



DBHDS

Employee Recognition and Appreciation Toolkit for Supervisors



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Being a part of their career journey is a honor and joy.

"A mind that is stretched by new experiences can never go back to its old dimensions." - Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

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The Importance Of Recognition



Overview

The DBHDS Employee Recognition and Appreciation Toolkit is designed to guide and support agency Supervisors, Managers, Program Directors, Chief Human Resource Officers, and other organizational leaders in strengthening a culture of recognition and appreciation – one that honors the vital contributions of every employee.

As we continue to build a unified #OneDBHDS identity and culture, this toolkit provides practical resources, evidence-based strategies, and shared language to ensure recognition is a meaningful and consistent part of our culture and the employee experience.

This toolkit is organized into six key sections:

- 1. Overview** – Frames the purpose of the toolkit and introduces the “Me-We-Us” framework for understanding and implementing recognition.
- 2. Why Recognition Matters** – Summarizes national research and organizational findings on the positive impact of employee recognition on morale, retention, engagement, and performance.
- 3. DHRM Policy 1.15** – Outlines the Department of Human Resource Management policy of the Commonwealth to recognize employees for their state service and important contributions.
- 4. Recognition at DBHDS Today** – Highlights current practices, trends, and employee feedback related to recognition across DBHDS facilities and offices.
- 5. Best Practices** – Shares evidence-based strategies and practical tips for effective and inclusive recognition in different work environments.
- 6. Actionable Tools** – Offers templates, sample messages, and other adaptable tools for both formal and informal recognition efforts.



“Me-We-Us” Recognition Framework

To ensure recognition efforts are holistic and impactful, this toolkit is informed through a “Me-We-Us” framework.



- Recognition starts at the individual level. It includes self-awareness, celebrating personal achievements, and reflecting on one's growth and contributions with humility.
- Employees who recognize their own progress know that their work matters.
- Self-reflection on our work leads to celebrating the unique value that we each bring to the agency, fostering motivation, pride, accomplishment, and a sense of belonging. It also reduces burnout risk!



- Recognition grows through co-worker and team-based practices. This includes colleagues celebrating each other's successes, team shoutouts, shared goals, and group accomplishments.
- Team and co-worker recognition helps build trust, community, and a sense of shared purpose.
- Recognizing team achievements also reinforces collaboration and encourages mutual support, while co-worker recognition can empower employees to uplift and motivate one another.



- Recognition is sustained and amplified when it is embedded in organizational culture.
- This means leadership at every level consistently models appreciation, and agency-wide programs reinforce values, unify our workforce, and align recognition with the DBHDS mission and vision.

Together, these three levels create a strong foundation for a recognition culture that honors the diversity, dedication, and impact of our workforce. Whether you are a supervisor, HR professional, or team member, your role in this framework matters – and this toolkit is here to help you take action.



Why Recognition Matters

Employee recognition is more than just a gesture of appreciation – it is a strategic driver of organizational health, performance, and retention. When employees feel valued for their efforts, they are more engaged, satisfied, and committed to their organization's mission. Research consistently shows that recognition improves morale, reduces turnover, boosts productivity, and strengthens a positive workplace culture. For DBHDS, where employee dedication is vital to delivering quality, person-centered care, fostering a culture of recognition is a critical part of creating a unified and resilient workforce.





Why Recognition Matters

A growing body of evidence confirms the importance of recognition in the workplace. One large-scale 2025 study found that recognition was a key predictor of employee engagement and job satisfaction, which are essential to reducing burnout and improving long-term performance (Jo & Shin, 2025). Similarly, a 2024 study in the scientific journal *Social Sciences and Humanities Open* established that employee recognition significantly influences retention, and that job satisfaction acts as a meaningful mediator in this relationship (Ndiango, Gabriel, & Changalima, 2024). In other words, when employees are regularly recognized, they are more satisfied – and satisfied employees are far more likely to stay.

Recognition also enhances a sense of belonging and organizational commitment. The Society for Human Resource Management highlights that recognition helps employees feel seen and appreciated, especially when it is timely, specific, and aligned with individual and team contributions (Mayer, 2024). Additionally, Forbes emphasizes the value of recognition in healthcare and human services environments, demonstrating that meaningful recognition can elevate team morale and reduce the emotional burden on staff – particularly during times of stress and crisis (Sonnenberg, 2024).





Why Recognition Matters

Recognition is not one-size-fits-all. Employees respond best to a mix of formal and informal, monetary and non-monetary appreciation. Studies show that recognition tailored to the individual's preferences and delivered authentically has a far greater impact than standardized programs alone (Chenevert, Hill, & Kilroy, 2021). Furthermore, co-worker recognition programs offer powerful opportunities to strengthen team cohesion, foster mutual respect, and elevate everyday contributions that might otherwise go unnoticed.



