

Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners



Fresh Ideas An Employee Suggestion Program

Program Guidelines
Effective: January 1, 2007

Introduction and Overview

The Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners' *Fresh Ideas* program is designed to motivate employees to share ideas in an effort to:

- improve productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, safety and quality of government services;
- stimulate morale; and
- recognize employees who foster an atmosphere of creativity, imagination, and innovation.

When an employee has an idea, they complete the *Fresh Ideas* form and submit it directly to the Program Manager (PM). The idea becomes a suggestion when it is received by the PM and assigned a number.

An idea qualifies when the following applies:

- the employee does not have the authority to implement the idea without prior supervisory approval,
- the idea produces positive results for Hamilton County, and
- the idea meets the criteria of the program.

The PM will inform the employee when an idea qualifies. The PM will send qualifying ideas to the appropriate county department for evaluation. The identity of the employee making the suggestion will remain anonymous at this stage. The Department Head, along with the Department Coordinator (point of contact), will process the suggestion through the department's team of most knowledgeable personnel for evaluation. The department's team will review the idea and prepare a report based on the following criteria:

- practicality
- efficiency
- conservation of property and/or materials
- physical working conditions: safety
- public image/customer service
- implementation
- length of implementation period
- overall evaluation and/or additional information

The PM may need to disclose the identity of the employee making the suggestion to the Department Head if he/she determines that authority for implementation of such a suggestion lies with an existing position. Disclosure will assist in determining how to proceed. The identity, if not yet disclosed for necessity purposes, will be disclosed once the eligible suggestion is approved for implementation.

Employees who submit suggestions to the PM on the proper form, accurately completed and compliant with the criteria of the program will receive a congratulatory letter and program item. An employee whose idea is implemented will be eligible for a tangible award or an intangible award.

Eligible suggestions, tangible or intangible, may be recognized by the Board of County Commissioners in publications, e-mail messages, etc.

All suggestions recommended for implementation must be approved by the County Administrator or designee. Decisions are deemed final and are not subject to appeal.

Program Purpose

The purpose of the *Fresh Ideas* program is to motivate employees to share ideas which may benefit Hamilton County and its residents. Suggestions are ideas which:

- Improve: cooperation, public relations, forms, quality, health, sanitation, methods, tools, output of machines, working conditions, property protection, workmanship, etc.
- Devise: new applications, designs, equipment, methods, procedures, tools, systems, safety practices, etc.
- Eliminate: accidents, fire hazards, bottlenecks, breakage, inventory shortages, costs, red tape, delays, spoilage, duplication, time losses, fatigue, waste, etc.

Definition

Suggestion – A voluntary, written, original idea or innovative application proposed by an individual employee that clearly identifies a specific problem/issue and suggests a specific method of improvement to do any job or procedure better, quicker, easier, safer, or at less cost; to increase productivity; or to improve the quality of government services and facilities, or the quality of work life, to enhance the County's public image; or to otherwise benefit Hamilton County and its residents.

Eligible Recipients

Individual Hamilton County employees, below the top management level (as defined by the County Commissioners' Personnel Policy Manual), may receive recognition or an award for suggestions that are exemplary and/or produce positive results for Hamilton County. The employee must submit the suggestion while employed with Hamilton County in a participating agency.

Awards

Employees who submit a suggestion to the Program Manager on the proper form, completed accurately, and compliant with the criteria of the *Fresh Ideas* program, receive a congratulatory letter and a program item.

Two types of awards are given to employees whose suggestions are implemented by the department. Employees must elect the preferred award when submitting the *Fresh Ideas* suggestion form.

