

Suggested Statewide Employee Recognition Program Handbook

August 2017
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The interdepartmental Retention and Recognition Work Group convened to develop resources for state departments to build and sustain employee recognition programs. The Work Group developed resources are housed in the CalHR Employee Recognition Toolkit. The Work Group was comprised of co-chairs Lisa Ingoglia (SCIF) and Nicole Shields (CA Health & Human Services Agency/CalOHII), as well as Sara Sepulveda (DMV), Gina Winston (HSR), Keith Mentzer (CalHR), and Jonathan Calabretta (CalHR). May this document serve as a foundation for your employee recognition program!

Revised 8/22/2017

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What is Employee Recognition?

According to the WorldatWork nonprofit human resources association, “recognition” is defined as “a spontaneous gesture of thanks or a structured or planned program of recognition implemented to acknowledge employees and achieve desired performance.”¹

Recognition is important, as discussed in the same report, because research finds “that organizations with a strategic and/or embedded culture of recognition indicate that their employees have higher engagement, motivation and satisfaction. Additionally, organizations leveraging results driven recognition programs, in particular, may be experiencing greater overall success.”

Why have an Employee Recognition Program?

An Employee Recognition Program speaks to our agency and department’s interest in communicating the value of your employees as it correlates to your mission, vision, values, and strategic plan. It is a retention tool to retain your quality employees, it is a recruitment tool in support of additional benefits unique to your department, and it is a workforce planning tool to highlight your employees’ successes in ways that are not bound strictly by promotions.

How does it align with our Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategic Plan?

[Customize this portion of the handbook with content from your Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategic Plan. Examples provided.]

EXAMPLE 1:

The Employee Recognition Program most closely aligns with DEPARTMENT’s Core Value of Excellence/Quality: *We have a passion for quality and strive for continuous improvement of our programs, services and processes through employee empowerment and professional development.*

The Employee Recognition Program also supports the Strategic Plan goal of “Organizational Excellence.”

Goal: Organizational Excellence

We must constantly seek to evaluate and update internal processes to maximize our ability to be responsive to the needs of customers. The design of our organization and framework of program procedures needs to be efficient in a way that aligns our limited resources to those operational needs that best support the department’s mission. Efforts to achieve organizational excellence, including prioritizing the work and monitoring progress, will be built on a foundation of effective ongoing strategic and tactical business planning processes. To address this goal, DEPARTMENT will pursue the following strategic objectives:

¹ “Trends in Employee Recognition,” A report by WorldatWork, published May 2015.
<https://www.worldatwork.org/adimLink?id=78679>

- Evaluate and update internal policies and procedures.
- Reengineer and innovate processes.
- Create an enterprise business plan.

Implementation of Organizational Excellence

The Employee Recognition Program supports the development of an internal process for formally and informally celebrating employee achievements.

Employee Recognition Program Governance Structure

The structure of your program should take into account the size of your department, needs, existing structures, leadership preferences and direction, and consistency with other department wide efforts. One structure that may be useful for departments starting or revitalizing a program is the formation of an Employee Recognition Committee. This encourages participation by people in many levels and areas of the department, which is important for acceptance and adoption of the program. Other departments have recognition programs directed by a single individual, or a unit with guidance from department leadership. There is no one right way to form a program, or place in the organization for it to exist.

EXAMPLE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE:

