

# *The Merit System Principles: Guiding the Fair and Effective Management of the Federal Workforce*

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Research  
Highlights



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## **What are the Merit System Principles (MSPs)?**

- Nine basic standards governing the management of the executive branch workforce.
- The foundation for an effective, merit-based civil service.
- Part of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 and can be found at 5 U.S.C. § 2301(b).

## **Do Federal employees believe their agencies uphold the MSPs?**

Our research shows that Federal employees believe their agencies have varying success—and substantial room for improvement—in achieving the vision of the MSPs. Employees agreed that their agency:

- Succeeds at preventing discrimination and holding employees to high standards of conduct.
- Does not succeed at addressing poor performers and refraining from favoritism.

## **What is driving these beliefs?**

MSPB administered a questionnaire to agency Chief Human Capital Officers and human resources staff regarding training on the MSPs and Prohibited Personnel Practices (PPPs) for different employee groups. The results showed that employees at all levels lack knowledge about how to adhere to the MSPs and avoid PPPs.

- **Approximately 20% of respondents said that nonsupervisory employees and political appointees receive no systematic training on the MSPs.** Given their substantial authority over personnel policies and decisions, it is critical that all political appointees receive training so they understand their legal and ethical obligations under the MSPs. Additionally, if nonsupervisory employees misunderstand their rights and responsibilities under the MSPs, they may fail to speak up or seek redress when appropriate to do so, or view agency decisions and practices as improper, even when they are both legal and proper.
- **Approximately 80% of the respondents indicated that all new supervisors receive training on the MSPs; however, only 60% indicated that refresher training was provided for supervisors.** Experienced supervisors should receive periodic training on the MSPs and PPPs, perhaps as an expansion of the training and development requirements of 5 C.F.R. § 412.202, because policies may change over time and supervisors may benefit from reminders regarding how the MSPs and PPPs relate to their actions.

## **What can agencies do to foster adherence to the MSPs?**

- Ensure that all employees receive training that is timely, tailored to their level of responsibility, provided by experts, and delivered effectively.
- Hold supervisors, managers, and executives accountable through internal agency mechanisms for adhering to the MSPs and avoiding PPPs.
- Enforce accountability through external agencies, when necessary.

*For a copy of the full report, please visit [www.mspb.gov/studies](http://www.mspb.gov/studies)*