



II. METHODOLOGY

A. Population of Respondents

The survey was distributed to 4,703 representatives of agencies and unions who used the Authority's and the OGC's processes in 1996 and/or 1997 and to individual participants and FLRA employees who appeared as a party before other FLRA components. Identification of the universe of potential respondents was made through lists maintained by each component of parties who filed cases or who were parties to cases processed before the Authority and the OGC.

Surveys were mailed with a postage-paid return envelope. A list of respondents was maintained to track individuals for purposes of ensuring a valid response rate. Representatives who had not returned a completed survey after three weeks were mailed a second survey to encourage their participation.

B. Survey Contents

The survey consisted of groups of questions to be answered by all respondents and by specific groups of respondents based on cases in which they were a participant during 1996 and/or 1997. The first section of the survey addressed perceptions about how well the FLRA has met its goals and objectives as set forth in its strategic plan. All respondents were asked to answer these questions.

Four sections of the survey addressed perceptions about specific programs: Unfair Labor Practice Charges (ULP), Representation Petitions (REP), Negotiability Appeals (NEG) and Exceptions to Arbitration Awards (ARB). Respondents were asked to provide perceptions about these programs only if they were a participant in cases that involved the program during 1996 and/or 1997.

Three other sections included in the survey were designed for all respondents to answer: Perceptions about the quality of decisions rendered by the Authority component; alternative dispute resolution and labor-management training services; and initiatives implemented by the Agency, the Office of the General Counsel and the Authority. Written comments within each of the sections of the survey and overall comments were recorded by respondents. Demographic information and an overall level of satisfaction were gathered in the last section of the survey from all respondents.¹

C. Scales Used

¹The survey booklet failed to acknowledge in the instructions that the survey was designed so the contractor could identify recipients, for the purpose of additional mailings if necessary to increase survey response; that this information was available only to the contractor, and that when it came to the Agency's attention that the instruction did not acknowledge this coding design, the Agency directed the contractor to destroy the information in his possession that would enable identification of individual survey respondents.



Research Applications

Most questions asked respondents to state their agreement with statements concerning services provided by the FLRA by rating their responses on a five point scale with a “5” indicating “Strongly Disagree.” a “4” indicating “Disagree,” a “3” indicating “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” a “2” indicating “Agree,” and a “1” indicating “Strongly Agree.” There also was a category of “Don’t Know/Not Applicable.” Respondents who marked “Don’t Know/Not Applicable” were not counted in the percent responses to the various questions. In a few places, other similar, “high satisfaction to low satisfaction,” scales were used. There also were some questions that asked for “Yes” or “No” responses.

D. Rules for Data Interpretation

In order to interpret the data in this administration of the survey, the following general rules were used. In most instances, the responses of respondents to scale points of Strongly Agree and Agree were combined and reported together as “agreed” and the scale points of Disagree and Strongly Disagree were combined and reported together as “disagreed.” If there was a difference of 10% or more between the parties involved, i.e., agency and union, agency and individual, and union and individual, this was highlighted in the discussion. If the difference is less than 10%, this is assumed to be a minor or little difference. If there were fewer than ten respondents to a question category, no comments were made.

One issue relates to the category of “neither agree nor disagree.” Where the percentage of respondents to this category was around 30% or more, or where the three summary response categories were essentially the same, i.e., 33%, the data indicated an uncertainty about the impact of a question. This type of response was found mainly on questions seeking out the effectiveness of a particular FLRA program. While there have not been many studies on customer satisfaction reported in the survey literature, it has been assumed in other surveys, which have used these types of response categories, that such a distribution of responses indicated that the persons responding to the questions were not sure of their answers. It may have been difficult for the respondents who are working through their various labor-management issues to appreciate change for good or bad in a relative short time frame of one or two years. Rather than interpreting these results to mean that the FLRA programs were not optimally effective, it may be that other more objective outcome criteria should be developed by the FLRA and used to evaluate the FLRA program effectiveness in these cases of assumed uncertainty. Other means of objectively evaluating program effectiveness can be developed, but are generally expensive to develop and maintain.

In order to fully flesh-out the rich data that was collected in this survey, the responses for many questions have been broken-out in cross-tabulations by program participated in (i.e., Unfair Labor Practice Charges, Representation Petitions, Negotiability Appeals, and Exceptions to Arbitration Awards) and by the role the respondents represented before the FLRA (i.e., Agency, Union, Individual, FLRA Employee, and Other). For the most part, the discussion of differences relates to the role represented by the respondents and not the program participated in unless the program is the major topic of the question. Tables are presented for each of the questions. The number of respondents are spelled out in the discussion to provide the reader with a better “feel” for this rich data source. The report is long, and the reader should recognize that efforts have been made to keep the report to within a somewhat manageable length while still providing a complete set of information on the findings.

The information concerning programs participated in comes from the unnumbered section of the survey immediately following Question 5. The information concerning the role respondents



represented before the FLRA comes from Question H1. Where there are cross-tabulation break-outs of a question with these two sources or other sources, the number of respondents in the break-outs represent those who answered each of the questions involved. In most tables, a summary of the responses to a particular question is given before the data are broken-out into cross-tabulations by program area and/or role respondents represented before the FLRA. (Note: Not every question was answered by every respondent.)

To simplify the wording in the discussion, the term “agency respondents” is used to represent those respondents who appeared before the FLRA representing an agency. The term “union respondents” is used to represent those respondents who appeared before the FLRA representing a union. Finally, the term “individuals” is used to represent those individuals who appeared before the FLRA as individuals. Again, to keep the report within a manageable length, the responses of FLRA employees and other respondents are provided in the tables but are not discussed in the commentary.

This is a base-line survey. Responses to surveys in future years will be compared to the results of this survey. A plus or minus change of 5% or more represents a substantial change from these base-line results. Survey responses are provided in tables presented throughout the report. The tables and discussion follow the order of the survey.

In this type of survey, respondents have been asked to answer detailed questions based on their memory of documents and events. Some respondents will not remember all of the details but rather will instead remember general impressions. For example, certain questions such as A10b3 showed that 85% agreed that information in the dismissal letter provided the respondent with information concerning their right of appeal and the necessary timing allowed, 8% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 7% disagreed. Actually, every dismissal letter that had this information and the response should have been 100% agreement. There is no simple way to determine what amount of error such as this will be found in a survey. Generally, the more important to the respondent a piece of information is, the more likely that he/she will remember it correctly.

The written comments are all included in the report. The comments were edited to remove identifying information concerning who the respondents were and information targeting particular FLRA employees, Federal agencies, and unions. Brief summaries are provided to illustrate the types of comments made. These summaries are not statistically representative of the comments.

E. Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this report. FLRA = Agency, as a whole; Authority = decisional component consisting of a Chair and two members; OALJ = Office of Administrative Law Judges; OGC = Office of the General Counsel; and, FSIP = Federal Service Impasses Panel.