



FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

REWARDS AND RECOGNITION PROGRAMS

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In Brief

Rewards and recognition programs yield great results for reinforcing positive food safety behaviors and are beneficial to building a strong, mature food safety culture. Rewarding and recognizing positive behaviors can be formal or informal and at regular cadences (e.g., monthly, annually) or every day. Recognition every day has the greatest impact on the relationship between gratitude and the adoption of desired behaviors. Tailoring the program to the targeted teams and individuals will also increase the impact of these activities. When creating a rewards and recognition program, identify the desired behaviors and goals, connect with internal and external resources to build ideas, and include the targeted individuals and teams in the planning and implementation to maximize engagement and impact. Rewards and recognition programs should be ongoing, building on successes and feedback from participants to best serve the ultimate food safety purpose.

Key Learnings



Rewards and recognition programs are beneficial to cultivating a positive and mature workplace and food safety culture.



Using different types and frequencies of rewards and recognition can help reinforce behaviors.



Involving input from external and internal resources, including target employees can increase the effectiveness of reward and recognition programs.



Rewards and recognition programs should be regularly evaluated for modification and improvement.



Why do we reward and recognize individuals?

Robust rewards and recognition programs are beneficial in building and reinforcing strong food safety culture and related behaviors. Broadly, rewards and recognition programs reinforce the connection between performance and trust within a workplace, increasing trust among workers and between workers and senior leadership. This foundation of trust drives overall work culture and can contribute to lower employee turnover and fewer food safety incidents.

For individuals, rewards and recognition contribute to high-level needs related to the social environment and esteem. Individuals motivated by these needs seek a sense of belonging, respect, and trust from their workplace. Providing a rewards and recognition program addressing such elements can motivate conscious—and eventually unconscious—actions towards food safety.

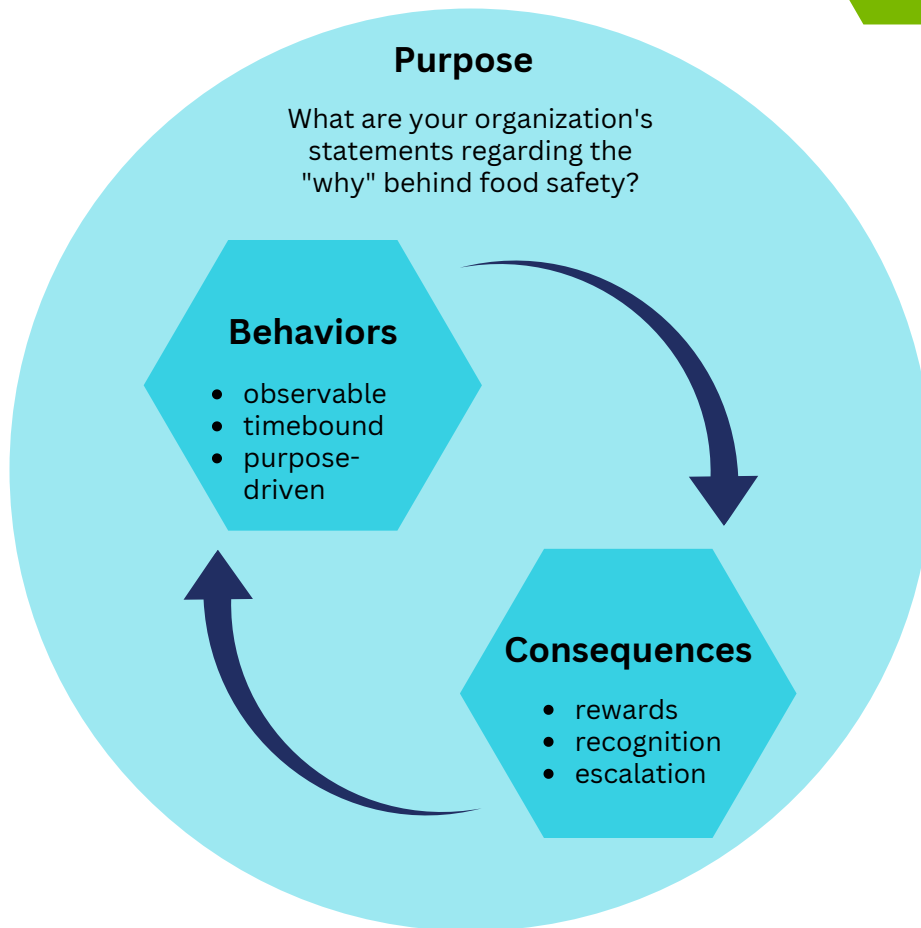
Further, social appreciation through recognition promotes the release of oxytocin in the brain, generating a happy, positive feeling. Oxytocin triggers most frequently in response to social interactions with another person, so the interactive nature of rewards and recognition programs can further increase the hormone in both the individual being recognized and the individual who gave the reward or recognition. Gratitude spreads, amplifying happiness throughout a workplace through the engagement of team members in triggering one another's oxytocin response.



