Executive Summary

This organizational assessment of the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA) provides a comprehensive evaluation of internal climate, leadership effectiveness, communication practices, structural systems, and employee sentiment. The findings are based on employee interviews, document review, and feedback provided throughout the review process.

Organizational Climate and Culture

WNADA operates in a dynamic, fast-paced environment that generally fosters productivity and collaboration. However, significant concerns exist regarding psychological safety[1], morale, and workplace consistency. While some employees report positive peer relationships and a shared sense of mission, others describe the atmosphere as tense and unpredictable, often citing fear of involuntary termination.

The current hybrid work structure offers flexibility but is marked by confusion due to inconsistent and changing work weeks. Communication practices—though generally functional—are fragmented, with employees expressing frustration over unclear channels, late-night messages, and last-minute requests that disrupt workflows and deadlines.

Leadership and Management

Executive Director Chad Williams is recognized by some as a high-performing, results-driven leader who brings decisiveness and energy to the organization. However, widespread concerns have been raised about his leadership approach, including reports of micromanagement, favoritism, inconsistent interpersonal conduct, and limited openness to feedback.

Employees report a lack of trust and transparency in decision-making, with many citing Williams' centralization of authority as a barrier to effective team engagement. Perceptions of inequitable treatment, particularly toward certain employees, have created tension and undermined morale.

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[1] Psychological safety refers to a workplace or social environment where individuals feel comfortable, secure, and confident to express their thoughts, ideas, opinions, and concerns without fear of negative consequences or judgment. It's a crucial aspect of fostering open communication, collaboration, and innovation.

Collaboration and Team Dynamics

While collaboration exists across the organization, its consistency and effectiveness vary widely. Teamwork is often hindered by siloed operations, personality differences, and uneven participation in shared responsibilities. Many staff members expressed a desire for more inclusive decision-making processes and stronger support for collaborative problem-solving.

Human Resources and Structural Observations

There is a perceived lack of a formal HR presence, which has contributed to concerns about accountability and support for staff. Hiring practices are informal and often bypass standard protocols, raising concerns about equity, transparency, and legal risk. Employees also report no confidence in internal grievance mechanisms, with several indicating a preference to exit the organization rather than seek formal resolution.

Financial Management and Operational Oversight

Concerns were raised regarding the organization's fiscal oversight and spending priorities. Staff identified discretionary expenditures—such as external consultants, security services, and retreat venues—that appear misaligned with operational needs. These practices have contributed to skepticism about financial stewardship and a lack of confidence in leadership's budgetary decision-making.

Staff Development and Retention

Employee satisfaction is mixed, with some expressing strong engagement and support from leadership, while others report feeling undervalued or disengaged. Retention is a growing concern, with several staff members actively seeking alternative employment due to low morale, perceived instability, and limited trust in organizational leadership.

Workplace Conduct and Inclusivity

Reports of inappropriate humor, particularly regarding race and age, as well as incidents of public admonishment, have highlighted the need for clearer expectations around professional behavior. These events have contributed to perceptions of bias and reinforced concerns about emotional intelligence and interpersonal dynamics within leadership.

Impact of Media Scrutiny

Ongoing media coverage related to CEO Williams has had a notable impact on internal operations and morale. Staff report distraction, discomfort, and reputational damage, compounded by leadership's lack of direct internal communication on the matter. The situation has intensified concerns about transparency and accountability, and further strained staff confidence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The assessment reveals an organization with committed personnel and meaningful potential, yet burdened by systemic issues in leadership, communication, and structural integrity. To strengthen organizational health and resilience, the following recommendations are offered:

- Enhance leadership training focused on communication, inclusion, and emotional intelligence.
- Increase HR visibility, with standardized hiring and grievance protocols. Strengthen HR's visibility and independence to ensure it serves as a neutral resource for employees.
- Retain a trained ADA Coordinator/Fair Practices Officer/EEO Director. This can be one person.
- Clarify internal communication channels and ensure timely, respectful exchanges.
- Improve budget transparency and align expenditures with mission-critical needs.
- Foster a culture of psychological safety, mutual respect, and consistent accountability.
- Address the reputational impact of external scrutiny through internal transparency and trust-building efforts.

By prioritizing these areas, WNADA can enhance its operational effectiveness, employee engagement, and long-term sustainability.

Introduction:

The West North Avenue Development Authority for Baltimore City is the economic development authority for the State of Maryland in West Baltimore to benefit Coppin State University and residents.

