



Entry Form 2018 Annual Awards for Program Excellence

Entry Deadline: Friday, June 15, 2018, Midnight ET

Each entry must include a completed entry form. Please complete a form for each entry your HFA is submitting. The completed entry form will become the first page of your entry.

This form is a fillable PDF. Type your information into the entry form and save it as a PDF. Please do not write on or scan the entry form. **Questions: Call 202-624-7710 or email awards@ncsha.org.**

Entry Title: Enter your entry's title exactly as you wish it to be published on the NCSHA website and in the awards program.

Category:

Subcategory:

Entry Summary: A 15-word (max) summary of the program, project, or practice you are entering.

HFA:

HFA Staff Contact:

Phone:

Email:

Visual Aids:

Are you mailing to NCSHA 10 copies of any visual aids that cannot be included in your entry PDF? Yes No

Payment:

My HFA is mailing a check to NCSHA.
My HFA is emailing the credit card authorization form to awards@ncsha.org.

Employee Engagement to Drive Change Management Innovation: Human Resources

Overview

Progress is impossible without change *[George Bernard Shaw]*.

Change happens by listening *[Jane Goodall]*.

Two simple quotes, but they serve as the underpinning to a very successful Human Resources employee engagement effort. As a result of the establishment of a “open” communications policy with all staff, our Executive Director, senior leadership, and human resources department have effectively changed the culture of our agency and tapped into our greatest asset – our employees.

Background

In the first months of 2015, RIHousing experienced significant change: following a tenure of 20+ years, our former Executive Director stepped down and we welcomed our current Executive Director: Barbara Fields. Her tenure began as Rhode Island was starting to pull itself out of the recession and our state had elected a new Governor, Lt Governor, Treasurer and Secretary of State.

While the promise of leadership offered opportunities for staff, change can be scary and is not always comfortable for everyone. We recognized a need to establish a connection and relationship between new leadership and our employees, while also **engaging staff in how the agency could take on a new direction under this leadership.**

Additionally, with exciting changes happening at the state level, we **needed to position ourselves to take advantage of and be prepared for changes that impact our work and mission.** New leadership was driving the institutional changes needed and was committed to **tapping into the expertise and insight staff could provide to help lead the change.**

With a new approach to employee engagement, and commitment from the senior leadership team, we sought to harness that change and tap into our agency’s greatest asset – our employees – **to ensure the change could result in success.** *Memos, intranet posts and formal staff meetings were not going to work to get us to where we needed to be as an agency.*

A New Way to Engage

Within the first few months of service, our new Executive Director established a program to meet and engage with staff: **Breakfast with Barbara.** These monthly breakfasts include five different members of staff (*combination of new/ newer employees and seasoned staff*) in our Executive Director’s office for casual breakfast and conversation. The goal was to meet on a more personal level with employees vs. the traditional staffing events where an executive director speaks with staff in a board room from behind a podium.

By inviting small groups of staff into her office/personal space, Barbara sought to get to know them on a more personal level than would otherwise occur. And with a new Executive Director replacing one who had been at the helm for 20+ years, these **breakfasts allowed staff to also get to know her and provide them with an opportunity to share ideas, suggestions, and opinions about theirs and the agency’s work.**

Goals

At the onset, there were some very clear goals in mind:

- Engage employees/solicit input/encourage open flow of communication
- Develop employee trust in new leadership
- Increase productivity/employee interest in the agency
- Spur innovation through new ideas/employee suggestions
- Bring new voices to the table
- Retain and attract top talent, grow employees
- Signal overall institutional change to employees and how they fit into it
- Tap into employee knowledge, interests and insight to affect real change within the organization.

It Takes Time

A number of employers tout “open door” policies. Yet **strengthening the employer-employee relationship requires much more than simply saying such a policy exists.** To create open lines of communication – and communication that flows both “up and down,” a very *real commitment to it needs to take place.*

At a pace of five employees per month, it has taken time to reach all staff. But after 3 ½ years, Barbara has now met with the majority of staff, and we are witnessing the outcomes from those meetings and relationships built.

