

Fermilab Employee Advisory Group Meeting July 9, 2010 - meeting summary

Issue 1: Communicating the long-term strategic plan

The EAG recommended considering the following ideas in communicating the plan to employees:

- Divisional/departmental meetings work better than all-hands meetings since they are more personal. However, meetings at this level are rare at Fermilab.
- Members suggested that management make better use of bulletin boards, this is not useful for everyone though in some areas the bulletin boards are very useful such as at Wilson Hall.
- Lots of employees don't get to Wilson Hall often so they do not see the materials posted there, and bulletin boards in other locations are often not very accessible.
- People do read *Fermilab Today* but not everyone and not every day.
- Direct e-mail might be more personal and accessible for very important messages.
- Consider mailing a letter directly to every employee at home; that will get the most notice.
- It is important to make the material less dry and more interesting and accessible. Many employees do not have the basic knowledge that is assumed in the draft handout.
- Recognize that shift workers, those without lunch breaks and those on vacation won't get to single all hands meetings. Also, the auditorium is very lecture-oriented space and less personal (a little distance). We need to get people more directly engaged. Pier (and/or other senior managers) should meet with smaller groups and have opportunity for some give and take. These meetings should be spread out different dates and times over a few months.
- Link messages into safety meetings and other regular meetings.
- Make sure there is a good Internet site.
- Create a good accessible brochure that folks can share with others and take home.
- Modify the brochure to put it on lunch tables.

In crafting messages, the following ideas were identified:

- Demonstrate that Fermilab has a plan and that there will be employment well into the future.
- Create a clear timelines so that people can understand the ramifications of changes and see well out into the future.
- Craft messages at a level that all employees can understand and explain the background.

- Create a simple and powerful title for the vision that conveys a long-term message, such as “Fermilab 2030”.
- Show a clear long range progression of activities of time.
- Make it personal, take it to people and show care. Pier used to sit at tables at lunchtime and that was a really great idea. Someone from the second floor - it does not always have to be Pier – should do this.
- There is a sense that management is too busy to interact, need to get out more.
- Mail information to people at home, when something goes to the house, it gets read.
- We have a graphic for the three frontiers. We should build off that, use repetition to get the image out there.
- People are used to colliders being here, now they need to get familiar with projects that are operating elsewhere but still have value here.

Additional communications issues raised by members:

- We need to create be a way to talk back to management. Presently there is no way to provide feedback to management. Suggestions included a Q&A section in *Fermilab Today*, an “Ask Fermilab” column, a virtual suggestion box, and an ombudsman.
- Divisions need to have meetings with people, many do not ever have department meetings and many folks don’t even know who their division leaders are.
- Information is simply not flowing down in many cases. We need to find the right level of meetings and information to ensure that people are informed.
- Employees in the field often feel management does not understand what is going on out there.
- Employees need a lot more contact with management, particularly their own managers.
- Do not assume that all employees know basic information about the lab and science.

Issue 2: Open session

Feedback was sought in the value and approach to creating a new column in *Fermilab Today* to deal with personnel issues, how often and what topics should be covered. Feedback included:

- This is a good idea, it is important to put an emphasis on HR items.
- Regular frequency is not too important. The column should be done whenever an issue is important and timely. Have it be topic/need driven instead of on an arbitrary schedule.

It was noted that there has been an overall decrease in the civility and friendliness of guard behavior. I was explained that the guards are under contract

to DOE, not the lab. However this will be changing in the fall, and members noted that guard behavior should be one of the issues considered in the new contract.

Issue 3: Operations of the EAG

A wide variety of issues were discussed in how to improve the function of the EAG. Ideas are organized by topics below.

Close all meetings with an action-oriented approach

We did not have a complete discussion of the performance assessment issue at the June meeting and need to do a better job of connecting and completing our conversations. At the end of each meeting topic, we should ask ourselves the following:

- Where are we on this topic, what have we decided, what else needs to be done?
- What additional data or information do we need?
- Do we need information from other employees, managers, and/or outside sources?
- What are the next steps or actions related to this topic?
- Will we develop formal recommendations?
- To what degree have we identified consensus recommendations to this point?

Better meeting preparation

- Agendas and materials need to be distributed earlier.
- We need a better overall schedule so we can see what is coming up. Start with a six month work plan.

Communicate EAG activities and results

It is very important to communicate the impact of the EAG, and to keep employees informed about our activities. Suggestions included:

- Put notices in *Fermilab Today* about upcoming meetings and meeting results
- Make better use of the EAG webpage
- Put member list, bios, pictures and email links
- EAG members need time to get out and talk to folks and get their input
- Establish a way for employees to provide ideas and input to the EAG on topics we are covering, suggestions or concerns can come to this one box, need to be very specific about how we would frame that
- We need a better announcement of the EAG and what it is doing, some folks who were not selected have indicated that they did not get notice
- Get the full calendar on the web including all upcoming topics and agendas
- Get a group photo as well as individual photos at the September meeting

Produce meeting summaries

Create meeting summaries and get them on the web. Doug will draft with a feedback loop with members to ensure that the summaries are accurate.

Additional opportunities for dialogue

As needed, “in-between” meetings can be called based on the results of the current meeting and the need for more member dialogue on an issue.

Improve dialogue during meetings

- There is a tendency to talk to the management end of the table, management and facilitator should not all sit at one end of the table.
- When obtaining presentations from Fermilab sources, schedule a time for Q&A and then have presenters leave so that EAG can have unguarded conversation.
- There will be the option at any meeting for members to call for a private session without senior management present.

Issue 4: Performance appraisal process

The EAG continued its discussion regarding performance appraisals.

One member of the EAG recently attended supervisor training on the performance appraisal process and noted a number of issues that were discussed, including:

- A number of supervisors at the training indicated that they feel pressured to rate employees down to a “2”
- Supervisors are being told to change ratings because “there is not enough money” but they are not being provided with enough explanation about the overall rationale to provide to employees. (No discussion is provided, it is simply given as an edict, “that is just the way it is”)

Additional comments on performance appraisal were raised, including:

- Some categories of employees seem to routinely obtain higher ratings than others
- There are vast differences in ratings based on supervisors’ approach and attitudes about ratings
- The fact that there are so many supervisors may contribute to this problem
- Employees really need to hear how they have done, they need the constructive and specific feedback, and to feel that their work is understood and appreciated
- As you improve, the bar raises, then you keep having to do even better over time to get any sort of increase, plus if you have much higher expectations then you are judged more harshly

- For many employees, money is really not the issue, they understand the limitations, but they want to feel appreciated and rated fairly vis-à-vis their peers
- It is often difficult to write clear goals, as much of the work we do is not quantitative
- It is difficult for many supervisors to give bad news
- Employees prepare an accomplishments report and there should be a conversation with the supervisor regarding this report prior to the review, however this rarely occurs
- It does not appear that managers are being evaluated as to their own effectiveness in implementing the performance appraisal system
- Employees and managers both need training to understand the system and to set effective goals

Upcoming Meeting Topics

August 5

- Discuss the perceptions of the 15th floor
- Performance appraisals

September

- HR presentation regarding ongoing activities
- Review draft communication materials for the strategic plan
- Introduce the flexible work schedule topic

October

- Flexible work schedules