

2018 Block 1-2 Project: Employee Events: Are There New Ways to Build Community?

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Project Charge

One of the five key recommendations of the college's strategic plan focuses on Workplace Excellence. Retention of our top notch employees is key to achieving this goal. One retention strategy is providing meaningful opportunities to recognize employees and show appreciation for service and contributions to the college's mission Building on the work of a previous block project team that looked at employee recognition, this block project team will focus on employee appreciation. A workplace culture that acknowledges its people advances our goal of making CC one of the best places to work in the nation.

The charge of the block project team is to evaluate the college's current employee appreciation events (the Year-end picnic, Sky Sox baseball, CC at the Zoo, Staff Council sponsored events and events for retiring employees). The team is asked to identify opportunities for improvement under the program mission of 'employee appreciation'. This may include adding new events, and or modifying or eliminating existing ones. The evaluation may also include examining the budget for these events and how the budget might be better utilized to show appreciation to all employees plus bringing equity to events for individuals (retirees and departing employees). The team may also want to review the most recent climate survey data for appreciation indicators. The block project team is encouraged to research high impact practices at other organizations within and outside of higher education. The team is also encouraged to seek input from all employees across campus.

Block Project Committee Summary

The block project team received the charge and developed a plan to review the current employee appreciation events and retirement recognition at Colorado College. Several meetings took place throughout the semester which included co-chair meetings, committee meetings and sub-committee meetings. The committee reviewed the recent climate survey and the budgets for past appreciation events for the past 5 years. Research was conducted by the team to evaluate best practices for employee appreciation in institutions of higher education, outside corporations, and various methodologies. A survey was developed and distributed across the campus community to seek input from all employees. Below are the results and recommendations from the survey and research the committee collected.

Survey Report

Through the survey, the Block Project team sought information regarding the 3 All-Employee appreciation events offered by Colorado College (Year-End Celebration, CC Night at the Zoo, CC Night at the Sky Sox) as well as the 2 staff appreciation events (Staff Council's Spring and Fall Parties). The team wanted information from staff and faculty members, whether they had attended the events or not. To keep the information relevant, respondents were limited to these appreciation events from the past 3 years. Survey participants were asked to indicate:

- If they were a member of the staff or the faculty.
- How many times they had participated in the appreciation events (in the past 3 years).
- If they had not attended, why?
- How they were informed of the events.
- To rate how each event contributed to feeling appreciated by CC.
- To rate how important the factors (listed below) were when deciding to attend:
 - Fostering a sense of Community
 - Fostering a sense of Camaraderie
 - Inclusivity
 - Enjoyment
 - Availability of Food and Drink
 - Opportunity to Interact with Co-Workers
 - Opportunity to Interact with New/Unknown Co-Workers

The answers to these questions showed a very high level of current event success. The majority of employee survey respondents were pleased or satisfied with the events. With the exception of the CC Night at the Sky Sox, over 80% of the respondents indicated that all the events added to feeling appreciated by the College. Additionally, a fairly even distribution of importance was attributed to each category, with *Enjoyment* as the most given reason. *Availability of Food and Drink*, while important for each event, was less important for why they choose to attend the off-campus events than those held on-campus.

From the respondents who had not attended specific events, *Timing* was offered as the most likely reason for each event, with the exception of the CC Night at the Sky Sox. For this event, the most given reason for not attending was *Not Interested*. For all events, the reasons of *Accessibility* and *Unaware* were very rarely given as reasons for not attending. Well over half of the respondents indicated that they became aware of the events through the *digests* and *CC Communications emails*. *Word of mouth*, *departmental announcements*, and *In the Loop* combined to add up to roughly 25% in each event.

The survey was completed by 329 members of staff and 95 members of faculty.

Survey results of staff and faculty who have attended an employee appreciation event at least once in the past 3 years; 410 responded to all-campus events, 315 responded to staff-only events:

Zoo-----	236/410
Sky Sox-----	114/410
Year-End Celebration-----	285/410
Staff-Only Events:	
Fall Staff Party-----	218/315
Spring Staff Party-----	190/315

Survey results of staff and faculty who have attended every offering of an employee appreciation event (of the 410/315 survey respondents respectively) in the past 3 years:

Zoo-----	60/410
Sky Sox-----	13/410
Year-End Celebration-----	113/410
Staff-Only Events:	
Fall Staff Party-----	53/315
Spring Staff Party-----	57/315

Survey participants had the opportunity to provide further written comments regarding each event. Staff and faculty combined to enter over 650 individual comments. Each comment ranged in length between 1 and 500 words and were reviewed by the entire committee. Survey comments and trends are highlighted for both individual importance and repetition.

