



2023 Employee Survey Responses Demand Action

March 19, 2025

Final Report 2425-02

Prepared by the

2024-2025 Madera County Grand Jury

SUMMARY

Frustrations expressed by Madera County's employees in the 2023 Employee Satisfaction Survey, prompted the Madera County Grand Jury (MCGJ) to examine departmental responses that revealed troubling issues related to workplace culture, leadership practices, and operational effectiveness.

The MCGJ finds that while the results of the survey bring to light significant concerns regarding employee dissatisfaction and leadership issues, the feedback is outdated and has not been effectively utilized to drive improvements. The MCGJ recommends the Madera County Human Resources Department conduct a new employee satisfaction survey with improved data and publicize the results for greater transparency. The report also underscores the need for enhanced leadership accountability. The Grand Jury stresses the urgency of these reforms to rebuild trust, improve employee morale, and ensure a more effective county government.

GLOSSARY

MCGJ - Madera County Grand Jury

CAO - Chief Administrative Officer

BACKGROUND

Rationale for Investigation:

Frustration expressed by representative employees from various departments interviewed by the MCGJ initiated an investigation into employee satisfaction. Responses to the 2023 Employee Satisfaction Survey, in addition to the information gathered through interviews, raised concerns regarding workplace culture, leadership practices, and the effectiveness of operations.

Why This Topic?

Employee satisfaction is a cornerstone of effective governance and public service. High employee morale and a supportive workplace environment directly impact the quality of services provided to the community. In recent years, however, Madera County has experienced a surge in employee turnover, reports of low morale, and persistent allegations of favoritism and nepotism within its ranks.

What Makes This Investigation Timely?

The investigation coincided with a period of unprecedented challenges for Madera County, including managing substantial state and federal funding, addressing post-pandemic workplace dynamics, and meeting the community's growing demands for services. Ensuring that employees are supported and that workplace conditions are conducive to productivity is essential for the county to fulfill its mission effectively. Furthermore, the findings from the 2023 Employee Satisfaction Survey provided a critical baseline for understanding the county's organizational climate and identifying areas in need of urgent reform.

General Information About Madera County Government:

Madera County is a diverse and dynamic community located in central California. The county government operates multiple departments and agencies tasked with providing essential services to residents, including public safety, health services, environmental management, and infrastructure development and maintenance. The Board of Supervisors oversees the county's administrative functions, setting priorities and policies for a workforce that spans various fields, from animal services to water and natural resources.

Over the past decade, Madera County has seen growth and increasing complexity in its operations, driven in part by state and federal mandates, population growth, and evolving community needs. These factors have placed additional pressures on county employees, requiring effective leadership, clear communication, and efficient resource allocation to maintain service quality. All of these factors contribute to overall employee satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

The investigation employed a comprehensive methodology to assess employee attitudes and perceptions, workplace conditions, and organizational dynamics.

Investigation Steps

1. Document Review
 - [Employee Satisfaction Survey \(2023\)](#): Analyzed data and insights from the 2023 survey. Reviewed verbatim statements by department.
 - [Past Grand Jury Reports](#): Referenced historical findings to identify recurring issues.
 - [Relevant State and Federal Regulations](#): reviewed compliance with labor laws and grant management practices.
2. Interviews
 - Participants:
 - County employees from various departments.
 - Supervisors and department heads.

- Community stakeholders and residents who interacted with county services.
- Focus Areas during interviews:
 - Employee morale and engagement.
 - Effectiveness of leadership and communication.
 - Challenges related to staffing, compensation, and resource allocation.
 - Feedback on specific workplace policies and procedures.

This multifaceted approach provided valuable insights into organizational dynamics and workplace culture, forming a strong foundation for actionable recommendations. The findings will guide meaningful reforms aimed at fostering a supportive, efficient, and effective workplace culture in Madera County.

