



Salem Snow Plan

Snow Staffing Problems Could Leave Drivers In the Cold

PROBLEM

Over the past 10 snow seasons, VDOT Salem District experienced a decline in the number of contractors working winter operations. This left them vulnerable to understaffing during critical winter weather events.

SOLUTION

PILLAR worked with VDOT to identify and address 8 separate issues causing snow contractor attrition. We developed a plan to increase contractor ranks and availability to keep roadways in the Salem District well maintained during snow and ice events.

APPROACH

PILLAR collaborated with another contractor to interview snow removal contractors about the causes of attrition. To find participants, VDOT provided a list of relevant personnel while PILLAR conducted a detailed search of potential contractors who did not show a history of having worked for VDOT.

We drew on our strong snow operations experience to draft a series of questions for snow removal contractors while the collaborating contractor reviewed and edited the questions. Questions and changes were tracked in an Excel spreadsheet.

Four PILLAR experts conducted the interviews by phone using an approved list of standardized questions to keep interviews consistent and focused. Contractors spoke openly and without hesitation while interviewers captured the contractors' comments in the purest form possible.

Following the interviews, PILLAR reviewed the data and identified 8 separate issues raised by contractors. We presented our findings and recommendations to VDOT to improve communications, increase innovative technologies, increase participation, and make working with the Salem District more appealing. Most specifically, we encouraged Salem VDOT to invest in communicating with contractors one-on-one in an ongoing relationship. We recommended that Salem VDOT offer clear information about their capacity to address concerns and to serve as a channel for information state level VDOT decision-makers. As a final step, PILLAR compiled practices from many states across the country and abroad and shared the information with Salem VDOT.