

NASPE Communications Awards
2014

The Bridge: A Quarterly State Civil Service Newsletter

<http://www.civilservice.la.gov/Newsletter/TheBridge.asp>

Louisiana

Lindsay Ruiz de Chavez
Public Information Director
Department of State Civil Service
P.O. Box 94111
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9111
Phone: 225-342-8272
Fax: 225-342-8058
Email: Lindsay.Ruiz@la.gov

1. Brief description

The Bridge is a communications tool issued by the Department of State Civil Service on a quarterly basis with the primary goal of providing information and resources that are interesting, relevant and applicable to multiple stakeholders. These stakeholders include individuals such as employees, supervisors, managers, administrators, commissioners, legislators, the media and the general public. *The Bridge* provides its readers with informative articles that highlight best practices in human resources services and programs, spotlight outstanding employees who go above and beyond, showcase accomplishments and achievements made by state agencies and so much more. Serving as a strategic instrument, *The Bridge* offers SCS the opportunity to achieve its mission and realize its vision of being recognized by state agencies as a leader and partner in the management of human resources.

2. How long has the submission been in existence?

The inaugural issue of *The Bridge* was published in February 2010. Issues are published four times a year on our website and emailed to our subscribers utilizing the ListServ® mailing list software.

3. Why was the submission created?

Our Director, Shannon S. Templet, perceived the need for a strategic, unified voice for SCS. Prior to *The Bridge's* inception, the SCS Compensation and Staffing divisions created separate publications that were limited in scope to divisional subject matter and were targeted to HR personnel at state agencies. At the same time, other SCS divisions that had extensive contact with state agencies did not produce similar publications. Instead, they relied on formal communications such as General Circulars to notify employees and HR personnel of changes to State Civil Service rules and procedures. These methods of communication allowed SCS to reach some stakeholders with the necessary information, but did not allow for effective communication between all stakeholders and SCS due to the one-way nature of the communications and the silo effect of technical divisional information. With *The Bridge*,

SCS can maintain formal communications through General Circulars, while allowing for different divisions to share in the common goal of connecting SCS with its stakeholders.

Communication is defined as a two-way process of reaching mutual understanding. Our communications initiative was called "*The Bridge*" because we intended it to serve as the medium by which SCS and its stakeholders could exchange information and cross the communications divide. *The Bridge* provides its readers with the opportunity to submit feedback in every issue and serves as a hub for state agencies to share best practices or items of concern. For example, before the February 2011 issue was published, the Executive Director of the Louisiana State Employees Retirement System approached SCS about including an article on the retirement process. The LASERS Executive Director was concerned that employees may not be aware of the steps required in order to receive their benefit checks timely when they retire. Although LASERS publishes its own newsletter, *The Bridge* provided a way for LASERS to reach other individuals that may not be considering retirement yet. LASERS now has a regular feature in each issue of *The Bridge*.

The Bridge was also created to serve as a public relations outlet. The Louisiana State Civil Service system and its employees are often the subject of criticisms made by the media and negative opinions of the general public that are based on misinformation. To counter this, *The Bridge* provides its readers with accurate information about the system, modern best practices in the management of human resources, and ways for state agencies to utilize the flexibilities provided by the Civil Service Rules in order to recruit and retain high quality employees. We also use *The Bridge* as a place to spotlight employees. In each issue of *The Bridge*, we highlight a specific employee (or group of employees) and explain how his job impacts our state. The majority of these employee spotlights are written based on nominations by coworkers. We encourage employees to submit nominations to have their fellow employees featured in *The Bridge* and have found that it is a great way to increase morale among employees.

4. How does this submission support the goals and objectives of your agenda/department?

The slogan of our communications magazine is “*The Bridge...Connecting Civil Service and You!*” Our publication lives up to this motto by providing links for readers to submit feedback, comments or suggestions in each issue. *The Bridge* offers SCS a forum to change minds, motivate employees and influence HR practices, thereby achieving our mission:

Mission

To provide human resource services and programs that enable state government to attract, develop and retain a productive and diverse workforce that excels in delivering quality services to the citizens of Louisiana.

The Bridge provides flexibility for SCS to reach out to all stakeholders with a variety of topics based on the current needs of our readership in conjunction with the strategic goals of our divisions. The divisions that work directly with state agencies and their employees currently include:

- Compensation – classification and pay
- Staffing – recruiting and hiring
- Employee Relations – HR programs and assistance in employee administration
- Accountability – compliance with State Civil Service rules and policies
- Training and Workforce Development – statewide training initiatives
- Appeals – by classified state employees regarding disciplinary actions, rule violations, and discrimination

With *The Bridge*, SCS is no longer limited to providing technical information in divisional silos. SCS divisions can now reach out to *The Bridge* readers with articles on varied topics such as leadership, management skills and the history of SCS, while providing the necessary advice applicable to governmental HR practice.

Although *The Bridge* serves as a communications hub for state employees and state agencies, it also provides an internal benefit to SCS. Each quarter, an email is sent to everyone in SCS calling for brainstorming ideas, and inviting staff to write a one-time article or join *The Bridge* committee. We believe that everyone in SCS should feel a sense of ownership for *The Bridge* and that good ideas can come from anyone. This process allows new employees to feel included in a departmental project, helps *The Bridge* committee to plan articles that are interesting and relevant, and has the added

benefit of helping to bolster morale within SCS since our email sends the message that everyone's ideas are valued and important.

5. Have you been able to measure the effectiveness of this submission? If so, how?

We consider *The Bridge* to be a success with every issue that we publish because the content delivered each quarter allows SCS to serve as a leader in the management of human resources as never before. Internally and externally, *The Bridge* lives up to its name by providing employees, agency administrators and human resources personnel a way to stay connected and cross the communications divide, while serving as a gateway to improving morale statewide.

Moreover, we see *The Bridge* as a success because employees have submitted questions and concerns, some of which we have published while addressing others privately. Employee feedback allows us to tailor our communications and improve our processes in order to best serve our readership. For example, an employee working in an Information Technology division at another state agency suggested that we only include a link to our website when emailing the subscribers instead of including an attachment, so that the email does not take up as much space on the web server. This small change will not impact dissemination of *The Bridge*, but it will help state agencies realize efficiencies in email management.

The effectiveness of *The Bridge* is also measured by the number of subscribers and by the web metrics that count the number of visits to the website. We currently have 2,632 subscribers, with additional subscribers signing up regularly since then. According to our web metrics, the most recent issue received 896 unique page views. Our marketing efforts have traditionally been targeted to HR professionals since they typically serve as a direct line of communication to their agency's employees. Although we rely on them to disseminate *The Bridge* to those employees that may not have access to a computer at work, we are currently researching methods to expand our readership.