Forest Service (FS) New Hire Experience Tiger Team (NHETT)
Voice of the Customer Findings – April 2020

Issue Statement
Delays and impediments in the new hire onboarding experience negatively impact employee productivity, individual and organizational performance, engagement, morale, and retention. These impacts translate to barriers to accomplishment of mission objectives and increase agency costs to recruit, hire, train, and effectively retain and manage the workforce.

Background
To better understand the onboarding process from the point of view of customers, the NHETT undertook an Agency-wide “voice-of-the-customer” data collection effort. The insights gathered will inform near-, mid-, and long-range NHETT initiatives and provide a baseline of customer experience data for new hires and hiring officials that can be used to gauge the impact of changes to the onboarding process. Research has shown that the early experiences of a new hire with the organization is critical to the long-term success of the employee. According to one study,1 employees who have a negative onboarding experience are twice as likely to look for new opportunities in the near future. And, a 2015 study by Glassdoor2 found that organizations with strong onboarding can increase productivity by 70% over their counterparts with a weaker new-hire experience. Along with the benefits for retention and improved productivity, effective socialization through onboarding has been shown to positively impact role clarity, job satisfaction and employee engagement.3 These studies highlight the importance of improving the new hire experience across the Agency.

Talking Points
- 19% of prior employees cited challenges with onboarding and the timing of equipment as a major factor in their decision to leave the FS. Better opportunities for career growth and professional development outside of the FS was cited by 47% of respondents as a key factor influencing their decision to leave.
- 60% of new hires are not participating in any orientation, leaving a gap in the timely receipt of important administrative information and a missed opportunity to connect the new hire to the mission, vision, and values of the organization.
- New hires (34%) and hiring officials (46%) agree that the onboarding process does not effectively reflect the values of the FS.
- Hiring officials and new hires indicate that there is opportunity to reduce the time it takes for new hires to integrate into their new roles and the organization:
  - 48% of new hires indicated it took three (3) months or more for them to reach full performance in their role.
  - 59% of new hires wait longer than two (2) weeks to receive the equipment and systems access they need to do their job.
  - 53% of hiring officials do not think the current onboarding process enables them to quickly integrate new hires to their team.

1 https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/0cbe87_664f8806dc694bd7b52246c2e0fe41c1.pdf
3 Klein & Polin (2012). The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Socialization
Most hiring officials indicate that the current onboarding process does not have a positive impact on employee engagement (54%) or retention (50%).

Across the quantitative and qualitative survey items and the focus groups, participants identified a need for more person-to-person contact to improve the process. Feedback ranged from requests for single points of contact and a case management-based approach, to onboarding to assignment of onboarding buddies and more interaction from the direct supervisor prior to EOD.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations for improving the onboarding experience were identified based on analysis of “voice-of-the-customer” data:

1. **Focus improvement efforts on both process and experience.** The NHETT is already pursuing a variety of onboarding process improvements; however, data indicates improvements to the overall experience have the biggest potential for maximum impact. While process improvements aim to address concerns with timing of equipment receipt and access to critical information, implementing changes focused on timely integration of new hires into their teams are critical for driving retention, engagement, and assimilation.

2. **Reduce handoffs throughout the process.** Lack of information on who to contact at various points in the process and the need to navigate complex internal organizational structures puts undue burden on new hires. The NHETT should identify opportunities – such as help desk consolidation or implementing a case management approach – to streamline the experience for new hires by clarifying where to go for information.

3. **Increase the frequency and focus of human touchpoints in the process.** In addition to ensuring new hires and hiring officials can readily reach a person to help resolve issues and answer questions, the NHETT should consider leveraging tools (videos, podcasts, texts, etc.) to add human touches into the experience. Efforts to introduce new hires to co-workers, peers in similar roles, and Agency leadership can accelerate assimilation and provide avenues for communicating about culture and values.

4. **Establish clear ownership for the new hire experience.** To sustain current improvement efforts and provide increasing levels of service and support to customers, the Agency must identify a champion to consistently advocate for new hires. This champion should have the responsibility and authority to drive improvements to the onboarding process and experience for all stakeholders.

5. **Create an evaluation strategy to measure and improve the new hire experience.** To support continuous improvement efforts and guide future investment decisions, the Agency should strategize on consistent data collection to measure performance of improvement efforts on individuals, teams, and the organization. Creating tools for understanding key activities, outcomes, and impacts for the onboarding process will be a key enabler of sustained success.

**Appendix: Overview of Data Collection Efforts**

The “voice-of-the-customer” data collection initiative consisted of surveys administered to three (3) stakeholder groups and five (5) focus groups, as follows:
## Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>New Hires</th>
<th>Hiring Officials</th>
<th>Prior Employees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employees who joined the FS in Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, 2019, and Q1 2020 in permanent positions.</strong></td>
<td>FS employees who were identified as the hiring official for a new, permanent employee with an entry on duty (EOD) date covered by the new hire survey.</td>
<td>Individuals who left the FS in FY 2018, 2019, and Q1 2020 within 12 months of their EOD.</td>
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<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>• 3,167 invited  • 981 responses  • 31% response rate  • Responses from all 10 regions, Business Operations, Research &amp; Development, Chief Financial Officer, and Washington Office</td>
<td>• 3,085 invited  • 822 responses  • 27% response rate  • Responses from all 10 regions, Business Operations, Research &amp; Development, Chief Financial Officer, and Washington Office</td>
<td>• 371 invited  • 78 responses  • 21% response rate  • Responses from 28 different states with Forest Service tenure ranging from less than 3 months to 12 months</td>
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<td><strong>Key Themes</strong></td>
<td>• Most responses tended toward the middle of the scale  • Consistent desire for more human touchpoints throughout the process  • Delays in receiving equipment &amp; system access impact productivity</td>
<td>• Current onboarding processes don’t facilitate quick integration of new hires to their job  • Believe a closer relationship with HR staff could help them onboard new hires more effectively</td>
<td>• Majority left to pursue better opportunities for career growth &amp; development  • Did not see onboarding as a positive experience overall</td>
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## Focus Groups

| Description | Three (3) focus groups conducted with randomly selected new hires from volunteers who completed the survey to explore identified gaps and opportunities and generate solutions to pain points. | Two (2) focus groups conducted with randomly selected hiring officials who completed the survey to gain additional experiential insight and solicit user-driven solutions for the highest priority improvement areas. | Not invited to participate in focus groups. |
|Participants | • 3 groups (14 participants)  • 6 Regions, Washington Office, Business Operations, Research & Development  • Professional, Technical, Admin, Clerical representation GS-4 to 14 | • 2 groups (11 participants)  • 8 Regions, Business Operations  • Supervisor, Manager, Admin representation | |
| Key Themes | • Desire a relationship-based, interpersonal approach  • Desire closer communication and better support from Human Resources (HR)  • Would like to set better job expectations before entry on duty (EOD) | • Believe that separate, independent processes slow onboarding timelines  • Seek to build relationships in HR to improve communication during onboarding  • Cited competing priorities with primary job function | |