

**innovative
ideas
improve**



Employee Suggestion Program

Coordinator's Manual

2nd Edition, August 2000 – updated July 2007

(1st Edition, April 1990 is OBSOLETE and is replaced by this edition.)

This Manual is also available online at [HTTP://SUGGEST.WI.GOV](http://SUGGEST.WI.GOV)

State of Wisconsin

Employee Suggestion Board

c/o Office of State Employment Relations

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Madison, Wisconsin 53703

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Manual*

Wisconsin
Employee
Suggestion
Program

*2nd Edition
(Aug 2000)
updated April 2004 &
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INTRODUCTION

The Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program is a vehicle for state and university employees to be recognized and rewarded for their ideas to improve the workplace.

Who is eligible to submit suggestions? Any employee of the State of Wisconsin or University of Wisconsin -- full-time or part-time, permanent or temporary, classified or unclassified.

Employees often have ideas to make work better. The Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program is one way for employees to submit an idea -- and get recognized and rewarded.

Suggestions can be related to the employee's job and all ideas are welcome. Ideas might improve customer service, or be a more efficient way of doing something. Suggestions can be an enhancement to equipment, or they may save money for the State. An idea can be submitted by an individual employee...or members of a work team can collaborate and submit a group suggestion.

The Suggestion Form is at the Web site (<http://suggest.wi.gov>) and a blank form is in Section 3 of this manual. The Suggestion Form can be filled out on-screen at the Web site, then printed & routed to the agency/campus coordinator who will arrange to have the suggestion evaluated.

Evaluators & Agency/Campus Coordinators use the Evaluation/Summary Form (also available at the Web site <http://suggest.wi.gov>; a blank form is in Section 3 of this manual). This form is used for reviewing an employee suggestion for feasibility & possible implementation, and when recommending that the State Board recognize the employee with an award.

The Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program is administered at the state level by the Employee Suggestion Board, staffed by the Office of State Employment Relations, and operates under the provisions of Wisconsin Statutes, section 230.48 (see "Board" section of this manual).

The Employee Suggestion Program was established in 1954 and in the history of the program, it's estimated that state employees have saved the state at least \$10 million.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To stimulate suggestions by employees to improve the quality, increase the efficiency, and reduce costs of state government.
- ◆ To recognize and reward employees for their ideas.
- ◆ To open up new channels of communication between management and employees, and between agencies when suggested ideas may have statewide impact.
- ◆ To increase job interest and improve morale by assuring employees that their good ideas will be studied and implemented if possible.

PROCESS

1. Employee completes the Suggestion Form (SESP-14), attaches any supporting materials, and sends to his or her Agency/Campus Coordinator who acknowledges receipt and arranges to have the idea reviewed as quickly as possible.
2. The Agency/Campus Coordinator completes the top sections on the Evaluation/Summary Form (SESP-15) and sends it with the Suggestion to an Evaluator -- a person who has knowledge or expertise on the subject of the suggestion. (See Form in Section 3 of this manual or at the Web site <http://suggest.wi.gov>)
3. The Evaluator reviews the suggestion for feasibility, completes relevant sections of the Evaluation/Summary Form (SESP-15), and returns to the Agency/Campus Coordinator in a timely fashion (usually within 1 or 2 weeks). (See Form in Section 3 of this manual or at the Web site <http://suggest.wi.gov>)
4. If the Suggestion documents annual savings more than \$25,000 the Agency/Campus Coordinator must obtain review and sign-off by the agency Budget Office as soon as possible.
5. The Agency/Campus Suggestion Committee meets and reviews the suggestion (and evaluation), and decides whether to forward it to the State Board with a recommendation for appropriate recognition/award. The employee is updated about the status of his or her suggestion.
6. If the Suggestion has not been implemented, and the evaluation process confirms that it can be done, the Agency/Campus is responsible for implementing the suggestion. Once it's in effect, then the agency submits the Suggestion to the Employee Suggestion Board with its recommendation and keeps the employee notified of the status.
7. Agency/Campus Coordinator completes the summary section of the Evaluation/Summary form (SESP-15), makes four copies of the suggestion packet including Evaluation/Summary, Suggestion, and any supporting materials, and sends to the State Board in care of the Statewide Program Coordinator at the Office of State Employment Relations, notifying the employee that this has taken place.
8. The Board reviews the suggestion at its next meeting and decides on an award. How do they do that and what kinds of awards do they give? See Section 6 in this manual for Award Criteria. The Statewide Coordinator acknowledges to the employee that the suggestion has been received by the Board.

