal communication and highlighted significant concerns of NMSU's employees' perceptions of the workplace climate. Given that trust is an indicator of both internal communication and perception of workplace climate, the Climate Study Action Team (CSAT) charged this Subcommittee to,

1. Explore employee's trust and lack of trust in NMSU's current work environment.
2. Propose low-or no-cost actions to begin improving trust in NMSU's work environment.

Tools and Sources of Data

To approach the above two objectives, the members of this subcommittee drew on:

- 10 conversations (60-120 minutes each or about 15-20 hours of listening) with Employee Council, HR Connect, AFSCME, Faculty Senate, Diversity Council, and other NMSU constituents. They asked the participants to respond to the following prompt, "Please describe what a work environment of trust looks like to you."
- Observations and conversations with colleagues about the impact of the current coronavirus pandemic on trust and internal communication at NMSU.
- Insights gained from public communications, including COVID-related town hall e-meetings, executive leadership mass emails and hotline announcements.
- Related findings of the External Review Report on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Organizational Structure and Strategy (2020).²

Each subcommittee member took notes during the above encounters to use in the analysis. Notes will be destroyed as soon as this report is finalized.

Data Analysis

Over a period of six months, the members of the subcommittee collaborated on the analysis process in weekly meetings and report drafting and redrafting sessions. They also consulted with a number of key

¹ NMSU's Survey of Employees Engagement (SEE) (2019), the Institute for Organizational Excellence, University of Texas, Austin. <https://president.nmsu.edu/focusing-on-our-workplace-climate-survey-results/>

² External Review Report on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Organizational Structure and Strategy (2020) by Archie Ervin, Paulette Granberry Russell and Jozi De Leon. <https://president.nmsu.edu/files/2020/05/NMSU-Final-Report-External-Review-Full-Report.pdf>

NMSU constituents on several drafts of this report, including the Faculty Senate, Employee Council and the larger CSAT committee, and the Diversity Council.

Major Insights

Trust and Mistrust

Based on their own lived experiences, the participants in the focus groups shared several perspectives on issues of trust or the lack of it in their workplace, particularly with immediate supervisors and/or with the new executive leadership (since June 2018).

Here are few of those perspectives:

- Trust is;
 - Built on
 - Consistent communication and clear expectations at all levels in the institutional structure.
 - Confidence that your needs and best interests are being taken into consideration.
 - Earned through service excellence, accountability, productivity and respect which will engender mutual commitment with transparency and reciprocity.
 - Fostered in collaborations, teamwork and genuine shared governance and decision making.
 - Built over years but it might be destroyed in minutes. Trust is like paper; once it is crumpled it will never be the same. You can flatten the paper, but it will never be perfect again.

- Mistrust is;
 - A result of:
 - Micromanaging personnel, slow or lack of response to microaggression, harassment, conflicts and tensions between personnel. Distrust decreases cooperation increases costs, slows work/production, strains relationships, inhibits teamwork, leads to workplace problems.
 - Dictated, inconsistent, contradictory and unclear orders rather than decisions that are based on reciprocity, balanced conversations and transparent procedures.
 - Deceptions that might lead to fear and anxiety.
 - Self-serving actions rather than shared-success actions.
 - Doubt, which leads to suspicion, which leads to testing, which leads to fear, which leads to separation.
 - Created by a lack of capacity to understand the implication of one's decisions/actions towards others, especially those who are in lower positions in the institutional hierarchy or are part of one or several marginalized social groups.

Trust Indicators

- Transparency and maintaining commitments.
- Respectful, caring and productive relationships between employees.
- Speed of progress, financial sustainability, and achievement of organizational objectives. Organizations that are bankrupt of trust are highly likely to fail.

- Employees' perceptions of an organization's internal communication as "reasonable, candid, and helpful" (NMSU's SEE, 2019, p. 7). Trust is an indicator of supervisors walking their talk.
- Work Ethics and Harassment (NMSU SEE, 2019, p. 9).
- Supervisors' feedback and middle- and upper-management communication.

It is important to highlight that the new Town Hall e-meetings, initiated in March of 2020, for some time, cultivated trust in the executive administration. Their co-leadership, expression of empathy and transparency engender trust with the goal to improve our campus climate.

