

City Auditor Courtney Ruby, CPA, CFE

CityAuditor@Oaklandca.gov

OaklandAuditor.com

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**CITY OF
OAKLAND**
City Auditor's Office

The City of Oakland's "Ethical Report Card"

2019 Ethical Climate Survey Results



In October and November 2019, City employees established a new baseline for the City's ethical climate by participating in the online Ethical Climate Survey (Survey). The Survey, created by the Institute for Local Government, measures the degree to which ethical standards influence organizational and individual decision-making and helps identify ethical blind spots. The first section of the survey gauges opinions about the ethics of individual Employees. The second and third sections respectively gauge opinions about the ethics of Management and Elected Officials.

Each of the Ethical Climate Survey's three sections contain ten statements with five possible responses. The Institute for Local Government weighs the responses to the individual statements as outlined in Appendix A on page 14. Ethical climate scores for each survey section and the survey overall, are explained in Appendix B on page 15.

RESULTS

The results of the 2019 Survey were meaningful:

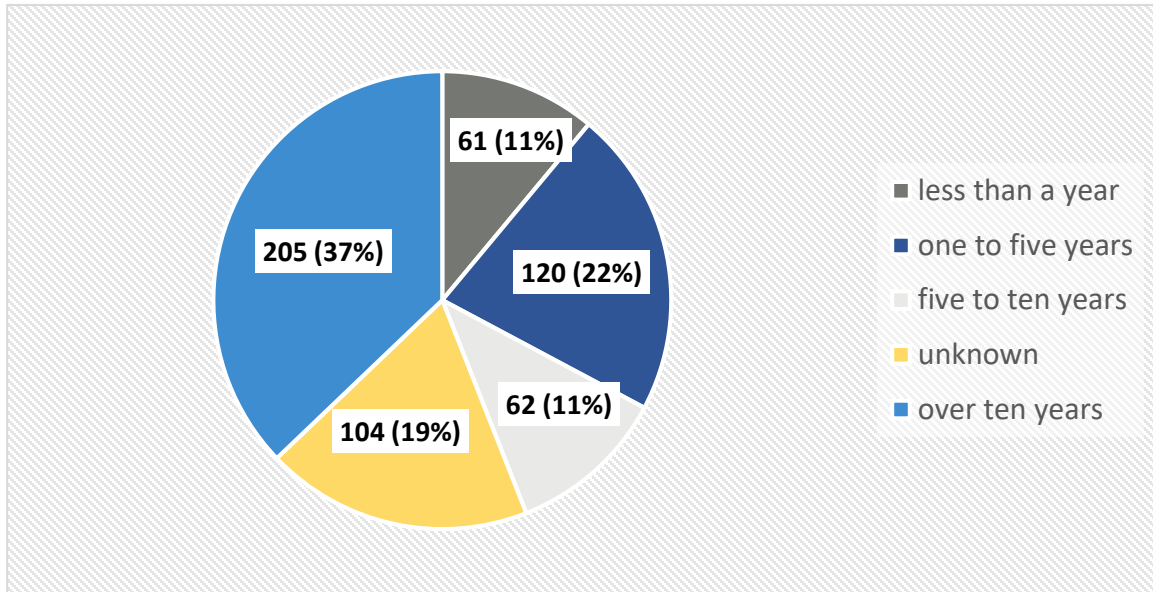
- **The City of Oakland has room to improve.** Overall, survey participants gave Oakland an ethical climate score of 167 out of 300. The Institute for Local Government categorizes scores between 150 and 224 as a “Medium” score. According to the Institute for Local Government, this means our City is in a good place but has room to improve.
- **Employees’ perceptions of their own ethics are better than their perceptions of the ethics of management and elected officials.** Participants of all levels scored their own ethics much higher than they scored the ethics of executive and elected leadership as a whole. The citywide score for elected officials was “Low.”
- **Employees’ perceptions differ across staff roles and years of service with the organization.** Participants who identified themselves as “Management” scored the City’s ethical climate significantly higher than did participants who identified their roles as “Supervisory,” “Line Staff,” or participants who did not identify their roles. Employees who reported working for the City for less than a year gave far higher scores than their counterparts with more years of City service.
- **Employees have myriad opinions about the City of Oakland.** About 31 percent of participants – or 169 of 552 – provided open-ended thoughts and comments. Participants’ statements were diverse and revealed participants’ feelings about the direction of the City, employee morale, and the viability of the City as a municipal organization.