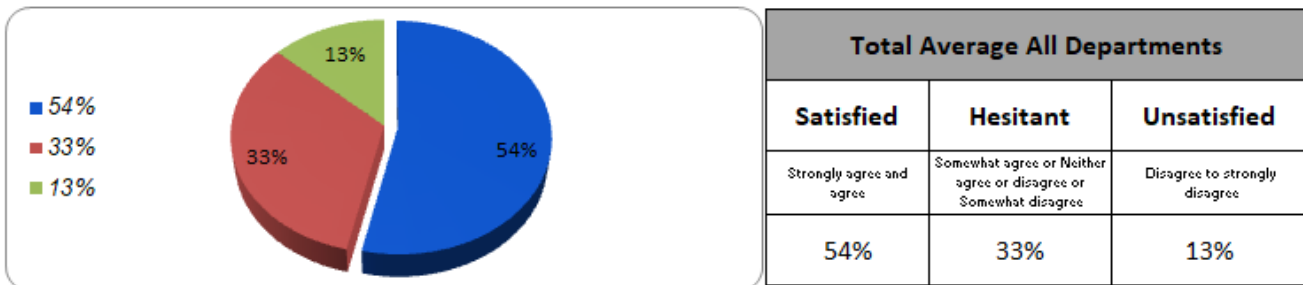
DISCUSSION

In 2023, the Department of Human Resources conducted an Employee Satisfaction Survey that was distributed electronically to the 1789 county employees. Approximately 684 chose to respond to the survey. Staff from 26 departments were asked to rate 29 statements on a scale, with responses ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The results of the survey were published on the Madera County Website.

The survey asked employees across all county departments to rate statements such as:

- *I have enough information to do my job well.*
- *My workload is reasonable.*
- *I have trust and confidence in my supervisor.*
- *My organization’s senior leaders maintain high standards of honesty and integrity.*
- *I am satisfied with the information I receive from management on what's going on in the organization.*
- *I am satisfied with the training I receive for my present job.*
- *Considering everything, I am satisfied with my organization.*

The MCGJ analyzed the composite published data and found that overall 54% of the responding employees are satisfied, 33% are hesitant, and 13% are unsatisfied.



Participants were also given the opportunity to share unrestricted comments regarding their department that were not made public. Several interviewees confirmed that the survey results or comments were also not distributed to the department leadership. The MCGJ was able to obtain the verbatim comments that were not made public, and discovered not just employee discontent, but indications of major issues regarding leadership, communication, workloads, and salaries.

Notable Employee and Citizen Comments:

- *“Supervisors are not held accountable, and favoritism is rampant.”*
- *“I dread coming to work due to a toxic environment and poor leadership.”*
- *“Our office urgently needs funding to address staffing shortages.”*
- *“The dress code and professionalism in some departments need improvement.”*
- *“Nepotism and unqualified leaders have eroded trust in management.”*

Synopsis of comments and concerns expressed per department as noted by MCGJ:

The comments provided reveal significant organizational challenges across multiple departments. Animal Services faces reports of disrespect toward experienced staff, while Behavioral Health voiced concerns for toxic leadership, poor communication, and systemic issues leading to burnout and low morale. Probation claimed favoritism, nepotism, and a lack of transparency that undermines trust and morale. Social Services perceived inequity, favoritism, understaffing, and insufficient resources, further diminishing employee well-being and productivity. In contrast, General Services highlights a positive culture despite resource constraints, and Water and Natural Resources reports high employee satisfaction.

- **Animal Services:** Reports of disrespect and poor treatment of experienced staff.
- **Behavioral Health:** The feedback reveals a pervasive organizational crisis within Madera County, marked by toxic leadership, poor communication, and a culture of micromanagement and fear that leaves employees feeling undervalued, overworked, and unsupported. High turnover rates, inadequate compensation, outdated management practices, and resource limitations exacerbate workplace stress, negatively impacting employee morale and mental health. Employees report a lack of trust in leadership, inconsistency in decision-making, and insufficient recognition for their efforts, all of which contribute to a toxic environment that hinders productivity and retention. There is a strong call for leadership reform, improved communication, and a shift toward a more inclusive, supportive, and adaptive organizational culture to rebuild trust, morale, and operational efficiency.
- **General Services:** A positive work culture is highlighted, but the department is under-resourced.
- **Probation:** Survey comments revealed a deeply dysfunctional work environment within the Madera County Adult Probation Department, characterized by systemic favoritism, nepotism, and lack of transparency. Employees report low morale driven by inequitable treatment, corruption, and a "good old boy" system where rewards and opportunities are based on personal relationships rather than merit. Supervisors and administrators are accused of creating a hostile environment through inconsistent