Survey Comments and Trends:

- Employees are overwhelmingly happy that the college has offered these events. They also commented their approval that CC is investigating ways to make these events even more effective.
- Employees were not necessarily aware that these events were specifically for the purpose of employee appreciation.
- The timing of the 5 events is especially restrictive for certain areas of employees, including, but not limited to, the Children's Center and Campus Safety. Issues of timing of each event (during work hours vs. after-hours, as well as time of year) was the largest factor noted for not attending.
- Employees were sometimes confused as to whether or not certain events are employee-only, plus-one, or if family members are invited.
- Issues of alcohol were repeatedly raised. Both pro- and con-alcohol presence comments were made, as were issues of: drinking during work hours, safe-driving practices after events, and presence of children.
- The Fine Arts Center should be more utilized during these events.
- Alternative sporting events were requested: CC Tiger Hockey, Colorado Springs Switchbacks, Denver Broncos, and Colorado Rockies. Along with these came many requests for formal or informal tailgating/pre-/post-event gathering. Sitting together in an easily identifiable CC section was also frequently mentioned.
- Themes, contests, raffles, as well as other organizational structures were noted as being valuable during the events, from both those who identified as intro- and extroverts. Having a comfortable place to sit, see/be seen by, and speak with others was frequently mentioned as being very important.

- Smaller, departmental appreciation events were also requested.

Appreciation Events:

Recommendation	Reason
Build variety and diversify the timing of faculty/staff events and celebrations.	This recommendation was put forward based on the feedback from committee members and survey respondents. There were many ideas put forth to offer a different variety of celebrations/events. Please see attached listing for more details.
Encourage departments to allow hourly staff to attend as work hours.	Survey comments revealed that people did not attend because their supervisor will not allow them to attend during work hours.
Offer events at different times of the year and day.	Survey comments revealed that various staff and faculty are not available in the summer and therefore summer events are difficult to attend.
Diversify events from year to year.	To appeal to a wider variety of the CC population. Highlight other opportunities, events, venues in the area.
Find a way to include engagement activities into event programming.	Survey results revealed a desire for people to interact with each other--those they know and those they do not know.
Have event planners consider the necessity for alcohol at events, especially while on campus and during work hours.	Survey respondents noted this as a concern.
Discontinue Sky Sox and Staff Council Spring Party to reallocate funds to other events. i.e. more money for Zoo event or purchase tickets during the year for other off-campus events knowing this would be a limited amount.	Survey results identified that the food at CC Night at the Zoo was inadequate and that people would like to see more variety of events, not additional events. By reallocating current funds the College would maximize funds that are being used and reduce the need for additional funding.
Incorporate a recognition board at events where people can leave nice/thankful notes/comments for their colleagues.	To foster an environment of recognition and allow employees to specifically acknowledge their colleagues.
Implement an employee appreciation week with small tokens of appreciation to pass along to all employees.	Organizations, in general, have an employee appreciation day/week as a clear way of showing their employees that they're valued.
Streamline communications for celebrations and events— 1. include the word “appreciation” in the title 2. clearly define the purpose 3. define who is invited	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make the purpose of the event clear in the marketing. 2. To clearly communicate the events are with the purpose of employee appreciation. 3. Employees were sometimes confused as to whether or not certain events are employee-only, plus-one, or if family members are invited.

Utilize the Fine Arts Center for celebrations and events.	Given the unique opportunities for engagement that the Fine Arts Center and staff offer, the campus community believes further utilization of the space, classes, and learning opportunities at the FAC would foster a sense of appreciation amongst employees.
Encourage people to attend the many free events that are already offered by CC.	The college offers dozens of free or discounted events throughout the year that appeal to a variety of personal interests and are amenable to individual schedules.
The College should support and actively encourage department level appreciation events/celebrations.	Many of the survey respondents indicated that gestures of appreciation at the departmental level is widely desired. While large scale events do create a sense of appreciation from the college and build community, department level activities and celebrations of accomplishments would be more impactful. This was also suggested in the Leadership Philosophy and Staff Service Awards Block Projects.
Have HR provide tools to help supervisors recognize and appreciate their staff.	By providing tools to supervisors on how to recognize their staff, the College can work toward building a culture of recognition and appreciation. Survey results and research suggest building appreciation and recognition into the daily work culture increases job satisfaction and morale. A top-down approach would help set the tone for departments.

