

The Authority On Fun
Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority
Management Innovation: Internal Operations

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NCSHA Annual Awards for Program Excellence

Overview

WHEDA strives to keep employee engagement high and is always seeking new ways to create a welcoming, inclusive work environment. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many standard office operations were halted in March 2020, and over the next two years, employees came to feel disconnected from both their co-workers and their work. In June 2022, WHEDA officially welcomed employees back to the office while following guidance from the World Health Organization and CDC on how to make it safe to once again gather in person. This was the first time in two years that many employees were able to come to the office to collaborate in person with their co-workers, but it was also the first time that many WHEDites would see WHEDA's brand new Madison headquarters. A desire to celebrate this milestone as well WHEDA's 50th Anniversary led to the formation of *The Authority on Fun* team to plan a "Week of Fun" to commence a new era for WHEDA employees.

A Fresh Take on Employee Engagement

Most WHEDA employees follow a hybrid-work format and are required to work in the office at least 30% of the time. While employees are more than welcome to spend additional time at the office, many business units have dedicated days that team members are in-person together to boost productivity and build stronger team relationships. Since many employees had mixed feelings about the transition, WHEDA wanted to make returning to the office as seamless and exciting as possible.

The Authority on Fun team began meeting weekly through Microsoft Teams to brainstorm and coordinate a wide array of activities to engage employees upon their June 13th return. The Week of Fun schedule is listed below:

1. Monday
 - a. Plant Pop-up Sale – WHEDA engaged a local vendor, whom we work with closely, to set up a plant sale in the Board room. Each employee received a \$10 credit toward the purchase a plant for their new desk. Many employees purchased additional plants for both their offices and collections at home.
 - b. Drop-in Convo with Elmer – WHEDA's new CEO and Executive Director hosted an open-door meeting where employees could stop in to introduce themselves and get to know their leader. Elmer creates a very fun and welcoming atmosphere, and it was the perfect way to welcome WHEDites back to the office.
2. Tuesday
 - a. Pool Tournament – WHEDA's new Madison headquarters features a Billiards Room, so we had to take advantage! Employees were encouraged to find a pool partner and strategically play their way through brackets throughout the week.
 - b. Employee Lunch – WHEDA ordered lunch from two area restaurants, Smokey Jon's and Monsoon Siam, and welcomed employees to the café and patio area to enjoy delicious local cuisine and great conversation.

3. Wednesday

- a. Pool Tournament continues.
- b. Grand Opening event – Employees were invited to attend the grand opening of The Valor on Washington, a multifamily housing development designed for veterans, which just so happened to be a few short blocks away from the new office. This provided an opportunity for employees to see firsthand how WHEDA's work changes peoples' lives for the better.
- c. Bags Tournament and Snacking – A wide variety of beverages, snacks, and freshly popped popcorn, made on-site, accompanied our outdoor bean bag tournament. Winners received prizes consisting of a choice between a variety of gift cards to local restaurants and shops.

4. Thursday

- a. Pool Tournament concludes.
- b. Bingo – Participants were welcome both in-person and online to play bingo over the lunch hour. Winners received a gift card to spend at a local business.
- c. Ice Cream Social – The ice cream social was a hit with Chocolate Shoppe ice cream, lots of toppings, and a 50th Anniversary cake to commemorate the occasion. Staff could grab ice cream to go or enjoy the beautiful summer day with their colleagues on the 5th floor café patio.

5. Friday

- a. Juneteenth Flag Raising – Staff were welcomed to the Capitol to attend the first Juneteenth flag raising event with Governor Tony Evers, his staffers, members of local organizations, and the public. Upon returning from the capitol, WHEDA held its own Juneteenth flag raising ceremony at the Madison headquarters to celebrate an important date with staff in a more intimate setting.

Ideas that could not be squeezed into the packed return to office schedule have been sprinkled throughout the last year to keep things exciting. WHEDA knew the week would look different than most, but it was important to come together as an organization to regroup and build strong connections. The work will always be there, but it can't be done without a strong foundation. Employees have responded well to the Authority's efforts and appreciate that WHEDA puts *people first*.

Adaptable, Replicable, and Effective

WHEDA's Week of Fun can easily be tailored toward whatever would be most beneficial for a different organization; a day, week, or month focused on employees is sure to be met with gratitude. Whether it's an employee retreat or spontaneous fun events throughout the year, it is crucial that companies make it a priority to invest in their people. The activities can be lighthearted like having an ice cream truck come to the office over lunch, or more mission-focused like volunteering in the community for a day of service. While WHEDA had budgeted funds for these activities, there are plenty of things to do for employees that require little to no money.

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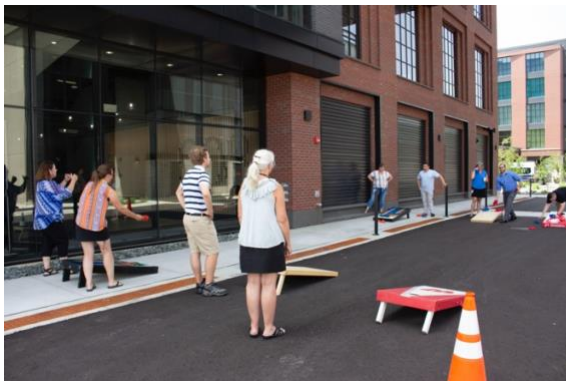
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Our Week of Fun acted as an icebreaker for people to come together again, and it was met with enthusiasm that led into work. Many employees look forward to their days in the office because of the safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment we are continuously working to create.

View our Return to Office – Week of Fun video [here](#).

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Visual Aids



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