

A Guide to Developing a Successful Employee Recognition Program

All employees like to be recognized and appreciated for the work they do for their employer. Employee recognition programs provide an opportunity to recognize and thank staff and faculty for their contributions, dedication, and commitment to the ISU community.

Each year the University recognizes employees through The Employee Recognition Reception to recognize the contributions of employees who achieved a length of service milestone during the calendar year. The reception provides an opportunity to recognize employees for their valuable contributions to ISU and congratulate them on reaching a length of service milestone.

The University Medallion was established in 1997 to recognize Indiana State University staff displaying a history of loyalty, dependability, and service to the University and the Terre Haute Community. The University Medallion is the highest honor that can be conferred on an employee by the University. ISU staff nominate individuals they feel have shown exceptional spirit throughout their years of service to ISU, distinguished achievement in their career, and involvement in the community.

The ExtraMile Award certificate can be given by any individual, full-time, regular employee, department, committee, or unit. The nomination form for this award can be found on the Office of Human Resources web page. The award is given to an individual or aforementioned organizational unit to show appreciation for exhibiting the ExtraMile attitude, for catching them doing something right, or for outstanding performance. Supervisors are encouraged to give this award to their employees.

However, recognition is most effective when it takes place on a regular basis and in a variety of different ways. It is also important that recognition activities be aligned with the culture of your division and/or department. An employee recognition program provides managers and supervisors different opportunities for acknowledging staff members, peers, and colleagues.

It is essential that every manager and supervisor be aware of their responsibility to provide effective feedback and positive reinforcement to their employees. To cultivate a successful recognition program, all managers and supervisors should:

- Learn ways to motivate and inspire others;
- Learn how to communicate needs, expectations, and goals clearly;
- Explain how the program works and how employees can receive recognition; and
- Provide employees with an understanding of how they impact the organization's goals, mission and success.

There are numerous reasons for recognizing employees:

- Exemplifying the University's values
- Identifying a process improvement

- Identifying areas of monetary savings
- Exceptional customer service
- Creativity in new and innovative methods and procedures
- Performance or service above normal duties
- Improving safety in the workplace
- Positive attitudes
- Team players
- Initiating productivity enhancements
- Contributing to a one-time, outstanding effort, which benefited the department or the College
- Initiative to get the job done

Informal recognition can be used every day to acknowledge contributions of individuals, teams and work groups. As with all recognition, it should be tied to a specific behavior or activity that you want to reinforce. What does your division/department value? The types of contributions that might be recognized are:

- staying late to help someone prepare a presentation for the next day
- volunteering to cover for a co-worker who is out sick
- going out of your way to help boost morale or create a positive, inclusive work environment
- exceeding expectations for a goal or milestone in a long-term collaborative project

Employee recognition tools and templates are provided for supervisors, managers, and peers to use to recognize and reward employees and teams. You can find these in the Employee Recognition section of the Office of Human Resources web page.

Formal recognition supports the objectives and strategic goals of individual department or division. Check with your department's administrator to learn if your department already has a recognition program or use the "Seven Steps to Developing a Successful Employee Recognition Program" to start one. What is this?

Why is Employee Recognition Important?

Employee recognition programs offer benefits not only for the employees, but for the University as well, including:

- Increased employee morale
- Increased productivity
- Increased positive employee commitment and loyalty
- Decreased turnover and increased retention of mid to high performers

Goals and Objectives of an Employee Recognition Program

- Recognize and promote positive behaviors that support individual, groups, divisions and departments in achieving the University's mission, vision, and values.
- Assist in creating a culture of mutual respect, reward, and recognition for employees at all levels.
- Provide timely recognition to employees in a non-monetary award based on the significance of the contribution.
- Improve employee productivity and quality of work

Seven Steps to Developing a Successful Employee Recognition Program

The Employee Recognition Program Guidelines are provided to assist Indiana State University departments and/or divisions with the development and implementation of recognition program(s). These guidelines are provided as a tool to support departments with their recognition efforts and do not imply that each department must have a recognition program. Additional recognition resources are provided on the Office of Human Resources website for all departments to use in their recognition plans.

A department's recognition program may include recognition for employees, supervisors and student workers; as well as, formal and informal recognition methods or both. A recognition program should strive to be aligned with a department's mission and/or core values to help create a positive work environment for employees, increase employee performance, engage employees, and improve employee morale. The steps outlined below will guide departments through the process of developing a recognition program.

Step 1: Establish an Employee Recognition Committee

An employee recognition committee's role is to identify, develop, and implement a recognition program for their department. When establishing an employee recognition committee, you will need to determine who will serve on the committee. The committee should consist of employees, management or both. Representation from each group is important to the overall success of the recognition program. Having employees and management serve on the recognition committee, ensures that each groups interests, ideas or preferences are included in the recognition program. Furthermore, if there are many units within a department, obtain equal representation from each unit to ensure all units share input into the recognition program.

Next, you will need to identify how committee members are selected to serve on the committee. Committee members may be identified by having employees volunteer to serve on the committee, elected by the employees in the department or appointed by management.

After the committee members are selected, the committee will need to elect a chair or co-chairs to oversee the development and implementation of the recognition program.

Finally, the committee will need to determine the length of service terms for serving on the committee. The length of service terms can range from one-year or as needed. Some committee members may have to serve a longer term, to ensure the training of new members and the continuation of the committee without interruption.

In the next step, the employee recognition committee will identify recognition program objectives for their department.

