Virginia Department of Human Resource Management

Employee Recognition and Engagement Handbook

2019

INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth's Employee Recognition and Engagement Programs recognize employees' for their state service and acknowledge their important contributions to the overall objectives of their agencies and state government.

Agencies **must** develop and implement recognition programs. The Governor of Virginia, the Governor's Cabinet, and Agency Heads are committed to recognizing the state workforce for the valuable work it does and to enhancing employee engagement. To support this commitment, state agencies are tasked to develop meaningful programs that recognize the contributions and service of their employees.

This handbook serves as a guide to agency management in developing individual agency Employee Recognition and Engagement Programs in accordance with DHRM Policy 1.15.

The handbook provides:
- information on the importance of recognition and rewards;
- program development that links to the organization's mission and values;
- steps to assist agencies in developing a successful program;
- ideas for recognizing employees within a budget; and
- an Appendix of various Internet resources.

Agencies must:
- Develop a plan for employee recognition programs that links with the agency's mission and goals;
- Ensure availability of funds to support costs incurred by employee recognition programs that acknowledge employees' contributions to the effective operation of an agency or state government;
- Provide training to Agency management and employees on the recognition programs;
- Promote and serve as an advocate for agency employee recognition programs; and
- Ensure fair and equitable administration of the agency's recognition programs.

RECOGNITION/ENGAGEMENT AND REWARDS

Employees not only want good pay and benefits, they also want to be valued and appreciated for their work, treated fairly, do work that is important and meaningful, and have advancement opportunities. Recognition and rewards are essential to attract and retain an engaged and highly qualified workforce. It is the day-to-day interactions in the workplace that make employees feel that their contributions are appreciated and that they are recognized for their own unique qualities.

Recognition is a leadership tool that sends a message to employees about what is important to the leaders and the behaviors that are valued. Managers can use recognition to help employees understand how their jobs contribute to the agency's overall goals and how their individual performance affects the achievement of those goals.

Employee engagement is the discretionary efforts an employee makes or takes to get the job done. It is the commitment an employee has to the organization and its goals. How does a state government agency gain and maintain this commitment from their workforce? Management must demonstrate a commitment to routinely recognizing and valuing employees' contributions.

According to Rainer Strack, Sr. Partner and Managing Director of The Boston Consulting Group(BCG) in his 2014 TED Talk, *The Workforce Crisis of 2030 and How to Start Solving it Now*, his company surveyed over 200,000 global jobseekers and asked them to rank 26 aspects of a job based upon what each candidate felt was most important. The results indicate that organizational culture is a critical factor in job satisfaction and retention:

WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IN A JOB?

1. **Being appreciated for your work.**
2. **Great relationship with colleagues.**
3. **Enjoy a great work-life balance.**
4. **Having a great relationship with the boss.**
8. **Steady salary.**

Source: Rainer Strack, 2014 TED Talk Boston Consulting Group

An effective recognition program should meet several essential criteria:

(a) The recognition program does not exclude any employee
(b) The employees know exactly what should be accomplished in order to earn recognition and rewards
(c) The manager's success is tied to the employees' success

Recognition can be delivered in a number of ways. A sincere Thank You along with a few details describing what the employee did well is often enough to encourage employees to continue to perform at a high level or to improve behaviors as needed. Everyone deserves to be thanked in a proper manner, place and time. However, it is important to exercise caution as insincere flattery or overly general praise can do more harm than good.

For many employees, recognition received through the expression of genuine appreciation for the work they do is a reward. Being involved in a special project, attending a conference or mentoring a new employee may be another's reward. Other employees may be more motivated by bonuses, leave or other non-monetary rewards identified in the

agency's recognition program. It is the manager's job to determine what motivates each employee on his/her team.

In developing a program incorporating gifts, bonuses, and leave, remember that some employees are recipients and some may be non-recipients. Pay careful attention to your goals and determine if a particular program will apply to all work units and your agency's mission. Consider whether the recognition and reward program focuses employees' efforts on the attainment of the gift/prize than on the underlying goals of the program. Bear in mind that if your work unit or agency has problems trusting management or colleagues, then you may need to work on improving those relationships.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Before developing or revising your agency's recognition program, determine why your current recognition methods are insufficient. It may be a lot simpler to change sections of your current program rather than create an entirely new program, especially if the current program is providing some positive results. Be prepared to communicate to employees how the recognition program ties into the agency's vision and strategic plan so employees know what behaviors and goals that the agency values and expects.

