

A REPORT BY  
THE 2011-2012 CONTRA COSTA COUNTY GRAND JURY

725 Court Street  
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Report 1214

# Employee Evaluation and Recognition

## Time to Stop Talking and Take Action

APPROVED BY THE GRAND JURY:

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Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report 1214

**Employee Evaluation and Recognition  
Time to Stop Talking and Take Action**

**TO: Board of Supervisors  
County Administrator**

**SUMMARY**

Contra Costa County (County) is faced with difficult challenges. For the past four years, revenue available to fund County operations has been decreasing. At the same time, the need for programs and services to support its residents has been increasing. The County needs to implement practices that will result in more efficient ways to conduct business and provide services to residents.

Greater efficiency can be achieved and sustained through a collective commitment to performance improvement. Innovative ways to improve quality and productivity can be identified, developed, and implemented. For this to happen, employees must gain an understanding of what needs to be accomplished and how progress will be measured. They are responsible for contributing their skills and knowledge to achieving goals and objectives. Finally, there must be an effective and accepted way to evaluate and recognize individual performance.

The desired outcome, improved operational efficiency, cannot be achieved without the support of the employees. An effective evaluation and recognition program is essential in order to get this support and has been identified as a “best practice” in organizations seeking to achieve optimal performance. The State of California (State) is in the process of developing and implementing an evaluation and recognition program for its employees.

Three previous Grand Jury reports have mentioned employee performance management in the County. In all cases, those reports only indicated that an employee performance management program was a best practice and did not discuss or develop what that program could be in the County. This report focuses on defining what that program could be and recommends that the necessary steps be taken to develop and implement an Employee Performance Evaluation Program throughout the County.

**BACKGROUND**

The County is faced with difficult challenges. For the past four years, revenue available to fund County operations has been decreasing. At the same time, the need for programs and services to support its residents has been increasing.

The Grand Jury reviewed published reports that describe what comprises an employee

performance evaluation program and some of the benefits realized after implementation. Current practice in this area was examined in several County departments. Examples of private sector organizations and public sector agencies undertaking similar initiatives were identified.

### **Components of a “Best Practice” Model**

In 2007, recognizing the challenges it faced in conducting its operations more efficiently and the role employees play in doing so, the State initiated a Human Resources Modernization Project. Part of the project included development of a new management tool, the Employee Performance Management Cycle. This tool was adapted from recommended practices provided by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. The project ended in June 2011, but its goals and objectives continue to be pursued by the newly formed California Department of Human Resources, including implementation of this new tool.

The following information regarding the new management tool was taken from the State Department of Personnel Administration website:

### Employee Performance Management Cycle



The five key processes in employee performance management are:

1. Planning work and setting expectations
2. Observing individual performance
3. Developing the capacity to perform
4. Evaluating performance
5. Recognizing successful performance

### **Planning work and setting expectations:**

Planning work means deciding what work will be assigned to staff and ensuring that all work supports organizational goals. Setting performance expectations informs staff of what is required for successful work performance. Involving employees in the planning process helps them understand how their work contributes to the goals of the organization.

Clear performance expectations:

- increase employee understanding of performance criteria
- provide a feedback communication tool
- focus on performance results

### **Observing individual performance:**

Observing individual performance means observing employees in action, reviewing work products, and providing ongoing feedback focusing on performance. Ongoing observation provides an opportunity to:

- check if employees are meeting performance expectations
- change unrealistic expectations
- recognize achievements along the way
- address gaps in knowledge or skills
- address problematic performance

### **Developing the capacity to perform:**

Developing the capacity to perform means providing ongoing feedback, building on strengths, and providing growth opportunities to strengthen job-related skills and competencies.

Results-oriented developmental strategies may include:

- formal training
- on-the-job training
- mentoring
- coaching
- rotational assignments
- job shadowing
- job aids

### **Evaluating performance:**

Evaluating performance is an ongoing process. Documented, formalized performance evaluations include performance expectations, managerial observations, and performance objectives, identifying growth opportunities and successes. Employee evaluations should be conducted at least annually and there should be no surprises.

Performance evaluations are to be:

- provided to probationary employees on a timely basis
- provided at least annually after employees have passed their probationary period

- consistent with the goals and expectations discussed with the employee
- objective
- directly linked to job requirements

**Recognizing successful performance:**

Managers should recognize employees for their performance. In addition, they should acknowledge employee contributions to the organization’s mission. Recognition can be formal or informal and, as with providing feedback, it should be ongoing. It can be as simple as saying “thank you” or writing a letter of appreciation.