Employee Recognition Committee

- **Purpose:** To support employee recognition efforts within **DEPARTMENT**.
 - Utilize internal portal to distribute resources and information. Work to collect data on usage at the division and individual level to support annual assessment of program's successes.
- **Membership:** 5 Members [***Size should reflect a plurality of divisions' representation.***]
 - Committee Chair – Personnel Office staff
 - Remaining members should represent various divisions. At least one member should be an executive-level sponsor.
- **Committee Meetings:** [***The committee could meet monthly, or as appropriate for your department.***]
 - The Committee serves to promote the employee recognition program, develop additional program components as needed, solicit nominations/evaluate nominations for awards, and track use of the program. Utilize the statewide Merit Award Program² for formal award programs.
- **Event calendar:** [***Adapt according to your department's needs.***]
 - Spring All-Staff meeting – celebrate education and professional development.
 - Summer All-Staff Meeting – celebrate fiscal responsibility and superior accomplishment.
 - Winter All-Staff Meeting – celebrate years of service and commitment to excellence.
 - Annual Training – host annual supervisory training to review the components of the Employee Recognition Program, and supervisors' roles in supporting its success.
- **Awareness of Employee Recognition Program**
 - Utilize posters, printable certificates, printable thank you notes, etc. to brand and promote the Employee Recognition Program.
 - Survey employees annually to gauge awareness, successes, failures, and general feedback of the Employee Recognition Program.

² CalHR's Statewide Merit Award Program resources may be found at: <http://www.calhr.ca.gov/employees/Pages/map-merit-award-program.aspx>.

Recognition that can be funded by the department is identified with the corresponding authority, otherwise costs would be incurred by the person giving the recognition. All suggested events are optional, and may be adjusted to reflect the culture desired by your department, to some extent.

Formal Recognition

Following is information about the statewide formal recognition awards of Superior Accomplishment, Sustained Superior Accomplishment, 25-Years of Service, and Retirement Awards. Additionally, there are examples from various departments about ways to customize these awards to create award and recognition programs that are meaningful for your department.

A “formal” recognition program is one that is publicized to the whole department, and is coordinated by your committee or other overseeing agent. It is structured to occur as a regular occasion, possibly with formal submission guidelines.

Department-wide Recognition Recommendations

1. Superior Accomplishment and Sustained Superior Accomplishment Awards³

Promote the use and nomination of employees by supervisors for superior and sustained superior accomplishment awards. These awards are a component of the statewide Merit Award Program, administered by CalHR.

Sample timeline:

- August through May – open nominations by all supervisors of their employees.
- May – Director reviews nominations, decides on awards.
- Summer – All-staff meeting is held, awardees are recognized.
- Criteria for awards:
 - Employee or employees act in a manner that exemplifies the Vision, Mission, and/or Strategic Goals of the department.
 - Employee or employees are given a definable task or project, with a clear deadline, and the employee or employees accomplish that task or project in advance of the deadline.
 - Utilize the [STD. 278](#) for nominating potential awardees.

2. Years of Service

A near universal component of recognition programs is to celebrate employees’ commitment to state service through recognition of service milestones. Some employees may opt for a discrete celebration, supervisor-to-employee, but they may still be acknowledged by announcement at an all-staff meeting.

³ Authority to pay for awards is found in CA Government Code Section 19823.

- Pull SCO employee tenure reports for five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, and thirty plus years of state service.
- Provide a certificate of accomplishment for each five year increment of state service.
- Provide a suitable memento for twenty-five years of service, utilizing the statewide Merit Award Program's established procedures.
 - Have the Division Chief, or a delegate, speak on behalf of the employee's service to DEPARTMENT. The goal is a story that connects the individual to the department.
- Provide a suitable memento for retirement after twenty-five years of service, utilizing the statewide Merit Award Program's established procedures.
 - Encourage any employee who would like to share a story about the retiring employee to submit their request to do so at the all-staff meeting honoring retirees.
- Email each employee on their DEPARTMENT anniversary thanking them for their year(s) of service to the department. Email should originate from the executive level, and include the number of years served by the employee at the department.
- Employees that are retiring without twenty-five years of service may also be honored at an all-staff meeting.
- Employees that are new to the department should be acknowledged at each all-staff meeting, as well.

3. *Streamlined Division/Program Award*

In an effort to promote fiscal responsibility, at the end of each fiscal year, Division Chiefs nominate to the Executive Office any individual, group, or division who successfully streamlined costs during the fiscal year, or over the past two fiscal years.

