

Establishing an Employee Engagement, Equity, and Education Committee During Remote Operations

J. Feola, M. Kimber, A. Hoeschen, M. Dworak, M. Loza

Masonic Cancer Center, University of Minnesota

1. Background

The retention of talented clinical research professionals is a top priority for all clinical research enterprises. Initiatives fostering positive interactions with colleagues, creating learning opportunities, and seeking to create a more equitable workplace can significantly enhance morale, job satisfaction, and retention. The abrupt shift to a remote working environment in the clinical research field has further underscored the need for robust employee engagement programs, many of which have required reimagining to accommodate the virtual workplace. An employee engagement working group was established for the first time in the Masonic Cancer Center Clinical Trials Office (CTO) in 2017. Although working groups were designed as short-term projects with employee participation lasting a year, the need to maintain employee engagement initiatives was emergent. However, full rotation of group membership at the end of each year inhibited progress on long-term projects. Furthermore, as a working group, the employee engagement team operated separately from other departmental teams with similar goals, missing opportunities for collaboration. With this in mind, a proposal to redesign the employee engagement group was developed in June 2020.

2. Goals

1. Establish permanent committees, rather than temporary working groups, that foster and promote employee engagement, equity and diversity, and education
2. Provide remote engagement opportunities that allow colleagues to make connections with one another

3. Solutions and Methods

A wide array of CTO staff engaged in collaborative discussions to develop the structure of the committee and ultimately broaden its scope to incorporate relevant focus areas. Thus, the Employee Engagement, Equity, and Education “Quad E” Committee was established, along with four subcommittees: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Early Education and Onboarding; Mentoring and Ongoing Education; and Engagement in Learning. The new committee structure was introduced via presentations at team meetings, and regular Quad E committee meetings began in September 2020. Meetings include dedicated time for subcommittee leaders to share updates and identify areas of cross-committee collaboration.

4. Outcomes

Five employees joined the Quad E Committee, with regular participation from an additional seven employees who serve as subcommittee co-leaders. In total, 38 percent of CTO staff participate in at least one committee. As of March 2021, the Quad E Committee has facilitated 11 unique virtual engagement opportunities, such as themed coffee chats and yoga sessions, with three additional activities in development. In a department-wide survey conducted in October 2020, Quad E initiatives

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were viewed favorably, with an average score of 4.46 on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being least favorable and 5 being most favorable.

5. Lessons Learned

Preliminary observations of our remote programs indicate that engagement in recurring events declines over time, which suggests that a wide offering of opportunities may enhance participation. We also identified a need to promote future participation on the committees by presenting them to new staff and developing annual recruitment strategies. Department-wide satisfaction in Quad E initiatives will be reassessed after a full year of operation under the new committee structure while remote operations continue, and as increased on-site operations resume. Regular evaluation of the Quad E Committee's initiatives will be key to understanding staff needs.