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PROCESS, continued

9. After the Board's decision, the Statewide Coordinator prepares meeting summaries, certificates, checks, and letters, then sends to Agency/Campus Coordinator. The Statewide Coordinator notifies the employee of the Board's decision.
10. Agency/Campus Coordinator makes arrangements for presentation of awards to employee and prepares article for agency newsletter. (In addition to recognition by the State Board, agencies may choose to further recognize employees as they see fit.)

NOTE: The maximum timeframe for this entire process -- from the employee's initial Suggestion, to the State Board's decision -- shouldn't be more than 4 months.

The process may take a little less or a little more time; sometimes it may take longer because of extenuating circumstances. (Processing time could take longer than 4 months if the suggestion is complicated, the evaluation requires a more in-depth review, or there are implementation issues at the agency/campus level.)

Further information on Evaluation is in Section 5 of this manual.

If there are any questions about the suggestion, or more information is needed, the employee will be contacted.

Employees will be kept up-to-date about the status of their suggestion at every stage in the process.

ELIGIBILITY

Any state or university employee, permanent or temporary, part-time or full-time, classified or unclassified may submit a suggestion. The suggestion may be related to the employee's job. In order to receive recognition by the State Board, the subject of the suggestion should not be specifically detailed in the employee's defined job description responsibilities. (If there is any confusion about this contact the Statewide Coordinator.) The agency/campus can always choose to recognize employees in any way it chooses.

SPECIAL ISSUES

INELIGIBILITY:

Some suggestions may **not** be eligible for awards. Examples include suggestions which:

- ◆ are made verbally or in any form other than on the Suggestion Form (SESP-14)
- ◆ call attention to a problem but do not offer an acceptable solution
- ◆ deal with items negotiated by the State with Labor Unions (work rules, grievances, etc.)
- ◆ are duplicates of prior suggestions already recognized by the Board

TAX IMPLICATIONS:

Cash awards given to employees by the Employee Suggestion Board are considered taxable income – “it’s the law.” Recipients must adhere to relevant state and federal tax reporting requirements. When awards are made, no deductions will be taken; however, the Office of State Employment Relations will generate W-2 forms at the end of each tax year and will send to employees who received cash awards from the Board during that time period.

OWNERSHIP:

There’s nothing in the state’s contract with an employee which requires that the employee accord any inventions to the state. However, federal law in 40 am. Jur., Patents, S.69 states: “...A public employer is entitled in the same way and to the same extent as a private employer, to shop rights, that is, the free and nonexclusive use of a patent which results from efforts of its employee in his working hours and with material belonging to the government.”

Suggestions which have been adopted, and for which awards have been granted, become the property of the state. The suggester may make no claims against the state regardless of the use made of the suggestion by the state. **Employees who submit ideas which could be patented may retain rights for commercial use.**

APPEALS:

Agency/Campus Level: An employee who believes that important elements of his or her suggestion have been overlooked, misinterpreted or misunderstood in the review process at the agency/campus level may appeal to the agency for reconsideration. The employee can also provide additional information that warrants consideration. Appeals at this stage should be directed to the Agency/Campus Coordinator. Appeals must clearly state the basis for the request and must be submitted in writing within 30 days. The Agency/Campus has the right to accept or reject a suggestion, and is responsible for deciding whether, how, and when to implement.

State Board: If a suggester or the agency/campus coordinator believes that the type or amount of the Board’s award is not consistent with the value of the suggestion, the Board’s decision can be appealed. Appeals must be in writing and clearly state the basis for the request, and must be submitted within 60 days of the notification of the award being appealed. Appeal review will take place at the next Board meeting. All appeal decisions made by the Board are final.

FORMS

The Suggestion form and Evaluation/Summary form are available on the web site:

<http://suggest.wi.gov>

AGENCY/CAMPUS COORDINATORS

One of the most **crucial elements** of a successful Employee Suggestion Program is the role of the **Coordinators at the agencies and campuses**. It is at this level – close to the workplace – that important promotion, coordination, and implementation work is done.

