

Employee Suggestion Program



The Washington County Employee Suggestion Program started in 2013 to reward employees for sustainable ideas that improve County operations. The program is led by the County's Sustainability Manager 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. Most of the suggestions are ideas to reduce waste. Others include ideas for using less energy, improving purchasing, improving health and wellness, decreasing fuel use, and saving money. **Here are the most effective winning ideas:**

IDEAS FOR REDUCING WASTE

1. Paperless deposit advice (pay slip) for employees with direct deposit paychecks
2. Promote use of recycled ink and toner cartridges
3. Recycle one-sided printed paper into notepads through Central Services
4. Remind employees to only use one line/space on interdepartmental mail envelopes
5. Recommend reuse or elimination of desk trash can liners
6. Recommend white board markers and cleaners to non-toxic refillable options
7. Reduce sending out stamped return envelopes to clients since many are never returned
8. Recommend use of dish drying racks in County lunchrooms to reduce paper towel use
9. TerraCycle collections for used pens, broken office supplies and plastic caps
10. Promote the Shake & Fold method to reduce paper towel use

IDEAS FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY & WELLNESS

1. Post signs noting the cost and energy use of elevators to encourage people to choose the stairs
2. Provide access to stairs after-hours so employees do not have to use elevators
3. Kick the Can – a challenge to help employees eliminate desk-side garbage cans
4. Add bottle fill stations to drinking fountains
5. Encourage stair use by adding art in stairwells and identifying stairway doors

IDEAS FOR REDUCING PAPER

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. Create online employee directory rather than printed phone directories
5. Recommend employees set up default, double-sided printing

IDEAS FOR REDUCING ENERGY

1. ITS sets up new workstations with the power strip on the desktop to enable easy shutdown
2. Create a bookshare for employees who take transit (open to anyone)
3. Promote teleconferencing options
4. Create a County bike fleet
5. Add electric leaf blowers for grounds management

PROGRAM SUMMARY 2013-2021

Total suggestions received	222
Percentage of County departments participating	100%
Total number of winning suggestions	41
Prize money awarded (in the form of local business gift cards)	\$980

KEY REASONS WHY SUGGESTIONS ARE SELECTED AS WINNERS:

- 👉 Suggestion application is complete and thorough
- 👉 Ideas are researched and vetted through management/implementing department 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 SUGGESTIONS ARE NOT SELECTED AS WINNERS:

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

HERE'S HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS:

1. Complete an [online suggestion form](#) or use the [PDF form](#) and submit it to the Sustainability Division.
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 Division.

County employees can submit a suggestion any time. Individuals and staff teams can submit ideas. County staff without computer access can request a hard copy of the form by calling x8857 and submit it to the Sustainability Division 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.