For DBHDS, implementing effective recognition practices is not just a way to thank employees – it is an investment in people, culture, and mission. Recognition supports the core goals of engagement, wellness, and workforce stability, and it sets the foundation for the high-performing, values-driven teams that are essential to delivering quality services across the Commonwealth.

“Motivating employees to work at their full potential is the main premise of successful management.”

-Eraldo Banovac

Conceptual Framework (Ndiango, Gabriel, & Changalima, 2024)





DBHDS Today

06



DHRM Policy 1.15

The Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) Policy 1.15 outlines the Commonwealth of Virginia's approach to **Service Recognition** for classified employees and **Organizational Recognition** for all agency employees, including classified, "at will," and wage employees. The policy affirms the state's commitment to recognizing employee contributions and service through programs that inspire teamwork, reflect agency and Commonwealth values, and promote employee engagement.

Agencies are directed to develop and implement Service and Organizational Recognition programs that are meaningful and appropriate, with responsibilities including ensuring funding availability, designating program coordinators, and maintaining appropriate records.





DHRM Policy 1.15

Under **Service Recognition**, agencies must acknowledge cumulative state service – beginning with the first and third year of service and continuing in five-year increments – through certificates, commemorative items, or recognition leave.

For **Organizational Recognition**, agencies may use a variety of formal and informal strategies to celebrate individual and team accomplishments tied to agency goals. Recognition may include monetary and non-monetary awards (up to \$5,000 per employee per fiscal year) and up to 40 hours of recognition leave per leave year for salaried employees.

Agencies are also encouraged to coordinate regional and inter-agency recognition events and integrate recognition into broader employee engagement efforts. All recognition programs and activities must be reasonable in cost and duration, held during work hours, and comply with state records retention, and expenditure guidelines.



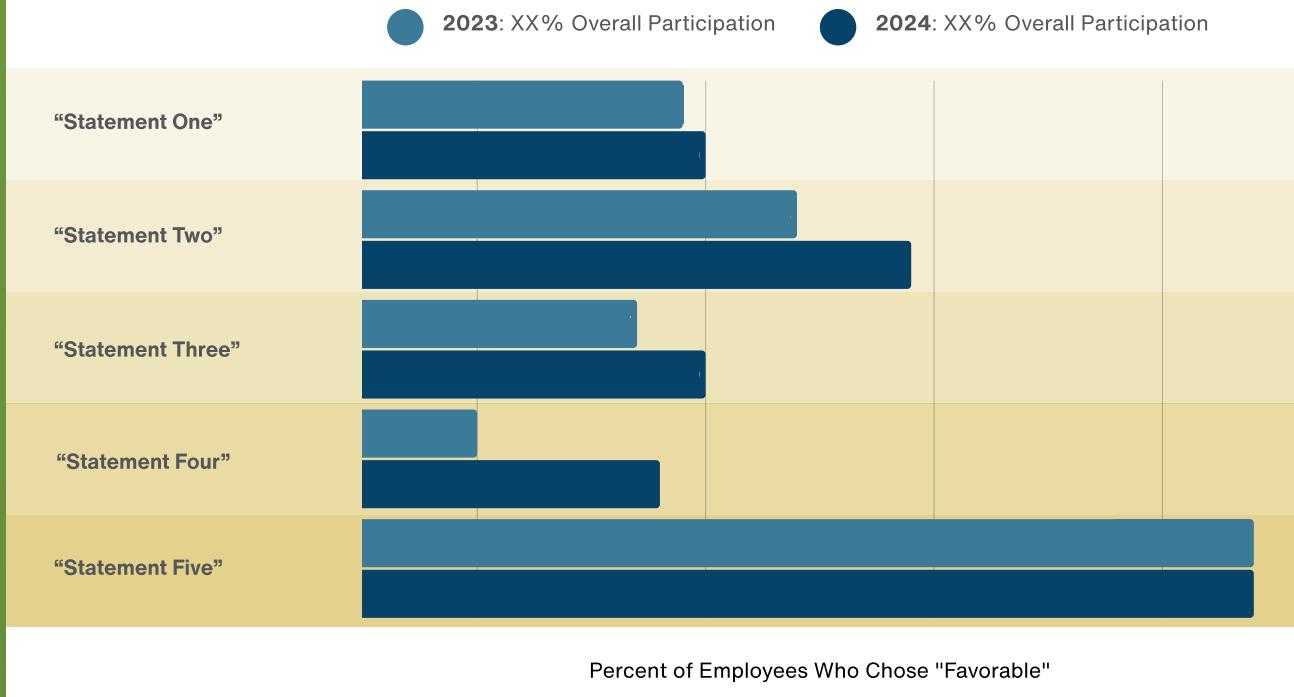


Recognition at DBHDS Today

Quantitative Trends

Recent results from the 2023 and 2024 agency-wide Employee Engagement Surveys provide insight into how employees at DBHDS currently experience recognition and appreciation. While there has been modest progress in many areas, the data suggests there is room for continued growth.