1. Intangible Award: May be given to an employee who submits a suggestion where a precise monetary value cannot be determined, but implementation of the suggestion is expected to produce a savings or enhancement in revenue of \$199 or less (e.g., suggestion includes more efficient and/or effective management of operations; improvements in employee morale, health, safety, and quality of work life, and improved quality of service to Hamilton County residents, etc). The employee who submits an intangible suggestion which is implemented will receive notification and be entered into a raffle for an award. This award may include, but is not limited to, two tickets to a Cincinnati sporting or arts event or one-day paid leave.
2. Tangible Award: Is given to an employee who submits a tangible suggestion when a value can be precisely determined and demonstrates projected annual monetary savings or enhancements in revenue of at least \$200. An award for a tangible suggestion being implemented in the employee's own department is one-day paid leave or \$200 (before all applicable taxes are deducted). An award for a tangible suggestion being implemented in a participating department other than the employee's own department is

one-day paid leave. Departments that are grant funded may award one-day paid leave in lieu of cash payment due to grant funding restrictions.

All projected net savings or revenue enhancements will be monitored during the implementation period. Upon completion of the implementation period all net savings or revenue enhancements which result from an implemented suggestion will be accurately recorded and appropriately documented. Each department will include documented savings or revenue enhancements with their annual budget request.¹

The cost of tangible awards will be funded from the budget of the department that benefits from the suggestion. Payment of award will be made as soon as the Department Head implementing the suggestion verifies the projected savings/enhanced revenue with the Budget Department, and the County Administrator, or designee, approves the suggestion. The PM will coordinate this process. Departmental implementation is expected as soon as feasible.

Exclusions and Limitations

Employees may not submit the same suggestion to both the *Fresh Ideas* program and the *Project Gain* program. Employees will not be compensated twice for the same suggestion through the two different initiatives.

If a suggestion is rejected, the same or similar suggestion is not eligible to be resubmitted by any employee for a one year period after the suggestion is closed. After one year the suggestion is again eligible for submission by any employee.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Department Heads. Department Heads will:
 - a. Designate a Department Coordinator to guide the activities of the department's *Fresh Ideas* program and process suggestions.
 - b. Designate team members to serve along with the Department Coordinator to review, evaluate and monitor the process.
 - c. Resolve conflicts regarding the submission of suggestions.
 - d. Recommend and approve awards for suggestions implemented in their department.
 - e. Forward recommendations to the Budget Department, the County Administrator, or designee, and the Program Manager for processing.
 - f. Process awards at department level (i.e., send voucher information to the Auditor's Office; approve leave days in accordance with program guidelines; document approved leave days properly. Note: These are the responsibilities of staff, not Department Heads.)
 - g. Participate in any *Fresh Ideas* award presentations and stimulate staff interest in the program.
 - h. Monitor and verify actual results of each departmental program, and inform the Budget Department and PM.

¹ In calculating savings the cost of capital expenditures will be amortized over the useful life of the equipment or facility. Direct labor costs and indirect or administrative costs of implementation will be considered first year costs.

2. Department Coordinator. Each Department Head will appoint a Department Coordinator with responsibility to:
 - a. Receive suggestions from the PM.
 - b. Assign suggestions to the department's team for review and evaluation, and monitor the process.
 - c. Propose or approve a timetable for suggestion implementation, monitoring, assessment, and measuring.
 - d. Coordinate and track the department's evaluation process by tracking number.
 - e. Log suggestions into a departmental database.
 - f. Submit department evaluations once the Department Head has signed off.
 - g. Promote and market the *Fresh Ideas* program within their department, and designate staff to support and facilitate related activities.
 - h. Work closely with the department's team to assure timely evaluation, implementation, and measurement of suggestion results.
3. Department Team. Members of the department's team will be assigned by the Department Head (and may change on a case-by-case basis so that the most knowledgeable personnel are members of the team). The team will:
 - a. Evaluate suggestions for efficiency, cost savings, revenue enhancements, quality of life, elimination of any kind of waste, or improvement of services.
 - b. Determine the usefulness of suggestions to the department.
4. Program Manager. The Program Manager will:
 - a. Develop and maintain overall program operations.
 - b. Design program operating procedures and forms, and recommend policy changes.
 - c. Develop and implement a marketing plan and conduct program promotionals.
 - d. Encourage managers to actively solicit employee suggestions.
 - e. Provide support to the Department Coordinator.
 - f. Receive employee suggestions, review them for completeness and compliance with *Fresh Ideas* criteria, and assign them to Department Heads for evaluation.
 - g. Interact with employees regarding program questions, concerns, program status and awards.
 - h. Ensure departments comply with the *Fresh Ideas* Program Guidelines.
 - i. Coordinate approval process by tracking status of suggestion and ensuring adherence to time frames.