Each agency/campus should have a **main program coordinator**. Some larger agencies choose to designate coordinators at the division/institution level in addition to the main agency-level coordinator.

The agency/campus should also have a **review committee**, headed by the main agency/campus coordinator.

Coordinators at the agency/campus level are responsible to:

- ◆ **Answer questions** and **provide forms** upon request from interested employees
- ◆ **Encourage active support** of the program, particularly from all levels of management
- ◆ **Promote the program** by such means as posters, articles in agency newsletters, e-mail messages, and other appropriate means
- ◆ **Receive, track, and acknowledge suggestions** from employees and review for completeness
- ◆ Ensure all suggestions are **evaluated without delay** by qualified evaluators
- ◆ **Facilitate timely processing** of suggestions at the agency/campus level
- ◆ **Keep employees informed** of the status of their suggestions at every stage of the evaluation and review process
- ◆ **Advocate implementation** of accepted suggestions
- ◆ **Organize and lead agency committee** meetings; maintain committee meeting records
- ◆ **Forward committee recommendations** to the Board in care of the statewide coordinator at OSER.
- ◆ **Arrange for award presentations** and publicity
- ◆ **Maintain files** of agency suggestions
- ◆ **Ask for help if needed! Either appropriate persons at your agency or campus level, or your colleagues** – coordinators at other agencies/campuses – can help and advise you, so don't hesitate to ask. (See next pages within in this Section of your manual for a directory of agency/campus coordinators.) Also, please consult the statewide coordinator at OSER if necessary (see Section 8 of this manual for more information about the statewide coordinator).

AGENCY/CAMPUS COORDINATORS DIRECTORY

The current list of Agency/Campus Coordinators can be found at this web link:

<http://suggest.wi.gov/category.asp?linkcatid=1957&linkid=1021&locid=122>

EVALUATION PROCESS

1. When the Agency/Campus Coordinator receives and acknowledges a Suggestion from an employee, the next step is to **find a qualified Evaluator** who is familiar (or an expert) with the subject of the suggestion.
2. **Forward an Evaluation/Summary Form (SESP-15)** with copies of the Suggestion and any attachments to the Evaluator. The Evaluation/Summary Form is available at the Web site (<http://suggest.wi.gov>), or See Section 3 of this manual. The coordinator may also include a copy of this 2-page overview (Evaluator Process & Evaluator's Role).
3. The **general due date** for completion of the Evaluation process is **two weeks**. Some complex Suggestions may take more time to evaluate. In either event, the Agency/Campus Coordinator is responsible to **keep the employee informed** of the status of the review process at every stage, as well as monitoring the evaluation process to **minimize delays**.
4. Evaluation includes **an initial review** from a broad point of view, including establishing pro's and con's of the Suggestion. As part of the Evaluation, there is an assessment of whether the Suggestion **can be implemented** (if it hasn't already). This step should include the **responsible decision-making authority**. If the suggestion is feasible and can be implemented, the Agency/Campus is responsible for implementing it.
5. If a successfully implemented Suggestion documents **annual savings more than \$25,000** the Agency budget office must review for verification and sign-off on the Evaluation/Summary Form.
6. After completion of the Evaluation process, **the Agency/Coordinator completes the Evaluation/Summary Form**. If the suggestion was successfully implemented, the Agency **forwards all documentation to the State Board** with the Agency's **recommendation for award**.
7. The coordinator should **recognize** and **thank Evaluators** for their contributions to the program, including such gestures as a thank-you letter, recognition in the agency newsletter for extraordinary evaluations, making upper management aware of the importance of Evaluators' roles, and so forth.

