

Scientific Integrity at EPA: Results of the 2016 EPA Employee Survey

Scientific Integrity Survey Results

In 2016, the Scientific Integrity Program distributed a survey to all EPA Employees and utilized the results to assess the effectiveness of the Policy on the eve of its fifth birthday. This survey asked respondents about their experiences with and opinions of scientific integrity at the Agency. In FY2017, the Scientific Integrity Program published a [report](#) that summarized the results and analyzed what these results say about the successes and challenges in the Agency’s efforts to nurture a culture of scientific integrity. Responses were received from 5,763 employees (a 39% response rate). These respondents represented all offices, programs, and regions. This report focused on the responses from 3,793 employees (66% of respondents) who stated that they spend “at least 25% of their time conducting, utilizing, communicating, or managing science” (Some of their responses are depicted in Figures 2-4).

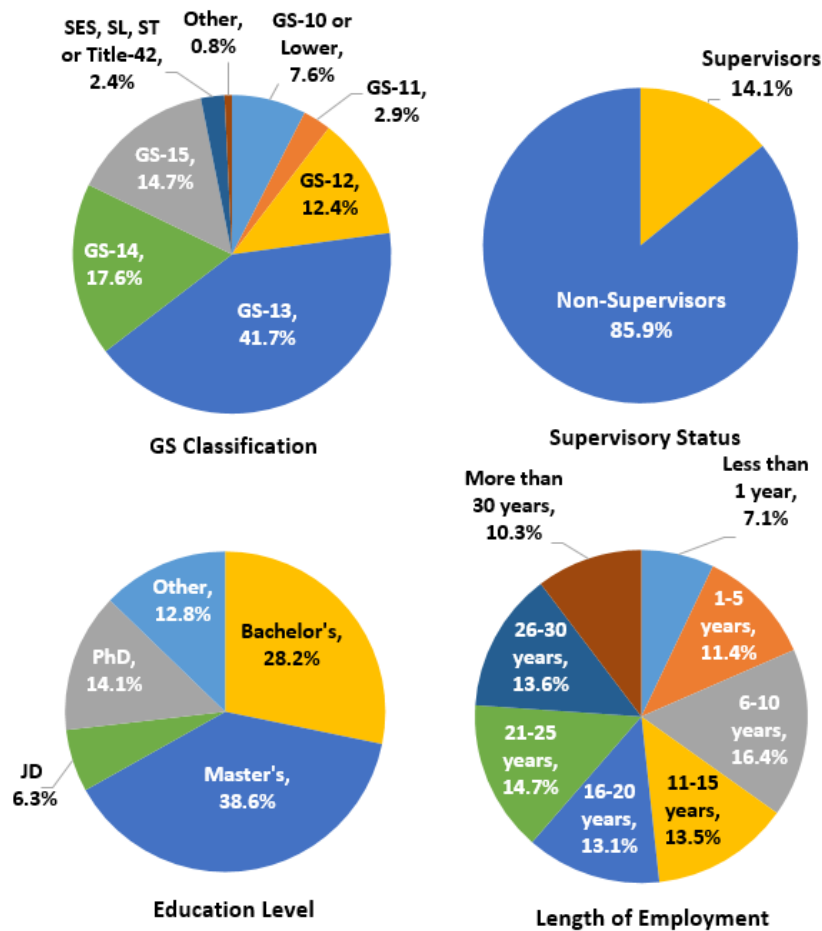


Figure 1. Descriptive categories of total respondents for employee survey

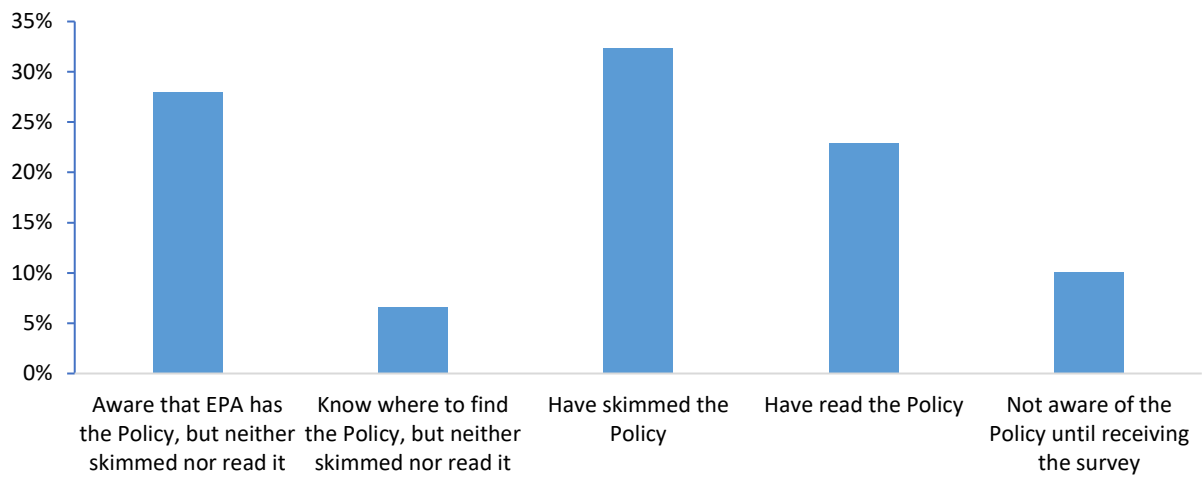


Figure 2. Familiarity with EPA’s Scientific Integrity Policy

The results indicated that there is a widespread awareness across the Agency that the Policy exists (90%), but over 30% stated that they were unsure of its contents. Nearly all respondents knew that protections exist for whistleblowers (91%), but only about half (46%) of the respondents knew of specific protections. By a margin of two to one, respondents felt that they can state a scientific opinion regarding the Agency’s scientific work without a fear of retaliation (67%). Slightly more than half of respondents believed that their management consistently stands behind scientists who put forth defensible positions even if they are controversial (52%). While a large swath of respondents (88%) would feel comfortable reporting a loss of scientific integrity to their supervisor, some dissenting opinions were expressed in the open-ended responses.

To whom would you feel comfortable reporting your information?