Be certain to include your supervisors and employees or form a focus group to make recommendations for changes in the existing program or to assist in the design of the new program. These individuals can tell you how and why recognition is important to them. Ask them what they value in recognition and rewards and listen to their responses. Take particular notice of the cash, non-cash, and leave rewards that employees' value and do not value. For example, an employee with low leave balances may value recognition leave more than the monetary or non-monetary reward.

Agencies are encouraged to leverage resources with other state agencies within a geographic region and to collaborate in the development and delivery of engagement events or to commemorate employees achieving major service milestones.

Key Points to Remember - Elements of Successful Program

A. ***Link behaviors that are to be recognized and awarded to the organizational mission.*** In order for a rewards and recognition program to survive and be cost effective, it should contribute to the accomplishment of the organizational mission. Organizations spend time and money to implement a rewards and recognition program so that it will make a difference in how well the organization performs against its mission—its very reason for existence. Otherwise, if the behaviors rewarded are not linked to the organizational mission, behaviors that are not valuable to the organization could be reinforced, and lead to ineffective programs.

In addition, a successful program that emphasizes the organizational mission should produce a positive effect on the work unit or agency. So, when managers see a direct contribution to their strategic goals it is more likely to sustain their interest in the effective use of rewards and recognition.

Several elements constitute a good program.
- Design the program so employees receive recognition and rewards as soon as possible
- Use a variety of rewards: a mix of monetary, non-monetary, and recognition leave
- Include SPOT and Peer to Peer Recognition
- Provide many opportunities for reinforcement
- Find items that are motivating to a wide range of employees in the organization or provide employees with various choices

B. ***Train all levels of management.*** Some managers are a natural when it comes to the elements of recognition and rewards. Others need to acquire skills related to recognizing employee's contributions and giving effective and timely feedback that result in positive reinforcement. Thus, all managers and supervisors should be trained on:

- Stressing the importance of the program and how it can impact the team's and agency's strategic goals and objectives
- Providing employees an understanding on how they can personally impact the organization's goals
- Discussing the approach for managing and rewarding both individual and team performance
- Explaining how the program works and how employees can receive recognition
- Learning ways to motivate and inspire others
- Learning how to communicate needs, expectations, and goals clearly

Ideally, training should begin as high in the hierarchy as possible and produce results that prompt involvement by executive management. The lack of participation by upper management may not prevent others from achieving significant results, but it may take longer to obtain results and they may be harder to maintain.

C. ***Communicate the program.*** Deciding how to communicate the program depends largely upon the culture of the organization and the various types of media readily available--training, staff meetings, policy and procedures, intranet, email, newsletter, fliers. It is also important, on an *on-going* basis, for managers and supervisors to reconsider the options available to them to recognize various types of employee achievement*.*

Plan a time to meet with employees and review the program's progress and solicit verbal feedback on how the program is working. It is a rare program that works without some changes in the design or process. Use the meeting to find out if employees truly

understand how the program works and whether or not the rewards currently being used are indeed of value to the recipients. Also, a review meeting could serve as an opportunity to discuss means of improvement by identifying supporting behaviors other than those already included in the program.

D. *Evaluate the program's effectiveness*. All programs should be evaluated at least on an annual basis in order to ensure that the program's goals and objectives continue to be effective, are fresh and align with the work unit or agency objectives. You may want to consider surveying employees about the programs and requirements to determine how well the programs are known and received throughout the organization.

Step-by-Step Guidelines

This section provides step-by-step guidelines to assist managers in the development and assessment of recognition programs that are beneficial and meaningful to your employees. These steps are elaborated further in this section and may be followed in the order that works best for your agency's recognition program needs. The steps were obtained from www.incentivemag.com, which provides a wealth of recognition information.

Below is a list of the steps. Good luck!

- **Step One – Target Your Audience**
- **Step Two – Choose the Goal**
- **Step Three – Build a Budget**
- **Step Four – Develop Criteria**
- **Step Five – Choose the Awards**
- **Step Six – Communicate the Program**
- **Step Seven – Present the Award(s)**
- **Step Eight – Evaluate the Program**

STEP ONE   *TARGET YOUR AUDIENCE*

Target your audience! Sometimes when managers and supervisors think about recognition, they may automatically assume that one plan fits all. Although each agency has strategic goals to accomplish, each work unit within the agency has distinct groups of employees who generally require different motivational strategies. First, you need to determine which part of your work unit or agency that needs to be motivated by achieving

goals within the work environment. Each work unit should have a specific audience to target. Also, as the manager, ask yourself:

- What type(s) of work and jobs are in your audience?
- How many employees?
- Who are they?
- What motivates our employees as individuals?
- Do we provide team, individual or both types of recognition?
- How do we keep our employees engaged and focused on our mission, goals and objectives?
- How do you plan to communicate your agency's recognition programs?
- What are our employees recognized for?
- How do our employees receive recognition?

