



CASE STUDY

How ECU Health crowdsources employees to connect with staff and boost engagement

Organizational listening has empowered ECU Health to improve the connection with employees, leading to improved engagement across the board.

a **PG Forsta** company



The challenge

Current financial strains have left many healthcare systems depleted of resources—including staffing. Many workers are looking for greener pastures, whether in healthcare or outside the industry altogether.

ECU Health, a large, rural academic health system and the largest private employer in eastern North Carolina, knows these challenges all too well. While ECU Health serves as a safety net for 29 of the most impoverished counties in the U.S. and is a lifeline for its communities, the income disparity has contributed to its financial struggles, as well as staffing challenges.

To overcome retention challenges, ECU Health has renewed its commitment to the employee experience. But first, they had to understand the root causes of employee sentiment. How could they tell if employees are happy and fulfilled? How could they measure engagement and predict employees' intent to stay?

FACTS & FIGURES

1.4M
people served

29
counties

9
hospitals

14,000
employees

180+
locations

ECU Health was already using Press Ganey employee experience technology, like census surveys. These tools have allowed the health system to listen to—and engage with—employees, tapping into the wants and needs of their most valuable resource: their workforce. “The real worry is creating environments in healthcare where people want to work,” says Dr. Julie Oehlert, ECU Health’s Chief Experience and Brand Officer, “and an environment that helps them thrive.” To more deeply understand ECU Health’s workforce, its leadership team doubled down on collecting employee feedback, and gathering intel in a variety of ways.



“All the problems of healthcare can be solved if we just ask our team members or ask our patients.”

JULIE OEHLERT, DNP, RN

Chief Experience and Brand Officer,
ECU Health

The solution

National data—as well as ECU Health’s results from their 2021 Press Ganey census survey—shows respect is the top driver of engagement and retention, and engaged employees are the backbone of the healthcare industry. ECU Health leadership cut right to the source in trying to improve engagement. But what did “respect” mean to employees? The health system added Press Ganey’s crowdsourcing technology to its solutions to further engage with their workforce. Crowdsourcing lets employees submit and vote on ideas to help leaders better understand the workforce’s top-of-mind challenges, and potential solutions.

Looking at their 2021 census survey results, the ECU Health team knew to focus on respect—what respect means to their workforce, and what they could do, as an organization, to build respect into their DNA. So, they implemented a crowdsourcing challenge via their online portal, asking employees to weigh in on what the organization could do to create and foster a culture of respect. These questions, referred to as crowdsourcing “challenges,” have had tremendous engagement so far with the respect challenge receiving 38 ideas and 2,353 votes in just over a month.

“Crowdsourcing has an application for any time you’re curious. It’s easy for us to use crowdsourcing for team members because we can push it out in our regular communications: We can put a link in our leader exchange, so it’s easy to use internally.”

JULIE OEHLERT, DNP, RN

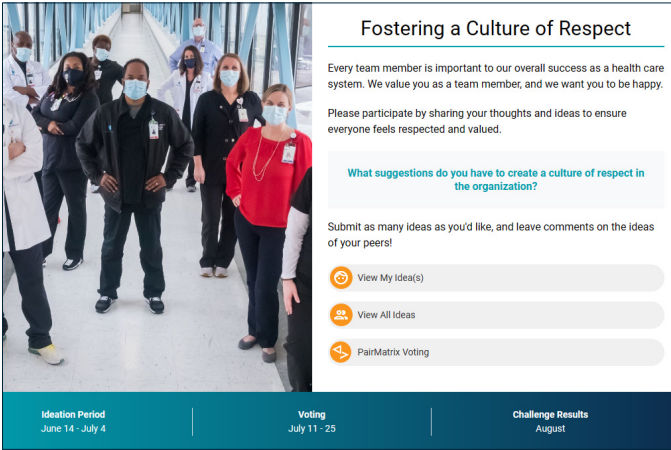
Chief Experience and Brand Officer,
ECU Health

Based on the top 10 ideas from the respect challenge, leadership created focus groups to facilitate in-depth conversations around the topic of respect. “It’s not a one and done. You get information from crowdsourcing. Then you have to do something with it,” Dr. Oehlert says.

“People who have siloed data are missing out, and people who don’t have dynamic surveying and crowdsourcing are also missing out. Because all of these are the more advanced form of organizational listening, and surveying alone isn’t good enough anymore.”

JULIE OEHLERT, DNP, RN

Chief Experience and Brand Officer, ECU Health



Fostering a Culture of Respect

Every team member is important to our overall success as a health care system. We value you as a team member, and we want you to be happy.

Please participate by sharing your thoughts and ideas to ensure everyone feels respected and valued.

What suggestions do you have to create a culture of respect in the organization?

Submit as many ideas as you'd like, and leave comments on the ideas of your peers!

- View My Idea(s)
- View All Ideas
- PairMatrix Voting

Ideation Period
June 14 - July 4

Voting
July 11 - 25

Challenge Results
August

Crowdsourcing respect challenge

38
ideas

2,353
votes

ECU Health's experience leaders wanted to close the feedback loop and share the results with the entire organization. They took the top 10 ideas crowdsourced from the challenge and created the "[ECU Health Respect in the Workplace](#)" video. Serving as a building block for individual teams to work off of, the video highlights the future of ECU Health's culture.

ECU Health learned that what employees really want is acknowledgement—appreciation, collaboration, teamwork, support, valuing their time, and, ultimately, feeling connected to each other, and the organization.

"I can crowdsource and get information back from hundreds of people in two weeks. It's just an advancement of organizational listening, and I think we need more of it. Surveying people once a year is pretty antiquated—but this is a very contemporary model."

