Introduction

The College of Engineering & Applied Science (CEAS) offers several award and recognition opportunities for staff, with more recognition opportunities being developed. Current awards include:

- Commitment to Excellence Award
- Staff Incentive Award
- Employee Recognition Award
- College of Engineering Outstanding Staff Award
- College of Engineering & Applied Science Staff Advisor Award

Details of these awards are available [here](#).

It is great that CEAS enables units with plenty of opportunities to recognize their staff. In this document, Engineering Staff Council (ESC) aims to (1) spread awareness of these opportunities to CEAS leadership and (2) recommend best practices for utilizing these awards.

In fall 2022, the ESC Retention Committee conducted a staff retention survey in an effort to narrow down the main causes of attrition and guide future retention efforts within CEAS. Key contributing factors identified in that survey include work culture, leadership support, and recognition. At the time of this writing, CEAS is still analyzing the 2023 Engagement Survey, but preliminary findings indicate that staff have strongly considered leaving their position in the past year and one of the contributing factors is that they feel their accomplishments are not recognized; a survey question that falls under the “Supervisor/Chair” category of the survey.

Employee achievement awards help increase motivation and engagement. During a time of growing retention issues, showing appreciation toward our employees is imperative. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), the biggest challenge in rewarding employees is effective recognition. Historically, approaches to recognition have been “results-based,” such as “Employee of the Month” or years of service awards. While still great, in an organization where employees’ job descriptions vary widely, recognition solely by result is not enough in our current workforce. To overcome this, organizations should strive to combine “process-based recognition” (which involves being more strategic, with regular measurement of performance) and “result-based recognition.” This may not be easy, but it provides a better structure for employee recognition. The CEAS Staff Incentive Award is a good example of this structure for employee recognition. The Staff Incentive Award recognizes employees’ special accomplishments or contributions, such as innovative ideas, creativity, and exemplary performance while undertaking special projects or tasks.

Recommendations & Best Practices

- **Leadership Buy-In:** First and foremost, any initiative cannot be successful without leadership buy-in. We want to make sure that unit leaders understand how valuable investing in employee recognition is. If leadership is committed to employee engagement initiatives, such as awards and recognition, then the initiatives are far more likely to be successful and impactful. The College of Engineering &
Applied Science’s Strategic Vision calls out the retention and celebration of staff, specifically in their Inclusion section; demonstrating commitment from the most senior level of CEAS.

- **Determine a Budget**: All awards except for the Outstanding Staff Award and Staff Advisor Award are funded by the unit. Each unit has a different budget as well as varying staff headcounts. Unit leadership, perhaps in conjunction with an Awards Committee, should determine an appropriate budget for employee recognition each year. They should work with their finance staff to incorporate this as a line item in their annual budget and track the remaining budget as awards are distributed, ensuring that they are able to spread awards, such as the Staff Incentive Award, throughout the entire year.

- **Establish Processes & Guidelines**: While CEAS provides brief explanations for the purpose of their existing awards, they have not provided detailed requirements for receiving each award. This is positive in the sense that it reduces the amount of “red tape” around nominating someone and gives units greater freedom to interpret which of their staff may be eligible for an award. On the other hand, this could lead to ambiguity and difficulty determining who is truly deserving of recognition. Therefore, it is recommended that units establish their own criteria for awards to ensure equity in the awards process. Some criteria to consider include: frequency of awards, number awarded per period (i.e., per month, semester, year), performance indicators, past awards received, and so on. Furthermore, if there are deadlines to adhere to, such as with the Employee Recognition Award that is rotated between units monthly, it is best practice to ensure someone has calendar reminders in place to notify of upcoming deadlines so that nominations are submitted on time. Email CEAS HR if you are unsure of your unit’s deadline.

- **Form a Committee**: Do we really need another committee? Maybe not. However, a select group of individuals or an existing committee should be tasked with managing the awards process for your unit. These individuals should track available awards, nomination requirements, and deadlines. These individuals do not have to be solely responsible for awards for administrative staff; they can also manage student, faculty, and alumni awards. By tasking a team with awards and recognition ensures that the process is organized and timely. Oftentimes, worthy people are not nominated for awards because there is not enough time or dedication to compile a nomination packet.

- **Peer-to-Peer Recognition**: Unit leadership and committees cannot do it all, and peer-to-peer recognition can feel more authentic. Empowering employees to participate in the recognition process helps give employees ownership of the culture. Involving fellow staff, faculty colleagues, and even students who interact with our student-facing staff can help foster this culture of recognition.

**Conclusion**

We hope that department leadership will consider how they can help champion recognition initiatives for their own teams. We encourage units to identify specific values that deserve recognition, be strategic about their recognition, communicate frequently and timely in relation to award deadlines, and consistently evaluate their awards process. ESC aims to bring awareness to the things that most impact staff and retention is certainly a key concern. We strongly believe that creating a culture of recognition and appreciation can positively impact retention of staff throughout the College of Engineering & Applied Science.

Authors: 2023-24 Engineering Staff Council Retention Committee; Madison Lane (Co-Chair), Anna Guy (Co-Chair), Deb Renshaw, Kayla Brooks, Rachel Sharpe
Sources


University of Colorado Boulder. (2023). Faculty and Staff Engagement Survey 2023. Human Resources. https://www.colorado.edu/hr/faculty-and-staff-engagement-survey-2023