DBHDS Employee Engagement Survey (All Agency)



From 2023 to 2024, there were subtle increases in agreement with the statement, "Statement One," and in the perception that employees "Statement Three". More notable improvements were observed in responses to "Statement Two," and "Statement Four," indicating a broader trend toward improved workplace culture and feedback. The statement, "Statement Five," while the highest rated, showed no change year-over-year, highlighting an area of opportunity for ongoing support and leadership development to further advance a culture of appreciation.



Recognition at DBHDS Today

Qualitative Feedback

Staff were also given the opportunity to provide qualitative responses in the Employee Engagement Survey. Out of XXXX responses in the 2024 Employee Engagement Survey to the question, “Question?” XX responses (XX%) included the words “recognition,” “recognize,” “appreciation,” or “appreciate.”

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Appreciative Leadership at DBHDS





Best Practices

Creating an effective recognition program is a strategic investment in culture, performance, and retention. Research and guidance from DHRM and national studies emphasize that recognition works best when it is meaningful, consistent, equitable, and aligned with organizational goals. At DBHDS, where workforce engagement directly impacts the delivery of essential behavioral health and developmental services, recognition must be integrated at every level – from co-workers, to supervisors, to workplace and agency leadership.



A high-impact recognition program includes both formal and informal, monetary and non-monetary, and individual and team-based approaches. Employees respond positively when appreciation is timely, specific, and authentic. Whether it is a verbal “thank you,” a handwritten note, co-worker acknowledgement, or a formal award ceremony, the key is to reinforce the values and behaviors that drive our mission. Based on guidance from DHRM’s Employee Recognition and Engagement Handbook, recognition should not exclude anyone, and every employee should clearly understand what accomplishments are valued and how to earn recognition within their role.



Best Practices

Evidence-Based Practices for Successful Recognition Programs

- **Link recognition to your mission and goals.** Recognize behaviors and results that align with your agency's strategic objectives and expressed values.
- **Train all levels of management.** Supervisors and leaders should be equipped to give specific, sincere feedback and understand how recognition supports engagement.
- **Use a variety of reward types.** Incorporate recognition leave, monetary incentives, personal "thank you" notes, team celebrations, and professional development opportunities.
- **Incorporate co-worker and SPOT recognition.** These encourage daily appreciation and strengthen team relationships and morale.
- **Make it timely.** Recognize efforts as soon as possible after the achievement to increase its impact.
- **Be inclusive and equitable.** Ensure recognition practices are accessible across shifts, roles, and locations to foster belonging and a sense of fairness.

Research supports these practices. One large-scale 2025 analysis found that recognition significantly improves employee engagement and job satisfaction while helping to reduce burnout (Jo & Shin, 2025). Recognition is also linked to improved retention, particularly when it is paired with job satisfaction and delivered in a way that affirms employees' value and belonging. Effective recognition does not need to be expensive – what matters most is that it is personalized, consistent, and meaningful (Mayer, 2024).





Best Practices

Additional Tips for Effective Recognition

- **Involve employees in program design.** Use surveys or focus groups to learn how employees prefer to be recognized.
- **Communicate early.** Make sure employees understand the program, what is being recognized, and how to participate.
- **Target specific goals.** Recognition programs are more effective when linked to measurable outcomes like productivity, collaboration, or customer service/patient care.
- **Celebrate both team and individual achievements.** Recognition should reflect both collective accomplishments and unique contributions.
- **Evaluate regularly.** Gather feedback and track participation, satisfaction, and performance outcomes to ensure the program remains effective and equitable.

Incorporating these practices into each DBHDS workplace culture – while remaining aligned with the agency's broader #OneDBHDS vision – can lead to stronger employee engagement, reduced turnover, and a more connected, motivated workforce.





Actionable Tools

To support the implementation of meaningful, accessible, and scalable recognition practices across DBHDS, this section offers a range of actionable tools that DBHDS workplaces can immediately adopt. These tools are designed to be flexible and adaptable to diverse teams, roles, and work settings. They also blend traditional methods of recognition with modern technology to help foster a culture of appreciation at every level of the Agency.