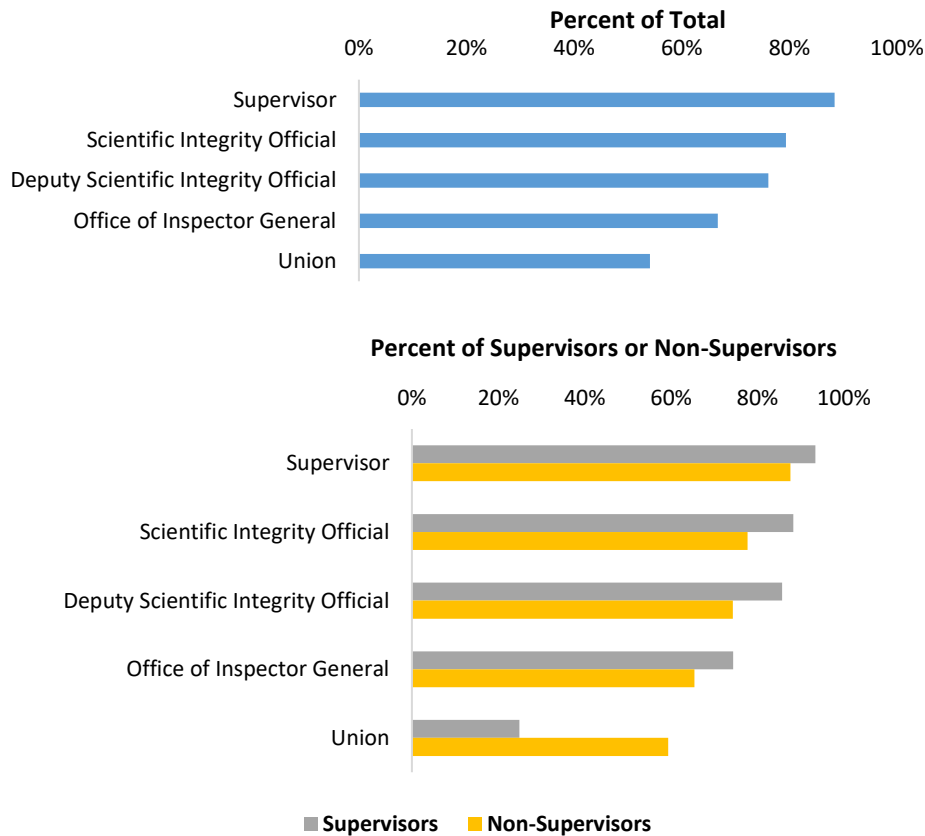


Figure 3. Trust in EPA authorities when reporting a loss in scientific integrity

Employees were less certain when responding to other questions. Only about 40% said that they know how to report an allegation of a loss of scientific integrity. A similar number (41%) believed that the scientific or technical products that they contribute to are released to the public in a timely fashion. Most respondents were pessimistic when asked whether the clearance process is transparent (39%), consistent across the office (30%), or if they can predict its timeline (12%) (The Scientific Integrity Program intends to unveil an electronic clearance system in FY2019 that will further promote transparency, clarity, timeliness, predictability, and consistency across the Agency. This versatile system will be an important component in implementing the Public Access Plan. Other anticipated benefits include automatic notifications to approvers and submitters, version control, and record-keeping).

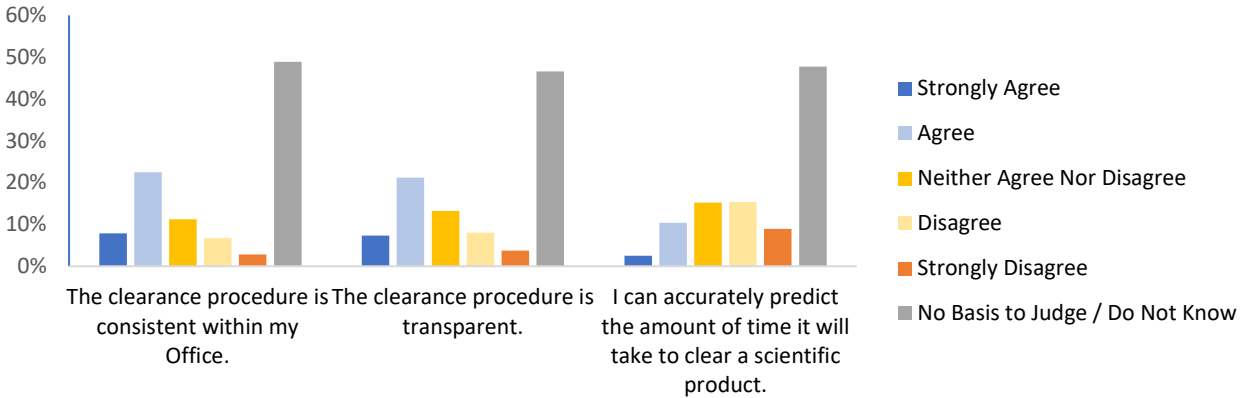


Figure 4. Clearance procedures at EPA

After analyzing the results, the Scientific Integrity Program determined that Policy implementation could be improved by increasing awareness and understanding of the Policy, further promoting a culture of scientific integrity, improving practices for releasing scientific information to the public, and promoting the professional development of EPA scientists and technical staff. The program identified 16 action plans that they can complete to address these focus areas. Four of these plans were already implemented in FY2017.

- After the survey period, the Scientific Integrity Program released a new training program that incorporated animated “whiteboard” videos that presented introductory information and a case study on scientific integrity. The training involved 98 trained staff who led sessions and reached 5,720 employees across all EPA offices, programs, and regions.
- In 2016, the Scientific Integrity Official briefed all new members of the Senior Executive Service (SES) and new Senior Level (SL), Scientific and Professional (ST), and Title 42 employees on scientific integrity as part of their onboarding process.
- Also in 2016, both the scientific integrity internet and intranet websites were expanded, updated, and redesigned to increase access to information and resources on scientific integrity at EPA.
- Since January 2017, all new EPA employees have been required to view a presentation by the Scientific Integrity Official and an animated whiteboard video as part of their onboarding process.

A description of the survey instruments can be found in Appendix A of the [report](#).