

## **Cultivating Gratitude: A Culture of Appreciation**

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### **1. Background**

In 2016, the Clinical Trials Office (CTO) was navigating a period of significant turnover and low morale across the office. To address these challenges, CTO leadership developed a plan for a staff-driven committee aimed at boosting employee engagement, enhancing morale, and improving both recognition and retention. The proposal was submitted to the CTO and Cancer Center administration, receiving approval along with a budget generously provided by Cancer Center Support.

### **2. Goals**

- Create opportunities for employee recognition
- Host regular CTO-sponsored staff appreciation events
- Provide swag/gifts to staff

### **3. Solutions and Methods**

- A submission portal was created on the CTO website for staff to post anonymous kudos and shout outs to other staff members.
- A monthly meeting was initiated for Appreciation Committee members to collaborate and plan events to be held throughout the year.
- The Appreciation Committee maintains a calendar of at least bi-monthly events.
- Provide an annual gift to staff.

### **4. Outcomes**

For the past nine years, the CTO Appreciation Committee has been dedicated to brainstorming and organizing initiatives aimed at recognizing staff and enhancing office morale. Led by mid-level management, the committee's efforts are primarily driven by non-management staff who take the lead in developing and hosting the majority of appreciation events. CTO leadership is kept informed on a for your information (FYI) basis. Staff participation in appreciation events varies, with an average of around 50 participants (out of approximately 120 CTO employees) attending most activities. These events include pitch-ins, catered lunches, multicultural days, pool parties, cookie and gift exchanges, family picnics, field days, and more. Each summer, the committee sponsors a large outing, such as an Indianapolis Indians baseball game, a visit to the Indianapolis Zoo, or a bowling event. In winter, the committee hosts a holiday party at a local restaurant. Prior to COVID, staff swag/gifts such as umbrellas, tumblers, headphones, blankets, and lunch bags were provided at the holiday party. Appreciation events are frequently highlighted in performance reviews as a key source of staff happiness.

### **5. Learned and Future Directions**

The CTO Appreciation Committee has been guided over the past nine years by a dedicated core group of members, many of whom have been with the committee since its inception. As staff turnover occurs within the office, new members join, and others depart. Historically, participation in the committee has been low, but recent efforts to promote the committee to new hires and present it at staff meetings have resulted in increased membership. The committee believes it is essential for events to be planned by non-management staff to foster a sense of ownership and ensure the activities resonate with the entire office. However, committee members face challenges in generating fresh ideas that don't require

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additional out-of-pocket costs, as the budget allocated for appreciation events is limited. Additionally, repeating the same events year after year has led to decreased enthusiasm and risked burnout. Post-COVID, the University also introduced restrictions on the types of gifts that can be provided to staff. Looking ahead, the committee plans to implement surveys during orientation and following events to better tailor activities to the preferences of the office.