- j. Provide quarterly reports to the County Commissioners and monthly reports to the County Administrator, or designee, regarding program status, including projected and actual savings/revenue, overall and by department.
- k. Serve as liaison with departments to share information pertaining to departmental program savings.
- l. Present awards to employees along with the Department Heads; coordinate raffles and award of prizes for approved intangible suggestions.

Program Rules

1. All *Fresh Ideas* suggestion forms will be accepted for review. Oral suggestions will not be accepted. Requests from an employee for technical assistance to complete the suggestion form will be honored.
2. Suggestions must offer specific solutions. Incomplete suggestions will be returned to the submitter for a complete solution. Ideas that lack solutions in specific terms will not be accepted.
3. A suggestion that can be put into effect by the employee without supervisory approval will not be accepted for evaluation. This suggestion will be returned to the submitter.
4. An employee's identity will remain anonymous when suggestions are initially sent to the Department Head. If the Department Head determines that the suggestion is the current duty or responsibility of an existing position, the PM may reveal the identity of the employee. Identity must be disclosed once the eligible suggestion is approved for implementation.
5. If the suggestion does not enhance revenue or provide a monetary savings, it is not eligible for a cash award.
6. The following suggestion subjects will not be eligible for award consideration:
 - a. Personal and personnel grievances.
 - b. Adjustments in job classifications, benefits, or salaries.
 - c. Matters within the scope of collective bargaining.
 - d. Matters requiring legislative or court action.
 - e. Stricter enforcement of already existing rules, regulations, or County Personnel Policies.
 - f. Routine corrections or updates to printed material, hard copy or other forms.
 - g. Periodic or routine matters for which established procedures are provided, such as:
 - Housekeeping (e.g., loose or frayed carpeting).
 - Normal maintenance and repairs, unless an improved method is proposed.
 - Ideas on subjects periodically re-examined by management.
 - Increases in existing fees or charges.
 - An idea awarded cash under a previous suggestion or a similar application of the idea.
7. Any eligible employee whose suggestion is implemented will not lose their eligibility for any monetary award by reason of resignation, retirement, promotion, or transfer. In the event of the employee's death, the award will be paid to the employee's estate or beneficiary. In the case of a terminated employee, the County Administrator, or designee, will review the circumstances and determine if the award will be presented.

8. If a department modifies an employee's suggestion so that the specific solution implemented is in a different form, the employee may be eligible for an award if the employee's suggestion is considered to be of substantial assistance and was directly responsible for management taking action. If the implemented suggestion does not allow for the quantifiable identification of the employee's contribution, then the suggestion may be judged as an intangible award.
9. The PM, with assistance from the appropriate Department Head, will determine the eligibility of employees and suggestions. The County Administrator, or designee, will have final approval of all suggestions. Decisions are deemed final and are not subject to appeal.
10. The entire *Fresh Ideas* suggestion program process will typically require no more than 90 days to complete, allowing for evaluation, budget review, Administrator/ designee approval, and award distribution processes. Should the process take more than 90 days, the employee will be informed of the delay. The complexity of a suggestion or a need for extensive testing may necessitate a longer evaluation period.
11. Employees may submit as many ideas as they wish each year. However, tangible award payments (\$200 before tax award and one-day paid leave awards) have an annual maximum of ten (10) awards per year, and may be in any combination (Example: 5 - \$200/before tax awards AND 5 - one-day paid leave awards; or 3 - \$200/before tax awards AND 7 - one-day paid leave awards). Intangible awards do not have an annual maximum per year.
12. The County Administrator, or designee, shall have final authority regarding program implementation, or award category or level.
13. The BOCC initiated this program to acknowledge employees for their *Fresh Ideas*. In addition to recognition letters and certificates, monetary awards, and paid leave, the BOCC may acknowledge employees as part of public appreciation and recognition events.
14. All implemented suggestions become property of the BOCC once they are submitted to the PM for review and consideration.