- Utilize the Superior Accomplishment and/or Sustained Superior Accomplishment Awards Program, a component of the statewide Merit Award Program, to provide a financial award for their successful efforts.⁴
- Executives and Division Chiefs may nominate themselves or each other for this award. Executive Office may also nominate individuals, groups, or divisions.
- Criteria for awards:
 - The cost reduction must be documentable, and the Director must decide if it meets a suitable threshold to receive the award.
 - Utilize the [STD. 278](#) for nominating potential awardees.

⁴ See authority noted in footnote 3.

4. *Annual Employee Appreciation Meal*

Modeled after an event celebrated by the Department of Motor Vehicles, in conjunction with the celebratory events' committee, work to support a meal sponsored by supervisors to demonstrate all-staff appreciation.

- Fall/Winter – encourage a supervisor-funded pre-all staff meeting breakfast, or another annual meal opportunity. A Thanksgiving department-wide potluck is another option.

5. *Fun Awards*

Modeled after an event celebrated by the Department of General Services, the Fun Awards are meant to bring joviality to the DEPARTMENT and celebrate employees in ways that are not tied to enterprise functions. Ensure an employee may opt-out from the nomination process.

Sample timeline:

- May – Survey employee input for what awards should be included.
 - i.e. – “Cleanest Desk,” “Best Dressed,” etc.
- June –July – Distribute categories and criteria for “fun awards.”
- August – Call for nominations of “fun awards.”
- Fall Picnic – Distribute fun awards.

6. *Lapel Pins*

Encourages pride in service to DEPARTMENT, and professionalism when representing the DEPARTMENT.⁵

- Lapel pins are given at all-staff meetings as a standard component of all formal recognition presentations.
 - An employee only receives a lapel pin at their first formal recognition. The “Fun Awards” are generally excluded from this.

7. *Recognition Displays*

Provide a space that is dedicated to appreciation of employee's work. Perhaps the Executive office or hallways; with photos, or certificates, or plaques that highlight staff achievements.

- For instance, CalPERS has photographs of past recipients of their Superior Accomplishment and Sustained Superior Accomplishment awards lining the hallway beyond their foyer.
- Update quarterly with most recent all-staff employee recognition event results.

Utilize the “Examples for Planning Purposes” section for help planning your events, including annual award ceremonies, and events like celebrating employee diversity and veterans.

⁵ Authority to purchase pins is found in California Code of Regulations Section 599.655.

Informal Recognition

Below are informal recognition strategies organized by who would offer the recognition. Informal recognition should be timely, occur in a smaller scope, and does not require oversight from a committee. Supervisors and managers should receive training in utilizing your adopted informal recognition strategies.

Department, Division, or Section-level Recognition Recommendations

[These recognition strategies are at a level above the individual unit. Adopt ideas to the level of implementation based on factors such as physical locations, reporting structure, work coverage needs, and/or number of employees.]

1. *Birthday Celebrations*

At monthly meetings, encourage snacks to be brought in to celebrate all birthdays that occur within the month.

2. *Public Service Recognition Week⁶*

Small daily events coordinated within divisions to celebrate nationwide employee recognition week event.

- Held annually for one week in May.
- Utilize national program resource for ideas to support division activities.

3. *Retirement Celebrations*

Encourage division members to coordinate farewell snacks and/or meals for their retiring peers. Ask the retiring person's permission in advance.

Supervisory-to-Employee Recognition Recommendations

1. *Maximizing the One-on-One, "Coaching for Commitment"*

Hold at least monthly one-on-one meetings with staff members; be consistent with the meeting. Discuss how the employee likes to be recognized; do they prefer one-on-one, small group, large group, or department-wide?

Dialogue with the employee on where they are with projects, and seek general feedback on how the supervisor is supporting staff. Listen for success in projects/accomplishments, sincerely compliment the success and be varied in affirmations. Listen for supervisor feedback without being defensive.

⁶ <http://publicservicerecognitionweek.org/>

2. *Cup of Excellence*

Modeled after the Department of Human Resources, an employee is given the Cup of Excellence at a team or division meeting for demonstrating excellence. The recipient then chooses the next recipient of the award, with “excellence” defined by the person giving the award. Awardees have their picture posted within their division.