JULIE OEHLERT, DNP, RN

Chief Experience and Brand Officer, ECU Health

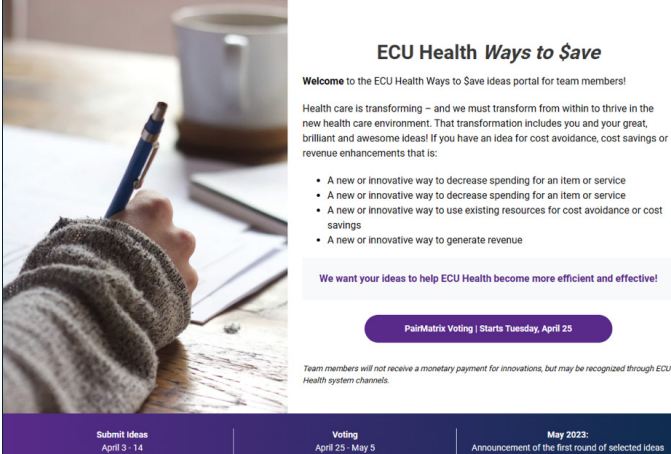
ECU Health's top 10 recommendations for creating a respectful workplace

1. Understand each team member's contributions to the organization.
2. Acknowledge, interact with, and cultivate meaningful connections between team members.
3. Support the work-life balance of your teams, and respect their time away from work.
4. Appreciate and honor others based on their actions and character.
5. Follow through on obligations, and keep your commitments.
6. Encourage people to bring their authentic selves to work by asking, listening, and acting with positive intent to help someone.
7. Reward loyal team members, who continue to keep their talents with your organization.
8. Consider and support a person's feelings, rights, wishes, and experiences, regardless of their role.
9. Give team members the time and space to disconnect outside of working hours.
10. Show respect not only in words, but in behaviors and in action.

How two ECU Health hospitals took action from crowdsourcing feedback

ECU Health has begun to host design thinking sessions, where employees can come together to learn, collaborate, and innovate patient experiences, services, products, and processes. Team leaders then work with the Experience Design team to implement ideas developed in the sessions.

ECU Health Bertie Hospital and ECU Health Chowan Hospital participated in a design thinking challenge where they created a “respect kit” intended to promote communication about how employees wish to be treated. The kit includes six icon stickers that team members can wear to help others know where they’re at emotionally. Whether it’s the “Desire encouragement” sticker or the “Need quiet space to think” sticker, these kits are a way for the teams at ECU Health to better connect, and respect one another’s emotional needs.



ECU Health Ways to Save

Welcome to the ECU Health Ways to Save Ideas portal for team members!

Health care is transforming – and we must transform from within to thrive in the new health care environment. That transformation includes you and your great, brilliant and awesome ideas! If you have an idea for cost avoidance, cost savings or revenue enhancements that is:

- A new or innovative way to decrease spending for an item or service
- A new or innovative way to decrease spending for an item or service
- A new or innovative way to use existing resources for cost avoidance or cost savings
- A new or innovative way to generate revenue

We want your ideas to help ECU Health become more efficient and effective!

[PairMatrix Voting | Starts Tuesday, April 25](#)

Team members will not receive a monetary payment for innovations, but may be recognized through ECU Health system channels.

Submit Ideas April 3 - 14	Voting April 25 - May 5	May 2023 Announcement of the first round of selected ideas
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In April 2023, ECU Health kicked off another crowdsourcing challenge called “Ways 2 \$ave.” This initiative asks employees how ECU Health could decrease spending, reduce waste, save time, and protect resources. Within 3 weeks, the prompt received 63 ideas and 39,554 votes. In total, ECU Health has completed nearly 5 challenges over the past year, helping leadership listen more deeply to employees, and create a stream of two-way communication.

The results

Since implementing Press Ganey's crowdsourcing technology, ECU Health's surveys have shown dramatic improvements in employee and caregiver engagement. Crowdsourcing has helped employees feel heard, appreciated, and respected by the health system and leadership—bucking national trends. While the national average for engagement declined from 2021 to 2023, ECU Health jumped from the 18th percentile to the 33rd percentile in employee engagement. And the health system surpassed the national average on the item "I am involved in the decisions that affect my work."

"You can't look at team engagement in a silo. You have to also look at patient experience data, you have to look at quality data, and then you look at the location and say, 'What's going on in this location?' based on the things you see."

JULIE OEHLERT, DNP, RN

Chief Experience and Brand Officer, ECU Health

The numbers

- Engagement increased 15 percentile points
- "I am involved in decisions that affect my work" surpassed the national average
- "This hospital treats team members with respect" improved by 0.07

Higher employee experience percentile scores correlate with higher patient experience percentile scores. In other words, people with higher EX scores have higher PX scores.

Beyond engagement, the Press Ganey Human Experience (HX) platform lets ECU Health look at its employee data in conjunction with all other experience data, providing for integrated, cross-functional insights across the entire continuum of care.

ECU Health's improved employee engagement metrics mean that the health system has strengthened its ability to prevent turnover—and, in turn, save money. The average cost of turnover for a bedside RN is \$52,350. Each percent change in RN turnover will either cost or save the average hospital an additional \$380,600 each year.¹ By retaining their knowledgeable and trained staff, ECU Health is on track to save hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

“We have all of our survey listening with our Press Ganey partner. I can’t imagine it not being that way, because I can look at patient experience, team engagement, workforce well-being, resiliency, nursing, and quality. I can look at everything, and everything’s all really connected.”

JULIE OEHLERT, DNP, RN

Chief Experience and Brand Officer, ECU Health



Renew your commitment to employee experience

For more information, reach out to a member of the Press Ganey employee experience team at:

pressganey.com/request-a-demo

¹2023 NSI National Health Care Retention & RN Staffing Report
Published by: [NSI Nursing Solutions, Inc.](https://www.nursingsolutions.com)

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