



STEELE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION AGENDA

Administration Center - 630 Florence Avenue – Owatonna, MN 55060

Steele County's Mission:

Driven to deliver quality services in a respectful and fiscally responsible way.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2022 AT 3:00 PM
County Boardroom, Steele County Administration Center

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. 2023 Preliminary Budget and Tax Levy (pg. 2)
3. Stay Interview Update – 1 hour (pg. 5)
4. Other business

Adjourn

Disclaimer: This agenda has been prepared to provide information regarding an upcoming meeting of the Steele County Board of Commissioners. This document does not claim to be complete and is subject to change.



Steele County Agenda Item

Subject: 2023 Preliminary Budget and Tax Levy

Department: Treasurer's Office/Finance

Committee Meeting Date: September 27, 2022

Board Meeting Date: September 27, 2022

Consent Agenda: ☐ Yes ☒ No

Resolution: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Policy Committee Recommendation:

Recommendation:

Adopt the resolution to set the 2023 preliminary tax levy to \$28,598,870

Background (*Including Budget Impact*):

Budget pressures and uncertainties for the 2023 budget include the following:

- Workforce development and retention – contract negotiations have not started for the upcoming year. Still a lot of unknowns at this time; however, an estimate of the possible increase has been included in the proposed 2023 preliminary budget.
- Inflationary cost pressures – Considering supplies are in great demand, prices for materials, including gas and contracts are continually increasing
- Revenue variations – decrease in revenues at Detention Center
- Information technology investments and support – In order to monitor and protect the County's cybersecurity systems, demands for software and workforce needs in this area are increasing.
- Service increases – More participants relating to the MN Choices, other human services needs

The proposed budget also includes over \$1.3 million of capital purchases to be funded by levy dollars. However, to pay for capital expenditures, reserve funds provide a mechanism for legally saving money to finance all or part of future infrastructure, equipment or other capital needs. It can also provide a degree of financial stability by reducing reliance on indebtedness to finance capital projects and acquisitions. Given the number of major capital projects currently in discussion, it is important to limit the use of reserves to create a robust financial plan detailing how future projects will be financed as decisions about infrastructure gets made in the upcoming months. The attached

worksheet includes options of using various levels of reserves/fund balance to fund some of the capital items and reduce the preliminary tax levy increase.

At this time, management is recommending using \$400,000 of reserves to fund half of the general fund capital expenditures. This would result in the preliminary tax levy increase to 5.7% or \$1.5 million more the prior year's tax levy. More in-depth reviews will be done in the subsequent months (i.e., Highway, IT, Public Health, GIS, Co Attorney, etc.) to reduce the levy before the deadline to finalize the tax levy in December. Remember, the preliminary levy is the "ceiling" amount for the levy increase and it is reasonable to set this at a level that accounts for some uncertainties (as mentioned above).

Attachments:

Preliminary Tax Levy Options

Steele County Preliminary Tax Levy Options

Description	Base	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Estimated Revenues	\$ 34,991,789	\$ 34,991,789	\$ 34,991,789	\$ 34,991,789	\$ 34,991,789	\$ 34,991,789
Estimated Expenditures including Non Levied Capital Outlay	62,618,559	62,618,559	62,618,559	62,618,559	62,618,559	62,618,559
Levied Capital Outlay *	1,372,100	1,372,100	1,372,100	1,372,100	1,372,100	1,372,100
Property Tax Levy - Subtotal	28,998,870	28,998,870	28,998,870	28,998,870	28,998,870	28,998,870
Potential Use of General Fund Reserves	-	(400,000)	(500,000)	(600,000)	(700,000)	(772,100)
Net Tax Levy	28,998,870	28,598,870	28,498,870	28,398,870	28,298,870	28,226,770
2021 Property Tax Levy	27,047,683	27,047,683	27,047,683	27,047,683	27,047,683	27,047,683
Increase in Tax Levy from PY	\$ 1,951,187	\$ 1,551,187	\$ 1,451,187	\$ 1,351,187	\$ 1,251,187	\$ 1,179,087
Preliminary Tax Levy	7.2%	5.7%	5.4%	5.0%	4.6%	4.4%

* \$600,000 of levied capital outlay is included in the highway budget

EMPLOYEE RETENTION FINAL REPORT

2022

Conducted by the Human Resources Department



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Purpose:

Steele County has used a variety of formal employee engagement and satisfaction tools over the years, such as exit interviews, employee listening sessions, and various surveys. The most long-standing tool has been exit interviews with employees who have left the county due to resignation or retirement. An exit interview seeks to learn why an employee is leaving county employment, and although that information may be helpful in the future, it does nothing to change the experience of the exiting employee(s).