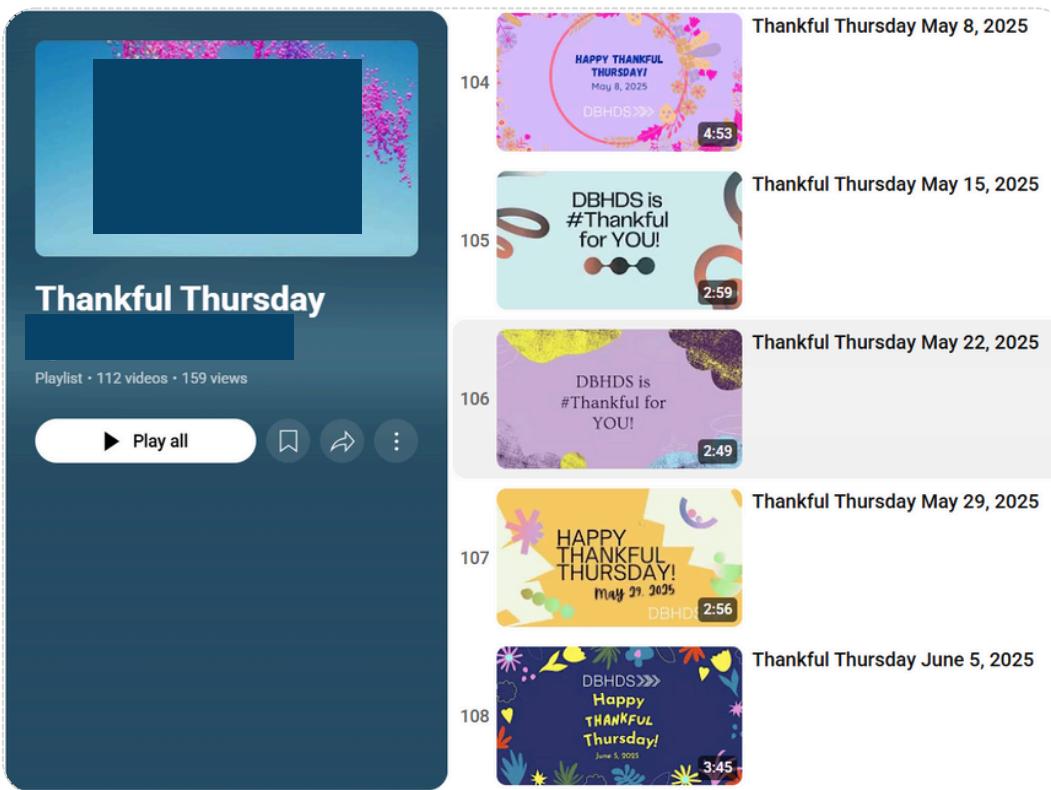
Digital Recognition Tools

1. Thankful Thursday

Thankful Thursday is a DBHDS department-wide initiative that allows you to publicly thank your co-workers who go above and beyond. Nominees are featured in a short weekly video which is shared on the DBHDS Intranet as well as with over 8,000 followers on social media platforms (including the DBHDS YouTube channel). Any DBHDS employee may nominate any other DBHDS employee to be featured in future weeks. They may also share the posts and tag each other on LinkedIn. This is a great way to share the vital work being done across the Department and show appreciation for the ones responsible.

To submit a nomination, fill out the Thankful Thursday nomination form located on SharePoint.

If you have any questions, contact DBHDS Marketing and Communications Manager, XXX XXX, at XXX@dbhds.virginia.gov.