Step 2: Identify Recognition Program Objectives

The employee recognition committee will need to identify recognition program objectives for their department to provide opportunities for the employee to be recognized and rewarded. There are many factors to consider when identifying these objectives for your department. Here are some important factors to consider in this process:

- The recognition program should meet the needs of the employees in the department or complement the kind(s) of job behaviors and performance the department wants to recognize and reward.
- The program should be linked to the mission statement or core values of the department, division or the university.
- The program should be fair and flexible to the employees in the department.
- The recognition program should comply with university rules and regulations related to awards.

To assist with this process, gather input from the employees in the department. This can be accomplished by developing an employee survey to identify work behaviors and job performances to recognize and reward, identify employee eligibility criteria and award criteria, and gather informal, formal, and other recognition ideas such as retirement, birthdays, years of service, etc.

After the recognition program objectives are identified, the committee may determine that informal recognition programs are better suited for their department. Please visit the Office of Human Resources website for recognition ideas and certification/card templates.

Finally, whether the committee decides that formal or informal recognition program objectives best serve their department, be sure to follow the SMART philosophy of Jim Brintnall, author of "What Makes a Good Reward?". Jim states that rewards should be:

Sincere - above all else, a good reward should reflect a genuine expression of appreciation. Token acknowledgements leave something to be desired.

Meaningful - to endure a motivating influence, rewards should be aligned with the values, goals, and priorities that matter the most.

Adaptable - the diverse workplace demands alternatives. Consider creative options to keep your program fresh. No single reward format works for everyone all the time.

Relevant - some personal dimension is essential to a good reward. No matter how formal or informal, expensive or affordable, the relevance of any recognition will be improved with a personal touch - it's a little thing that makes a big difference.

Timely - it is important that rewards respond to the behavior they are intending to reinforce. Don't let too much time pass or the reward may be devalued and credibility eroded.

The remaining steps will focus on the recognition committee setting-up a formal award program for their department.

Step 3: Identify Award Selection Criteria

The recognition committee will need to identify selection criteria. The selection criteria may be linked to a department's mission or core values or positive behaviors. To help with this process, create an employee survey to find out what qualities or attributes the employees value and think an employee should exhibit to be nominated and receive an award. Also, seek input from management on the types of behaviors they want to be recognized. Here are some examples of selection criteria:

Teamwork
Going the Extra Mile
Customer Service
Professional Development
Award for Excellence
Creativity and Innovation
Performance Excellence
Leadership
Commitment
Flexibility
Innovative

Once you've established the purpose and criteria for the award make sure everyone on staff knows the purpose and the criteria. Communication greatly increases and 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 4: Identify Award Eligibility Criteria, Award Frequency and Award Selections

The committee will need to identify funding, determining award eligibility, award frequency and award selection processes. The committee will need to determine who is eligible to participate and/or be nominated for an award. They will also need to make sure that the award eligibility criteria complement the work environment of the department. Components of award eligibility criteria to consider are:

- Employee status: are temporary workers, part-time employees, or student workers eligible to be nominated?
- Length of service: is there a minimum length of service an employee must have with the department or University?
- Can an employee win the same award more than once in year?
- Are recognition committee members eligible to participate or be nominated?

After award eligibility criteria are identified, the frequency of awards will need to be determined. There are some factors to consider when determining the frequency of awards for a department such as:

- Are department funds available to cover the cost of multiple awards?
- Are there too few employees in the department to participate in the program?
- Are there other recognition programs in the department?
- Will awarding many employees devalue the award itself?

After you have identified the frequency of awards, you will need to determine the types of awards. The awards selected for a recognition program should be meaningful and relevant to the award recipient(s). The following are examples of awards:

Cards
Flowers
Award plaque
Lapel pin
Tickets
Framed certificates

The recognition committee should involve the employees in this process by determine the types of awards the employees want. Please note the cost of the awards should be within the department's budget and in compliance with Indiana State University Rules and Regulations.

Step 5: Award Nomination and Selection Process

The recognition committee will be responsible for carrying out the nomination and selection processes of a formal award program. The committee should determine the following factors about the nomination process:

- Is the nomination process confidential? Should nominators be known or remain anonymous.
- Which employees are eligible to submit a nomination?
- What employee information should be provided on the nomination?
- How should the nominations be submitted? (email, electronic submissions, etc)

The committee will need to determine the following items for the selection process:

- Defining rating procedures and processes
- Determine who will review and score the nominations
- Determine the length of membership for the selection committee
- Determine who will make the final decision on the winning nominations
- Determine if past recipients should serve on the selection committee
- Determine if selection subcommittee is eligible for nomination

Step 6: Market Award Program

The recognition committee is responsible for providing public announcements to their department regarding the award program. Public announcements should be made prior to the award program to announce the award program, after the award program and immediately following the recognition of the award recipients to recognize the employees. Here are some examples of how to market your department's award program:

- Email to department employees
- Department newsletter
- Department website
- Department bulletin boards
- Department meetings

Step 7: Finalize and Monitor Award Program

After the recognition committee has finalized the award program, the committee will need to confirm approval of the award program with the employees and management in their department.

Last, the committee will need to monitor the award program in its first year to determine its effectiveness and employee satisfaction with the award program. The following are factors to consider overtime to determine if changes need to be made to your department's award program:

- department reorganization
- department size
- changes to award program budget
- overall employee satisfaction of program

The seven steps provided in the text above outline guidelines for establishing a recognition program. Remember, recognition programs may consist of formal recognition, informal recognition or both. Please visit the Office of Human Resources website for recognition resources such as ideas, certificate/ card templates.

Adapted from the University of Washington, Texas A&M University, and the University of Michigan

Updated 7.25.11