Further study and focus on employee recruitment and retention has been underway as a result of the 2021 – 2025 Steele County Strategic Plan key objectives and the rapidly changing job market coming out of the Covid-19 health pandemic. Therefore, it was determined the county would use the following tools in 2022 to gather employee feedback regarding retention:

- 1) anonymous, electronic retention survey
- 2) in-person stay interviews

Stay interviews are conducted with current employees to learn what things are keeping them employed with an organization and also to identify the potential factors or reasons that would cause an employee to seek employment elsewhere. Employee retention surveys and stay interviews are both proactive approaches to employee retention.

To illustrate the importance of using employee engagement tools, Congress mandated all federal agencies to conduct annual employee viewpoint surveys beginning in 2004. Conducting employee stay interviews and retention surveys are two methods to learn about the sustainability of the county's most valuable resource – its employees.

Statewide data shows that Minnesota is experiencing historically low unemployment rates. According to DEED's website, the July 2022 unemployment rate was 1.8% compared to 3.3% in July 2021. The national unemployment rate in July 2022 was 3.5%. The low unemployment rate, along with numerous other factors has resulted in significantly more challenges in the successful recruitment and retention of employees in 2022 than in the past. Here are some Steele County recruitment/retention statistics:

- 2022: (January through August) posted 50 position vacancies and have received 373 applications
- 2021: posted 39 position vacancies and received 402 applications
- 2020: posted 26 position vacancies and received 802 applications

As the labor market continues to tighten, a variety of strategies will be necessary to improve our recruitment and retention.

Methodology:

Due to time and staffing capacity constraints, not all county employees were invited to participate in a face-to-face stay interview with Human Resources staff, but all employees with a county email address were invited to participate in an anonymous, electronic retention survey using Survey Monkey which went out to approximately 205 employees. There were 171 employees who responded to this survey, which is an 84% participation rate. Since not all employees were invited to do a stay interview, there are some limitations to consider when viewing the data in this report. The limitations are: 1) a few employees declined to participate in a stay interview; 2) the responses collected from the stay interview group may not match the opinions of all employees.

The data collected from the retention survey and stay interviews identified nine (9) recurring and consistent themes/categories. Therefore, it was determined that a thematic approach was the best method to use to compile and report the findings.

Stratified Sample Criteria for Stay Interviews:

- Conduct a minimum of 60 stay interviews which is 33% of benefit eligible employees who have been employed for a minimum of 6 months. Employees who have submitted their resignation/retirement notice will be excluded.
 - Interview benefit eligible employees = 180 as of 04/18/2022
- Ensure a mix of length of service with Steele County

Years of Service Bands	# of Employees in Band	% of Total Eligible Employees (% of 180)	Number of Employees to Interview
<6 mo – 2 years	24	13.33%	8
3-5 years	45	25.0%	15
6-8 years	36	20.0%	12
9-11 years	15	8.33%	5
12-15 years	18	10.0%	6
16-18 years	12	6.67%	4
19-21 years	9	5.0%	3
22-29 years	12	6.67%	4
30+ years	9	5.0%	3
TOTALS	180	100.00%	60

- Each department represented by at least one staff member:

Administration	Assessor
Attorney	Auditor
Building and Grounds	Community Corrections
Detention Center	Emergency Management
Extension	Highway
Human Resources	IT
Landfill	Parks and Rec / Four Seasons
Planning and Zoning	Public Health
Recorder	Sheriff
Treasurer	Veteran Services

- 60 employees were invited to participate in a stay interview, with 56 choosing to participate and 4 declining.