Providing a rewards and recognition program addressing employees' social needs—a sense of belonging, respect, and trust—can motivate conscious and unconscious actions towards food safety.

What and how do we reward and recognize?

In the intentional construction of positive food safety culture, a workplace must first identify the purpose behind its focus on food safety. Next, define observable and timebound behaviors which align with that purpose and the positive and negative consequences which both result from and influence these behaviors. Rewards and recognition create positive consequences to formalize and reinforce the desired employee behaviors which serve to better food safety.



INTENTIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF REWARDS & RECOGNITION

Rewarding and recognizing employees for exhibiting these behaviors can be formal (e.g., an annual banquet), informal (e.g., a monthly newsletter callout), or everyday (e.g., impromptu appreciation). The impact of recognition on behavior is greatest when done every day, reinforcing the feedback loop between gratitude and the adoption and reiteration of desired behaviors. Tailoring the program to the targeted teams and individuals will also increase the impact of the rewards and recognition. For example, employees may respond best to paid time off as a reward. In other cases, T-shirts identifying employees as food safety leaders, posted pictures in shared spaces, or cafeteria vouchers might be best.

How do we know what rewards and recognition will work for us?

Before developing a rewards and recognition program, a combination of external and internal research can provide benchmarks and inform what behaviors would be best to target, what rewards would be well-received, and what additional elements of the organization may require changes to support the program (i.e., communication, cross-function or cross-level interaction).

For external research, utilize existing written materials such as white papers. In addition, identify and connect with peer groups at similar organizations about their food safety culture journey. For example, before Conagra Brands, Inc. (an American consumer packaged goods holding company) examined the possibility of developing and implementing a rewards and recognition program, they conducted interviews with similar-sized companies. The sharing of ideas and information on rewards and recognition programs which have or have not worked well allows organizations to avoid reinventing the proverbial wheel.

For internal research, a pre-existing food safety coalition can provide thoughts on organizational food safety culture and areas which a rewards and recognition program could target. In the absence of this type of coalition, or in conjunction with a coalition's observations, feedback from employees across all levels and functions is also invaluable. Conagra, for example, conducted a survey with their employees which received a high rate of response (85%), due in large part to Conagra providing paid time for employees to participate. The paid time designated for the survey demonstrated to all employees that their feedback was valued and their time respected. This resulted in thoughtful responses which informed Conagra's decisions as they moved forward with establishing a new rewards and recognition program.

The goal of a rewards and recognition program is not only to instill pride in the workforce but also to engage employees, and by including their feedback, buy-in for your program will be far higher.



Implementation is not the end of a successful program. Understanding what will work best in each organization is an ongoing process. Conagra's rewards and recognition program, for instance, is not the same today as it was initially. The program is now in its second iteration, after continued evaluation identified the need to adjust. Both versions of the program provided frontline employees a platform for submitting suggestions to drive food safety in their facilities, but version 2.0 includes more supervisor and manager involvement to aid floor-level employees in the vetting, submission, and presentation of their ideas. As a result, monthly suggestion submissions have increased by over 50%.

In addition to the functional structure of a rewards and recognition program, feedback and regular interaction and communication with employees can also inform the aesthetics of a program. As Conagra continued to adapt their program, they created an additional element: their "Be a Food Safety Hero All Year" initiative. The campaign incorporated materials sent to plant managers and messaging in corporate offices to encourage positive food safety culture across all levels. Materials had a comic book superhero appearance to increase engagement, and individual plant employees were recognized as "Food Safety Heroes."