Recommended Actions to Build a Trust-Based Workplace and Improve Campus Climate

Based on the above insights, we recommend that NMSU prioritize building a trust-oriented campus at every level of the organizational hierarchy, between individuals, small groups and NMSU's bigger community by committing to at least the following areas, 1) trust boosting initiatives and programs, 2) system-wide infrastructure of communication, 3) Trustworthy Employee Related Policies & Procedures, 4) Accountable Leadership and 5) Final Thoughts: Trust within LEADS 2025.

Trust Boosting Initiatives & Programs

Committing resources to systemic transformations via targeted initiatives that support clear actions committed to equity, inclusion, and diversity. This should include:

- An urgent examination of NMSU's systemic structures that erase NMSU's history and legacy of inequities and exclusion of Native Americans and people of color.
- An intentional and open conversation about the historic meanings of NMSU as a land-grant and Hispanic/Minority-Serving institution. The aim of such a conversation should be to revise the dominant narrative about NMSU and the reshaping of its identity to be able to serve, not only enroll, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and other marginalized intersecting ways of being and knowing.
- Robust academic programs, faculty teaching and researching NM's history and its peoples and elevating the importance of NMSU as a Borderlands higher education institution.

System-Wide Infrastructure of Multi-Directional Communication

- Build system-wide communication infrastructure based on robust mechanisms of multi-directional communication that are:
 - Transparent, reliable and consistent.
 - Open in all directions of communication, circular, horizontal and top-down but especially bottom-to-top.
 - Clearly name *trust* as a major driving ethical value to the identity of NMSU and ways of acting to all constituents.
 - Bilingual (Spanish and English) and multimodal.
 - Available to employees whose schedules and job duties don't accommodate ready access.
 - Accessible to people with disabilities and those in the rural areas of NM.
- Maintain the town hall format as needed and emphasize transparency, inclusiveness, collaboration and consistency.

Trustworthy Employee Related Policies & Procedures

- Encourage a movement towards partnership and collaboration.
- SBuild skip-level engagement opportunities; which facilitate interactions between an employee and their supervisor’s manager, to open lines of communication and create stronger bonds between employees at all levels.
- Strengthen the capacity of the offices of Institutional Equity and Employee and Labor Relations to play a greater role in facilitating a fair, safe and healthy workplace for all.
- Recognize the nuances of trust in a multitude of interactions within a hierarchical structure and amongst individuals with power differential.
- Establish mandatory professional development programs with an emphasis on leadership skills, building trust, power differentials and social justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity. Such programs will aim to:
 - Facilitate collaborative systems and process improvements to include the interface between units.
 - Prioritize service excellence throughout the institution.
 - Encourage collaboration and teamwork rooted in creativity, excellence and ethical reflexive practices.
- Protect employees from retaliation, fear and uncertainty by providing safe and robust self-advocacy tools/mechanisms for grievances, mediation, and training—utilize NMSU’s Center for Learning and Professional Development.

Accountable Leadership

- Maintaining clear public communication taken up during the pandemic transparent while paying attention to consistent and clear messaging at all times and through all venues and modes of communication.
- Providing programs to:
 - Prepare courageous leadership with the integrity and will to create a dignifying and healthy workplace.
 - Advance empathetic, inclusive and employee supportive leadership.
- Building robust mechanisms/tools for employees to hold appointees in the middle and upper administration accountable on their performance to:
 - Give periodic feedback or express a vote of no confidence of any appointee in the middle and upper administration.
 - Share outcomes of collective evaluations of any appointee of the middle and upper administration to any or all NMSU’s governing boards and councils, NMSU’s Board of Regents, as well as, state representatives and legislators.
 - Provide feedback on immediate supervisors.
- Building a more comprehensive shared governance system by:
 - Opening data repositories and data analysis to all constituents including budgetary information and decision making and equity and diversity status.
 - Engaging the memorials and propositions of the Faculty Senate and recommendations of the Employee Council in a timely and transparent approach.
- Developing an administrative and academic leadership mentoring program for all NMSU employees.
- Mandate a specific upper administration office to conduct an on-going climate study led by NMSU qualitative faculty researchers who are already doing similar or related studies.

While LEADS 2025 discusses excellence and leadership, there is no mention of the role of trust in achieving excellence by all or as an element of effective leadership. It is of utmost importance that, if included in Vision 2025, this statement provides tangible outcomes.

- Infuse the above actions in every goal of LEADS 2025 on all levels of the organizational structure.
- Incorporate a statement of trust in LEADS 2025 (Goal 4.2 or 4.6).

Proposed text:

NMSU is committed to create the conditions and provide resources to build a strong trust culture that is understood, valued and participated in by everyone.