Stay Interview Questions:

1. *You've been employed with Steele County for # years. What things have kept you here?*
2. *In general, what aspects of your position do you enjoy the most?*
3. *Have you actively looked for other employment in the past couple of years and what caused you to look elsewhere?*
4. *Thinking back on previous jobs and employers you've worked for, what did you love about a previous job and employer that isn't present here?*
5. *Are you provided flexibility to support a work-life balance? If yes, please describe further. If no, what would better support you?*
6. *Is there anything else you want to share that you feel is important?*

Employee Feedback Themes/Categories:

Employees that were interviewed were professionally candid. Their candor is appreciated and necessary in order to really get the pulse of Steele County staff. The aggregate stay interview responses were reviewed in detail by Human Resources staff and then summarized into this report to help maintain anonymity. The Human Resources Department will work with Department Heads on any recurring themes that were identified in specific departments in order to address the issue or concern.

When analyzing the stay interview responses and data from the retention survey, Human Resources staff identified nine (9) themes/categories that responses generally fell within. The nine (9) themes/categories are: Commitment to County – Pride and Satisfaction; Compensation; Benefits; Supervisors-County Leadership; Hours, Flexibility & Work Life Balance; County Commissioners; Morale, Environment & Culture; Opportunities for Growth; and Seeking Other Employment. Below is a summary of the data by theme/category.

Commitment to County – Pride and Satisfaction:

Most employees reported they feel good about their work, are motivated by the work they do and by serving the public. Passion and pride for daily work is present across county departments. Employees appreciate and value the relationships they have developed with their co-workers and members of the public. Getting enjoyment from serving and educating the public as well as having variety in their work responsibilities was an overarching theme in employee responses. Employees take great pride in their work and in cultivating relationships within their departments.

Compensation:

Income is the primary reason most people work. Of the employees interviewed and surveyed, there was a minority portion that reported they are satisfied with their pay. The majority of employees expressed concerns about pay. Two consistently recurring concerns were: 1) 13 steps on the wage scale is too many; AND 2) the counties wages aren't keeping up with the increased cost of living expenses and other comparable employers.

Many employees stated that the City of Owatonna pays considerably higher wages for similar positions, specifically referencing highway/roads, maintenance, law enforcement, planning & zoning, and administrative support roles.

There was frustration expressed from some employees that not all new hires start at step one of the pay scale; however, these same employees also pointed out that our current wage ranges for some positions are low, resulting in recruiting issues, thereby recognizing it's sometimes necessary to offer higher wages to new employees.

Benefits:

Benefits are an important part of the employee compensation package. PERA was mentioned by many employees as being an important benefit of public employment and in some cases has been a primary motivation for some employees to remain employed by Steele County.

Most comments about benefit plans were related to health insurance. The feeling overall is that the county's health insurance benefit plan generally meets most employee's needs. Of course, each individual (and their family) has differing medical needs, which influences how frequently they utilize their health insurance benefits. Many employees communicated dissatisfaction with the premium amount employees pay, the deductible amounts, and that these costs disproportionately impact lower wage-earning staff. It is also felt there is an inequity among staff that elect single coverage vs. employee +1 or family health insurance coverage because the county makes a significantly larger contribution to employee +1 and family health insurance coverage than to single coverage. As a result, most employees stated they think single coverage should be offered at no cost to employees. Employees also stated that the cost of health insurance and deductibles are less at neighboring counties and with local private employers. Because health insurance is a necessary but costly benefit, some employees shared that cheaper health insurance could be a deciding factor for them in seeking employment elsewhere.

As mentioned above, most benefit comments were about health insurance but there were some comments about ancillary benefits. Those employee comments included: a desire for short-term disability insurance to be offered to everyone even if there is a premium cost to employees; that our current vision insurance provides a low benefit amount; that our dental benefit is very costly and provides a low benefit amount; and the amount of employer paid life insurance of \$10,000 is low and may not even be enough to cover a basic funeral at today's costs.