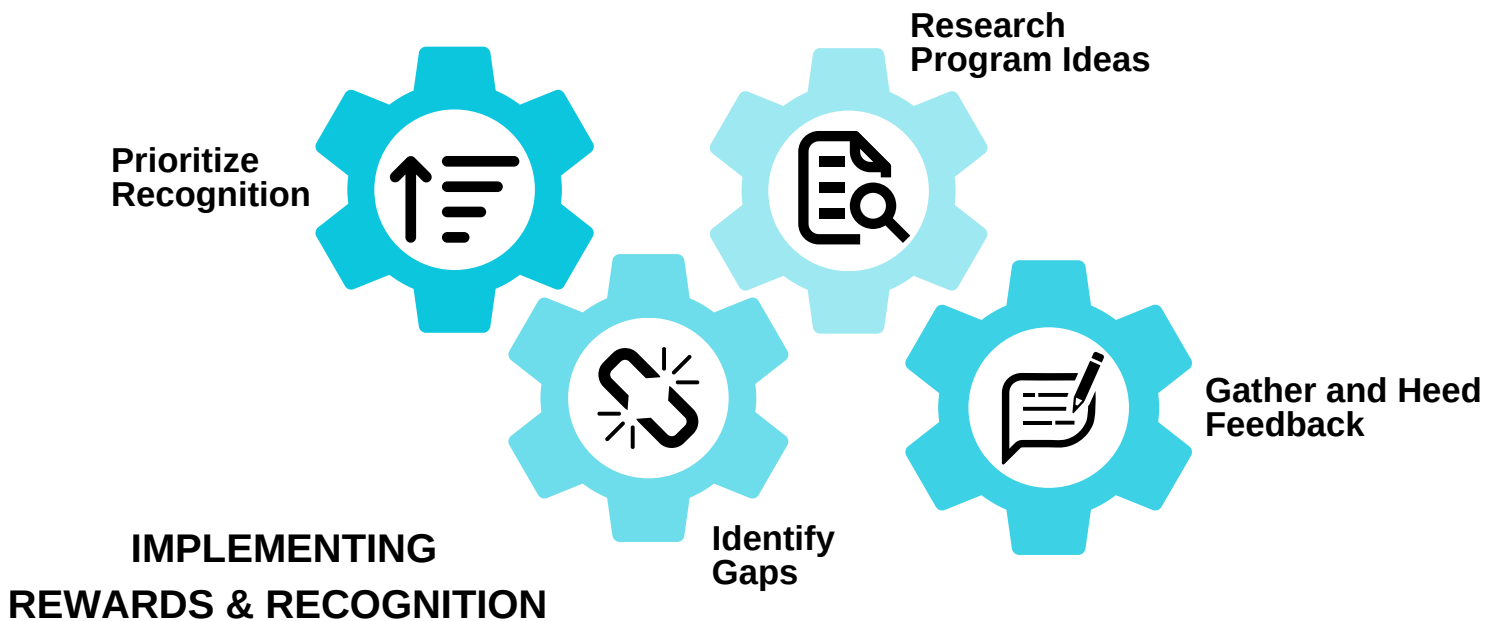
The goal of a rewards and recognition programs is not only to instill pride in those we recognize but also to engage all employees with food safety culture. By incorporating mechanisms for employee feedback throughout the development, implementation, and evaluation process, engagement and buy-in will be far higher than if a program is developed without employee input, interests, and needs in mind.





How do we move forward with rewards and recognition?

When implementing a new rewards and recognition program or evaluating an existing program, ensure leaders at all levels identify recognition as a priority before proceeding. Analysis should follow, pinpointing gaps in current rewards and recognition or opportunities to shift implementation strategies. Connect with internal and external resources to build out ideas for the program. Discuss with counterparts in other companies or colleagues in other functions what methods of rewards and recognition they use and ways to link food safety to existing programs. Research and reuse effective program ideas where possible but be willing to invent new tactics. Include teams and individuals who will participate and receive rewards and recognition through the program in the planning, implementation, and evaluation process to maximize employee engagement and impact.



The process of designing and implementing a rewards and recognition program is ongoing. Evaluating the success of the program can include food safety metrics and analysis of employee engagement and feedback. Continuous examination of the program and willingness to identify opportunities for changes or updates will help ensure the program is serving the underlying food safety purpose.

Acknowledgments

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On October 26, 2022, the Alliance and FDA co-hosted a webinar as part of a series on food safety culture. The webinar greatly informed this paper and included the following panelists:

Shawn Fear, Director of Quality, Conagra Brands, Inc.

Danielle Richardson, Director of Food Safety, Conagra Brands, Inc.

We are grateful for their contributions and for sharing their stories as we all work towards stronger, more positive food safety culture throughout the food industry.

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Disclaimer: This document summarizes discussions by participants in a webinar that took place on October 26, 2022, as well as best practices identified by participants related to organizational and food safety culture. This document reflects the views of the authors and should not be construed to represent FDA's views or policies.



Interested in learning more about cultivating a positive food safety culture?

Sign up for the Alliance's Food Safety Culture Toolkit:
<https://stopfoodborneillness.org/alliance-to-stop-foodborne-illness/#toolkit-register>

View the joint FDA / Alliance Food Safety Culture Webinar Series:
<https://www.youtube.com/@alliancetostopfoodborneillness>