Consider what should be accomplished. Only then can you design an efficient and effective program. Ask your organization "What are our objectives and how do they fit within our agency and with our employees?"

STEP TWO	_CHOOSE THE GOAL_

In looking at the specific audience, also target a specific group of behaviors you want to improve. Is your goal to improve employee morale, reduce turnover, increase teamwork, or all of the above? Consider targeting behaviors that impact your agency's mission and strategic goals. Be certain these behaviors are also measurable, such as an increase in productivity, or a decrease in time necessary to meet strategic goals without impacting quality of services to citizens. Make a list of your expectations for employee recognition efforts.

Focus on the particular challenges and objectives within your work unit or agency. What are the most pressing needs? Focus on the exact requirements of the top one or two. With this information, you should be in a better position to develop the program and set the goals. Determine why the goals have not been met in the past, and if there are any bottlenecks that need to be eliminated to ensure a successful recognition program. Are there any other factors that may hinder the desired outcomes?

Are your current recognition methods sufficient? Determine if you need to redesign your existing program or design a new one. Include supervisors and employees, or use a focus group, in your determination. Identify the types of rewards (monetary, non-monetary and recognition leave) that employees value.

Be specific in your objectives and state them plainly so that employees understand the "line of sight". Focus on one or two goals. More than that may make

the program cumbersome, difficult to understand and unachievable from the employee's perspective.

Is the proposed program directly related to work unit or agency goal? Are the goals difficult or expensive to measure? How do these goals interact with the agency's vision? Will the program be in conflict or affected by any agency or state policies? Below are a variety of recognition and reward programs that you may want to consider for your work unit or agency:

- Safety achievement
- Honoring separating employees/long-term employment
- Exemplary attendance
- Productivity
- Creativity in new and innovative methods and procedures
- Excellent customer service
- Superior performance
- Employees of the week, month, quarter, year
- Positive attitudes
- High levels of skill
- Collaboration of Team Members
- Initiative to get the job done in adverse conditions

Once you have completed this step, carefully craft a statement regarding the purpose of the program that can be clearly understood by employees. Determine a suitable name for the program that is compatible with the work unit and/or agency culture.

STEP THREE   *BUILD A BUDGET*

When developing your budget consider the following items in your estimate:

- The costs of the promotional materials or invitations – Use e-vites!
- The potential number of recipients
- The costs of the awards/gifts
- The presentation type (formal/informal)
- The number of people expected to attend the award presentation
- The costs of food, facilities, decorations, equipment, etc.
- The costs for the presentation ceremony
- The costs related to administration and oversight of the program
- The costs of training managers and supervisors

STEP FOUR   DEVELOP CRITERIA

These are the criteria, usually written, that participants need to meet to succeed in the program. Be sure to include specific and straightforward goals that have some stretch, because it is unlikely that all employees will achieve the goals. Agencies have the option to set program limits on the number of award recipients and may want to consider different levels and types of awards. Consider surprises, such as two people tying for the reward.

Be specific about the timeframe for which the goal must be completed. If your target audience is asked to meet too many benchmarks to attain the recognition, the program may fail before it takes off. Also, keep in mind that you want to create an atmosphere that excites employees so they are having some fun as a participant in the program. Focus on one or two goals and consider how you will measure progress on an on-going basis.

Create a measurement system that is understood by employees, viewed as fair, and quantifiable. You may consider using a focus group and ask for feedback on how specific jobs are measured. You could use measurements such as the number of customers served, safety, or positive customer service comments.

Consider how often progress is reported (daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly). Send reports on a regular basis to keep interest levels high. Avoid competition between workgroups as this provides only short-term results and can negatively impact morale within the organization.

STEP FIVE   CHOOSE THE AWARDS

Based on completion of the budget step, you may determine whether multiple choices are available to the recipient. **Look at a variety of options within a certain price range that provide a good opportunity to meet the individual's interests.** Even a budget with few dollars can still afford a personal thank you for a job well done.