There were many mixed feelings expressed about the Paid Time Off (PTO) vs. sick and vacation program. The majority of employees in the county earn sick and vacation accruals. Only non-

represented employees and Community Corrections employees (who are represented) earn PTO. Employees feel there are not well-established countywide parameters for exempt staff to use PTO and that consistent, clear parameters should be established. Sick leave accruals are only paid out upon separation if the employee is retiring, not resigning, and the amount paid out is a percentage based on years of service with a maximum payout of 40 percent. Many employees feel that sick leave should be paid out upon retirement and resignation. The rationale was that if sick leave was fully paid out, then fewer employees would take unnecessary sick days while employed. A number of employees also suggested that if employees were allowed to cash out a specific number of sick leave hours each year, that could also curtail sick leave abuse.

Some employees stated they think it's important for the county to provide some level of paid parental leave for both mothers and fathers, in addition to their PTO/Sick/Vacation accruals.

Supervisors/County Leadership:

Most employees reported they appreciate having the board packets and the Administrator's board meeting summary emailed to them but expressed a desire for more regular information with county-wide updates and happenings. For example, it was shared by some employees that other counties send a weekly email with county-wide updates, which creates more connectedness among employees and helps build county-wide culture.

Many employees reported having good rapport with their department head/supervisor, that they enjoy working for them, and are comfortable bringing issues, ideas, and concerns forward. Other employees feel that their leader(s) listen but there is little action or follow through. These employees reported that they understand not everything can be addressed, or every idea implemented, but are looking to have a conclusion, even if the answer is no. Some employees report a lack a leadership in their department, including concerns about some leaders having favorite staff. There is a strong desire among many employees to have the opportunity to provide feedback on their supervisor as part of their supervisor's annual performance review process.

A recurring comment from employees was that there's inconsistent implementation of policies or practices. When new policies or procedures are implemented at the department level or county-wide level, follow-up should occur with employees about how implementation is going, along with as much consistency as possible among departments.

There is a desire among employees to have leaders be more visible, get to know employees in other departments and buildings in order to build authentic relationships, and be more hands-on, yet not to the point of micromanagement. A common comment heard from many employees is that it feels like there is too little focus on working across departments, which creates many silos and is counter-productive and inefficient.

Most employees reported that leaders try very hard to allow employees to have their requested time off, even on very short notice.

Human Resources was specifically mentioned numerous times by employees and they stated overall that they've found Human Resources staff to be approachable, responsive and helpful. It

was also reported by a few employees that the relationship with HR can sometimes feel tense during contract negotiations but that they appreciate their good working relationships outside of that setting. It was reported by an employee that a co-worker had a negative experience with HR five years ago and that has had an effect on how the whole unit views Human Resources.

Hours, Flexibility & Work Life Balance:

Steele County is a complex organization with many departments that have different roles and objectives. In some respects, there are essentially twenty (20) businesses under the Steele County umbrella with very different needs, which can naturally lead to inconsistency between departments related to alternate work schedules, flexibility, remote work, scheduling shifts, and more.

Overall, it was reported that department heads and supervisors honor time off requests to the best of their ability, to include whole or partial days, as well as for appointments and other activities that may occur during the work shift. Some employees reported frustration with inconsistency in terms of the amount of flexibility that is allowed from one department to another. Some of the inconsistency is solely based on the nature of the work (i.e. correctional officer vs. an office position) or size of the department, but some of the inconsistency is based on the department head's preference or philosophy about staffing, flexibility, etc.

Time is a finite resource and naturally employees want to have adequate time to tend to their personal life. Many employees suggested the following ideas to create better work-life balance:

- hybrid remote working (i.e. four in-person workdays and one remote workday each week)
 - All work expectations remain in place on remote workdays. Remote workdays create personal life capacity because employees don't have a commute, they can do home tasks during their breaks, and their morning preparation routine may be quicker when not having to report to the physical worksite;
- rotation among staff so not everyone has to work until the department closes;
- change business hours to close at 4:30 pm
- ability to use breaks and lunch at the same time;
- offer alternate shift options (i.e. four-10 hours shifts or four-nine hour shifts and a four hour shift);
- reduced FTE without prorating benefits;

Some county departments end their business day at 4:30, while many are open until 5:00. The Sheriff's office, including the detention center, is open 24 hours per day, so finding a balance is certainly a challenge for the county and will likely continue to be to some degree.

