

SECTION 3.10: FRESH IDEAS: AN EMPLOYEE SUGGESTION PROGRAM

MISSION STATEMENT

- A. The Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners' Employee Suggestion Program, *Fresh Ideas*, is an effort to motivate employees by rewarding and recognizing them for sharing ideas that improve service and generate savings and/or revenue and otherwise benefit Hamilton County.

RATIONALE

- B. The concept of *Fresh Ideas* offers county employees an opportunity to share ideas with management.
1. Employees are the best source of innovative ideas and process improvements to further improve the quality and efficiency of County services.
 2. Hamilton County will reward county employees who share ideas that are implemented and benefit Hamilton County and its residents.

DEFINITIONS

- C. The following are definitions of terms used in this policy:
1. Department(s) – includes all departments under the jurisdiction of the Board of County Commissioners and other participating departments.
 2. Funding Pool – amount that *Fresh Ideas* identifies as annual savings and/or enhanced revenue.
 3. One-day Paid Leave – an award which an employee may elect for approved tangible suggestion instead of the \$200 cash award.
 4. Revenue – additional annual funds or income brought into the department/agency, above the current budget; the figure may be higher than the funding pool and should be noted on the Cost Tracking Sheet (completed by Department Director).
 5. Savings – total amount of funds saved annually as a result of an approved suggestion. The amount by which a department's, appointing authority's, and elected official's budget will be reduced in the subsequent year.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- D. An employee *is* eligible to submit a suggestion under these conditions:
1. The employee is in a permanent position that is below the top management level as defined by the Board of County Commissioners' Personnel Policy Manual;
 2. The employee submits the suggestion while employed with Hamilton County in a participating agency.
- E. A suggestion *is* eligible when:
1. The employee does not have the authority to implement the suggestion without prior supervisory approval;
 2. The suggestion produces positive results for Hamilton County;
 3. The suggestion offers a specific solution;
 4. The suggestion supports the county's and the department's mission;
 5. The basis of performance measure is taken into consideration with the department's budget performance goals;
 6. There is permanent and sustainable change; and
 7. There is no decline in the standard of service as a result of *the Fresh Ideas* program.

INELIGIBILITY AND LIMITATIONS

- F. Ineligible suggestion subjects include personal and personnel grievances; adjustments in job classifications, benefits, or salaries; matters within the scope of collective bargaining; matters requiring legislative or court action; stricter enforcement of already existing rules, regulations, or County Personnel Policies; routine corrections or updates to printed material, hard copy, or other forms; periodic or routine matters for which established procedures are provided; housekeeping, normal maintenance and repairs (unless an improved method is proposed); suggestions on subjects periodically re-examined by management; increases in existing fees or charges; or an idea awarded cash under a previous or similar suggestion.

- G. Exclusions & 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).
- H. If a suggestion is rejected under the *Fresh Ideas* program, after one year the suggestion is again eligible for submission by any employee.
- I. 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.

AWARDS

- J. 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.
- K. 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.

- L. 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
- M. 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 Program Manager will coordinate this process. Departmental implementation is expected as soon as feasible.

PROGRAM RULES

- N. 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.
- O. 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.
- P. An employee's identity will remain anonymous when suggestions are initially sent to the Department Head. The Program Manager may ask the Department Head to identify who in his/her department would be responsible for implementing the suggestion. If the person identified by the Department Head proves to be the same person who suggested the idea, and that person has the ability to implement the idea without supervisory approval, no award will be made. Regardless, the identity of the employee and his/her idea must be made public once the eligible suggestion is approved for implementation.
- Q. If the suggestion does not enhance revenue or provide a monetary savings, it is not eligible for a cash award.
- R. Any eligible employee whose suggestion is implemented will not lose his/her 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.

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 administrative costs of implementation will be considered first year costs.

- S. 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.
- T. The Program Manager, 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.
- U. 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.
- V. The County Administrator/designee shall have final authority regarding program implementation, or award category or level.
- W. The BOCC initiated this program to acknowledge and reward employees for their *Fresh Ideas*. In addition to raffle prizes, recognition letters and certificates, monetary awards, and paid leave, the BOCC may acknowledge employees as part of public appreciation and recognition events.
- X. All implemented suggestions become property of the BOCC once they are submitted to the Program Manager for review and consideration.

SUBMITTING A SUGGESTION

- Y. Suggestions must be submitted on the *Fresh Ideas* suggestion form or be submitted electronically using the Intranet application. Forms are available in the County Personnel Department and on the county Intranet.
 - 1. The suggestion form should be forwarded by the employee to the Program Manager, whose name and address are on the form. Online suggestions will be acknowledged once the form is received by the Program Manager. Interdepartmental and U.S. mail suggestions will normally be acknowledged within 10 calendar days. The preferred tangible award (monetary payment or one-day paid leave) must be selected on the *Fresh Ideas* suggestion form prior to submittal.

2. The Program Manager 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. 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 an intangible award. To be eligible for a tangible award the suggestion must be projected to produce a monetary 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 explaining why the suggestion is not being recommended for implementation, is sent to 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.

4. The appropriate Budget Analyst will review the financial aspect of the Department Head's projected savings/revenue and forward verification to the County Administrator/designee.
5. Once the County Administrator/designee approves/denies the recommended suggestion, the Program Manager will be notified. The Program Manager will review the evaluation for completeness and accuracy, coordinate awards for payment, and respond to all parties involved, including the employee, regarding the final decision.
6. Once the Department Head is notified that a program is approved by the County Administrator/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 paid leave days. (Implemented cost saving proposals will be reflected in subsequent year budgets.)