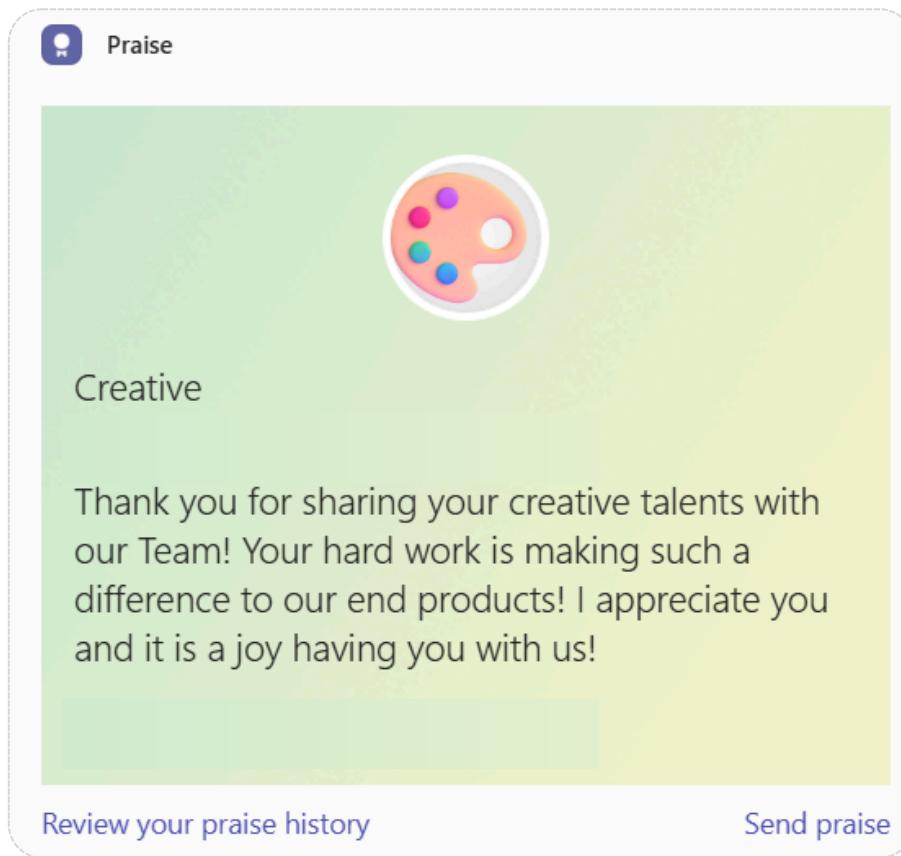


Digital Recognition Tools

2. Microsoft Teams “Praise” Function

Microsoft Teams includes a built-in “Praise” feature that allows users to send virtual badges of recognition to colleagues. These customizable badges include messages like “Thank You,” “Leadership,” “Team Player,” or “Creativity,” among others, and can be sent within individual or group Teams chats or even in larger channel threads.

This tool is great for real-time recognition during team meetings, project milestones, or after a successful shift. **See Appendix 1 for instructions on how to use “Praise” in Microsoft Teams.**



Tip: Encourage supervisors and co-workers to send at least one “Praise” message per week, either in individual or group chats, to build a culture of consistent, low-cost/no-cost appreciation. You can even set up Praise reminders in Teams to help prompt you to create this great habit!



Digital Recognition Tools

3. E-Certificates

This toolkit contains DBHDS customizable, fillable PDF certificates that can be emailed or printed. These can be used to recognize everything from years of service to specific acts of excellence.

See Appendix 2 for an example certificate template. All Fillable PDFs will be available for download from the Employee Appreciation Toolkit folder posted on SharePoint. Award template themes include:





Digital Recognition Tools

4. Nomination Forms (Fillable PDFs or Microsoft Forms)

Provide supervisors and teams with quick nomination forms for co-worker and manager-led recognition. These nomination forms can help identify monthly or quarterly “Employee of the Month” awards, quality of care recognition, innovation spotlights, and more.

See Appendix 3 for a Nomination Form template or download it from the Toolkit.





Digital Recognition Tools

5. Recognition Preferences Forms

Understanding how employees want to be appreciated is crucial to actually providing effective appreciation supports. However, people vary greatly on how they would like to be approached or what they may receive positively. This is why having employees take an appreciation language quiz is a great way to ascertain that information to better inform appreciation efforts.

See Appendix 4 for a recognition preference form template or download it from the Toolkit.





Digital Recognition Tools

6. Automated Outlook Emails for Birthdays and Work Anniversaries

The “Send Later” function in Microsoft Outlook allows managers and/or HR staff to schedule emails in advance, making it easy to acknowledge employee birthdays, work anniversaries, or key milestones consistently through the year.

By drafting recognition messages and scheduling them to send automatically, teams can ensure timely, thoughtful communication without relying on memory or manual reminders. This tool is especially useful for large teams or facilities managing multiple schedules, helping make recognition feel personal and planned – not rushed or forgotten.

See Appendix 5 for instructions on how to use the “Send Later” function in Microsoft Office, as well as two sample email templates.





Traditional and Hybrid Tools

1. Recognition Leave Tracker

A simple Excel template to help HR teams and supervisors track organizational recognition leave awarded to employees in accordance with DHRM Policy 1.15. Using a tracker will help ensure fair distribution and avoid exceeding annual leave limits.

See Appendix 6 for a Recognition Leave Tracker template or download it from the Toolkit.





Traditional and Hybrid Tools

2. Thank You Cards

Thank you cards are a tangible form of appreciation, one that an employee can hold onto as a keepsake or as a visual reminder that they are valued. Also, cards are more meaningful, especially if they are hand-written or designed by the sender. Be sure to write specifically why the employee is being thanked to make the card more genuine and thoughtful.

See Appendix 7 for a card template or download it from the Toolkit.





Closing

By utilizing the guidance from this toolkit, we will get even closer to our goal of building a #OneDBHDS identity. Recognition is vital to our workplace culture at all levels, whether it be individual, co-worker to co-worker, or organizational. Studies have pointed to employee recognition as a factor behind improved morale and increased sense of belonging, as well as job satisfaction and reduced turnover. Recognition is an investment in people, culture, and mission that follows our core goals of engagement, wellness, and workforce stability. Employees produce great results when they are valued and included. By referring to the practices and resources within this toolkit, it is possible to implement recognition across the workforce, formally and informally. Inclusive and thoughtful recognition presents the best results and shapes an empowered and galvanized workforce.