County Commissioners:

Many employees feel a disconnect with the Steele County Board of Commissioners. Although it probably isn't common for employees to have significant relationships with board members, it is reasonable for employees to want to know the values and perspective of the board who make decisions that impact how and when employees do their work.

The Board sets the direction for the county and many employees perceive the board as lacking strategic, long-range thinking/planning and as being indecisive. Many employees view the board as stuck in the past and unwilling to change and try new things that might make Steele County a more attractive employer. Some examples provided by employees were: more hybrid remote working opportunities, closing at 4:30 pm, alternative schedules, and valuing/funding more training to enhance employee skills, resulting in better service to the public.

Many employees report not knowing who the commissioners are and being unable to identify them. Some employees report they could identify commissioners because of their photos on the County website but that they haven't interacted with any of them. Employees reported when they've seen a commissioner in a building, they haven't interacted with employees and are perceived by some as standoffish or unfriendly. Many employees stated they don't feel like the board cares about or values them as an employee.

The employees who have been approved to telecommute reported that they genuinely appreciate being able to do so, although they also reported there is an undertone and assumption that the board doesn't fully trust they are working and staying on task based on repeated comments made by board members at board meetings and work sessions.

Many negative comments were shared by employees regarding the board's decision not to disperse the dividend money from the Southeast Service Cooperative to employees. Most employees reported feeling unappreciated and unsupported by the Board's decision on this, especially when board members verbally state they support and value employees but then don't take action to support them when given the opportunity, such as in this case. It was also shared by many employees that this particular issue has been so upsetting because dispersing the money to employees wouldn't require using any money from the county's budget or tax-payers.

The prolonged, ongoing conversations and indecision about whether to close the detention center has been extremely stressful on those employees and has reportedly played a large role in the high level of turnover at the detention center. The future of the detention center impacts more than just the County budget; however, employees believe that the discussion only seemed to involve money and not the programming that occurs with inmates, public safety or the impact that closing the detention center would have on other departments and entities.

Morale, Environment & Culture:

Responses about morale and culture were very mixed. Some employees reported being satisfied, having good morale in their departments, and had many positive things to say about their peers. Equally as many employees report not being satisfied. The dissatisfaction ranges from personality conflicts within departments, tension between departments about how processes should be done, lack of forward thinking/being stagnant in how work is done, supervisors not holding employees accountable, and not offering praise for good work often enough.

Employees reported that they tend to keep to themselves at the department level and generally view themselves as a department and not Steele County as a whole. There is a desire among many employees to learn more about other departments and build relationships with employees in

other departments, whether through joint work projects or coordinated employee appreciation events, picnics, etc. There is a desire among staff from a variety of departments to work towards process improvements and move away from so many manual, paper-based processes.

Employees stated that because so many positions in the county are “one of a kind” and have a single incumbent doing that job, a variety of challenges come from that fact, such as: 1) employees feel uneasy about taking time off; 2) there’s nobody else to do the work when there’s a medical leave of absence; 3) it’s very difficult when a new employee is hired and no one truly knows the work in-depth, except for the person who has already exited the county.

There was concern from many employees that the Sheriff’s Office is staffed very lean in terms of licensed deputies and correctional officers. Employees reported that being so leanly staffed can impact service and may create a higher level of risk/danger at times. Being leanly staffed and short staffed are two areas of great stress for employees in the county. Employees reported other counties are staffed at a higher level in the Sheriff’s Office in order to provide essential backup.

Employees reported that most county information, including timesheets and paystubs are computer based. Some employees who don’t work at a computer feel they may be missing information and suggested the county provide an iPad/tablet to employees who work in the field or not at a computer. This would also allow remaining paper processes to go electronic.

Opportunities for Growth:

Some employees reported they have gained more independence and responsibilities as time goes on and some have been formally promoted to higher level positions. Most employees said that due to the size of many departments, there aren’t a lot of career ladders and most opportunities to advance occur when someone resigns or retires. Many staff communicated a desire to participate in more technical trainings and obtain certifications related to their field of work. It was also suggested by employees that departments should do more succession planning and identify steps that will help prepare employees to be considered for higher level positions when they become available. Some employees reported that when someone from the outside is hired for a higher-level position, it is often viewed negatively by employees.