Choosing awards is one of the most important steps in the success of your program. If the reward chosen does not motivate or inspire employees to achieve the stated goal, the program may have less participation and not achieve the level of success expected. By taking into consideration input from the supervisors, employees, and/or the targeted audience, you should be able to determine the rewards that do or do not have meaning. Variety is important because recipients have varying tastes and interests.

There are a wide range of awards that include monetary awards, non-monetary awards, and recognition leave.

Non-monetary items may be purchased through the state contract held by the Division of Purchases and Supply or through other vendors.

STEP SIX	*COMMUNICATE THE PROGRAM*

Program communication is essential from the start up and should be ongoing. Rationale and results of the new program should be clearly communicated. There should be a clear link between what the target audience is rewarded for and the work unit or agency's priorities. Ensure that everyone understands the relationship between his or her improvements and rewards. Ask employees to compare old and new programs. Follow up with employees so they know they're being listened to. Make sure your front line supervisors understand the program and support it.

By involving employees and supervisors in the development of the program, you already are well on your way! Use input from your target audience to develop a catchy theme for your recognition program and use it on your awards, promotional items, letterhead, labels and envelopes. Make sure the message is relevant and in accordance with your agency's image.

Teasers are a great way to pique the interest of your employees. If you can develop an interactive type of teaser, such as a puzzle, it may make the initial promotion more fun. Something in an unusual shape or bright color also catches attention more than a plain flier. Be creative!

Have a kick-off meeting to provide full details about the program, criteria, awards, and target audience. Develop and circulate marketing materials to build momentum and excitement about the agency's recognition program. Tie the reward into the kickoff meeting. For example, if one of the rewards is a plaque or certificate, have one available.

If your agency is scattered throughout the state, be certain to send materials to field offices and help them develop a kick-off meeting for their location.

Use promotional materials often to remind and reenergize employees participating in the program. Fliers, posters, brochures, bulletins, and your Intranet site are some other considerations.

During the program, provide status updates via mail, E-mail or Intranet to the employees. Be certain to keep senior management up-to-date with reports of the program's success or need for fine-tuning.

STEP SEVEN   PRESENT THE AWARD(S)

Generally if something is worth recognizing, it's worth publicizing. **Make sure your presentation matches the significance of the recognition.** You may choose to use formal or informal means of recognition. However, as a manager, you need to consider the additional financial impact of a formal presentation.

Take the opportunity to let employees know what their individual achievements or team accomplishments are and the type of rewards available. This can be accomplished by verbal, written, E-mail or Intranet communication:

- One-on-one with the employee
- In the immediate group or work unit
- In an agency-wide meeting

You can present during potluck lunches (zero cost to agency), low cost (doughnuts, cake, ice cream), moderate cost events (box lunches), and during higher cost events (catered picnic, restaurant dinners). Remember to factor in the range of costs from tips, deliveries, tents, paper supplies, decorations and utensils to rewards and entertainment.

It is important to consider whether the recipient prefers to participate in a public presentation or in a less formal setting. Why wouldn't they want to attend the presentation if it's all about recognition? If they are shy or introverted, they may feel uncomfortable with the attention. By having your program fully developed and clearly communicated, it can be easily conveyed that the presentation is part of the program criteria. Consider carefully the potential impact this may have on those exemplary employees who do not "like a fuss."

Above all, make your presentation to the employee worthy of the reason that you are recognizing the employee!

STEP EIGHT   EVALUATE THE PROGRAM

It's important to measure the success of your recognition program by considering both tangible and intangible results. Ask for feedback from upper management, and your supervisors and employees (participants and non-participants). Distributing an employee assessment survey prior to and during the program initiative also may be worthwhile. Also, reviewing turnover rates and exit interview summary data should provide some indication of success of your program as well.

Consider developing a survey or informal set of questions using the information listed below. After you have completed your evaluation, you can then begin the process of fine-tuning.

Employee Reaction
- Did employees clearly understand the program and its objectives?
- Was the workgroup excited about the program?
- Did employees like the rewards or activities provided?
- What did employee participants and non-participants like/dislike about the program?

How well is the program understood?
- Did the program clearly explain how and why you should recognize others?
- Were the guidelines clear and communicated well?
- Was the nomination and award process understood?
- What were the results, broken down by work unit, region, agency-wide?
- What was everyone's favorite part of the program?

How has behavior changed?
- Are recognition tools being used more often?
- How frequently do you, as a manager, and your supervisors recognize their employees?
- Did we meet our less tangible goals – improving morale, fostering loyalty, and inspiring suggestions?
- Is an appropriate level of recognition given for the behavior?
- How often and to what extent is recognition a part of the work unit or agency's communication vehicles?