EVALUATOR'S ROLE

1. After reading the Suggestion and any attached documentation, **complete the Evaluation sections** (Evaluator Information & Parts 1-6) of the **Evaluation/Summary Form (SESP-15)** by the due date, preferably within 1-2 weeks after receipt.
2. Provide an **impartial and objective evaluation** of the Suggestion. If this can't be done, advise your Agency/Campus Coordinator and return the Suggestion so it can be evaluated by someone else.
3. Assess whether the Suggestion **can be implemented** (if it hasn't been yet).
4. **Contact your Agency/Campus Coordinator** if you have any questions or if you won't be able to complete the Evaluation by the due date.
5. **In some instances**, you may wish to contact the suggesting employee directly for clarification of any questions about the employee's suggestion.
6. It's important to **involve the decision-making authority** in deciding whether a suggestion is feasible to implement.
7. When a Suggestion is not feasible for implementation, **provide a clearly stated, detailed reason** in Parts 1 & 5 of the Evaluation/Summary Form.
8. After completing the Evaluator Information section and Parts 1-6 of the Evaluation/Summary Form (SESP-15), **return it to your Agency/Campus Coordinator**.
9. THANK YOU!

AWARD TYPES & CRITERIA

REGULAR AWARDS:

- Cash awards of between \$50 and \$1,500
- Certificate of Commendation

SPECIAL ANNUAL AWARDS:

- Suggester of the Year receives an additional \$100 plus engraved plaque
- Group Suggester of the Year receives an additional \$100 shared equally plus engraved plaques
- Agency Coordinator of the Year receives engraved plaque
- Agency of the Year receives engraved plaque.

Any suggestion that improves the quality of state government operations and services (whether it saves money or not) is eligible. This program is **open to any State or University employee**, temporary or permanent, part-time or full-time, classified or unclassified.

Employees can submit a suggestion **whether or not it's been implemented**. Suggestions are considered for feasibility during evaluation of the suggestion at the agency/campus level.

If the suggestion has not been implemented -- and if it's found to be feasible when evaluated -- the agency should decide to implement it, and then submit the suggestion to the state-level Board for recognition of the employee who made the suggestion. (The suggestion must be implemented in order for the Employee Suggestion Board to give a cash award or other recognition.)

The suggestion **may be related to an employee's job**, but the substance of the suggestion cannot be specifically detailed in the employee's job description. (If there is any confusion about this, contact the Statewide Coordinator at OSER, e-mail WIEmployeeSuggestionProgram@Wisconsin.gov or telephone (608) 266-0664, for clarification and examples.)

In general, the Employee Suggestion Board will give a cash award based on 3% of the average annual savings. The **minimum** cash award is **\$50**; **maximum** is **\$1,500**. If 3% of the average annual savings is less than \$25, the Board will award a Certificate. If 3% of average annual savings is \$26 to \$50, the employee will receive the minimum cash award of \$50. If 3% of average annual savings is \$51 to \$100, the employee will receive \$100. After that, the employee will receive the calculated amount. The maximum award is \$1,500.

If **identical suggestions** are submitted, the suggestion bearing the earliest date of receipt by the Employee Suggestion Board will be considered for an award.

While some employee suggestions may not be eligible for recognition by the Employee Suggestion Board, they **may be eligible** for recognition by the individual agencies. This type of recognition is the decision of the affected agency. Agencies can also choose to recognize and reward their employees in addition to any state-level recognition and awards given by the State Board.

Not all Suggestions result in implementation, and not all employees receive cash awards or Board recognition for their suggestions. But the Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program strongly encourages employees to suggest their ideas for review and possible recognition!

RECENT AWARDS

A listing of regular Awards can be found within the meeting summaries at our web site:
<http://suggest.wi.gov/category.asp?linkcatid=1988&linkid=1020&locid=122>

A listing of special Annual Awards can be found at this web page:
<<http://suggest.wi.gov/subcategory.asp?linksubcatid=1995&linkcatid=1987&linkid=1020&locid=122>>

Employee Suggestion Board

The Employee Suggestion Board is made up of three members, appointed by the Governor to four-year terms. One of the Board members must be a current state employee. The Board determines statewide policies and procedures. It decides on awards, including amounts and types, and recognizes suggestions that might have statewide impact.

The Board also holds an special Annual Awards Ceremony in November of every year, at the State Capitol. Special recognition is given to annual suggester of the year, group suggestion of the year, agency coordinator of the year, and agency of the year. Staff support to the Board is provided by the Office of State Employment Relations. The Board operates under the provisions of Wisconsin Statutes, section 230.48 (see next page).