Seeking other employment:

Of the employees who completed a stay interview:

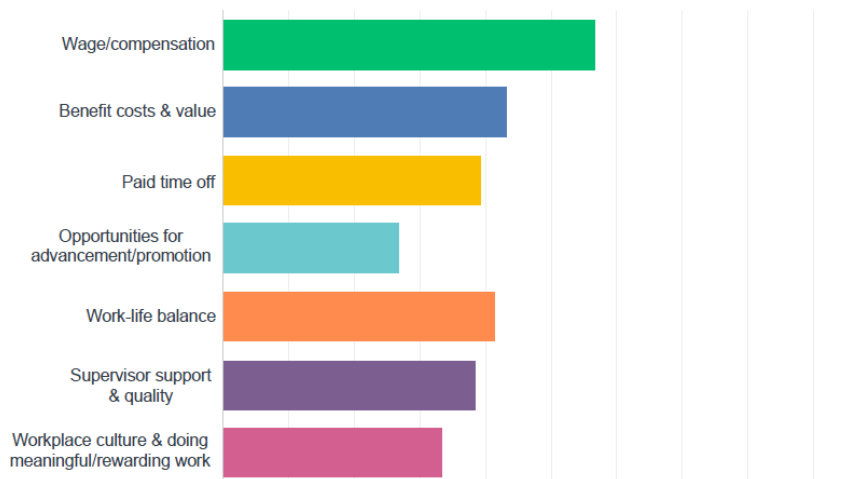
- 38.64% are not looking for other employment
- 27.27 % are actively looking for other employment
- 29.55% are passively looking for other employment
- 4.54% are being recruited by other employers

Over 61% of the employees who completed a stay interview are either actively or passively looking for other employment OR being recruited by other employers!

Retention Survey Data From Survey Monkey

Please rate the following factors in terms of their importance to you which would result in you staying employed with Steele County long-term. 1 = most important; 7 = least important

Answered: 171 Skipped: 0

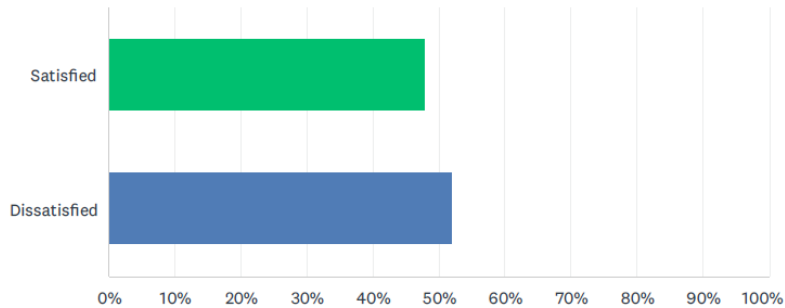


	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL
Wage/compensation	47.95% 82	19.88% 34	8.19% 14	9.94% 17	7.02% 12	4.68% 8	2.34% 4	171
Benefit costs & value (health/dental/life/disability insurance, etc.)	4.68% 8	31.58% 54	16.37% 28	15.20% 26	13.45% 23	9.36% 16	9.36% 16	171
Paid time off	2.34% 4	10.53% 18	29.24% 50	17.54% 30	21.64% 37	14.04% 24	4.68% 8	171
Opportunities for advancement/promotion	0.58% 1	4.09% 7	12.28% 21	18.13% 31	10.53% 18	20.47% 35	33.92% 58	171
Work-life balance (work hour flexibility, working from home, etc.)	21.64% 37	9.94% 17	12.28% 21	17.54% 30	11.11% 19	11.11% 19	16.37% 28	171
Supervisor support and quality	6.43% 11	16.96% 29	12.87% 22	14.62% 25	24.56% 42	18.13% 31	6.43% 11	171
Workplace culture and doing meaningful/rewarding work	16.37% 28	7.02% 12	8.77% 15	7.02% 12	11.70% 20	22.22% 38	26.90% 46	171

Please select whether you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the current state of each factor.

