

# National Academy of Public Administration Study Summary

## Federal Aviation Administration Office of Human Resource Management Labor and Employee Relations Organizational Assessment



### Project Overview

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is the largest transportation agency of the U.S. government and regulates all aspects of civilian aviation in the country. The FAA has a large union presence, with eight unions currently representing approximately 79% of its entire workforce. The Office of Human Resource Management (AHR), Labor and Employee Relations Directorate (AHL) manages the relationships between the FAA and its unions and collaborates with managers on employee performance and disciplinary matters, supported by 132 employees and a budget of \$23.2 million.

FAA AHR engaged the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) to conduct an independent assessment of FAA's labor and employee relations (LER) functions. The study was conducted from January 2023 through June 2023. The Academy Study Team conducted the study based on a gap analysis framework, which entailed developing a sound understanding of the current state of AHL, identifying successes and challenges, analyzing root causes, and outlining a set of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the FAA's LER functions.

The Study Team collected and reviewed a wide variety of documents provided by the FAA AHR, stakeholders, benchmarking agencies, as well as publicly available documents and studies. In addition, the Study Team conducted semi-structured interviews and listening sessions with almost 100 individuals, including senior AHR officials, staff, Lines of Business (LOBs)/Staff Offices (SOs) officials, other key stakeholders, experts, and officials from benchmarking agencies.

The Academy assembled an Expert Advisory Group (EAG) consisting of three distinguished Academy Fellows. The EAG engaged with the Study Team routinely to review research progress and provide input and direction. The Study Team delivered four briefings to the FAA AHR leadership over the course of the project to provide research updates and present findings, observations, and recommendations.

### Key Findings

- AHR has a highly dedicated and committed workforce who work in a complex LER management environment to support the FAA's mission. The perception of some LOB/SO officials is that there has been an improvement in the quality of service over the past few years.
- There are opportunities for improvement in the areas of:
  - Consistency and timeliness in providing high quality LER guidance and advice.
  - A proactive, enterprise labor relations management approach to reduce fragmentation and complexity.
  - Reducing the tension between AHL staff and LOB/SO support staff with a focus on the value of support staff in LOBs with defined and enforced division of labor.

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## Recommendations

### **I. A strategic plan provides a foundation for developing effective LER functions and drives organizational transformation.**

- Develop an LER strategic plan through a collaborative process, guided by AHL leaders and shaped by input from staff and an array of stakeholders, to set the overall direction for the organization.
- Update AHL employees' individual performance plans to ensure that individual performance expectations are aligned with AHL's strategic goals and objectives.

### **II. A strong commitment to improving customer service is key to success.**

- Adopt a customer-centric service delivery approach.
  - Reaffirm the role of AHL as a trusted advisor of LOBs/SOs and focus on addressing the widely held perception that AHL is the gatekeeper that automatically says "no."
  - Create a more seamless customer experience for LOBs/SOs by coordinating with other HR components (e.g., staffing, recruitment, etc.) and SOs (e.g., AGC, ASH, etc.).
- Improve consistency and timeliness in providing LER guidance.
  - Strengthen AHL HQ's capability to provide technical assistance to field offices for policy interpretation and related training.
  - Establish a formal process to enable greater coordination among service areas/regional offices in policy interpretation and implementation.
  - Conduct Employee Relations (ER) case audits based on a risk-based approach driven by data.
  - Consider establishing a Discipline Review Board to promote fairness and consistency in addressing employee misconduct cases.
  - Establish a working group comprising specialists from both AHL HQ and regional offices to review the current use of the Labor and Employee Relations Information System (LERIS), identify pain points, and explore opportunities to modernize FAA/AHR's technology platform and enhance the experience of employees.
  - Establish timeline goals for ER cases to ensure actions are processed in a timely manner.

### **III. AHR serves as a strategic partner of the agency's senior leadership.**

- Take a more proactive role in addressing labor relations/union issues.
  - Establish an ongoing, disciplined approach to administering contracts, identifying potential issues, developing negotiation strategies, and preparing for term negotiations.
  - Strengthen AHL's efforts to leverage data analytics and technology to analyze emerging trends and potential issues to inform LER strategy development.
- Adopt an enterprise approach to managing labor relations.
  - AHL should take the lead in coordinating among LOBs and developing a more integrated labor relation/negotiation approach.

### **IV. An expert, engaged, and trained staff is a critical asset to the organization.**

- Enhance the competencies and capabilities of AHL staff through training and career development.
- Institute formal employee engagement efforts to improve staff morale and organizational performance.

### **V. Build trust and develop proactive customer relationships with LOBs/SOs is a top priority.**

- Establish and maintain effective communications to solicit customer input and encourage collaboration.
- Update the Service Level Agreements to clarify and institutionalize key roles and responsibilities of AHL specialists vs. LOB support staff.
- Provide LOB/SO staff rotation/detail opportunities to work in AHL.
- Consider establishing HR Business Partners positions to develop proactive customer relationships.