The following sections provide more details on the results of the 2019 Ethical Climate Survey.

CITYWIDE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS & RESULTS

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. About 14 percent – or 552 of the City’s estimated 3,937-person workforce – participated.¹

Number of Survey Participants by Years of Service with the City



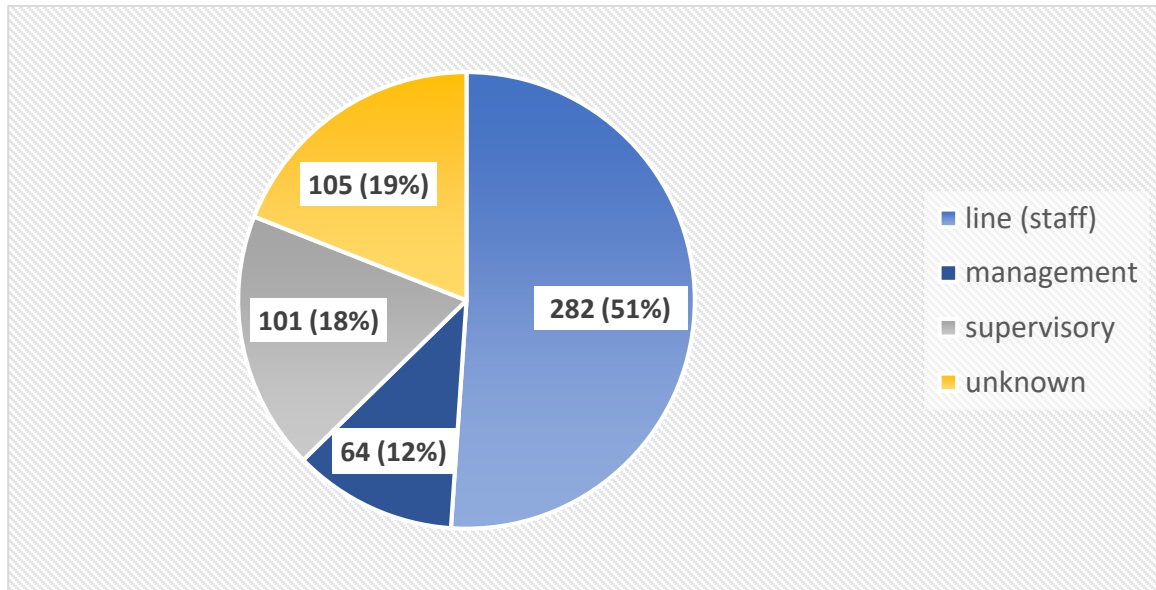
Participants identifying themselves as working for the City for less than a year gave higher ethical scores in all three sections (Employees, Management and Elected) than did participants who reported working for the City for longer. Participants who did not disclose their years of service gave the lowest scores by far.

Survey Results: Participants’ Years of Service with the City

Years of Service	Section 1 Employees	Section 2 Management	Section 3 Elected	TOTALS Combined
Less than a Year (<1)	77 (High)	66 (Medium)	51 (Medium)	194 (Medium)
One to Five Years (1-5)	72 (Medium)	62 (Medium)	38 (Low)	172 (Medium)
Five to Ten Years (5-10)	68 (Medium)	56 (Medium)	40 (Low)	164 (Medium)
Over Ten Years (10+)	64 (Medium)	49 (Low)	35 (Low)	148 (Low)
Unknown	70 (Medium)	49 (Low)	28 (Low)	147 (Low)
ALL PARTICIPANTS	71 (Medium)	57 (Medium)	39 (Low)	167 (Medium)

¹According to the October 2019 Semi-Annual Staffing Report, as of September 23, 2019, the City’s budgeted full-time-equivalent position count was 4,533.21, and 595.83 were vacant. Therefore, we estimate a workforce of 3,937.