Wage/compensation

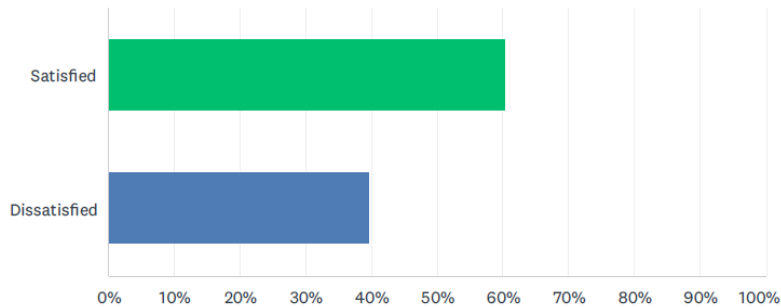
Answered: 169 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Satisfied	47.93%	81
Dissatisfied	52.07%	88
TOTAL		169

Benefit costs & value (health/dental/life/disability insurance, etc.)

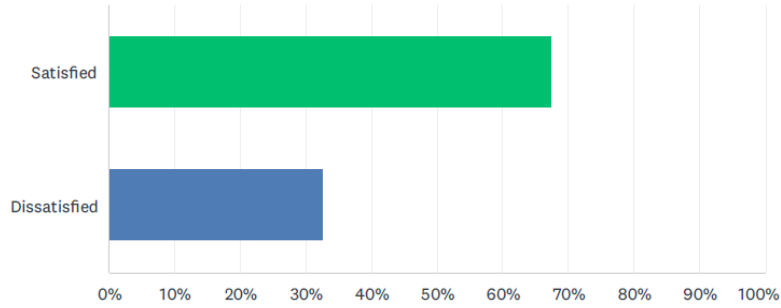
Answered: 169 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Satisfied	60.36%	102
Dissatisfied	39.64%	67
TOTAL		169

Paid time off

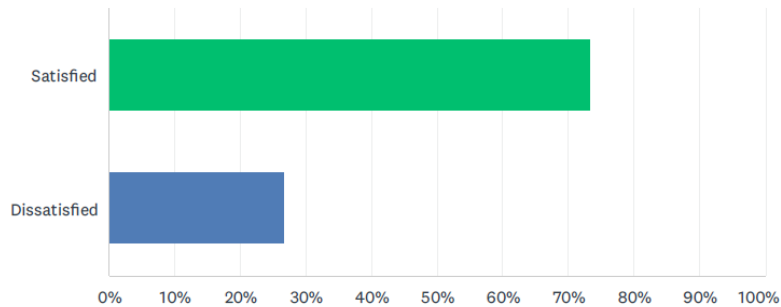
Answered: 169 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Satisfied	67.46%	114
Dissatisfied	32.54%	55
TOTAL		169

Opportunities for advancement/promotion

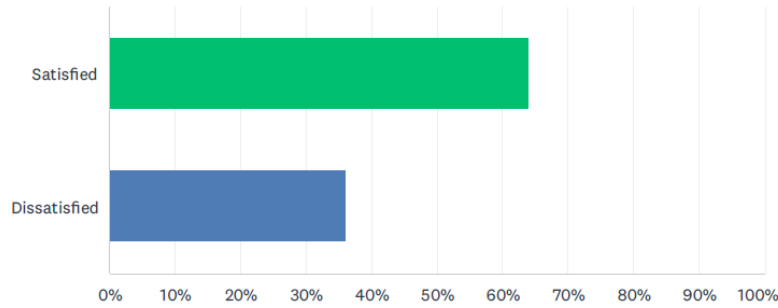
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Satisfied	73.37%	124
Dissatisfied	26.63%	45
TOTAL		169

Work-life balance (work hour flexibility, working from home, etc.)