Suggestion Submission Process

1. Suggestion Submittal Form. Suggestions must be submitted on the *Fresh Ideas* suggestion form (on paper or electronic format). The suggestion form should be forwarded directly by the employee to the PM. Online suggestions will be acknowledged once the form is received by the PM. Interdepartmental and U.S. mail suggestions will be acknowledged within 10 calendar days. The preferred tangible award (monetary payment or one-day paid leave) must be elected on the *Fresh Ideas* suggestion form prior to submittal.
2. Departmental Review. The PM will forward eligible suggestions to the appropriate Department Head, who shall coordinate the process with the Department Coordinator and selected team members to begin the evaluation process.
3. The department team will review the suggestions, evaluate their potential effectiveness, and project annual cost savings and revenue enhancements. The team will send its recommendations for implementation and its evaluation of any subsequent annual savings/revenue to the Department Head through the Department Coordinator. The

Department Head will sign-off on projected annual savings/revenue. Suggestions not recommended for implementation will be sent to the Department Head through the Department Coordinator.

4. The Department Coordinator will monitor the departmental review process to ensure timely evaluation, implementation, and measurement of suggestions. The Coordinator will make certain that employees and the PM receive appropriate feedback regarding suggestions.

Department evaluations will be completed within 15 calendar days after receipt using the Evaluation Form provided by the PM.

5. Department Head Recommendation. If the Department Head believes the suggestion is feasible, he/she will recommend implementation and project the annual monetary savings/revenue. This will assist in determining whether the employee is eligible to receive a tangible award or intangible award. To be eligible for a tangible award, the suggestion must be projected to produce a monetary annual savings/revenue enhancement of at least \$200.

If the Department Head does not believe the suggestion is feasible, then the evaluation form along with rationale as to why the suggestion is not being recommended for implementation is sent to the PM who will share the information with the County Administrator, or designee. At any point during this process the Budget Department, the County Administrator or designee, or the Program Manager may request additional information.

6. Budget Department Verification: The appropriate Budget Analyst will review the financial aspect of the Department Head's projected annual savings/revenue and forward verification to the PM who will share the information with the County Administrator or designee. Budget Department review will be completed in 2 business days.
7. County Administrator or Designee Review. Once the County Administrator, or designee, approves/denies the recommended suggestion, the PM will be notified. The PM will notify employees of the final decision. The Department Head will be copied. The County Administrator, or designee, review will be completed in 2 business days.
8. Program Manager Review. At any time during the cycle the PM can view data regarding the progress of the suggestion process. Once the cycle is complete the PM will review the evaluation for completeness and accuracy, and respond to all parties involved regarding the final decision. The PM will approve awards for payment and submit quarterly reports to the County Commissioners and monthly reports to the County Administrator, or designee, detailing suggestions received, implemented suggestions and any pending suggestions. The PM will also send reports to the Department Heads of all the projects implemented in their department, and will track actual program savings/revenue.
9. Department Implementation. Once the Department Head is notified that a program is approved by the County Administrator or designee, the Department Head is expected to implement the idea. All implemented ideas will be monitored and the results will be measured. The Department Head will process tangible awards, sending appropriate documentation to the Auditor and/or documenting approved leave days. (Implemented cost saving proposals will be reflected in subsequent year budgets.)