Survey Respondents by Staffing Role



Responses varied significantly across staffing roles, with participants identifying themselves as “Management” registering significantly higher scores for each of the three sections of the survey. Employees who did not disclose their staffing roles registered the highest variances across the sections, and by far the lowest overall scores.

Survey Results: Participants’ Staffing Role with the City

Employee Staffing Roles	Section 1 Employees	Section 2 Management	Section 3 Elected	TOTALS Combined
Line (Staff)	69 (Medium)	54 (Medium)	39 (Low)	162 (Medium)
Management	78 (High)	71 (Medium)	44 (Low)	194 (Medium)
Supervisory	74 (Medium)	61 (Medium)	40 (Low)	174 (Medium)
Unknown	70 (Medium)	48 (Low)	29 (Low)	147 (Low)
ALL PARTICIPANTS	71 (Medium)	57 (Medium)	39 (Low)	167 (Medium)

SURVEY SECTION 1: EMPLOYEES

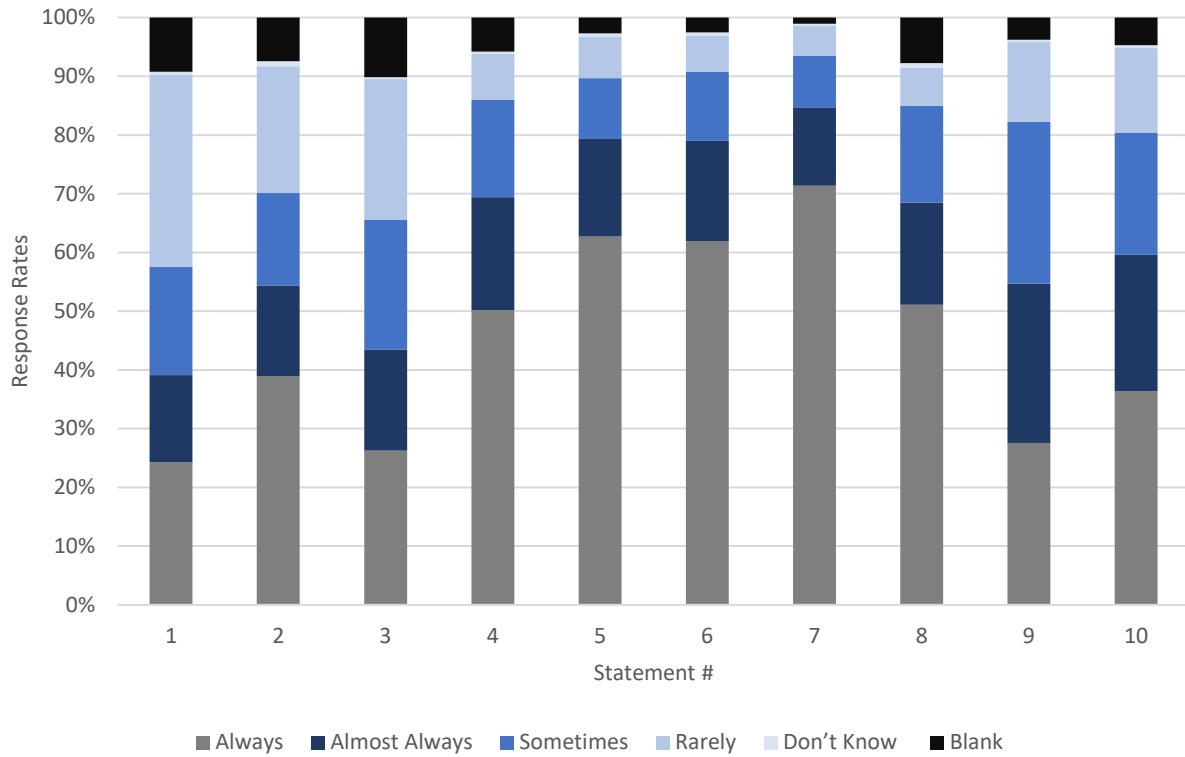
Overall, participants scored this section **71**, reflecting a “Medium” ethics score. This section was by far the highest scoring section of the survey. Scores varied across the section’s ten statements, but responses for four of the statements scored above 7.5, which suggests perceptions of “High” ethics. None of the 10 statements scored below 5, which would translate to a “Low” ethics.