Comprehensive Revitalization Plan
The Maryland General Assembly established the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA), on October 1, 2021, to create a comprehensive plan for housing, economic, transportation, and neighborhood development along West North Avenue between 600 - 3200 Block, defined as the Target Area, and 250 yards surrounding the Target Area, defined as the Buffer Zone. This plan seeks to advance restorative justice and community development by promoting context-sensitive strategies that enhance housing, public space, mobility, and economic opportunity for West North Avenue.

Objectives of the Analysis.

Chad Williams is the Executive Director at WNADA. On 4/7/2025 former WNADA Chief of Staff ███████████ent a lengthy email where she went into detail on why she believes that Mr. Williams is a very bad executive director and that he should be terminated. Ms. ████ent the email to every current WNADA employee, as well as 60+ other people and agencies. Former employees ████████, and ████████sponded to the email echoing Ms. ████entiments (Appendix A).

On April 25, 2025, The Baltimore Beat (Appendix B). published an extensive article outlining Mr. Williams' past difficulties while employed as the Director of the Southern Nevada Housing Authority. These difficulties included sexual harassment and age discrimination charges. The article also outlined Mr. Williams' Las Vegas charges of domestic abuse. Further, the reporter interviewed several past employees of WNADA who alleged a significantly toxic work environment created by Mr. Williams. The employees alleged that they were unjustly terminated or forced out.

This Organizational Assessment was commissioned to better understand the "*organizational climate*[2]" of WNADA, and make recommendations as needed.

Methodology

Every current employee of WNADA was interviewed (Organizational chart Appendix C). Also included were members of the Maryland State Department of Budget and Management.

Individuals interviewed:
1. **Chad Williams** - Executive Director

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[2] Organizational climate refers to the shared perceptions employees have about their work environment and the atmosphere within an organization. It is how employees experience and feel about the organization's policies, practices, and procedures. A positive organizational climate can lead to increased motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity, while a negative one can result in dissatisfaction and lower performance.

Data collection consisted of obtaining relevant documents and their analysis. These documents include:
-Emails
-Performance evaluations
-Prior organizational evaluations- "Be Equitable"
-Social media posts
-Newspaper articles
-Court filings

Findings:

I.   Work Climate

Overview

The overall work climate presents a complex and evolving picture, characterized by both high productivity and notable areas of concern. While some employees describe the environment as collaborative and goal-oriented, others report challenges related to communication, morale, and leadership dynamics.

Positive Aspects:

Several employees highlighted the organization's fast-paced and dynamic nature, noting that no two days are the same and that this contributes to a stimulating work environment. There is a shared perception among some team members that staff are working toward common goals, and that coworker trust exists at the peer level. One employee described the environment as "comfortable," and another expressed surprise upon learning others were dissatisfied, suggesting that not all issues are universally felt.

Challenges and Concerns:

Despite these strengths, multiple employees expressed concerns about psychological safety and organizational culture. A recurring theme is the sense of walking "on eggshells," particularly during morning meetings. One employee mentioned that staff are seeking alternative employment, driven by a fear of involuntary termination. While one team member emphasized the absence of overt hostility, others described the environment as "intense," "busy," and "grinding," indicating fluctuating morale and sustained pressure.

Remote Work and Communication:
The hybrid work model also drew mixed reactions. Some employees appreciate the flexibility of remote work, calling it a "blessing," while others cited communication difficulties, such as delays in receiving critical information. The current telework policy was described as overly complex and inconsistent, with one employee remarking that it changes monthly, making it difficult to adapt and plan effectively. One employee described the telework framework as a "cumbersome hybrid matrix" that lacks stability and predictability.

Team Dynamics:
Siloed work practices were noted by some as a functional necessity, while others saw it as a barrier to cohesion. Despite the fragmentation, individual trust within teams remains relatively strong.

II.   Collaboration

General Perception:
Most employees describe collaboration as "good" or "present," though perspectives vary on its effectiveness and necessity.

Decision-Making Dynamics:
When time is constrained, decision-making often defaults on leadership (notably Williams), which some see as efficient, and others view as limiting meaningful collaboration.

Uneven Participation:
Some employees consistently contribute to group efforts, while others are less engaged, resulting in uneven workloads and frustrations for those who take on additional coordination roles.