3. *Official Personnel File Letter of Commendation*

Modeled after the Department of Motor Vehicles, a form letter is made available on your department’s intranet that any supervisory may complete and file in the Official Personnel File of the recipient. (An example is provided at the end of this handbook.)

4. *Recipient of the Most Thank You Notes*

Celebrate with a visual token of esteem for employees who have received the most thank you notes in a month or calendar year.

5. *Recognition & Appreciation Display (R.A.D.)*

An internally developed recognition program from the Selections Division at CalHR, employees who receive affirmation or compliments from the public or peers forward their email to their supervisor, who posts the compliment, the recipient’s name, and a general description of who provided the compliment on a board visible to the division.

- For instance, “Jose did an excellent job helping me resolve my inquiry about my vision benefits. – HR Personnel Officer from CDCR”

6. *Thank You Notes*– formal and informal

The employee recognition program develops and maintains certificates, form letters of appreciation, and other “thank you” options for supervisor-to-employee appreciation.

- Post form letters to intranet so employees may print and post to bulletin boards, in newsletters, or any real or virtual space that employees use to seek and receive information.
 - Create one that celebrates each aspect of the Mission/Vision/Values, and another that acknowledges general hard work. A generic “thank you” card is also very helpful.

Employee-to-Employee Recognition Recommendations

1. Thank You Note

Utilize templates discussed in the “Thank You Notes” section. Encourage employees to share the reason for the thank you note at the following staff meeting.

2. Gratitude Board

Each department has a space for notes of gratitude to be posted, either anonymously or signed by a peer, to publicly share peer-to-peer support of hard work.

Other Informal Forms of Appreciation

Be mindful of your personal budget – appreciation does not have to cost a lot to be effective. Here are additional ideas you can utilize to further grow your own culture of recognition.

- Host an end-of-year/start-of-year celebration.
- Celebrate your agency or department “birthday.”
- Celebrate Administrative Assistant’s Day, Staff Appreciation Day, and/or Boss’ Day.
- Pumpkin carving contest around Halloween.
- Decorate cubicle for a new employee’s first day, or an employee’s birthday or special event.
- Host events in each division for Bring Your Child To Work Day.
- Give open praise at staff, branch, and division meetings.
- Make a traveling “Thank You” card, where the recipient signs it and passes it on to another deserving colleague.
- Have the Deputy Director call or visit the employee to thank him or her for a job well done.
- Nominate employees for any of the department’s award programs.
- Place an article explaining their success on the intranet, or newsletter.
- Have treats in the name of the individual – “For all you do, this treat is for you”.
- Project Launch/Landing - Celebrate the beginning or ending of a project by ordering doughnuts or pizza for the group or team.
- Hold luncheon, potluck, or breakfast in recognition of staff accomplishments.
- Create personalized cakes and cookies.
- Place a banner in the person’s office or work area for milestones.
- Present flowers or a bouquet to the individual.
- Have each employee share their successes/achievements (large and small) with their peers during scheduled staff meetings.
- Host cultural celebrations.
- Hold a staff picnic day.

Examples for Planning Purposes

Annual (monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, etc.) Awards Ceremony

Purpose: An overview of planning a formal awards ceremony.

- Nomination Form
 - Tie criteria for nomination to Department Mission, Core Values, and Vision
 - Nomination form should allow nominator to concisely explain nominee's success
- Timeline
 - Set an annual deadline – for instance July 1 to August 2
 - Post nomination form on intranet for submission ([Superior Accomplishment](#) offers additional information)
 - Review period – for instance, end of August
 - Have Personnel Office review nominees for potential conflicts
 - Have a group of reviewers that include front line employees, supervisors, and upper management
 - Pre-award ceremony planning
 - Secure forms, correct spelling of awardee names, develop a script for emcees, and secure a location
 - A program with award criteria descriptions and the names of awardees is an appropriate addition to the event
 - Choose to notify awardees in advance or not, though bringing their family to the event is often meaningful
- Event
 - Department Director or surrogate emcees event; nominator or nominee's supervisor describes why nominated
 - Work with your communications team to do photographs, filming, and related props, décor, etc.
 - Provide a certificate and/or suitable memento and/or monetary award for awardees
 - Post awardees and their successes to intranet, social media, etc.
 - Perhaps have a theme – for instance, Air Resources Board had an Olympics theme, and had all awardees submit sports-themed photographs of themselves. These photographs were scrolled through as a start to the ceremony.

