

WHEDA Bucks Employee Recognition Program: How Peer-to-Peer Empowerment Elevates Culture

Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority
Management Innovation: Human Resources

HFA Staff Contact

Lori Buscaglia

lori.buscaglia@wheda.com

WHEDA Bucks Employee Recognition Program: How Peer-to-Peer Empowerment Elevates Culture

SUMMARY

In response to one of the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority's (WHEDA) Strategic Priorities to "Put People First," leadership worked to modernize a previous program that was popular amongst employees. By updating processes and utilizing existing technology, in the short time since the program was relaunched, WHEDA Bucks have significantly boosted employee engagement and morale.

OVERVIEW

Relaunch the WHEDA Bucks Employee Recognition Program using an online platform instead of a manual process that uses paper coupons. The relaunch goals were to:

- Gain efficiencies in processing and redeeming WHEDA Bucks
- Increase employee access and usage in a hybrid working environment
- Automate the data collection of program usage and redemption to inform future recognition programs

CONCEPT AND DESIGN

A WHEDA Buck is an informal recognition program designed to encourage employees to acknowledge each other for outstanding performance both within and outside their divisions. WHEDA Bucks are valued at \$25 apiece and are not intended for personal use (you cannot gift a WHEDA Buck to yourself).

The original program, which consisted of employees passing slips of paper to each other and placing them in a box for payroll to count by hand, was halted due to inefficiencies and delayed response due to a hybrid work environment. The relaunch of WHEDA Bucks posed several challenges:

- Turn paper program into fully digital operations
- Ensure accessibility for all staff to use, especially remote and hybrid teams
- Easy to use on both front end and back end, reducing amount of nomination and administration time
- Highly automated process, accompanying a detailed tracker for data insights
- Utilizing internal systems/technology already available
- A fun experience to entice engagement

WHEDA began the process to review, automate, and implement the new and improved WHEDA Bucks Employee Recognition program in 2024 with the goal to relaunch in January 2025. The project included cross-functional collaboration between Human Resources (HR) Payroll, Information Technology (IT), and Marketing & Communications. Through research and testing, the cross-functional team identified a two-question form, used Power Automate to send



personalized emails to Outlook based on answers to the questions in the form (to the recipient, sender, and payroll), and transferred the data from Forms into a Teams spreadsheet that had dynamic formulas to track engagement and completions.

ACHIEVE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The goal with the relaunch of the program is to achieve a 75% participation rate, during the initial trial period, meaning that 75% of WHEDA staff gift at least one WHEDA Buck to a fellow employee.

The trial period was set to run from January 2025 through June 11, 2025. All employees received three WHEDA Bucks coupons, managers got four, and executive leadership was given five. Today, with just over one month left in the trial period, we sit at a 56% participation rate.

PROGRAM RESULTS AND IMPACT

The new and improved automated WHEDA Bucks Employee Recognition Program utilizes an existing technology that can be replicated and expanded with minimal overall investment to the organization. The 56% employee engagement during the pilot period as well as the employee feedback listed below demonstrate that the benefits outweigh the cost.

RESPOND TO A MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE OR OPPORTUNITY

One of WHEDA's three Strategic Priorities is to "Put People First", and this program speaks to the trust and encouragement leadership shows in wanting staff to bring their authentic selves to work, by promoting this space where any one person can make someone's day a little better. Nurturing these positive peer-to-peer feedback loops has shifted WHEDA's culture back into an environment of acknowledgement, kindness, collaboration, and innovation.

Examples of some appreciations that employees have sent to their colleagues:

- "You did an AMAZING job with that very difficult call. You picked up right where I had left off with her and managed to see her all the way to the finish line. Your patience with her was absolutely remarkable."
- "Thank you for everything you do to help keep the team moving in a positive direction."
- "For SO many things, I appreciate you!"
- "Thank you so much for mathing the math so the math mathed!"
- "Thank you for making my transition to WHEDA so effortless. You have trained me, helped me, and you are there for any questions I have throughout me learning new policies and procedures. I sincerely hope you know how much I appreciate you!"
- "For always thinking of others no matter the situation and bringing a smile to every day. It sure makes coming to work easier. :)"
- "I am so grateful for all the help you have given me over the last seven months of my employment. It is always with no judgement and with such kindness. Thank you for being you!!!"