DBHDS

ONE DBHDS
COMMITMENT

As your co-worker, and with our shared commitment of accountability to each other, our team, and those in our care:

- I accept responsibility for maintaining healthy relationships with you and everyone on our team. We are ONE DBHDS.
- I will intentionally and purposefully work to establish trust with you and every member of our team, regardless of titles, positions, levels of education, or personal differences. I will be respectful, honest, supportive, and transparent. I will share my knowledge and expertise and appreciate the opportunity to learn from yours. We are in this together.
- If I am having difficulty in our relationship, or have questions about your work, I will speak with you directly. I will keep an open mind and listen thoughtfully. I will not speak over you or interrupt. I will invite your contribution to the conversation. I will assume your intentions are good. The only time I will speak with anyone else about the difficulty is to seek advice on how to connect with you on the concern.
- I will contribute, collaborate, and celebrate with you and every member of our team. Our work matters, and together we are better.
- I will practice gratitude, encouragement, and hope. I will practice the art of apology and forgiveness, accepting that we are all human, including me.
- I will offer solutions over blame, encouragement over shame, and resources over withholding.
- I will affirm your contributions to the quality of our work.



References

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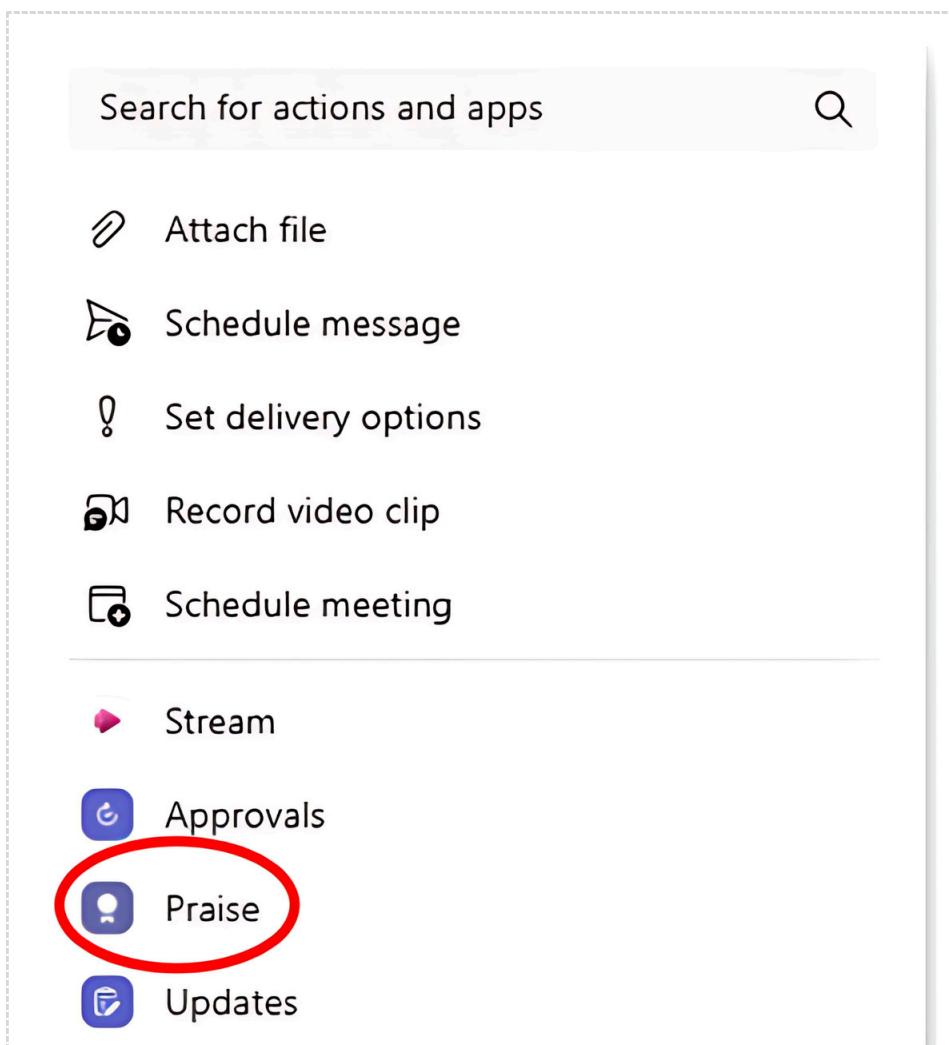
Appendix One

How to use the “Praise” function in Microsoft Teams:

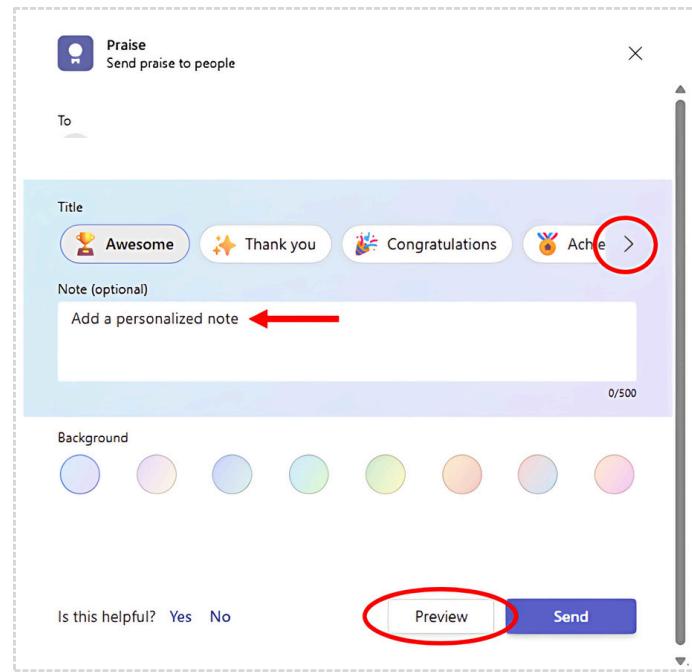
1. In a Microsoft Teams chat or channel, select the “+” button at the righthand side of the text bar.



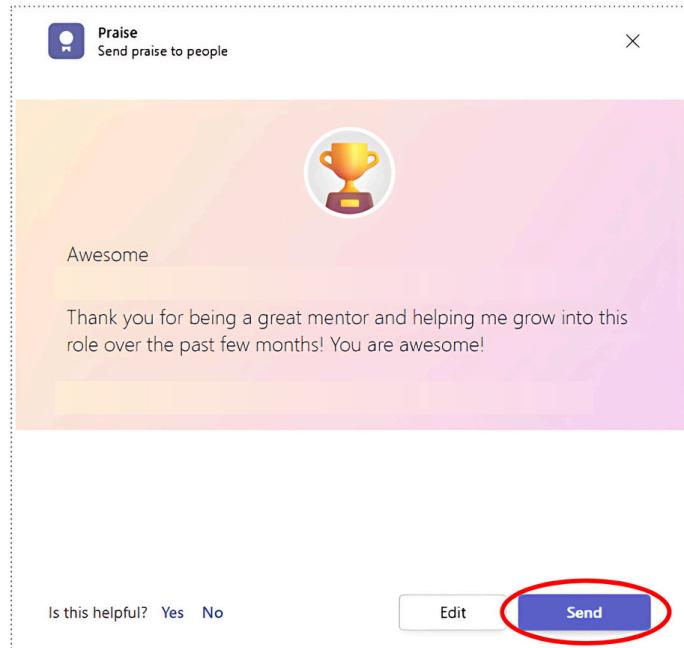
2. From the list of options, select the “Praise” icon.



3. You can now customize the “Praise” you would like to send. The “To” line identifies the recipient of your recognition. Under “Title,” you can click the arrow to scroll through the 14 different types of recognition. Add a personalized note in the “Note” text box and select a color pallet for the badge under “Background.” Once you have made all customizations, you can select “Preview” to view how the badge looks before sending.



4. The “Preview” will look like this. If you like how yours looks, hit “Send”!





Appendix Two

Example Certificate Template





Appendix Three

Nomination Form Template

Click the image and make a copy of the provided form.



Nominate an Employee for []

Thank you for taking the time to fill out a nomination form for [].

We at [Department/Division Name] are grateful for our staff and leaders that empower our teams and bring us closer to our #OneDBHDS vision for the workplace. Please fill out all sections of the form.

Section 1

NOTE (Delete when done formatting)
This is a template nomination form for supervisors and teams to distribute for peer-to-peer or management recognition. Feel free to edit questions, title, and description based on your division's or department's needs.

1. Nominee Name (First and Last) *

Enter your answer

2. Nominee Work Unit *

Enter your answer

3. Your Name (First and Last) *

Enter your answer

4. Your Work Unit *



Appendix Four

Recognition Preferences Form Template



Click the image and make a copy of the provided form.

After collecting responses from your employees, compare them to the results in the chart below to determine what types of recognition should be utilized for your team.