Communication Style:
Communication is described as civil, but not always proactive. Some individuals refrain from offering input, which can hinder group problem-solving.

Variability in Work Style:
There are strong personalities and varied communication styles across the team. Some employees prefer to work independently, with one noting that collaboration is often unnecessary and they keep their office door closed.

Team Dynamics:

There is recognition that some teams or individuals collaborate better than others, reflecting diverse interpersonal dynamics within the organization.

Opportunities for Improvement:

1. Encourage more inclusive and consistent collaboration across roles.
2. Foster an environment where input from all team members is welcomed and valued.
3. Address reliance on top-down decisions where appropriate to support shared ownership and engagement.

III. Communication

Overall Assessment

Employee feedback indicates that communication within the organization is generally functional, with several avenues of communication—such as email, Microsoft Teams, and meetings—being utilized effectively. Respondents rate overall communication around 3.5 out of 5, suggesting that while foundational systems are in place, there is significant room for improvement, especially regarding clarity, consistency, and tone.

Email and Interpersonal Communication

There are mixed reviews regarding the tone and timing of email communication from leadership. While some employees reported neutral or professional interactions (e.g., Person I), others highlighted concerns with the tone and delivery of emails sent by senior leadership, specifically by Williams. Multiple respondents characterized the emails as "firm," "demanding," and "borderline hostile," with one citing an external example included in Appendix D (Baltimore Unity Hall email). Concerns were also raised about emails and calls being sent during late-night hours, contributing to ambiguity around work-life boundaries and expectations regarding response times. Several employees noted that Williams tends to come across as softer and more collaborative in person than in written communications.

Information Flow and Coordination

A recurring theme among respondents is the fragmentation of communication streams, which contributes to confusion and potential information loss. Some noted that information is often delivered through too many separate channels, creating inefficiencies.

There is a desire for more centralized, streamlined communication practices and better transparency around task ownership and progress.

Communication Environment and Office Presence

Many employees expressed a strong desire for a consistent physical office presence. Remote work arrangements, while flexible, were seen to contribute to disconnection and hinder collaborative communication. Multiple staff members highlighted that a shared office space would enhance transparency, team cohesion, and informal communication. Although office space at Coppin State University is available, usage has been inconsistent due to reported issues including mold and safety concerns. A new office location is under renovation, but staff have raised concerns about its suitability, particularly related to safety and parking.

Disruptive Communication Practices

A significant concern identified by several staff members is the practice of issuing last-minute or high-effort requests with insufficient lead time. This was perceived as disruptive and detrimental to meeting existing deadlines. Specific instances were cited where extensive materials (e.g., a 134-slide deck) was distributed the night before key meetings, without time for preparation. Such practices were seen as demoralizing and disorganizing, and contributed to a broader sentiment of unpredictability in work planning

IV.   Collaboration and Trust Within the Organization
Collaboration Toward Organizational Goals

The majority of respondents reported a general sense of alignment and collaboration across the organization. Most employees believe that members of the organization work together effectively toward shared objectives. However, a few respondents offered nuanced perspectives, noting variability in engagement levels and motivations. Some indicated that while collaboration exists, certain individuals may be more focused on personal advancement than collective outcomes. These insights suggest that while a strong foundation of teamwork is present, there is room for improvement in ensuring consistent, organization-wide commitment to common goals.

Power Dynamics Between Leadership and Staff

Employee perceptions of leadership dynamics, particularly regarding Williams, reveal a complex interplay of authority, collaboration, and individual experiences. Several staff members describe Williams as directive yet open to feedback. One employee noted that his instructions are generally clear and that while he makes executive decisions, he does

so in a collaborative manner. Another highlighted that Williams does open the floor for discussion.

However, concerns were also raised about his leadership style. Some employees view Williams as authoritarian, with one describing him as having "dictator" tendencies and a resistance to employee questions about their roles. Another noted that his confidence can come across as arrogance, citing a statement attributed to Williams in which he claimed he was selected for the role because "Baltimore couldn't find anyone with his skills." These mixed perceptions suggest a leadership style that some interpret as confident and effective, while others see it as overly controlling and dismissive.