- “You are always kind and positive regardless of what is happening. It helps ground all those panicking around and makes the world a better place :) Thank you for your kindness and friendship”
- “Thank you for taking the lead on Tax Credit fees and helping to improve procedures.”

Employee feedback from those who have sent a WHEDA Buck to a colleague:

- “I’ve been waiting for these to come back. I like being able to send these to my coworkers”
- “I like that the WHEDA bucks are back. Feels good to give to colleagues and it always makes their day.”
- “It was great, and it is nice being able to give back to those that go over and beyond to help others.”
- “I really appreciate being able to recognize my coworkers for their efforts at work. It has also been a very validating experience to receive WHEDA bucks.”
- “Wish I had more, but I understand we don’t have a bottomless pot to draw from. The process was as easy as it was before. Thanks.”
- “I felt that the process was easy to use and awardees were notified quickly of the award which is nice.”
- “It was fun to have the Wheda Bucks back! So many people work hard and are deserving of them. I could have handed out at least 3 more. Thanks!”
- “It was a great experience. I’m looking forward to being able to give out more in the upcoming fiscal year!”
- “My experience was great! I love this new way of doing WHEDA bucks, so quick and easy! LOVE!!! Great job!”
- “It was easy to send out. Thanks for allowing us to provide a kudos to people we felt deserved it!”

VISUAL AIDS



WHEDA Bucks

Third and redemption cycle = May 1st – June 11th

WHEDA BUCKS EXTENDED TO JUNE 11th!

57% of WHEDAites have gifted someone with WHEDA Bucks.

Here's some of the recent appreciation shared:

Thank you for always helping, learning with us and & being patient and kind!

W/hedabest <3

For all your help no matter how busy you are. Your encouragement and work on project. Being a good sounding board to talk through a tough file.

I appreciate your hard work and dedication. You are making a difference for some of the most vulnerable people in WI.

Thank you for being a great co-worker and being willing to work together on our team's tasks to make things more efficient.

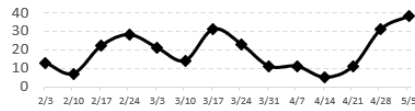
Thanks for the assistance!

Our goal is to have **75%** of WHEDA staff gift at least one WHEDA Buck to a fellow employee.



So far, **57%** of all WHEDA staff have participated.
 (121 out of 213 total eligible staff)

92 people have not sent a single WHEDA Buck.



Number of Appreciations Sent by Week (Mon-Sun)
 19 WHEDA Bucks are sent each week on average.



So far, **38%** of available WHEDA Bucks have been submitted.

(266 out of 698 total WHEDA Bucks available)
 Equates to **\$6,650** in rewards sent peer-to-peer.

There are over 425 WHEDA Bucks unsent, leaving over \$10,600 on the table.

All WHEDA Bucks gifted since April 30th will be processed at the end of the final redemption cycle (June 11th).
 If you were recently gifted WHEDA Bucks from a fellow employee, you will see this on your 2nd paycheck in June.

As a reminder: Employees receive 3 WHEDA Bucks to gift, Managers get 4, Directors and above have 5.
 Please reach out to nicole.martin@wheda.com if you have questions about your balance.

Data as of May 5, 2025, 8:03PM.



Send appreciation with WHEDA Bucks (FY25)

WHEDA Bucks have gone DIGITAL!

Say I APPRECIATE YOU to anyone within WHEDA by sending a little extra \$ their way.

Please see the full Program Guidelines on WHEDAMent for details about eligibility, payroll, and timing.

WHEDA Bucks distributed for fiscal year 2025:

- Employees will receive 3 WHEDA Bucks.
- Managers will receive 4 WHEDA Bucks.
- Directors and above will receive 5 WHEDA Bucks.

The WHEDA Bucks program encourages employees to acknowledge each other for outstanding performance both within and outside their departments. WHEDA Bucks are valued at \$25 apiece and are not intended for personal use (you cannot gift a WHEDA Buck to yourself). You can gift WHEDA Bucks to your fellow employees as you see fit, based on the eligibility requirements outlined in the full Program Guidelines. Each form submission will immediately inform the intended Awardee and will be sent directly to HR Payroll for processing in the next redemption cycle, which will appear on the Awardee's paycheck. No other actions are required. The WHEDA Bucks form can be submitted at any time before May 15, 2025. If a sender has exceeded their WHEDA Buck count for the fiscal year, any further submission attempts will be voided and both the intended Awardee and the sender will be informed. There is no limit to the amount of WHEDA Bucks any one employee can receive.