Current Board Members:

(as of July 2007)

Chair:

Sandy Drew

(state employee member)

Madison, WI

Term is current through May 1, 2009
(Originally appointed: 2004)

Member:

Gene Dalhoff

Baraboo, WI

Term is current through May 1, 2009
(Originally appointed: 2006)

Member:

David Vriezen

Waterloo, WI

Term is current through May 1, 2011
(Originally appointed: 2004)

Wis. Stats. sec. 230.48 State employees suggestion board.

230.48(1)

(1) Duties. The state employees suggestion board shall do all of the following:

230.48(1)(a)

(a) Formulate, establish and maintain a plan or plans to encourage and reward unusual and meritorious suggestions and accomplishments by state employees promoting efficiency and economy in the performance of any function of state government.

230.48(1)(b)

(b) Appoint departmental or divisional committees to analyze and review suggestions and accomplishments of state employees submitted for consideration under the plan or plans established under par. (a) and make recommendations regarding the plan or plans to the state employees suggestion board.

230.48(1)(c)

(c) Make and render awards to or for the benefit of state employees nominated to receive them in accordance with the plan or plans established under par. (b).

230.48(2)

(2) Personnel, facilities and equipment. The department shall appoint, under the classified service, a secretary and such other employees as are necessary to carry out the duties of the state employees suggestion board, and shall provide such facilities and equipment as that board requires for the proper performance of its work. The state employees suggestion board may request and shall receive from any state department any assistance that it requires.

230.48(3)

(3) Awards. The state employees suggestion board may determine the nature and extent of the awards to be made under this section which may include, but shall not be limited to, all of the following:

230.48(3)(a)

(a) Certificates, medals or other insignia, in the form and awarded at the times that the state employees suggestion board determines.

230.48(3)(b)

(b) Cash awards, in the amount and payable at the times that the state employees suggestion board determines.

230.48(4)

(4) Rules. The state employees suggestion board may promulgate rules governing the operation of any plan or plans established under sub. (1)(a), the eligibility and qualifications of state employees participating under this section, the character and quality of suggestions and accomplishments submitted for consideration, the method of their submission and the procedure for their review, nominations for awards, and the kind, character and value of the awards, and any other rules as are necessary for the proper administration of this section or for the accomplishment of the purposes of this section.

230.48 - ANNOT.

History: 1971 c. 270 s. 87; Stats. 1971 s. 16.34; 1977 c. 196 s. 61; Stats. 1977 s. 16.008; 1977 c. 418 s. 36; Stats. 1977 s. 16.006; 1981 c. 20; 1987 a. 142; 1989 a. 31 s. 99; Stats. 1989 s. 230.48.

(Ed. Note: This was copied 8/2000 from Revisor of Statutes Web site at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/stats.html>)

MEETING SUMMARIES

Summaries of Board meetings – including decisions on suggestion awards –
can be found at the web site:

http://suggest.wi.gov/section_detail.asp?linkcatid=1955&linkid=1019&locid=122

STATEWIDE COORDINATOR

The Employee Suggestion Board is staffed by the Statewide Coordinator at the Office of State Employment Relations (OSER).

The Statewide Coordinator's responsibilities are to:

- ◆ Receive and review Suggestions recommended by agencies/campuses for Board recognition
- ◆ Coordinate administrative activities (budget & purchasing, records & files, support to the Board including agenda & minutes)
- ◆ Prepare Certificates, Checks, and Letters for employees who receive Board awards
- ◆ Maintain the Web site for the Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program (<http://suggest.wi.gov>)
- ◆ Promote the Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program by disseminating promotional materials, publishing *The Innovator* (a regular e-mail newsletter highlighting suggestion awards), and writing press releases and articles for the OSER newsletter as needed
- ◆ Publicize suggestions which may have statewide impact on Web site and newsletters
- ◆ Respond to all inquiries to OSER or the Board. Refer issues to Board when appropriate
- ◆ Arrange the Annual Awards Ceremony
- ◆ Maintain communications with Agency/Campus Coordinators, and provide consulting services when needed
- ◆ Recommend policy or procedural changes when appropriate
- ◆ Update procedure manuals, including the *Agency/Campus Coordinator's Manual*

The Statewide Coordinator can be reached at the Office of State Employment Relations, preferably by e-mail at

WIEmployeeSuggestionProgram@Wisconsin.gov; or telephone (608) 266-0664, or fax (608) 267-1020.