Trust Among Team Members
Responses regarding collegial trust within the organization were more varied. Several employees affirmed that trust is present among team members, while others highlighted inconsistencies. A few respondents noted that trust tends to depend on individual relationships, with some colleagues being seen as more reliable than others. One participant explicitly expressed a lack of trust. This variability points to an opportunity for the organization to foster stronger, more consistent trust-building practices across teams

Trust in Leadership
Responses regarding trust in management, particularly honesty and openness, are varied. Several staff members report trust in Williams, noting openness and honesty in their interactions. However, others express skepticism. One employee stated that while they personally trust Williams, not everyone shares that sentiment. Another noted that Williams tends to justify his actions rather than engage in open dialogue. One employee expressed doubt, citing shaky trust despite high compensation, which may contribute to a baseline of employee loyalty.

These responses suggest that while some employees feel confident in leadership integrity, there are significant trust gaps that may stem from perceived defensiveness and a lack of transparent communication.

Leadership Receptiveness: How does the agency react to employee feedback?
Employee perspectives on the agency's receptiveness to feedback are mixed, with significant variation in experiences and perceptions, particularly regarding leadership responsiveness.

Several employees expressed concerns about inconsistent reactions to feedback. Notably, multiple respondents reported that Williams does not consistently foster a collaborative environment. For instance, one employee noted that Williams responded negatively to a colleague's input, resulting in the employee's emotional distress. Others observed that Williams tends to discourage questions, operating under the belief that employees should resolve issues independently.

Conversely, a few employees shared more neutral or positive experiences. One reported that Williams does occasionally listen and that feedback is "sometimes valued," while another described him as receiving feedback well.

Additionally, there was a broader observation that collaboration is undervalued in certain parts of the agency and that increasing community interaction among staff could improve communication dynamics overall.

These insights suggest a need for leadership training focused on fostering psychological safety, encouraging open dialogue, and reinforcing the importance of constructive feedback across all levels of the organization.

V.   Workplace Conduct and Interpersonal Dynamics
Observations of Inappropriate or Demeaning Comments/Racial and Sexist Jokes

Several employees reported witnessing a comment made by Williams regarding the racial dynamics of an assignment involving ███████, a white male colleague. The comment— "I'm not sending ████ ennsylvania or North Avenue. What would it look like to send a white guy to that neighborhood?"—was perceived by some as lighthearted and well-received by the individual it was directed at ███████ (who was not offended). However, reactions from witnesses varied:

- *Person H* reported the comment did not appear malicious.
- *Person K* confirmed witnessing the comment and was not offended.
- *Person C* expressed concern that such jokes may not be appropriate in a professional setting.
- *Person F* found the comment inappropriate.

This range of reactions suggests a lack of consistent standards or shared understanding around humor in the workplace, particularly as it relates to race. While the comment may not have been intended to cause harm, its impact on observers indicates a need for clearer expectations regarding professional communication.

Interpersonal Conflict and Emotional Responses

December 2024 Staff Retreat Incident

During a session at the December 2024 retreat, an exchange occurred between ████ ████████ nd Chad Williams that resulted in ████ ecoming visibly upset and crying after Chad Williams responded sharply to a question. This incident suggests potential concerns regarding emotional intelligence and the handling of interpersonal communication in high-stress or public settings.

Comments by Williams Directed Towards Staff

Williams was also mentioned in relation to other concerning interpersonal behaviors:

- He reportedly directed a negative comment █████████████ uring a meeting, prompting her to respond assertively.
- Multiple employees noted that Williams frequently makes jokes referencing age, particularly about Persons D and B, implying that younger employees are better suited to technological tasks. These comments have raised concerns given a prior age discrimination complaint involving Williams.
  - **Person K** described these jokes as "stupid" in light of the past complaint.
  - **Person B** reported believing that Williams views older employees as resistant to new ideas and less capable of adapting to modern tools like social media.

Perceived Targeting of Employees

- The issue of employee targeting—specifically regarding ██████████—was a prominent theme. Multiple employees believe that █████ s being singled out by ████████ eports include instances of public admonishment, being put "on the spot," and even encouraging Jefferson to seek employment elsewhere.

- Others, however, reported no direct observation of targeting. Some noted that while they had not personally witnessed such behavior, they were aware of peers who believed they were being targeted. One respondent acknowledged that Williams does single out individuals in meetings, creating an uncomfortable atmosphere for staff.

- Interestingly, at least one employee stated that while some individuals are called out, it is due to their poor performance rather than unfair targeting.

- This divergence in perspective indicates a need for deeper examination of management practices to ensure accountability, fairness, and a workplace culture free of perceived or actual favoritism or punitive behavior.

