

Employee Suggestion Program



The Washington County Employee Suggestion Program started in 2013 as a way to reward employees for sustainable ideas that improve County operations. The program is led by the County's Sustainability Coordinator and a cross-departmental committee. Ideas with the broadest application, greatest sustainability impact, and those that result in cost or resource savings generally rank the highest.

Employees from every department participated by submitting suggestions. The majority of the suggestions were ideas to reduce paper and waste. Others included ideas for using less energy, decreasing fuel use, improving purchasing, improving health and saving money. **Here are the most effective winning ideas:**

IDEAS FOR REDUCING PAPER USE

1. Eliminate printing of paper job announcements for every department
2. Reduce minimum order of business cards from 500 to 250
3. Print County year-at-a-glance wall calendars double-sided, spanning two years
4. Recommend employees set up default, double-sided printing
5. Recommend not printing internal employee phone lists, save to desktop instead
6. Reduce unsolicited faxes by updating County legal disclaimer
7. Switch to electronic certified mail from hardcopy
8. Update WISARD reporting to eliminate blank pages (completed as needed via ITS request)
9. Recommend scanning and email documents instead of making copies
10. Create online suggestion form for this program

IDEAS FOR REDUCING WASTE

1. Promote use of recycled ink and toner cartridges
2. Remind employees to only use one line/space on interdepartmental mail envelopes
3. Remind employees to use interdepartmental mail when possible to save postage
4. Recommend reuse or elimination of desk trash can liners
5. Reduce sending out stamped return envelopes to clients since many are never returned
6. Recommend use of dish drying racks in County lunch rooms to reduce paper towel use
7. Use Outlook calendar instead of purchasing calendar or datebook
8. Recommend white board markers and cleaners to non-toxic refillable options
9. Recycle one-sided printed paper into notepads through Central Services
10. Promote the Shake & Fold method to reduce paper towel use

IDEAS FOR REDUCING ENERGY AND FUEL

1. ITS sets up new workstations with the power strip on the desk top to enable easy shutdown
2. Use co-op library courier system to distribute interdepartmental mail to/from libraries
3. Remind employees to turn off office or task lights when not needed, like during lunch
4. Post signs noting the cost and energy use of elevators to encourage people to choose the stairs
5. Provide access to stairs in PSB after-hours so employees do not have to use elevators
6. Switch to manual sweepers from electric vacuums in Community Corrections Center
7. Create a bookshare for employees who take transit (open to anyone)
8. Promote teleconferencing options
9. Encourage stair use by adding art in stairwells and identifying stairway doors
10. Pilot test electric leaf blower for grounds management

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

In addition to the recognized winning ideas, some County departments have used ideas garnered through the program to adjust the process of implementation for projects already planned, or to adapt suggestions into future projects. Examples of those ideas include:

- ✓ Paperless deposit advice (pay slip) for employees with direct deposit paychecks
- ✓ Water fountains with bottle refill stations
- ✓ Online employee directory rather than printed phone listing
- ✓ Kick the Can – a challenge to help employees eliminate desk-side garbage cans
- ✓ TerraCycle collections for used pens, broken office supplies and plastic caps
- ✓ County bike fleet
- ✓ Food scraps collections for composting

PROGRAM SUMMARY 2013-2019

Total suggestions received	182
Percentage of County departments participating	100%
Total number of winning suggestions	37
Prize money awarded (in the form of local business gift cards)	\$855

KEY REASONS WHY MANY SUGGESTIONS WERE SELECTED AS WINNERS:

- 👉 Suggestion application was complete and thorough; ideas were researched and vetted before submittal
- 👉 Suggestion can be applied County-wide or in multiple departments
- 👉 Suggestion shows clear savings in resources, produces an environmental benefit or addresses inequity
- 👉 Suggestion costs very little money to implement or results in cost savings
- 👉 Suggestion provides a social benefit such as improving employee wellness or access to a service

KEY REASONS WHY MANY SUGGESTIONS WERE NOT SELECTED AS WINNERS:

- 👉 Suggestion was incomplete, too vague or not an implementable sustainability project
- 👉 Suggestion costs too much money
- 👉 Suggestion could not be implemented because of lack of jurisdiction or authority
- 👉 Implementation of the suggestion was already started or completed
- 👉 Suggestion was not recommended by County management (e.g., improper use of County resources, not a best practice)

HERE'S HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS:

1. Complete a [suggestion form](#) and submit it to the Sustainability Program or use the [online form](#).
2. Suggestions submitted without department or management approval are sent to key County managers for initial feasibility screening.
3. The Suggestion Program Committee reviews the feasible suggestions with consideration given to clarity of detail, practicality, sustainability benefits and cost. Suggestions are scored and ranked.
4. Selected winners receive awards in the form of gift cards to local stores and certificates of recognition.
5. Non-winners receive an email explaining why their idea was not selected.
6. Suggestion implementation and outreach begins through the Sustainability Program.

County employees can submit a suggestion any time. Staff without computer access can request a hard copy of the form by calling x8857 and submit it to the Sustainability Program via interoffice mail at MS 26. All County employees are invited to participate in the program. Suggestion Program Committee members, elected officials and department heads can submit suggestions and be selected as winners; however, they are not eligible for awards.