Section 1: Statements and Scores

In my local government, I AM...	Average Point Score	Ethical Climate Score
1. Encouraged to speak up about any agency practices and policies that are ethically questionable.	5.31	Medium
2. Expected to report questionable ethical behaviors of others.	6.44	Medium
3. Clear about where to turn to for advice about ethical issues.	5.64	Medium
4. Expected to follow the spirit as well as letter of the law in my work for the agency.	7.51	High
5. Expected to use ethical behaviors in getting results.	8.26	High
6. Expected to tell the complete truth in my work for the agency.	8.26	High
7. Expected to treat everyone who comes before the agency equally, regardless of personal or political connections.	8.73	High
8. Expected to follow stated policy of the governing body and not the desires of individual elected or appointed officials.	7.45	Medium
9. Surrounded by coworkers who know the difference between ethical and unethical behaviors and seem to care about the difference.	6.53	Medium
10. Working with one or more trusted confidantes with whom I can discuss ethical dilemmas at work.	6.81	Medium

Note: High = 7.5 - 10, Medium = 5.0 - 7.4, Low = 0 - 4.9

Section 1: Participants' Responses to 10 Statements About THEMSELVES



Responses of "Don't Know" present a gap in an organization's overall ethical climate and therefore, factored negatively into the scoring. Non-responses were not factored into scoring.