Outcomes

Some of the beneficial outcomes from this effort include:

- *Accessibility:* staff feel that senior leadership is approachable and accessible to them
- *Open flow of communication:* senior leadership has gained important insights about the company and its employees
- *Fast access to information:* issues of importance to employees rise to the top more quickly
- *Closer working relationships:* promotes a culture of friendliness and caring; fosters mutual respect and consideration

The effort has also:

- Created a spirit of openness and transparency
- Fostered communication with ‘front line’ employees
- Empowered staff – all employees have ideas and suggestions; employees can affect organizational change and therefore, also take ownership of the changes

Organizational Improvements

These policies and expanded engagement have led to many new systems for the agency:

- **IT improvements:** significant changes in IT to meet employee demand/improvements based on feedback and employee interest
- **Healthy eating options:** healthier options in existing vending machines; also introduced ‘Lean Box’ system as staff reported not always having the time to find healthy options nearby
- **Creation of quiet room:** for nursing mothers (also used for mindfulness, religious practices)

- **On-site exercise classes:** twice a week on-site exercise classes; participation is encouraged by senior leadership, many of whom exercise side-by-side their employees
- **Specialized trainings:** based on staff feedback, capacity building to help staff reach goals
- **Tap into skills and interests of employees:** that would have otherwise not been tapped
- **Staff recognition:** executive team recognizes staff for both professional and personal development activities, milestones, etc.
- **Career pathways for employees:** senior management has gained insight into employee goals/interests
- **Boost employee morale:** all employees feel valued

Organizational Gains

Changing Rhode Island Housing's culture was an enormous challenge. These kinds of efforts require leaders who are receptive, approachable, and interested in fostering positive working relationships. Strengthening employee engagement has paid off in terms of productivity, profitability, and business reputation. The culture shift to a more "open" atmosphere has opened the door to new avenues and business practices. We've broken records across division lines in Homeownership, Development, and more based on the changes made.

As the changes came from "the top," we were able to create an open-door policy among all levels in the agency. These **less formal engagement opportunities allow employees to open up and share their ideas and solutions and helped staff to get to know our Executive Director on a more personal level. Staff now have a clear vision for the agency, where we are going, and what part they play.**

Results

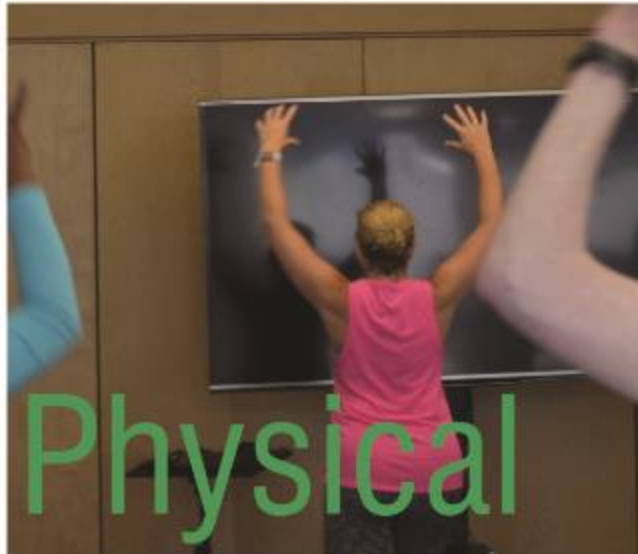
In the three years since the implementation of these new engagement tools, we have reached a milestone: the majority of staff have now benefited from these new efforts and had multiple opportunities for real engagement with our Executive Director and senior leadership.

Employee comments and insight, along with a receptive Executive Director, have driven change. So much so, we were recently recognized with a Providence Business News 'Best Places to Work' award based on employee feedback.

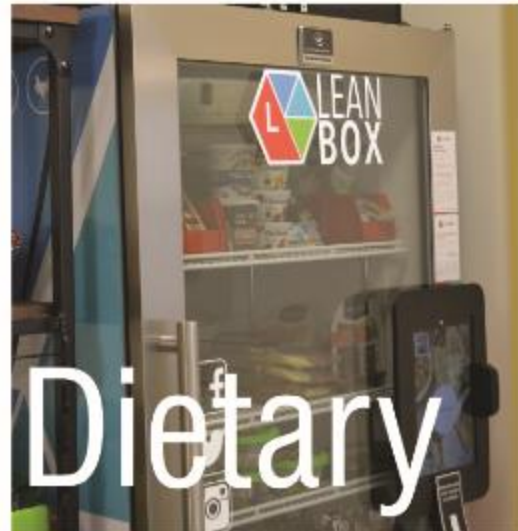


Hands on Leadership

Employee Wellness



Physical



Dietary

Healthy snack machines, free fitness classes, Quiet Room for nursing mothers, cafe area, and smoking cessation programs driven by employee engagement



Social



Health

d



Our employee engagement effort has brought together our newer, Millennial employees with our tenured staff to engage and drive change!