Below are a few of the ideas put forth by the committee and survey respondent feedback on how to increase the variety of events/celebrations aimed at employee appreciation:

- Discount tickets for major Colorado sporting events
- Olympic training center utilization
- Food drives, book clubs
- Events/celebrations that are staff and faculty only (not open to the public)
- Bemis School of Art classes and/or reserving tickets for theater shows for employees

Retirement and Departing Employees:

Informal feedback received, general knowledge surrounding the topic, and personal desires sparked insightful discussions among all committee members in regards to honoring, and appreciating, retirees at Colorado College. Following the project charge to evaluate events for retiring employees, the committee thoughtfully examined how our current practices for both faculty and staff retirees align with the college's retention strategy to recognize and show appreciation for their time with the College and all of their various contributions to the success of the institution. Below lists the committee's recommendations, which revealed strong trends for EQUITY and CHOICE in how we show our appreciation for our retirees.

Recommendation	Reason
Create a college-wide central budget and policy to fund staff retirement. i.e. \$500 to be used for party and/or gift of choice	The committee found that there may be a vast inequity between how faculty retirements are funded compared to staff retirements. To rectify this issue, our recommendation matches what the faculty/dean's office currently does.

Offer retiring employees a choice for how they would like to be recognized.	This acknowledges that our retirees have individual desires for this major life event.
Continuity of acknowledging staff/faculty retirement. i.e. recognize staff in commencement program, recognize retiring faculty/staff at In the Loop, faculty meetings, or Fall/Spring Conference	Communication of retirement announcements are inconsistent in regard to where those announcements occur across the campus between faculty and staff.
Standardize a timeline and/or process for staff to report retirement in order to receive outlined recognition.	Faculty have a clear timeline/deadlines to decide on their retirement date for the upcoming academic year (outlined in faculty handbook). This allows enough time for planning and written notes from the President. A standardized timeline and process for staff will allow for appropriate campus announcements, party and/or gift planning, and personal notes from the President as well.
Develop a College policy to recognize and/or appreciate people who leave (not retire) after a significant period of time serving the institution.	There are many individuals on campus that depart after lengthy services to the institution that contribute just as much as those who are retiring, however, due to age or desire to continue their career, they are not appreciated in the same way. As a committee, we see this as an inequity to those individuals who provide such dedicated service to the college and believe they deserve quality and equitable recognition for their tenure as well.

Additional Observations/Recommendations:

Additional observations and unanswered questions that came up during our charge.

Recommendation	Reason
Review faculty events.	The charge for this project focused specifically on the listed all campus and staff events. There were many comments by the committee and through the survey to also review faculty events.
Recognize faculty years of service at Fall Conference.	The charge for this project focused specifically on all campus and staff events though there was some question as to why faculty are not recognized at Fall Conference for their years of service as is done for staff.
Provide professional opportunities for leaders to cultivate a culture of appreciation and recognition at every level.	Survey results and research shows that people who do not feel appreciated or recognized at the lowest level will not feel appreciated in the larger group settings of the campus.
Continue to evaluate the success of these types of events.	Continually check in after large events to see if they have hit their mark.

Be aware that any event or celebration at the FAC requires those staff members to work and not participate in events/celebrations.	The FAC provides a wonderful space for the College to hold events and people seem to want to take advantage of this partnership though doing so puts those who work there “on duty” and are not able to enjoy the experience with the rest of their colleagues.
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Unanswered Questions

How can we distinguish between CC's policies around recognition versus appreciation? i.e. Tiger Service vs. appreciation events

What opportunities are there to ensure the College's policies for recognition, appreciation and retirement are equitable (ongoing question)?

How can we be inclusive of our colleagues who are often working during events (facilities, children's center, campus safety, Bon Appetit, etc.)