

The County of Santa Clara's SSA Voice Videocast: An Innovative Approach for Employee Engagement and Well-being

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Good communication in the workplace is essential, as it builds a positive and inclusive work environment, improves employee morale, increases collaboration and eliminates inefficiencies¹. With the COVID-19 pandemic, communication shifted, and the workforce heavily relied on digital platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to communicate. With this transition in communication style, the workforce felt the negative effects, resulting in sentiments of isolation and disconnection from others². The County of Santa Clara Social Services Agency (SSA) has addressed these impacts with the implementation of the innovative SSA Voice Videocast, which connects employees and county leadership, thus resulting in improved employee engagement and communication. Solano County Health and Social Services Department has the potential to implement a similar practice. In turn, the department will improve overall morale, engagement, and collaboration.

Introduction

Solano County Health and Social Services (H&SS) Department is made up of seven program areas which include:

Administration; Research and Planning; Special Investigations Bureau; Child Welfare Services; Employment and Eligibility Services; Behavioral Health Services; and Public Health Services. Currently, Solano County H&SS employs 1,254 employees.

The Public Health Division is one of the larger program areas within Solano County H&SS Department, employing almost a quarter of the workforce with 277 employees. Within the Public Health Division are seven bureaus which include: Emergency Medical Services, Preparedness, Immunization and Communicable Diseases; Health Promotion and Community Wellness or VibeSolano; Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health; Nutrition Services; Older and Disabled Adult Services; Public Health Administration; and the Napa-Solano-Yolo-Marin-Mendocino Public Health Laboratory.

Every year in May, the Division comes together for the Annual Public Health Division Wide Meeting and completes a post-survey. From the 2023 Solano Public Health Division Wide Survey, staff were posed with the question, “What does good communication look like?” Respondents shared the following sentiments:

- “Being open, honest, and transparent with staff.”
- “It starts with leadership. It seems like supervisors and management are the only ones that get the information of new things happening in the program.”

- “Allowing people to express themselves and have dialogue with no fear of judgment or retaliation.”
- “Give us the opportunity to collaborate. Having departments be able to communicate with one another regularly will allow us to share resources and information.”
- “Provide space for bureaus to share what they do so others can learn what programs are offered.”

The survey identified that staff do not feel well informed about the Division as a whole and feel as though they are siloed in their programs. Staff also feel that they are not provided with enough time during the annual meeting to provide substantial program updates and are often rushed due to time constraints. Another common theme was the desire to cross-collaborate and work with others outside of their own bureau to increase program reach.

SSA Voice Videocast

Since 2019, the County of Santa Clara Social Services Agency (SSA) has done extensive research to obtain feedback from the nearly 2,700 employees within SSA and learn of ways to improve employee morale department-wide through the Annual Employee Engagement and Well-being Survey. Results indicated that communication from leadership needed improvement with transparency and frequency, along with the need to recognize staff for their work.

As a result of the extensive research and feedback from employees, SSA implemented the SSA Voice Videocast in 2020, a 90-minute bi-weekly virtual webinar hosted via Zoom that aimed to improve communication and morale throughout SSA,

keep employees apprised of current events, acknowledge accomplishments and connect all levels of staff. SSA is broken into the following segments:

- Begin with a Mentimeter polling question, allowing the meeting host to interact with the audience and increase engagement.
- Announcements that are voiced by volunteer staff in SSA, providing updates on events or activities throughout the department. Having a different staff member provide the updates increases collaboration within SSA.
- Special Guest segment that has included County Executives, SSA Executive Leaders and panel discussions that allow for SSA staff to learn from others not working within SSA.
- Virtual Hi-5's during which SSA staff, from support staff to program leaders, can submit names and examples of great work done by colleagues.
- Interview segment with SSA Director Daniel Little. During this portion, Director Daniel Little answers questions submitted by staff.

Staff dedicated to the production of the SSA Voice Videocast are integral to its success. The team consists of five to eight employees across SSA, as well as an employee from a division outside of SSA. The inclusion of individuals across SSA further demonstrates the importance of a collaborative work environment.

The SSA Voice Videocast is now in its fourth year of existence and has since moved to a monthly occurrence with an average of 200 employees in attendance. Recordings are available for staff who are

unable to attend the live event and average about 100 clicks per video. Data from the 2023 Annual Employee Engagement and Well-being Survey indicates that 97 percent of staff know about the SSA Voice Videocast, and that 60 percent of staff have participated or attended it.

The timing of the SSA Voice Videocast is strategic in that it is scheduled during work hours and does not require staff to attend during their lunch hour or use leave accruals. Executive leadership has been supportive since its implementation in 2020, and leadership continues to encourage staff to attend and participate regularly.