Overall
- Did the program meet your expectations?
- How is the new or modified program better than the previous program or activity?
- Are there areas for improvement?
- What would the results have been without the incentive program?
- What did you like/dislike about the program?
- Would you recommend continuing the program next year?
- What percentage of employees participated, and what percentage were non-participants?
- How did the participants' performance measure against the non-participants?
- How many and which participants did or did not succeed and why?
- Were your budget calculations adequate?

IDEAS TO HELP MEET YOUR BUDGET

Surveys and studies over time have shown that employees want to be acknowledged for the work they do! Providing timely recognition for a job well-done costs very little, but may reap the manager big rewards. Think of it this way - if it only took five minutes of our time to produce five days of increased productivity, most of us would jump on the bandwagon. Just a quick thank you to an employee shows that their work is appreciated and recognizes them individually.

Also remember that a blanket "Thank you" – thanks for doing a great job – is too broad for the recipient to attach very much meaning. Tell the employee what you're thanking them for – "You really handled that customer well" – and why – "Our goal is to provide good customer service and sometimes that's not easy with a difficult customer."

If someone in the agency thinks another employee has done something well, have him or her send you an E-mail. Then if you personally forward the message to the recipient, include your "Thank you" note. It's a great way to let employees know that others think they do a great job and that you, as their manager, appreciate them, as well.

What is important to employees is being appreciated for the work they've done, being kept informed about things that affect them, and having a manager who takes the time to listen to them. Taking the time to provide recognition that is unique to that individual is more meaningful and memorable for the employee.

Managers, if you receive recognition yourself, recognize the contributions and support of your staff, as well. This sends a clear message to your employees that "We're a team."

No/Low Cost Recognition Ideas

These ideas are limited only by your own imagination and creativity. Here are a few ideas that are low cost to implement.

- Personal thank you, thank you notes or emails – good deed awards
- Post on 'recognition board,' bulletin board, newsletters, web site
- Hall of Fame – pictures of your employees
- Submit article to Intranet for agency viewing
- Submit article to local/regional/national newspaper regarding employee's achievement
- Ask a senior manager to attend your staff meeting when you recognize employees for their achievements or invite your Cabinet Secretary for Agency-wide recognition events
- Schedule a "Humor Week" and designate staff members to share a corny (but clean) joke or funny story with the rest of the staff. Vote on the best and provide a silly trophy, goofy sunglasses or huge clown tie. Pose for photos.
- Recognition lunch
- Informal party – coffee/Danish or cookies/drinks or ice cream

- Gift certificate to restaurant
- Traveling trophy (and how about a photo of the manager congratulating the award recipients)
- Certificate or plaque
- Mugs, pens, tee shirts, etc. with team or agency logo
- Inexpensive gift related to employee's hobby
- Flowers
- Certificate for CD's or Books
- Movie Tickets
- Inclusion in special project
- Alternate work schedules
- Opportunity for cross-training
- Recognize outstanding skill or expertise by allowing employee to mentor another
- Rotate the responsibility for being the unit representative at meetings
- Include employee in goal setting and work planning
- Having employee attend ceremony or opening upon the completion of a special project

Moderate/Higher Cost Recognition Ideas

If you are in the fortunate position of having funding to spend on recognition and rewards, only your available budget and creativity limits this category! These suggestions tend to be more expensive and in some situations more time consuming.
Be imaginative when thinking about developing rewards that your employees will value and appreciate!

- Gift Certificates
- Trophy
- Clocks
- Cash bonuses
- Recognition Leave
- Jewelry
- Enrollment in seminar or additional training
- Catered lunch
- Annual Picnic
- An excursion for the department – night out for dinner, bowling, sports event, etc.

APPENDIX A

RESOURCES

Appendix A provides a compilation of research on recognition and rewards to aid you in your search for information on recognition programs (web sites, books, articles and sample programs). Your research can be enhanced by the wealth of information available at your fingertips by accessing the Internet.

National Association for Employee Recognition	*https://www.recognition.org/default.aspx#*
Incentive Magazine	*http://www.incentivemag.com/*
Nelson Motivation, Inc.	*http://www.drbobnelson.com/*
International Personnel Management Association	*https://www.ipma-hr.org/HRPolicies*
Society for HR Management	*https://www.shrm.org/*
World at Work	*https://www.worldatwork.org/*
USDA Employee Awards & Recognition Program	*https://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/DR4040-451-1.htm*