Redemption Cycles:

- **ENDS March 30th** in order to be paid with 2nd paycheck in April
- **ENDS April 30th** in order to be paid with 2nd paycheck in May
- **ENDS May 15th - FINAL DATE TO SEND** in order to be paid with 1st paycheck in June

Hi, Nicole. When you submit this form, the owner will see your name and email address.

* Required

1. **TO (Awardee email address) ***

Please enter an email

2. **ADD NOTE: I appreciate you... ***

Enter your answer

Submit

Microsoft 365

This content is created by the owner of the form. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner. Microsoft is not responsible for the privacy or security practices of its customers, including those of this form owner. Please give us your feedback.

Microsoft Forms | An Power Automate survey, quiz and poll. [Create your own form](https://forms.office.com)

Privacy and Cookies | Terms of use

WHEDA Bucks FY25

When a new response is submitted

Form ID: [Dropdown]

Send application with WHEDA Bucks (FY25)

Get response details

Form ID: [Dropdown]

Send application with WHEDA Bucks (FY25)

Response ID: [Dropdown]

Respondent ID: [Dropdown]

Send an email (V2)

TO: [Dropdown]

Subject: Congratulations, someone sent WHEDA Bucks to you!

Body: [Rich text editor with content: "WHEDA Bucks have been submitted by [Respondent ID]"]

There is nothing more for you to do. This has been submitted to HR Payroll for processing. If the sender has exceeded their WHEDA Buck count for the fiscal year, this submission will be voided and both you and the sender will be informed.

Send an email (V2) 2

TO: [Dropdown]

Subject: WHEDA Bucks have been submitted by [Respondent ID]

Body: [Rich text editor with content: "This is an automated email to let you know [Respondent ID] submitted WHEDA Bucks on appreciation of [TO (Awardee email address)]"]

Send an email (V2) 3

TO: [Dropdown]

Subject: WHEDA Bucks have been submitted by [Respondent ID]

Body: [Rich text editor with content: "This is an automated email to let you know [Respondent ID] submitted WHEDA Bucks in appreciation of [TO (Awardee email address)]"]

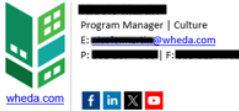


Congrats, someone sent WHEDA Bucks to you!



[Redacted]@wheda.com appreciates you and has sent you WHEDA Bucks! "For finding a way to bring back WHEDA BUCKS! Thank you for your hard work and CONGRATULATIONS! :)"

There is nothing more for you to do. This has been submitted to HR Payroll for processing. If the sender has exceeded their WHEDA Buck count for the fiscal year, this submission will be voided and both you and the sender will be informed.



Please consider your environmental responsibility before printing this email.

RE: WHEDA Bucks Completion

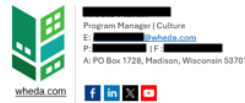


Congrats Sam!

You have used up your 3 WHEDA Bucks allotted for this fiscal year. **How was this experience for you?**

Your next WHEDA Bucks opportunity begins with the start of next fiscal on July 1st, any attempts to submit more WHEDA Bucks before then will be voided. Please stay tuned at that time for news on how many WHEDA Bucks will be allocated for the next fiscal year.

Feel free to reach out with any questions,



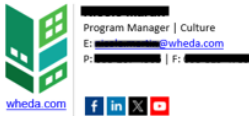
Please consider your environmental responsibility before printing this email.

WHEDA Bucks have been submitted by [Redacted]@wheda.com



This is an automated email to let you know [Redacted]@wheda.com submitted WHEDA Bucks in appreciation of [Redacted]@wheda.com.

Please check the tracker to ensure this is within the sender's WHEDA Buck allotted count. If this exceeds the count, inform the sender and the intended awardee at the earliest convenience.



Please consider your environmental responsibility before printing this email.

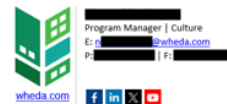
WHEDA Bucks - first redemption cycle, for your awareness



Hello Robin,

This is to inform you that members of your team have been gifted WHEDA Bucks! Awardees will be notified this week of their totals for this first redemption cycle, which will appear on their second paycheck in April (4/18/25).

Name	# WHEDA Bucks received	Redemption amount
[Redacted]@wheda.com	3	\$75
[Redacted]@wheda.com	1	\$25



Please consider your environmental responsibility before printing this email.