The SSA Voice Videocast is an exemplary, innovative, and feasible example of how communication in the workplace can be accomplished. With ongoing support and buy-in from the SSA Director Daniel Little, the SSA Voice Videocast helps to foster a collaborative work environment where staff are well-informed and feel valued, thus resulting in employees feeling included and engaged.

Application to Solano County

From the feedback received from the 2023 Solano Public Health Division-Wide Survey, Solano Public Health implemented the Public Health Brown Bag Session series to improve communication division-wide. Additionally, the invitation to attend was extended to all the employees in the H&SS Department.

The series began in November 2023 with Public Health's Chief Deputy Health Officer, Dr. Bela Matyas, who provided an update on the Public Health Division and held a Q&A portion at the end. The series will continue through May 2024 with all seven Public Health Bureaus hosting an

hour-long virtual session of their own, during which they share programs offered and success stories from the past year. For those unable to attend the live event, recordings are available on the H&SS SharePoint site under “Public Health Services,” for all employees to access during a time that is more convenient for them. Leadership in the Public Health Division continues to support this effort and encourages all staff to attend when possible. Initial feedback has been positive, where employees have shared the following sentiments:

- “I’ve gotten to learn more about programs I’ve never heard of.”
- “Acknowledgement of the work that we’ve done is nice; makes me feel seen.”
- “I really enjoy learning about the other bureaus and hope these sessions continue!”

Additional time will be needed to develop a formal survey to assess the success of the Public Health Brown Bag Session series. Moving forward, the Public Health Division can implement these sessions on a yearly basis. The time commitment requested from each bureau will be minimal, as it will be a once-a-year occurrence and planned months in advance. In alignment with workforce development and quality improvement efforts, the role of coordinating the Public Health Brown Bag Sessions can remain with the Sr. Health Education Specialist in Public Health Administration who are assigned to Communication and Media Outreach for the bureau.

In February of 2024, H&SS Director Jerry Huber hosted a “Virtual Morning Mingle” for each of the campuses in Fairfield, Vacaville, and Vallejo. During these virtual one-hour sessions hosted via Microsoft Teams, H&SS Director Jerry Huber and

members of the executive team provided updates on current events and answered questions about issues affecting H&SS. The highest attended session had almost 400 participants and was open to all divisions within H&SS.

Solano County H&SS Department can expand the work being done by the Public Health Division by implementing virtual brown bag sessions across the department to include other divisions such as Behavioral Health, Child Welfare and Employment and Eligibility regularly, as well as continuing the Virtual Morning Mingle sessions. As a result, each division will receive a more in-depth look into the services provided and possibly find cross-departmental collaboration opportunities that can expand program reach.

An assessment of department staffing would be needed to determine what staff in each division would be appropriate and available to dedicate time to this collaborative effort. Consistent communication results in enhancing workplace happiness and ultimately contributes to the achievement of organizational goals¹.

Conclusion

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the workforce was forced to adapt to digital platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams². However, moving to such platforms has increased the potential reach for department-wide communication. Solano County H&SS Department can benefit from

¹ Gupta, N. (2022, Jan.) Role of Communication in Enhancing Workplace Happiness: A Review of Literature. <https://ijrpr.com/uploads/V3ISSUE1/IJRPR2504.pdf>

² Li, F. (2022, July 15). Disconnected in a pandemic: COVID-19 outcomes and the digital divide in the United States. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9283607/>

adopting a similar practice of the SSA Voice Videocast by hosting virtual and division-specific brown bag sessions that all employees are encouraged to attend and participate in, when feasible, by H&SS executive leadership. Like SSA, H&SS can schedule the sessions during work hours and allow staff the flexibility to attend sessions live or watch the recorded sessions, so long as they receive permission from their supervisors to attend, and prioritize their assigned duties when it does not interfere with prior engagements. Solano Public Health can continue internal efforts and host the Public Health Brown Bag Session series on a yearly basis.

Securing buy-in from H&SS leadership is crucial to the successful implementation of this effort. Allowing employees to have open dialogue with leadership will help improve employee morale and engagement, thus resulting in a thriving work environment³. Encouraging staff to participate and attend the live sessions will also increase the likelihood of success for this effort, demonstrating that leadership supports a learning and collaborative work environment. Additionally, acknowledging the everyday work of staff that implement the programs offered through Solano County will help employees feel valued and seen. Improving communication and engagement within Solano County H&SS will result in a thriving and enjoyable place to work and grow.

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³ Curado, C. (2022, June 13). The Contribution of Communication to Employee Satisfaction in Service Firms: A Causal Configurational Analysis. [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/09722629221101157#:~:text=The%20employee%E2%80%93organization%20relationship%20becomes,Kang%20%26%20Sung%2C%202017\).](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/09722629221101157#:~:text=The%20employee%E2%80%93organization%20relationship%20becomes,Kang%20%26%20Sung%2C%202017).)