SECTION 2: MANAGEMENT

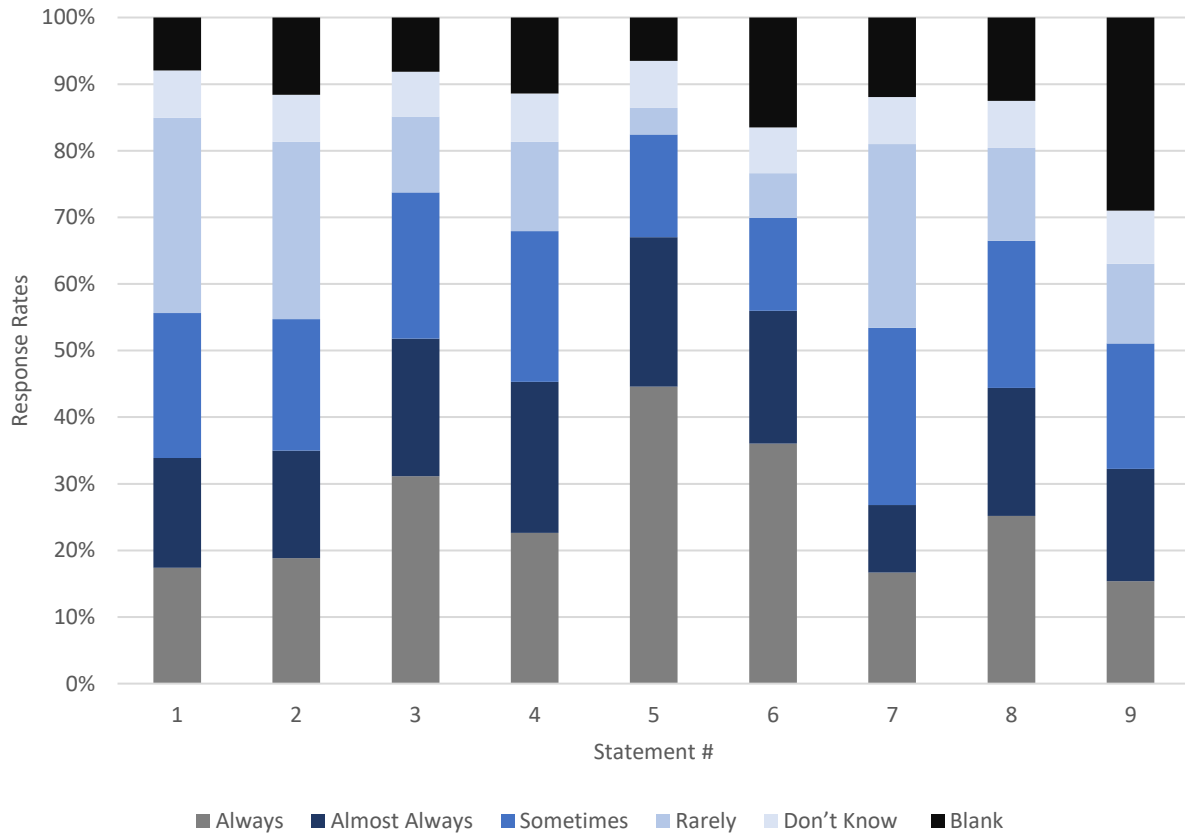
Participants scored this section **57** reflecting a “Medium” ethics score. As a whole, this section scored significantly lower than Section 1 and significantly higher than Section 3. Scores varied across the ten statements. Most scores were between 5 and 7.5, which are “Medium” ethical climate scores. Only one statement scored above 7.5, which translates to a “High” ethical climate. This section of the survey had significantly higher rates of incomplete and “Don’t Know” responses than Section 1.

Section 2: Statements and Scores

In my local government, EXECUTIVES...	Average Point Score	Ethical Climate Score
1. Create an environment in which staff is comfortable raising ethical concerns.	5.16	Medium
2. Appreciate staff bringing forward bad news and don't "shoot the messenger" for doing so.	5.11	Medium
3. Expect staff to use ethical practices in getting results not "whatever it takes."	6.48	Medium
4. Gear their decisions to the spirit as well as letter of the law.	5.85	Medium
5. Treat the public with civility and respect.	7.54	High
6. Use public resources only for agency purposes and not for their own personal or political uses (such as agency supplies, staff time and equipment).	6.41	Medium
7. Appoint and reward people on the basis of performance and contribution to the organization's goals and services.	4.79	Low
8. Treat all members of the public equally, regardless of who has people connections.	5.82	Medium
9. Help elected officials work within their policy role and stay out of day-to-day work of the agency.	4.39	Low
10. Refuse to accept gifts and/or special treatment from those with business before the agency.	5.21	Medium

Note: High = 7.5 - 10, Medium = 5.0 - 7.4, Low = 0 - 4.9

Section 2: Participants' Responses to 10 Statements About MANAGEMENT



Responses of "Don't Know" present a gap in an organization's overall ethical climate and therefore, factored negatively into the scoring. Non-responses were not factored into scoring.