Language Type	Communication	Actions	What to Avoid
Mostly A's = Words of Affirmation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compliments• Affirmation• Kind words	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Send notes/ cards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Criticism
Mostly B's = Quality Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-to-one time• No interrupting• Face-to-face conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Celebrations• Doing things together• Team-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long periods between one-on-ones• more time with others than with them
Mostly C's = Receiving Gifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive• Fact-orientated information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give gifts for milestones and accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not recognizing milestones and accomplishments
Mostly D's = Acts of Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action words like:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ “I can”◦ “I will”◦ “What else can I do?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helping with projects• Acts of kindness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ignoring requests while helping others



Appendix Five

How to use the “Send Later” function in (web-based) Microsoft Outlook to schedule emails:

1. Create an email like any other by clicking the “new mail” button.

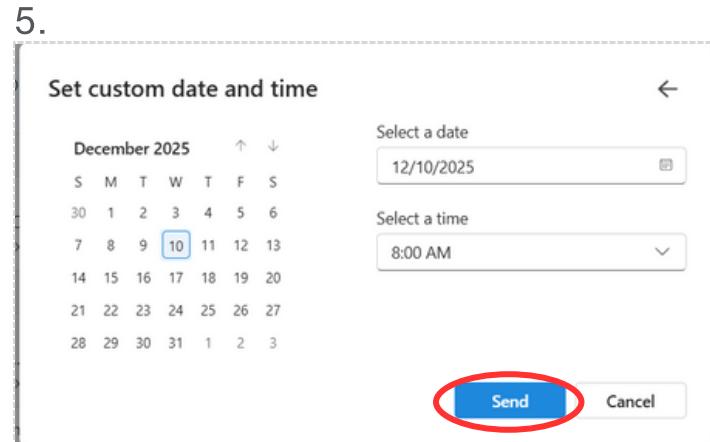
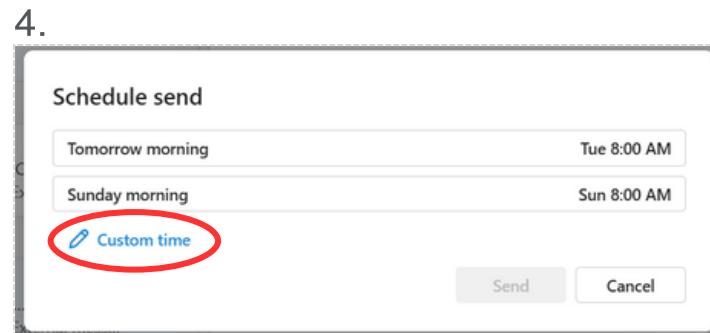
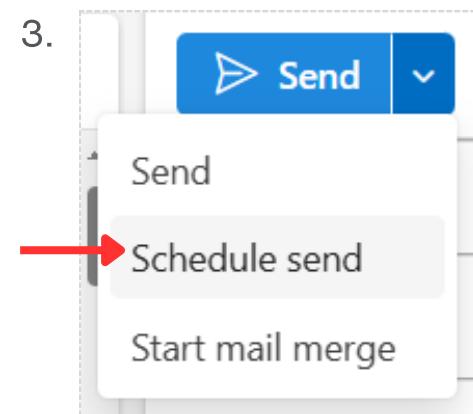
2. Address the email, add a subject, and write the email’s contents.

3. Prior to hitting send, click on the drop-down menu next to the send button, and select the “schedule send” option.

4. Enter a date and time for the email to be sent using the calendar provided.

5. Double-check the correct date and time has been selected and then proceed by clicking “Send.”

*Messages can be cancelled by finding the scheduled email in the “Drafts” folder and selecting the option to “cancel send.” After emails have been cancelled, they remain a normal draft that can either be sent immediately or rescheduled to another time.





Sample Emails:

#1: Birthday

Subject: Happy Birthday! 🎉

Hi [employee name],

I hope this email finds you well on your special day! 🎈

Your contributions are vital to the work we do here at [facility], and I would like to thank you for making our workplace a better one.

On behalf of the [department/facility], we wish you the happiest of birthdays!

Best, [Sender's name]

#2: Work Anniversary

Subject: Celebrating Your Work Anniversary

Hi [employee name],

Congratulations! Today is an important day – one that marks [number of years] years of you working at [facility name]! On this work anniversary, I hope you know that your contributions are noticed!

You have grown professionally and are an important member of our team. I can truly say I am looking forward to many more years of collaboration.

Thank you for your continued service!

Best, [Sender's name]



Appendix Six

Recognition Leave Tracker Template

Click the image, or visit the Toolkit, and make a copy of the provided spreadsheet to track awarded recognition leave to ensure fairness.





Appendix Seven

Thank You Card Template

There are three templates: there are horizontal and vertical versions that are fillable in Word and there is one that can be printed with the message handwritten on the back. All three templates can be handwritten (just delete the text when editing).

Instructions

1. Download the fillable forms from the Employee Appreciation Toolkit on SharePoint and save them to your computer or desk top.
2. Open the saved file from your computer, edit the fillable form components, and save as a PDF to email as an attachment or print.