Celebrating Employee Diversity

Purpose: Create an atmosphere to celebrate the value of your diverse workforce.

- Invite employees with ties to local cultural entities to share their contacts with an identified point person
 - An email to all-staff that invites sharing of contacts allows for individuals to share by choice, as opposed to asking individual employees to share
- Work with local cultural entities to provide programming to educate employees about their culture
 - For instance, reach out to local Native American groups, and inquire if they would be interested in doing an educational program for staff
 - Anything from an educational presentation to a traditional performance would be appropriate. Offer space and promote the event to all staff
- Work with your Disability Advisory Committee to bring speakers, films, and other educational opportunities to your department to educate employees about different disabilities
- Always loop in the Personnel, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Labor Relations Offices in your planning

Veteran's Day Celebration

Purpose: to celebrate employees who are veterans, and family members of veterans.

- Develop an appreciation card (or other memento) and have the Department Director hand sign each.
- Host a ceremony/appreciation event with light refreshments
 - Invite department peers to attend ceremony via department wide email
 - Decorate space accordingly – streamers, balloons, etc.
 - Invite a performer to do “Taps” and/or National Anthem, America the Beautiful
 - Invite CalVet or nearby military organizations to speak, share a proclamation, invite their honor guard, etc.
- Invite department veterans to share their experiences
 - Invite veterans, employees with veteran family members to share images honoring the veterans, such as the service member in uniform
 - Create a slide deck of pictures, set to music, and share at all locations, or post pictures to a bulletin board, or publish in a department newsletter.
- Post images/article to social media, intranet, and a follow up department-wide email
- Hang event related posters to promote event – reach out to CalVet for templates

References

CalHR Employee Recognition Toolkit

- <http://www.calhr.ca.gov/state-hr-professionals/Pages/employee-recognition-toolkit.aspx>
- Webinars, videos, department peer contacts

Recognition Strategies for Supervisors

- [Recognition Strategies for Supervisors \(PDF\)](#) | [Recognition Strategies for Supervisors - Text Only \(RTF\)](#)
- Distribute to all supervisors regularly, possibly annually

Department of Rehabilitation Accessibility Guides

- <http://www.dor.ca.gov/DisabilityAccessInfo/How-do-I-Construct-Accessible-Documents.html>
- Resources to create accessible documents

Annual Diversity Celebrations

- <http://www.diversitybestpractices.com/2017-diversity-holidays>
- A reasonable place to start to plan days and months to celebrate aspects of employee identities

EXAMPLE Official Personnel File Letter of Commendation:

<Date>

Dear <Employee Name>:

On behalf of the DEPARTMENT NAME, I would like to congratulate you for a job well done! The efforts noted below demonstrate your commitment to DEPARTMENT'S success.

Recognition for: *<Add text to describe the achievement/accomplishment or outstanding performance. Include an overview of the effort, project, or service, applicable dates and timeframes, where the event took place, etc.>*

Impact: *<Describe how the employee's performance directly impacted a customer(s) or benefitted the department. Include cost and time savings, and department Core Values, Goals, and performance objectives supported by the event.>*

Your hard work and dedication results in the DEPARTMENT NAME further realizing its Vision Statement, "VISION STATEMENT."

Your outstanding efforts are valued by the management team. A copy of this letter of commendation will remain in your official personnel file to serve as evidence of your exemplary performance and contribution to the department.

Sincerely,

<Manager's Name, Title>

<Unit or Division>

cc: <Deputy Director, Branch Chief>

Employee's Official Personnel File