SECTION 3: ELECTED OFFICIALS

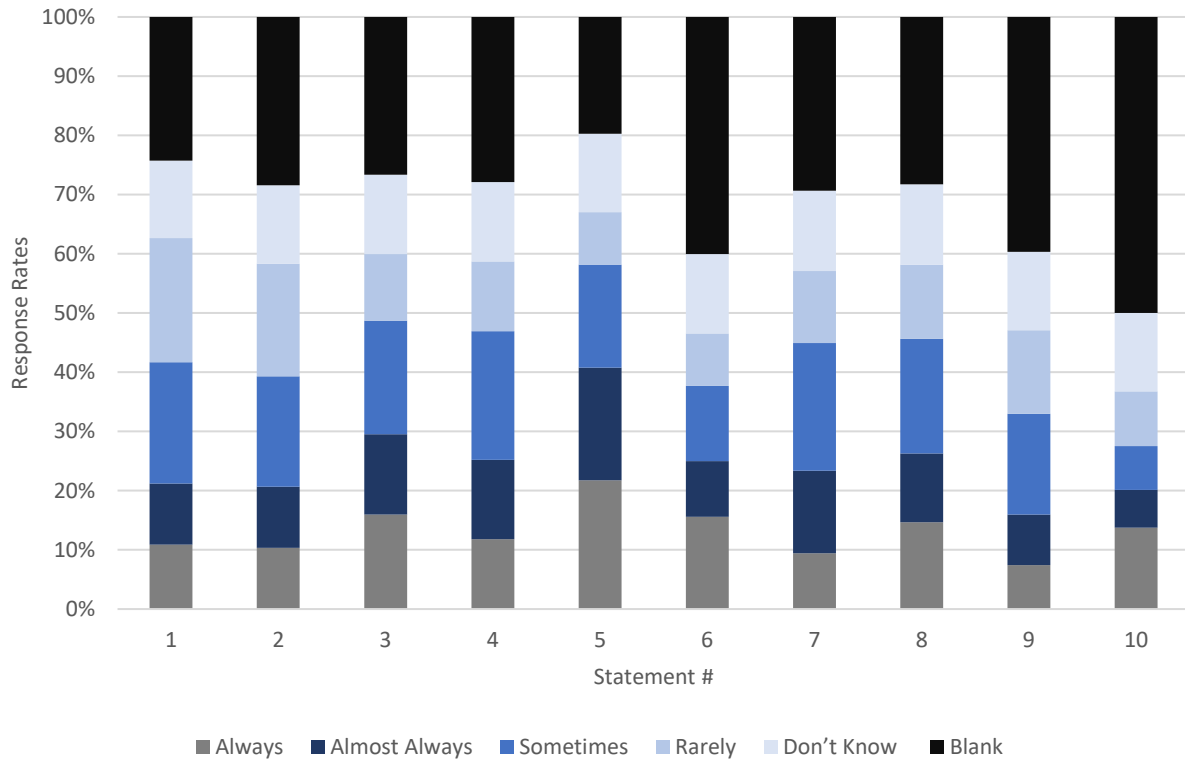
The overall score for this section was **39**, reflecting a perception of “Low” ethics. As a whole, this section scored significantly lower than Sections 1 and 2. Scores for nine of the ten statements in this section were below 5. This section of the survey had significantly higher rates of incomplete and “Don’t Know” responses than the other sections, which contributed to its low scores.

Section 3: Statements and Scores

In my local government, ELECTED OFFICIALS...	Average Point Score	Ethical Climate Score
1. Create an environment in which staff is comfortable raising ethical concerns.	3.92	Low
2. Appreciate staff bringing forward bad news and don't "shoot the messenger" for doing so.	3.71	Low
3. Expect staff to use ethical practices in getting results - not "whatever it takes."	4.45	Low
4. Gear their decisions to the spirit as well as letter of the law.	4.12	Low
5. Treat the public with civility and respect.	5.41	Medium
6. Use public resources only for agency purposes and not for their own personal or political uses (such as agency supplies, staff time, and equipment).	3.60	Low
7. Allow the staff to handle day-to-day management issues and don't try to get involved.	3.90	Low
8. Treat all members of the public equally, regardless of who has people or political connections.	4.19	Low
9. Exclude themselves from decisions when reasonable members of the public might question their ability to make a fair decision.	2.98	Low
10. Refuse to accept gifts and/or special treatment from those with business before the agency.	2.83	Low

Note: High = 7.5 - 10, Medium = 5.0 - 7.4, Low = 0 - 4.9

Section 3: Participants' Responses to 10 Statements About ELECTED OFFICIALS



Responses of "Don't Know" present a gap in an organization's overall ethical climate and therefore, factored negatively into the scoring. Non-responses were not factored into scoring.