As of May 2005, the current Statewide Coordinator is:

Robert Toomey
Office of State Employment Relations
101 East Wilson Street, 4th Floor
PO Box 7855
Madison, WI 53707-7855

PROMOTION, WEB SITE & PUBLICITY

The Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program web site is located at:

<http://suggest.wi.gov>

Promotional tools (poster & bookmark) can be found at the web site:

<http://suggest.wi.gov/category.asp?linkcatid=1991&linkid=1019&locid=122>

The Platteville Project

What was the "Platteville Project"? In September 1999, the Employee Suggestion Board and the then-Department Employment Relations (DER, now OSER) – which provides staff support to the Board – began a unique partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Platteville.

Then-DER Secretary Peter Fox, appointed to lead the agency in 1999, took an active interest in the Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program. One of the major issues was a lack of employee awareness. It was Secretary Fox's idea to **connect with a University of Wisconsin campus** where a marketing/design class could take this on as a class project.

You can read all about The Platteville Project in this section (see next 2 pages).

September 1999 Client Presentation by DER

Madison-Platteville Connection: Platteville is in southwestern Wisconsin, located only a few miles from Belmont -- the original state capital (the present capital, Madison, was later chosen).

Not only is this link fitting, but it's also symbolic of the "**Wisconsin Idea**" – which proposes that the borders of the University are the borders of the State. This partnership project is an excellent example of the Wisconsin Idea in action.

In September 1999, Robert Toomey of DER made a **client presentation** (see following pages) to the UW-Platteville student team, which was led by **Professor Paul Shecter**. The **students included:** Jeff Brown and Nathan Maxwell (business/marketing); and Derek Carpenter, Shann Deprey, Kathleen Ebben, Nathan Maxwell, and Miriam Schroeder (graphic design).

The **Suggestion Program** -- begun in 1954 -- was **due for revitalization**. This was an opportunity for the UW-Platteville design/marketing student team to make a positive impact on state government -- enhancing a program which has enormous potential to improve government services, increase efficiency, save taxpayer money, and boost employee morale.

In autumn of 1999, the Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program could be compared to the Wisconsin Badgers basketball program... a "**Sleeping Giant**." Also at that time, while it couldn't have been predicted even by the most ardent of fans, the Badger basketball team was about to embark on a journey which led to Wisconsin's first Final Four appearance since 1941.

At UW-Platteville, the Final Four (NCAA Division III) is old hat -- four national championships in the 1990's. Was the "Sleeping Giant"/Basketball comparison more than coincidence? In any event, the project to revitalize the Employee Suggestion Program appeared to be in the right hands....

Summer 2000 Implementation

In June, **DER hired a graphic designer** for the summer to assist with implementation: **Shann Deprey** -- a member of the UW-Platteville student team -- was selected.

One of the first matters needing attention was to **finalize the new logo**. A **Focus Group** was consulted to react to eight potential new logos. The clear favorite was the first choice of 9 of the 12 Focus Group members, and in July the Board selected it as the new logo for the Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program.

By the end of July, Shann Deprey finalized the design of a **new poster** and a **bookmark** to go to all employees as a payroll stuffer; while Robert Toomey finished **revising the forms** which are in PDF format and can be filled out on-screen.

A letter signed by Secretary Fox went to all Agencies on July 28, notifying them of the coming changes.

By early August, the **new Web site was finished**. Shann designed the layout and navigation, incorporating the new logo and color scheme; while Robert was responsible for writing the content.

Shann and Robert gave presentations to the **State Human Resource Managers Council** (SHRMC) on August 9; and to the **Governor and Cabinet Secretaries** on August 17.

Because **Agency/Campus Coordinators are critical** to program success, DER and the Board held a **training/orientation conference** for them on August 14. Each person at the conference received a Coordinator's Manual which Robert updated.

Finally, on August 24, 2000, the bookmark/payroll stuffer was received by all state and university employees with their paychecks.

What is a Successful Employee Suggestion Program?

Blinda Beason & Marjorie McCormick of the Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation gave a presentation on this topic on September 21, 1999.

The **Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT)** has an internal suggestion program (STAR) which is successfully linked to the state-level program administered by the Employee Suggestion Board. The DOT employee suggestion program is called **STAR**, for **Successful Thoughts Are Rewarding**, and was begun in September 1997. Prior to that, each DOT division had its own program.

