

Georgia State Personnel Administration (SPA)
Submittal for NASPE Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. Award
Category: Innovative State Human Resource Management Program

Program Title: Becoming “A Great State to Serve”
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Program Summary:

In December 2009, Georgia’s State Personnel Administration (SPA) launched a new program designed to reduce employee turnover and increase productivity by focusing on improving workplace satisfaction. A pilot group of seven disparate agencies and one college, representing 24,000 employees or about 20% of the workforce, collaborated to develop plans of action. Based on employee survey data, they implemented best practices around communication and recognition, stressing the relationship between management and employees. Agency leaders were actively engaged and employee teams empowered to recommend change. The goal was to increase satisfaction scores by two points, a challenge considering that employees had faced layoffs, furlough days and budget cuts. A year later, the average score was five points higher, with a range of improvement between one and sixteen points. Next year, the agency leaders have committed to work together to sustain these results and to focus more closely on employee retention. In addition, the program, now with a proven model for success, will expand to include additional agencies and colleges.



Becoming "A Great State to Serve"

1. Please provide a brief description of this program.

In tough economic times, with employees facing salary freezes, furloughs, increased health care costs and negative public perceptions, can public sector executives take actions to retain them? Can leaders not merely maintain workplace satisfaction levels, but actually improve employee satisfaction? Georgia's answer is "Yes"!

In December 2009, the State Personnel Administration (SPA) initiated a novel program to prove the concept that certain things mattered more than money and that workplace satisfaction could be improved across diverse agencies and work groups through low-cost efforts. The program is based on three years of research and testing of Workplace Satisfaction surveys by independent university faculty. Conclusions were further validated through the Great Place to Work Institute (known for grading private companies). Analysis showed that satisfaction scores for state employees were driven by "Pride in the work they do" and "Credibility, their relationship with management." Across the state, "Pride" scores were high and "Credibility" lower, so managers had an opportunity to impact satisfaction levels.

Leaders from a diverse group of organizations focused on their agency-specific survey results, built action plans around the data and created employee-led teams to interpret data and recommend opportunities for change. Quarterly meetings created a synergy and sharing of ideas among the group. The primary focus for each agency was to improve two-way communication and employee recognition. The "Great State to Serve" initiative was branded with a logo so that employees would recognize which efforts were part of the program. Workplace posters featuring individual agency workers were used to spread the word. Some

agencies used contests to select their "face" or used award-winning employees. A year later, a second survey was conducted to gauge improvements in satisfaction.

2. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Since December 2009.

3. Why was this program created? (What problem(s) or issues does it address?)

During an economic downturn, citizen demand for state services actually increases. Yet government's ability to meet those demands is significantly impacted by the number of layoffs, furlough days and budget cuts throughout the state. Greater efficiencies are required to meet the demand without increasing costs. A key factor in providing efficient services is retaining well trained and experienced employees who provide a higher quality of service to customers. It is essential that we create a work environment where our top performers want to stay.

4. Why is this program a new and creative method?

To our knowledge, this has never been done before in government. Private sector "best practices" were used with public employees. In addition, the approach was tested and proven with a diverse group of agencies serving all kinds of citizens, including:

- Georgia Perimeter College, a two-year college with four separate urban campuses
- The Dept. of Community Affairs, serving local government agencies
- The Dept. of Juvenile Justice, charged with educating youth
- The Dept. of Corrections with 31 institutions, which had just closed a facility and moved its headquarters 50 miles from the capital; many employees did not have email accounts
- The Georgia Forestry Commission, which had closed offices and reassigned employees, many of which did not have email access
- The Dept. of Revenue, whose employees face seasonal demands
- Two agencies serving internal state customers, the State Accounting Office and the Governor's Office of Customer Service

The extent to which employees were empowered to lead change in their agencies is also unique. "Employee Action Teams" interviewed other staff to identify meaningful change. For

example, in one agency, interviews revealed employee perceptions that training funds were not available and time off work for training would not be supported. When made aware of that perception, management clearly communicated its support for employee professional development. In another, employees were asked to create their recognition program and determine the kinds of non-monetary awards they preferred. In many cases, employees expressed desires for simple changes that, as long as they were sustained, made a noticeable impact on satisfaction. Employees were empowered to hold one another and their leaders accountable for implementing and sustaining these actions for improvement.

5. What was the program's start up costs?

- Agencies used existing staff and technology already in place.
- SPA provided program leadership using existing staff.
- The cost of conducting employee surveys through Georgia State University is \$8,500 per agency. Pre- and post-surveys totaled \$136,000.
- The design of the logo and collateral print pieces cost \$12,000.

6. What are the program's operational costs?

The continuing operating budget for each agency is \$8,500 each year for surveys.

7. How is this program funded? Budgeted state funds

8. Did this program originate in your state? Yes

9. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? No

10. How do you measure the success of this program?

The program is measured through employee surveys, designed and conducted by an independent research organization. Statewide surveys of randomly selected employees from each agency and college were conducted in 2009 to create a baseline of data. The annual survey in 2010 showed that despite the effect of the economy on state budgets, workplace

satisfaction remained about the same. The goal of the "Great State to Serve" program was to increase scores by two points, which experts say is difficult. In the same time period, however, the agencies participating in this initiative increased scores an average of five points, with a low of one point and a high of sixteen points. It is important to note that each of the original participating agency leaders have made a commitment to continue and enhance their efforts.

11. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

In the second year of the program, the scope for the original eight agencies will include more data on employee retention and voluntary turnover. Additional agencies and colleges will be added to the program, which now offers a proven model for success.