IMPLICATIONS

The survey results revealed areas for the City leadership to focus attention. For example, participants reported relatively low scores for:

- ✓ being encouraged to speak up about City practices and policies that are ethically questionable
- ✓ being clear about where to turn for advice regarding ethical issues

Participants reported low scores for:

- ✓ elected officials staying in their lane and out of day-to-day operations
- ✓ appointing and rewarding people based on their performance

It is also important to note that elected officials were ranked low in all but one of ten statements. These employee perceptions suggest a need for City leadership to reach out to employees and regularly affirm their rights and responsibilities to bring issues forward. Additionally, it is incumbent upon management and elected leadership to self-reflect upon how their actions are contributing to the state of Oakland's ethical environment. Lastly, perceptions regarding hiring practices are troubling, as illustrated in the survey comments, and in response to this, the City Auditor's Office is committed to initiate a hiring practices audit as soon as resources are available.

Survey Participants' Comments

Some themes emerged from the comments that survey participants provided. Here is a collection of comments that provide insight into how employees feel about the City's current ethical climate.

Theme 1. The City has work to do to promote ethical behavior among all employees

"I think that the ethical climate can be changed by training supervisors and managers to treat all employees equally and fairly."

"...This government is not functioning in alignment with the City Charter, which clearly establishes roles and responsibilities that, when followed, optimize the deliberative process and enhance effective decision-making. City Councilmembers are hostile, dismissive, and derogatory towards staff and seem to bend to the loudest voices in the room or the special interests in their ears rather than consider the broader needs, views, and perspectives of their constituents. ..."

"I feel like ethics isn't talked about in my work. I don't hear it from the Director. I don't hear it from politicians. That makes it difficult to understand where their heads are at on the issue."

“The most concerning thing I have seen is the lack of accountability when it comes to employees who simply do not do the work they are required to do. To me, this is a serious ethical problem.”

“The climate of the city of Oakland has changed to be a place where there's a "all about me" attitude. Staff is under appreciated and executives are not in touch with the worker's or the amount of work they need to get done. There's too much management and not enough workers to more efficiently get the work done on time and accurately. “

“Training on the MOU and AI to city staff to ensure they have an understanding and are able to interpret ethical versus unethical behavior.”

“Have mandatory ethical meeting with all staff and management.”

“City Council, including new council members, seem to not understand that they should not direct staff. They also rarely respect the expertise of staff, and instead criticize staff. I think the council needs an in-depth training on non-interference, and the city attorney / city administrator need to establish and communicate clear protocols for council members interacting with staff...”

“In terms of work ethic in my department, almost everyone does their share of duty. I enjoy the department work environment because many of us share and help each other. I am lucky to have a good group.”

“As a government body, we should expect supervisors, managers, and directors to lead by example. How can we expect an employee (especially new ones) to learn how to treat the citizens of Oakland with ethics, respect, or even common decency if their superiors are not?”

“Voters are idealistic and want "Cadillac" level policies that we can't afford and our elected officials champion them for the votes. Meanwhile, the Cadillac is half built and not on the road, we'd be better off in a Honda that actually runs, even if it doesn't look so great. We need to be more grounded. We're going to have to be a lot tougher and have top-down leadership focused on fiscal responsibility and practicality, focusing on our most basic needs.”

“I hear a lot about Racial Equity. However, I don't think I have heard much about ethics. I think that my colleague value ethics and act in an ethical manner, but I can't say that ethics have been discussed in a way that makes me think that this is an important part of agency culture. We probably should talk about it more often. Some employees may find themselves in situations where they face temptation or simply do not know the right way to act. Talking about ethics, and offering training, would help all of us.”