Summary and Implications

The incidents detailed above highlight the importance of reinforcing organizational expectations around respectful and inclusive communication. While some comments may have been intended humorously, they were not universally received as such and, in certain cases, led to visible distress or reinforced existing concerns around bias and professionalism. These findings underscore the need for:

- Enhanced training on inclusive workplace behaviors;

- Clearer communication policies;

- A proactive approach to managing interpersonal conflicts and ensuring a respectful organizational culture.

There is a particular concern regarding ████████████ Williams openly expressed his dissatisfaction with ████████ erformance during his investigation interview. Her most recent performance evaluation indicated that she was performing satisfactorily. That Ms. ████████, and four of her colleagues believe that she is being targeted by Williams is a failure in management. It reinforces the notion that Williams unfairly targets employees.

The perception th ████████ s being targeted, whether intentional or not, has broader organizational consequences:

- It contributes to diminished morale for the individual and her colleagues.

- It undermines confidence in leadership and fosters a culture of fear and disengagement.
- It illustrates a potential failure to align leadership behavior with organizational values and performance assessment processes

VI. Job Feedback Summary

Perception of Value and Feedback

Most employees indicated that they feel their contributions are valued and that they receive adequate feedback. Several individuals (Persons G, H, I, C, K, A, and B) expressed clear affirmation, highlighting supportive leadership and opportunities to contribute meaningfully. Notably, Person G emphasized that Williams provides a platform to make a difference. However, one employee (Person F) reported not feeling valued, and another

(Person E) expressed uncertainty, suggesting potential inconsistencies in how recognition and feedback are experienced across the team.

Overall Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction among respondents varied, with a range of ratings and sentiments:

- **High Satisfaction**: Several employees expressed strong satisfaction with their roles. Person H rated their satisfaction as "10 out of 10" and described themselves as extremely satisfied. Person I also reported being very satisfied. Person A and Person C gave ratings of 8.5/10 and 7/10, respectively, indicating generally positive sentiment. Person G noted that the "pros outweigh the cons" and particularly enjoys working with Person E.

- **Moderate to Low Satisfaction**: Other responses reflected moderate or mixed feelings. Person K rated their satisfaction as 5 out of 10, suggesting room for improvement. Person B also rated satisfaction as 7 out of 10.

- **Dissatisfaction and Turnover Risk**: Two employees (Persons F and E) stated they are actively seeking other employment or considering returning to previous positions, highlighting a potential retention concern.

Perception of Value and Feedback
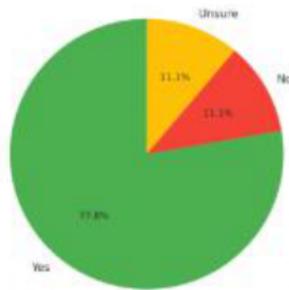
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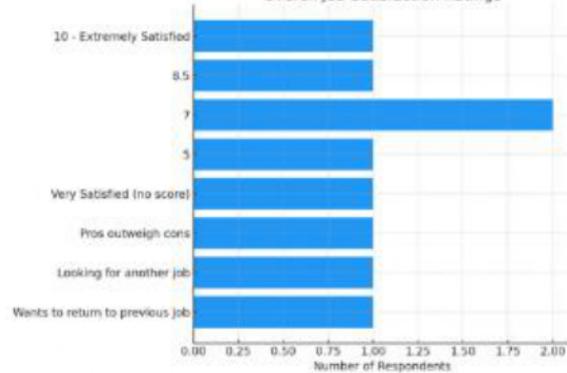
VII.   Organizational Structural Observations

Human Resources

There is a perceived need among some staff for increased HR oversight and visibility. One employee noted that greater HR presence and involvement could potentially improve workplace behavior and accountability. There is an existing HR representative, ███████, who maintains regular consultation with leadership—particularly with Williams. ███████ is regularly consulted on matters such as employee separations and disciplinary actions. However, the broader staff perception suggests that HR's role may not be fully transparent or directly accessible to all employees. Staff are generally aware of ███████'s advisory role to leadership, but this has not translated into a clearly perceived HR presence or influence across the organization.

Hiring Process

The current hiring process is viewed by staff as informal and lacking in structure. While HR was reportedly involved in recruitment activities at the onset, hiring decisions are now largely managed independently by Williams. According to multiple employees, there appears to be no standardized or formalized hiring procedure. For example, one employee noted that a recent hire was made based solely on a review of the candidate's LinkedIn profile and a conversation, with no apparent involvement from HR.