The STAR program is based on **quality leadership**, and its objective is to encourage, support, and implement ideas in the spirit of continuous improvement. DOT measures how it does business, and also wants to increase employee satisfaction in his or her job.

Elements of the success of the STAR program include:

- Employee Involvement and Excitement
- Senior Management Support
- Employees look for support from above
- Employees know that DOT will listen
- The program is supported, and sponsored, by Division Administrators and Office Directors
- Any and all ideas are welcome

The Department has a STAR committee with 7 members representing each division, plus the executive (Secretary's) office. Membership is staggered in two-year increments. Budget review is provided by the appropriate division. **The Secretary's Office supports the program wholeheartedly. DOT advertises the STAR program in many ways:**

- intranet (DOTNET) web page
- suggestion form is on-line
- form is included within the paper brochure
- "Lobby Day" at Hill Farms State Office Building -- photos of suggesters; video on loop; samples/trinkets; "fishbowl" for business cards; gifts
- Articles in DOT newsletter
- Annual STAR award ceremony at DOT -- photos, visibility

DOT gives non-cash awards including a choice of items with the STAR logo -- sweatshirts, coffee mugs, portfolios, and umbrellas. Their goal is to add one gift item a year. Other token gifts include flashlights, markers, tape measures, notepads, and pens. Award-winners at the annual DOT ceremony also receive a STAR plaque signed by the Department Secretary.

What is a Successful Employee Suggestion Program? (continued)

DOT is also developing an **on-line system** in which awards may be submitted either by Inter-D mail or to an electronic In-Box. Suggestions received are routed to an **Evaluation Committee** which reviews suggestions in terms of feasibility and savings (money/time) and rejects or accepts them.

Employees whose suggestions are rejected receive a letter with a blank suggestion form to encourage them to submit suggestions in the future. Employees whose suggestions are accepted receive a congratulatory letter and a gift. Accepted suggestions are also forwarded to the State Board with an agency recommendation for a certificate and, when appropriate, a cash award.

Budget for the DOT suggestion program (STAR) is funded by the DOT Secretary's Office. **Staff Time** devoted to the STAR program by Division coordinators is up to 10 to 20 percent of the employee's job. The STAR Department-level coordinator gives about 25% of her time to the program. DOT takes a team approach to its STAR program, with each division having a backup program coordinator.

The STAR program is also enhanced by **printed materials** including a poster, brochure, forms, letterhead; a **video** produced by DOT; a **digital camera** for award ceremonies; and **food (treats)** during special occasions.

DOT has successfully linked the STAR program with the state-level **Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program**. Starting in 1997, when the DOT agency-level STAR program began, through 1999, the department received 240 employee suggestions. Of those, 70 were accepted and forwarded to the Employee Suggestion Board for review, certificates, and possible cash awards given by the State Board.

...Further Notes...

(by Robert Toomey, Statewide Program Coordinator)

DOT is a "model agency" in the Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program. While DOT is one of the largest state agencies, **many of the same concepts** used in their STAR program can **still apply to the development** of a successful internal agency-level employee suggestion program in **medium and small agencies**.

Agency/Campus program coordinators are CRITICAL to the success of the Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program. The State Board, and administration of the program at the state level, primarily involves Board review of suggestions forwarded at the recommendation of agencies, the annual special awards ceremony, and state-level coordination and promotion.

What is a Successful Employee Suggestion Program? (continued)

Program success at the agency/campus level depends on activism and involvement by many people at that level, led by the agency/campus program coordinator. Managers and supervisors are needed to support the program -- such as encouraging their staff to participate, mentioning the suggestion program at staff meetings and in other day-to-day encounters with staff.

Much like the Wisconsin Badger basketball program -- which until April 2000 had last appeared in the Final Four in 1941 -- **the Wisconsin Employee Suggestion Program is a "sleeping giant."** The program has enormous potential to have a positive impact on the operation of state government -- by saving money for taxpayers, improving services to Wisconsin citizens, and boosting the morale of state employees who work hard to improve efficiency and create innovation in their daily work.

Success of the program depends on visibility, credibility, and the cooperative efforts of employees and management at the agency and campus level.

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