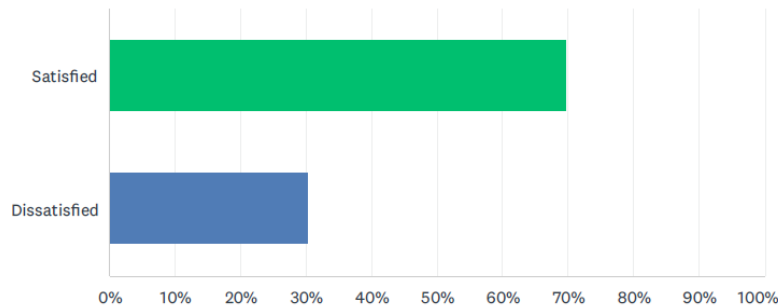
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Satisfied	63.91%	108
Dissatisfied	36.09%	61
TOTAL		169

Supervisor support and quality

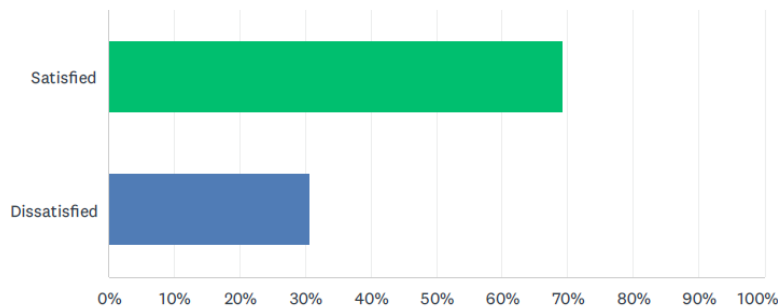
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Satisfied	69.82%	118
Dissatisfied	30.18%	51
TOTAL		169

Workplace culture and doing meaningful/rewarding work

Answered: 169 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Satisfied	69.23%	117
Dissatisfied	30.77%	52
TOTAL		169

Conclusion & Employee Recommendations:

The summation of any research about workplace satisfaction or organizational effectiveness concludes there is a link between engaged, fulfilled, and satisfied employees and organizational success. The stay interviews and electronic retention survey have provided valuable insight into employee's experiences and perceptions about working for Steele County. The data collected could be used to develop and consider strategies and help inform decisions made by elected officials and appointed department heads and supervisors about employee retention and recruitment.

Overall, Steele County employees enjoy the work they do and serving the public, and many employees intend to stay employed here if it continues to financially makes sense for them to do so and they are also able to adequately meet the demands in their personal life (work-life balance).

There is a strong desire among a majority of staff to work across departments, authentically build relationships, and identify ways to improve processes. Because employees care about their work and the County, there is a desire to have more deliberate training opportunities and succession planning so more individuals will be prepared to be considered for promotional/advancement opportunities.

Recommendations:

- Continue to hold and offer more appreciation events like the recognition/holiday party, picnics, and encourage all employees to participate
- Commissioners and leadership encouraged to be present in buildings and engage staff
- Department heads should work with staff to identify ways they can interface with other departments to make processes better, more efficient, and more end-user friendly

- Provide more frequent communication (weekly or bi-weekly) from County Administration to employees to build county-wide culture and sense of community/connectedness
- Include employee feedback in annual supervisor performance evaluation process
- Provide Steele County logoed apparel to employees

There was a lot of comparison by most employees to the City of Owatonna which naturally makes sense because they are another large public employer in the same community and in many ways do similar work. Steele County employees report that the City of Owatonna pays higher wages for similar work, specifically referencing highway/streets, planning & zoning, maintenance, law enforcement and administrative support roles. Another comparison reported by many employees is that the City of Owatonna and their City Council recently approved closing City offices at 4:30 pm instead of 5:00 pm, which was reported as a strongly desired change by county employees to provide better work-life balance.

Recommendations:

- Complete a market salary/wage study
- Address lagging wages to make the county more competitive with market
- Change business hours to close at 4:30 pm
- Research offering new benefits such as short-term disability and paid parental leave

The world is changing at a rapid pace and as a society many people are doing things differently, including everything from virtual medical appointments to how they purchase goods and services. Most employers were forced to find different ways to get work done during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, the way people work seems to be the epicenter to the changing world. It's more important than ever for Steele County to consider the way and where we do our work in order to successfully compete with other employers in our efforts to recruit and retain employees into the future.

Recommendations:

- Explore alternative ways to allow employees to do their work in a more flexible manner as long as the public is still receiving high quality services, such as 1) hybrid work arrangements; 2) alternate schedules; 3) full telecommuting; 4) flex time

The decisions that are made today will greatly impact the long-term sustainability of the county's workforce tomorrow and into the future.