There is concern among staff that the absence of job applications through JobAps (https://jobapscloud.com/MD/) may be an intentional effort to limit the pool of State employee applicants, raising potential equity and compliance issues. The lack of a formal hiring protocol is viewed by some as exposing the organization to unnecessary legal risk, particularly in the area of discrimination complaints. While the Authority acknowledges that its hiring needs are highly specialized, staff express concern that this does not justify bypassing standard hiring practices designed to ensure fairness, consistency, and legal protection.

Employee Retention

Employee feedback indicates significant concerns about retention and job satisfaction. Several staff members expressed a lack of confidence in internal mechanisms for resolving workplace issues, with some preferring to leave the organization rather than report problems. One employee noted, "I would just leave before reporting a problem," reflecting a broader sentiment of disengagement from formal resolution channels.

Additionally, there are indications of active attrition risk. Multiple staff members disclosed they are currently seeking employment elsewhere, citing a perception that "people are getting out before they are shoved out." At least two employees are actively pursuing

alternative employment outside the organization. Another employee shared regret about joining WANADA, stating they felt it was a mistake.

The overall tone suggests a culture where trust in leadership and retention strategies is low, and where staff morale may be impacted by fears of job insecurity and a perceived lack of support.

VIII.　　Organizational Concerns: Budgetary Oversight and Expenditures

Several employees have expressed significant concerns regarding fiscal management practices within the organization, particularly in relation to spending decisions made under the direction of leadership.

A consistent theme among employee feedback is the perception that current leadership, specifically Mr. Williams, exhibits a pattern of discretionary spending that lacks sufficient oversight. Multiple respondents cited examples of what they consider unnecessary or excessive expenditures, including:

- **Consultant Engagements:** Staff noted the frequent use of external consultants, some of whom were perceived as offering limited value to the organization. A specific example involved hiring an interior designer for office enhancements, which was viewed as a non-essential expense.

- **Event and Retreat Costs:** Employees raised concerns about the high costs associated with retreat venues, characterizing them as unnecessarily lavish given the organization's budget constraints.

- **Avoidance of Cost-Saving Options:** There is concern over a reluctance to utilize cost-effective state-mandated resources, such as Maryland Correctional Enterprises (MCE), which are typically used by state agencies to control expenditures.

- **Security Services:** Employees noted the engagement of a private security firm for the personal protection of Mr. Williams, a decision seen by some as disproportionate and not aligned with broader organizational security needs.

- **Programmatic Spending:** The spending associated with the purchase of a loan and grant management system was also flagged. There were concerns about a lack of cost-consciousness in how these funds are allocated and administered.

- **External Assessment Contract:** One example that drew particular criticism was the engagement of an external firm, *Be Equitable*, to conduct internal assessments related to work and communication styles. Respondents reported that the initiative involved several days of interviews and focus groups but yielded no tangible outcomes or follow-up. Furthermore, results from the study were never shared with staff, leading to questions about the value and transparency of the investment.

Collectively, these concerns reflect a broader apprehension among staff regarding financial stewardship and prioritization of organizational resources. There is a perception that spending decisions may not always align with core operational needs or demonstrate prudent use of public funds.

IX.   **Staff Retreats – Summary of Employee Feedback**

Employee feedback on staff retreats indicates a general dissatisfaction with their current format, content, and utility. Several recurring themes emerged:

- **Lack of Clear Purpose and Agenda**
  Participants noted the absence of a structured agenda and clear objectives prior to the retreat. One employee commented that the information shared during retreats "does not seem helpful," while another expressed concern that the sessions lack focus, particularly on core operational issues.

- **Content Misalignment**
  Multiple respondents highlighted a disproportionate emphasis on soft skills and conceptual activities, which were perceived as unrelated to daily work responsibilities. Specific references included the use of games (e.g., "Peacemaker") and extensive sessions with external consultants (e.g., Be Equitable), which did not yield tangible outcomes or improvements.

- **Preference for Strategic Focus**

  There was a consistent sentiment that retreats should be used for strategic planning and organizational alignment rather than inspirational talks or generic team-building exercises. Employees expressed a desire for more substantive discussions centered on the "nuts and bolts" of their work.

- **Questionable Cost and Format**

  Concerns were raised regarding the cost and necessity of holding retreats at external venues, particularly when the activities conducted could, in employees' views, be handled just as effectively in a full-day staff meeting at the Coppin office.