enforcement of policies, double standards, and divisive behavior. Communication and accountability are described as virtually nonexistent, with grievances and concerns routinely ignored or dismissed. The lack of resources, proper training, and support further exacerbates frustrations, leaving employees feeling undervalued and disillusioned. Many staff feel trapped, underappreciated, and disheartened by the pervasive culture of unprofessionalism and lack of change, prompting some to seek employment elsewhere and fueling distrust in leadership.

- **Sheriff's Department:** Accounting inaccuracies and inconsistencies in payroll distributions have caused dissatisfaction.
- **Social Services:** Reports of systemic issues of favoritism, inequity, and a lack of accountability within the workplace. Employees express frustration over promotions based on personal relationships rather than merit, leading to a hostile and demoralizing environment. Supervisors and management are perceived as dismissive of concerns, fostering division, and failing to enforce policies consistently or support staff adequately. Chronic understaffing, overwhelming workloads, insufficient training, and inadequate compensation exacerbate burnout and low morale. Communication between leadership and staff is described as superficial, with little action taken to address grievances or operational inefficiencies. The toxic work culture, coupled with inconsistent management practices, undermines trust, productivity, and employee well-being.
- **Water and Natural Resources:** Notable high employee satisfaction.

Major Concerns Identified:

In reviewing the data and comments from the Employee Survey, the MCGJ finds the results revealed deep-seated discontent, highlighting concerns such as favoritism, inadequate professional development, and systemic staffing shortages. Leadership practices, employee feedback, and organizational performance metrics within the organization were identified as areas of concern. Central to these concerns are persistent leadership and organizational issues, and employee discontent due to frustration regarding staffing, payroll, professional development, performance reviews, and nepotism. The investigation into the Employee Satisfaction Survey, coupled with responses to numerous interviews conducted by the MCGJ, reaffirm the recurring challenges that employees of the county face, as well as questions regarding leadership and organizational effectiveness.

Recurring Challenges

Many issues identified in the 2023 survey continue to frustrate employees:

- **Staffing:** Chronic understaffing and shortages, leading to excessive workloads and burnout.
- **Toxic Work Environments:** Systematic issues including micromanagement, bullying, and lack of recognition.
- **Delayed Performance Reviews:** Inconsistent and late evaluations undermine accountability.

- **Payroll Errors:** Ongoing accounting inaccuracies in pay have created distrust, especially in critical departments like the Sheriff's Office and Behavioral Health.
- **Favoritism:** Reports of preferential treatment continue to hurt morale and hinder professional growth.
- **Limited Growth Opportunities:** Many employees cited obstacles within the promotion process that are limited, unclear and biased, thus discouraging career advancement.

Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness

The investigation shows that leadership plays a critical role in improving workplace conditions. Employees highlighted:

- **Lack of Accountability:** Leaders often fail to follow through on commitments.
- **Policy Inconsistencies:** Unequal application of policies, like telework and scheduling, creates perceptions of unfairness.
- **Uneven Resource Distribution:** Some departments lack basic tools while others thrive, signaling an imbalance in resource allocation.

Revealing comments, interview responses, and documents provide a critical foundation for understanding the current state of the organization and underscore critical areas requiring attention to improve trust, accountability, and workplace satisfaction. Prioritizing enhanced leadership accountability, consistent application of policies across all departments, and improved communication is essential to restoring trust and morale within the organization. Strategic investment in staffing and resources, coupled with a renewed focus on transparent performance measures and meaningful employee engagement, will strengthen the foundation for a more effective and equitable workplace.