Theme 2. Hiring processes are broken, and at times unethical

“We are desperately in need of staff. There's a critical management position in our Division that has been vacant 35 months. This impedes public service and agency priorities and has a very negative impact on staff morale.”

“Require new employees to be hired through a fair process, not through nepotism, (hiring of friends and family) without going through a public interview process.”

“This organization has decades of nepotism and friends and family hiring practices, and incestuous internal promotion practices.”

“Our City seems to always hire from outside and not provided promotions to staff. The City announce opening to current staff before going outside at all levels. The City needs to fill the vacancies in a timely manner to relive the over worked staff.”

Theme 3. Employees feel silenced, fear retaliation and don't think being a whistleblower gets results

“Employees should be able to discuss unethical practices with their supervisors, managers, and directors without fear of retaliation. All employees should be treated fairly based on their work not the supervisor's personal opinion of them...”

“When people are brave enough to file a whistleblower report, your office needs to take action in a timely manner. Otherwise the whistleblower process means nothing and discourages people from reporting unethical behavior.”

“...People talk about unethical behavior of others but do not want to do anything about it because: a) it takes work and commitment on the part of the whistleblower to catch the wrongdoer; and b) there is a deep-seated belief that nothing will happen to the wrongdoer even if he/she is caught...”

“There needs to be a better means by which persons who work for the City can reasonably be able to report wrongdoing of management without fear of retaliation and having his/her career subsequently stifled as a result of having done so.”

APPENDIX A

Ethical Climate Survey Graduated Scoring Methodology for Each Statement

Response	Points	Scoring Effect	Meaning of the Score
Always	10	High	Your Agency Has A Strong Ethical Environment
Almost Always	7.5	High	Your Agency Has A Strong Ethical Environment
Sometimes	5.0	Medium	Your Agency Is In A Good Place, But Has Room For Improvement
Rarely	2.5	Low	Your Agency's Culture Needs Significant Change
*Don't Know	0	Low	Your Agency's Culture Needs Significant Change

**Responses of "Don't Know" present a gap in an organization's overall ethical climate and therefore, factored negatively into the scoring. Non-responses were not factored into scoring.*

APPENDIX B

Scoring: Your Local Government's Ethical Climate		
Score	Rating	What it Means/Steps to Take
75-100 per part or 225-300 for the entire survey	High  GREEN LIGHT	Congratulations! Your agency has a strong ethical environment. Keep up the good work, including such steps as: ❑ Incorporating ethics into the hiring and evaluation process for staff ❑ Conducting regular ethics-related learning opportunities, including examples of ethical dilemmas and ways to resolve them ❑ Going through specific items on the assessment to identify further opportunities for positive change ❑ Reinforcing the importance of ethical considerations in agency behaviors and decisions
50-74 per part or 150 to 224 for the entire survey	Medium  CAUTION	Take a moment to reflect. Your agency is at a good place but has room to improve by doing the following ❑ Evaluating the areas of weakness indicated by the questionnaire and considering targeted remedial actions ❑ Analyzing the messages that staff and others receive and send about ethics ❑ Reviewing the agency's policies, including the criteria by which staff are evaluated ❑ Considering whether having a code of ethics would be helpful for the agency ❑ Following the best practices indicated in the box above.
0-49 per part or 0 or 149 for the entire survey	Low 	Stop! Your agency's culture needs significant change. Suggested activities include: ❑ Identifying the aspects of the agency's culture that foster the problematic behaviors and analyze how to remediate them ❑ Consulting with your agency's attorney about potential violations of laws and agency regulations ❑ Following the best practices indicated in the boxes above



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Office of the City Auditor

1 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza • 4th Floor, City Hall • Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 238-3378
CityAuditor@OaklandCA.gov



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