Conclusion

The overall sentiment suggests a need to re-evaluate the purpose, structure, and delivery of staff retreats. Employees seek a more focused, practical, and cost-effective approach that directly supports strategic and operational goals

X. Assessment of Management Characteristics: Chad Williams

Employee feedback regarding Chad Williams reflects a complex leadership style marked by both strengths and concerns. Several staff members highlighted his straightforward communication and high expectations; while others pointed to issues of favoritism, control, micromanagement, and inconsistent interpersonal conduct. The synthesized themes are presented below:

Leadership Style and Communication

Williams is consistently described as direct and task oriented. Employees characterized him as someone who "gets to the point" and "expects results." He is perceived as a decisive leader who often issues directives rather than engaging in collaborative decision-making. While some staff report positive and respectful interactions, others have experienced inconsistent behavior, ranging from supportive to dismissive or even humiliating, particularly in public settings.

Several employees noted that Williams communicates more harshly in writing than in person. One staff member described interacting with "different versions" of Williams depending on the day. Others perceived a lack of openness, stating that questions are discouraged or postponed until the last minute.

Expectations and Work Environment

Williams sets high expectations and pushes staff to perform at a high level, aligning with his self-described "shark" mentality. He is known to be results-driven and frequently reminds staff of his influence and the organization's independence. Williams expects staff to operate with minimal guidance, and some employees have expressed frustration with the lack of clarity or support. Williams expects staff to "figure it out" without asking him.

High salaries are viewed by some as a mechanism for securing loyalty and compliance. One employee observed that almost all staff are paid six-figure salaries, which contributes to Williams' ability to maintain control and demand performance his way.

Favoritism and Employee Dynamics

A recurring theme among staff feedback is the perception that Williams plays favorites. Multiple employees observed differential treatment, with certain staff receiving preferential treatment in assignments and approvals. For example, the same suggestion made by two individuals may receive different responses based on who presents it.

Some employees reported feeling marginalized or ignored, especially those not among Williams' favored group. One individual recounted being informed by Williams that a colleague disliked them—an action perceived as potentially manipulative and divisive.

Organizational Control and Transparency

Williams is viewed as highly controlling, often centralizing decision-making and approval processes. Staff noted that virtually nothing moves forward without his direct approval, creating bottlenecks and slowing operations. Emails to the Office of the Attorney General must include him, and termination decisions—as well as appeal processes—are controlled entirely by Williams.

This consolidation of authority, paired with his emphasis on connections (e.g., board members, legislators), contributes to a perception of unchecked power. Some employees feel they have little or no direct access to higher leadership, reinforcing the notion that Williams operates with autonomy and minimal oversight.

Organizational Culture and Employee Sentiment

The culture under Williams' leadership is described as high-pressure and performance-focused, with a strong undercurrent of political awareness. While some employees respect his competence and decisiveness, others feel silenced or intimidated. Several staff

members indicated that morale is uneven, and communication with leadership—particularly beyond Williams—is perceived as closed or discouraged.

Summary

Williams is widely seen as a driven leader who sets high standards and maintains tight control over operations. At the same time, there are substantive concerns among staff about favoritism, centralization of power, limited transparency in decision-making, and inconsistent interpersonal conduct. The organization may benefit from greater checks and balances, enhanced communication pathways, and structured feedback mechanisms to ensure all employees have equitable access to leadership and support. Balancing authority with inclusivity and fostering open communication could enhance organizational effectiveness and employee trust.

XI. Impact of Media Coverage on Organizational Climate

Overview

A review of staff input reveals significant concern across various levels of the organization regarding the ongoing media coverage and public scrutiny surrounding Williams. While a minority of staff report minimal personal impact, the prevailing sentiment is one of distraction, discomfort, and reputational concern. This issue has been described by multiple employees as "the elephant in the room," and its lack of direct internal acknowledgment has exacerbated staff unease. Relevant News Articles can be found in Appendix E

Key Themes Identified

Workplace Disruption and Distraction

Many employees report that the continuous media coverage—particularly from persistent local sources such as *The Baltimore Beat*—has created a distracting work environment. Staff express frustration that the external controversies are detracting from the agency's mission and undermining the visibility of its accomplishments. Several note that work has been delayed, rescheduled, or negatively impacted as a result.