The Grand Jury emphasizes the need for systemic reforms by learning what the positive leadership practices are at other departments, including leadership accountability, transparent policy enforcement, improved communication, strategic investments in staffing, and meaningful employee engagement to restore trust and foster an effective workplace capable of meeting community needs.

What Happens Now?

The MCGJ learned that after the survey was conducted, the Department of Human Resources experienced a turnover in management personnel, resulting in no further action regarding the survey results. The Grand Jury finds strong evidence supporting the need for a new employee satisfaction survey. The 2023 survey provided valuable insights and highlighted many challenges, but persistent issues and new organizational changes make it clear that updated feedback is necessary. Changes in leadership and organizational priorities have created new dynamics that must be assessed. A new survey would help the county address unresolved problems, rebuild trust, and guide meaningful improvements but only if there is transparency and actionable follow-through with the results. Each department within

the county needs to utilize the survey results to guide strategic planning and prioritize reforms aimed at fostering a supported workforce and efficient workplace.

The Need for Better Data

Accurate and timely data is crucial for making informed decisions. The investigation revealed:

- **Limited Use of Past Feedback:** Department heads did not receive feedback from the 2023 survey. Results were not utilized to implement improvements. Transparent goals to county employees have not been created or applied as a result.
- **No Clear Metrics:** Without measurable goals, success cannot be measured.

Rebuilding Trust with Employees

Feedback from employees highlights a widespread lack of trust in leadership and organizational processes. Key concerns include:

- **Poor Communication:** Employees feel left out of important decisions and have limited chances to share their concerns.
- **Low Morale:** Perceptions of favoritism and lack of transparency have fueled skepticism about management’s willingness to improve.
- **Engagement Opportunities:** Departments with better communication reported higher satisfaction, showing how vital engagement is.

Conclusion

The results of the Employee Satisfaction survey provided valuable insights into systemic issues affecting employee morale and organizational effectiveness. The Madera County Grand Jury strongly recommends a new employee survey to address unresolved issues and provide fresh insights. By listening to employees and taking meaningful action, the county has the opportunity to:

- Rebuild trust with its workforce.
- Improve morale and engagement.
- Increase overall efficiency.
- Enhance leadership accountability.

The MCGJ also underscores the critical need for systemic reforms to address the organizational challenges identified during its investigation. By addressing employee discontent and leadership challenges, the County can support the creation of a supportive and efficient workplace culture across the county. A renewed focus on employee attitudes is not just necessary—it’s an opportunity to create lasting, positive change for Madera County’s workforce and community. These efforts are vital to ensuring that Madera County is well-equipped to meet the needs of its community and achieve long-term organizational success.

FINDINGS

F1. The MCGJ finds that while the 2023 Employee Satisfaction Survey provided valuable feedback, updated feedback in 2025 is critical.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The MCGJ recommends that the Madera County Human Resources Department conduct a 2025 Employee Satisfaction Survey. This will be completed by 60 days after the MCGJ report publication.

R2. The MCGJ recommends that results and verbatim comments to the 2025 Employee Satisfaction Survey be provided to all Madera County Department leadership. This will be completed by 90 days after the MCGJ report publication.

R3. The MCGJ recommends that each Department leadership staff submit a plan to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) detailing measurable goals to improve employee morale and organizational effectiveness following the results of the 2025 Employee Satisfaction Survey. This will be completed by 120 days after the MCGJ report publication.

R4. The MCGJ recommends that upon receipt of the leadership-developed departmental goals, the CAO's Office will allocate appropriate resources to achieve the identified goals. A notification of requested and allocated resources will be submitted to the MCGJ by 150 days after the MCGJ report publication.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

The following responses are required pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05:

From the following governing bodies within 90 days:

- Madera County Board of Supervisors

200 W. 4th St.

Madera, CA 93637

Invited responses within 60 days:

- Madera County Human Resources Department

200 W. 4th St.

Madera, CA 93637

- Chief Administrative Officer of Madera County

200 W. 4th St.

Madera, CA 93637

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.