“Recognition is so easy to do and so inexpensive to distribute  
that there is simply no excuse for not doing it.”  
--*Rosabeth Moss Kanter*

Inexpensive ways to recognize individual performance:

- create success ceremonies
- provide recognition certificates
- give out recognition letters
- create “behind the scenes recognition certificates” for those not usually in the limelight who were key to the success of a project or initiative
- coordinate a “thank you” call from the Director

**Current County Practices**

There is a long-standing policy in the County requiring that all employees receive annual performance evaluations. The Grand Jury identified examples of employees who were not aware of any performance evaluation program being in place. Evaluations often did not include any feedback regarding the quality of their performance. In addition, there were employees who had not received annual performance evaluations, in some cases for years.

Employees expressed interest in measuring their level of achievement relative to the goals that had been established for them and wanted to receive recognition if they were doing a good job. They expressed appreciation that previous reviews had recognized their efforts.

The Grand Jury identified a few County departments in which a performance evaluation program had been independently developed and implemented. An example is the Clerk-Recorder/Elections Department, where a performance management process was put in place a number of years ago. It provides tracking of expectations for each employee, including adherence to clear goals aimed at improving the efficiency with which the Department’s work is done. This Department has been recognized by outside entities for their operational results and implementation of process improvements.

Elsewhere in the County, some managers wanted to improve the performance management programs in their workgroups. They considered annual evaluations and employee recognition very important. In the absence of guidance from the County, they found ways on their own, such as using tools that other departments had already installed or training their staff in ways to

improve performance.

Absent from discussions of employee performance evaluation practices with some County managers is any mention of how accomplishments are recognized or how desired performance will be encouraged. Some of those managers question the benefit associated with setting goals and evaluating performance because of an inability to give bonuses or raises directly tied to individual contributions made in achievement of goals. As cited in the State's plan, this is not the only type of encouragement for good performance. Many studies have pointed out that recognition is more effective in encouraging top performance than financial incentives. In reviewing current practices with managers and employees of various County departments, there was no acknowledgment of a policy or process available to recognize exceptional contributions made by individuals.

Even though there are some County departments that have, on their own initiative, developed and implemented some form of employee performance evaluation program, awareness of those efforts and experiences by other departments was virtually non-existent. Even if those departments wanted to share this type of information with others, a central point for accumulating and distributing this information within the County could not be identified.

### **Past Grand Jury Recommendations**

Three earlier Grand Jury Reports have mentioned the performance evaluation issue within the County. Reports from 1994 and 2002 were specifically targeted to performance evaluations for department heads. A 2007 report focused on best practices for the County and one of the three best practices recommended was to conduct personnel performance evaluations for all County employees, not just department heads. In response to these reports, the Board of Supervisors stated general agreement with the principle that performance evaluations should be done for all County employees.

### **FINDINGS**

1. The County has not followed the recommendations of previous Grand Juries and its own policy that all employees should receive an annual performance evaluation.
2. Evaluations that do not include feedback regarding the quality of performance are not useful to employees.
3. The performance evaluation process already in place in the Clerk-Recorder/Elections Department could provide lessons and guidance as to what practices are effective.
4. Contrary to the beliefs held by some County managers, numerous methods exist to recognize and thereby motivate employees aside from monetary remuneration.
5. Because there is no process for sharing performance management initiatives and experiences between departments, the County may not be getting the benefits of lessons learned.
6. The County can use the State's Employee Performance Management Cycle as a model for a performance evaluation program.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Board of Supervisors should take all steps necessary to ensure that County employees are receiving annual performance reviews, per current policy.
2. The Board of Supervisors should direct that these reviews be based upon the five key processes identified in the State's Employee Performance Management Cycle.
3. The Board of Supervisors should assign responsibility for tracking annual performance reviews.

## REQUIRED RESPONSES

	<u>Findings</u>	<u>Recommendations</u>
Board of Supervisors	1-6	1-3
County Administrator	1-6	

### **Copy for Information Only – No Response Required**

Agriculture/Weights & Measures Department  
Animal Services Department  
Assessor's Office  
Auditor-Controller's Office  
Department of Child Support Services  
Clerk-Recorder/Elections Department  
Conservation & Development Department  
County Counsel's Office  
Office of the District Attorney  
Employment & Human Services Department  
General Services Department  
Health Services Department  
Human Resources Department  
Department of Information Technology  
Library  
Probation Department  
Public Defender's Office  
Sheriff's Office  
Treasurer-Tax Collector's Office