Emotional and Professional Impact

A number of staff members describe feelings of embarrassment, discomfort, and discouragement. Some indicated second-guessing their decision to work under Williams's leadership, citing the ongoing scrutiny as a factor that affects morale and job satisfaction.

Lack of Internal Communication and Leadership Accountability

A consistent concern was the absence of direct communication from leadership to staff regarding the media reports. While Williams addressed community members, many employees feel his failure to acknowledge the issue internally has contributed to a breakdown in trust. Calls for greater transparency and accountability were repeated across statements.

Perception and Reputation Management

Several respondents emphasized the potential reputational damage to WNADA. Employees worry that the organization's credibility is being eroded both internally and externally. There is a strong desire for the agency to uphold a trustworthy, honest image, which some feel is currently compromised. One individual questioned the decision to hire Williams given his professional history, while another emphasized the need for clearer boundaries when offering second chances.

Divergent Views and Calls for Resolution

While the majority expressed concern, one employee defended Williams, pointing out that there are "two sides to every story" and highlighting the pressure he is under. Nonetheless, this individual also acknowledged delays in work due to the situation. Others voiced support for a temporary step-back by leadership to allow staff to refocus on core responsibilities.

Conclusion

The ongoing media scrutiny surrounding CEO Williams is having a tangible and multifaceted impact on the agency's staff. It is impeding productivity, eroding morale, and straining both internal and external perceptions of WNADA. There is a clear call for more transparent internal communication, leadership accountability, and a strategic approach to reputational recovery. Addressing these concerns is essential to restoring organizational focus and trust.

Report Conclusion

The organizational climate assessment of the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA) reveals a talented and mission-driven staff working under conditions strained by inconsistent leadership, insufficient structural supports, and diminished psychological safety. While there are pockets of effective collaboration and positive working relationships, these are undermined by concerns about micromanagement, favoritism, opaque decision-making, and lapses in professional conduct. The impact of media scrutiny has further eroded trust in leadership and weakened organizational morale.

Nonetheless, WNADA remains an institution with significant potential to drive meaningful community development. To fulfill its mandate, it must make targeted internal reforms to foster a healthier, more resilient workplace culture and improve staff retention, transparency, and trust.

Recommendations

1. **Leadership Development**

   - Require executive leadership coaching focused on emotional intelligence, inclusive communication, and staff empowerment.

   - Establish 360-degree feedback for leadership to identify blind spots and accountability gaps.

2. **Human Resources and Structural Integrity**

   - Strengthen the independence and visibility of HR, ensuring it serves as an accessible and neutral support mechanism for all employees.

   - Implement formalized, transparent hiring and onboarding protocols that follow state guidelines and promote equity.

   - Retain a dedicated ADA Coordinator/EEO Officer/Fair Practices Officer to support compliance and fair treatment (required under Maryland State Law for all State agencies.)

3. **Communication Reforms**

   - Establish consistent communication norms (e.g., no after-hours emails, centralized task tracking) to reduce confusion and stress.

   - Create clear escalation channels and regular all-staff briefings to promote transparency, especially during crises.

4. **Organizational Culture**

   - Conduct mandatory training on professional behavior, anti-discrimination, and inclusive workplace practices, and Sexual Harassment Prevention (required by Maryland State law for all State agencies every two years.)

   - Promote a culture of psychological safety by encouraging respectful dialogue, constructive feedback, and shared problem-solving.

5. **Financial Accountability**

   - Increase budget transparency by documenting and justifying all discretionary expenditures.

   - Align financial decisions more closely with operational priorities and stakeholder (this includes staff) expectations.

6. **Governance and Oversight**

   - Consider establishing a Board-led oversight committee to review executive actions, grievances, and budget allocations.

   - Revisit the role of executive leadership if misconduct or leadership deficiencies continue to erode staff trust or organizational performance.

7. **Reputation Management and Recovery**

   - Develop an internal communications strategy to acknowledge past controversies and outline a forward-looking plan for accountability.

   - Engage external consultants only when deliverables are clearly defined and outcomes are reported back to staff.

8. **Staff Engagement and Retention**

   - Conduct periodic climate surveys and regular check-ins to monitor morale.

   - Create pathways for professional development and mentorship to invest in employee growth.

Implementing these recommendations will require commitment from both leadership and oversight bodies but is essential for rebuilding morale, stabilizing operations, and reinforcing WNADA's credibility and mission-driven purpose.