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Employee Recognition - Develop a Formal Recognition Program

Formal recognition supports the objectives and strategic goals of individual department or units. Check with your department's administrator to learn if your department already has a recognition program or use the "Five Steps to Developing an Employee Recognition Program" to start one.

ACT - [Four Steps to Develop a Recognition Program](#)

Step 1: Define your program's purpose, criteria, and budget

For a recognition program to be meaningful to both the awardees and the others in the department, it should be tied to the department's goals, mission, or values. As a leader, you can determine the goals and purpose of the program on your own, or you can ask that a team of employees provide you with suggestions. Another idea is to conduct an employee opinion survey for your department. It can assist a recognition committee in identifying preferred types of awards, establishing nomination and selection procedures, and determining the frequency and method(s) of award presentation preferred by employees.

Most importantly, the recognition program must be fair. All employees must know and understand the criteria used for formal recognition.

Some suggestions for recognition programs and criteria:

- Tie the program to a departmental initiative. For example, your department may be engaged in process improvement efforts. Providing awards for suggesting or implementing process improvements can help to communicate how serious you take the process improvement effort and how everyone can be involved.
- Tie the program to your department's or the University's core values. Many organizations have values, but frequently these values are just words and never get translated to behaviors. Recognizing employees for exhibiting behavior consistent with the values help the values come alive and build understanding and buy-in of the values. If you don't have core values in your own department, use the University's values: Innovation, Excellence, Teamwork, Diversity, Respect, and Integrity.
- Tie the program to your department's core purpose. Does your department exist to serve students? Does it exist to provide technical expertise? Recognizing outstanding customer service or new technical skills gained or technical proficiency makes sense to be recognized in this situation.
- Tie the program to other circumstances that your department may be facing. For example, your department may be facing a difficult challenge that might get everyone stressed or down. What better time to establish an award for positive attitude?

Employee Recognition - Develop a Formal Recognition Program

Some suggestions for types of awards include:

- Teamwork
- Efforts that promote a Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive environment
- Going the Extra Mile
- Customer Service
- Professional Development
- Award for Excellence
- Creativity and Innovation
- Supporting a Safe Environment
- Performance Excellence
- Leadership
- Commitment
- Flexibility

Once you've established the purpose and criteria for the award make sure everyone on staff knows the purpose and the criteria. Doing this greatly increases that employees will exhibit the behaviors you want them to and you are not accused of favoritism.

It is important to note that a formal recognition program does not take the place of informally appreciating or recognizing employees on a daily basis. A formal recognition program serves to supplement informal, day-to-day recognition of employees.

Step 2: Form an Employee Recognition Committee

Getting employees involved in the recognition program can help to ensure that the program is viewed as equitable and inclusive and it helps create shared ownership of the program. You may even delegate the development of purpose and criteria to the committee. Many departments have an employee representative from each functional work unit serve on the committee to ensure equal representation. The recognition committee might determine the components of the recognition program and ensure compliance with the University's recognition program policies, as well as helping to determine criteria, soliciting nominations and selecting awardees.

If you decide to form a standing recognition committee, keep the following ideas in mind:

- Establish term lengths for members on the committee. At least one member should stay on the committee across any two terms to ensure continuity and cross-training (i.e., begin a "rolling" membership cycle to ensure a partial carryover of members each year).
- Set committee membership through election, appointment, or volunteerism.
- Appoint a chair or co-chairs.
- Determine the "sponsor" of the committee (this might be you, or someone else on your management team)
- Include employees from each work group/area to ensure diverse representation.

Employee Recognition - Develop a Formal Recognition Program

- Define an appointment period for membership -- for how many award cycles may an individual serve consecutively on the selection committee? It is often helpful to have at least one committee member serve on two consecutive award cycles to ensure some continuity of process.
- Set the final decision-making level for the award -- does the Selection Committee make the selection or does it forward a recommendation to management?
- Address the participation of past recipients -- some programs establish that the one or two most recent recipients of the award then serve on the selection committee for the next award cycle.
- Define voting procedures -- this may include the processes by which the nominations will be reviewed. Some committees may establish a numeric ranking system for evaluating nominations.
- Ensure consistency in the voting/selection process.

Step 3: Define Award Eligibility, Frequency, and Process

Once the purpose, criteria and committee have been established, eligibility for the award and how often you will give the award should be determined. Some components to consider for eligibility include:

- Employment status: Is the award available only to regular status employees? Temporary employees? Full-time/part-time employees?
- Length of service: Is there a minimum length of service that the employee must have with the University or the department in order to be eligible for the award?
- Participation in the selection process: Can a member of the recognition program selection committee be nominated for the award? (If so, the employee must exclude him/herself from the selection of that particular award.)
- Frequency of receipt: How frequently can the same individual receive the same award?

Once you know who is eligible, you or your committee must determine how often the award will be given. Factors to include in making this determination are:

- The available resources of the department
- The number of employees and number of other recognition programs available within the department
- The scale/significance of the award relative to the frequency of its nomination cycle.

Finally, the selection committee must determine how nominations for awards are made.

- Is the nomination process anonymous or confidential? (i.e., must the nominators self-identify? Will the nominee be allowed to know who nominated him/her?)

Employee Recognition - Develop a Formal Recognition Program

- Who is eligible to submit a nomination? (Regular status employees? Temporary employees? Can an employee self-nominate?)
- What information is required on the nomination?
- Must nominations be submitted on hardcopy, or are electronic submissions possible?
- What details are necessary in order for the selection committee to make its choice?

Step 4: Monitor the Program

Recognition programs do not have to be expensive. Awards can range from an award certificate to gifts. Be sure that your awards are in compliance with University policy. Awards should be aligned with the department's resources and should be determined with an eye toward sustainability. You might have extra funds this year…but can you sustain the recognition budget for subsequent years? Many departments coordinate ceremonies or meetings as forums for presenting awards.

Public announcement of an award recipient is essential to giving employees appropriate recognition. Departmental newsletters and other University publications are valuable and cost-effective ways to market the award as well as to recognize the award recipient(s). Some departments display a plaque or trophy publicly. Even a letter or certificate given personally to an employee by a supervisor or director can mean a great deal.

It's easy to let a recognition program, once established, continue without many changes. Resist the urge to keep the recognition program the same for years at a time. As your departmental goals and needs change, so should the recognition program. This doesn't mean that you have to completely overhaul the program and start over. It's a good idea to review the awards and their criteria to make sure they are still relevant and meaningful to employees and the department. Adding an award to an existing program to highlight a new initiative may be all that is needed to keep the program relevant. Or the recognition committee may need to rethink the program completely. It's important to keep recognition fresh and updated. Consider doing a department employee survey to gauge the effectiveness and value of the program and for other recognition ideas and enhancements. This is particularly important within the first year of the program's implementation to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the department or work unit.

All proposed changes should be approved by you and communicated to employees in a timely manner following approval.