

NIH Policy Manual

2300-451-3 - Employee Suggestion Program

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Transmittal Notice

1. **Explanation of Material Transmitted:** This chapter contains revised policies and procedures for processing employee suggestions.
2. **Filing Instructions:**

Remove: NIH Manual 2300-451-3 dated 05/12/93.

Insert: NIH Manual 2300-451-3 dated 10/27/2000.

(Keep this transmittal sheet as long as any pages of this chapter are in effect.)

PLEASE NOTE: For information on:

- content of this chapter, contact the issuing office listed above.
- NIH Manual System, contact the Division of Management Support (DMS), OMA, on (301) 496-2832.
- on-line information on the NIH Manual System and on-line chapter text, use:
INTERNET (<http://oma.od.nih.gov/manualchapters/>)

A. Purpose

This chapter describes the NIH Employee Suggestion Program. As part of the HHS Incentive Awards Program, the NIH program aims to improve Government operations and services. The program is designed to motivate employees to increase productivity and creativity by rewarding those whose accomplishments and adopted ideas benefit the Federal Government.

B. Background and References

1. 5 U.S.C. 4501 et seq.
2. Federal Personnel Manual, Chapter 451.
3. HHS Personnel Manual Instruction 451-1, Incentive Awards.
4. NIH Delegation of Authority, HR: Awards #01 entitled Monetary Awards can be accessed via the NIH Delegations of Authority (DOA) Database at <http://www.delegations.nih.gov>

C. Responsibilities

1. Director, NIH:
 - a. is responsible for the overall NIH Employee Suggestion Program;
 - b. has authority to approve cash awards up to the amount of \$10,000 and to recommend awards in amounts in excess of this level to the Secretary;
 - c. approves cash awards for members of the SES/SSS/SBRS between the amounts of \$5,001 and \$10,000; and
 - d. approves cash awards for employees who report to the NIH Director.
2. NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator, Office of Management Assessment (OMA), Division of Management Support (DMS):
 - a. manages and administers the NIH Employee Suggestion Program, and
 - b. forwards suggestions that require evaluation by another component within or outside HHS, through appropriate channels.
3. Deputy Directors, OHR Director, and IC Directors:
 - a. have delegated authority to approve cash awards up to \$10,000 for adopted suggestions, with authority to redelegate (OD, NIH approval is required if employee reports to IC Director);
 - b. have delegated authority to approve cash awards up to \$5,000 for members of the SES/SSS/SBRS; and
 - c. appoint a Suggestion Coordinator to administer the program within the IC.
4. NIH Supervisors:
 - a. must be receptive to employee suggestions;
 - b. do not have the authority to reject employee suggestions;
 - c. evaluate the practicality and soundness of the ideas; and
 - d. assist employees in preparing suggestions by obtaining the suggestion forms, assisting in wording the suggestion, if the employee so requests, and forwarding the suggestion to the IC or NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator, if requested.
5. Suggestion Coordinators:
 - a. acknowledge each employee suggestion upon its receipt, assign a control number, and record the date and time the suggestion is received;
 - b. review all suggestions received for evaluation and forward to the Employee Suggestion Coordinator of the evaluating organization;
 - c. forward suggestions that require review outside of their organization to the NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator in DMS; and
 - d. retain and dispose of employee suggestion program files (see Section J).

6. Suggestion Evaluators:

- a. give due consideration to a suggestion.
- b. process suggestions which pertain to their functional areas in a fair and timely manner (HHS Personnel Manual Instruction 451-1 indicates that suggestions processed within the same organization should be completed within 30 days from date of receipt by the suggestion coordinator; within 60 days if the suggestion requires higher level consideration; and within 90 days if the suggestion requires consideration at the Department level or by other Federal agencies (See Appendix 3));
- c. decide whether or not to adopt a suggestion; and
- d. consider granting an award for adopted suggestions.

7. Suggestors:

- a. submit suggestions using Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion. (The completed form must include the signature of the suggester and should indicate in item 9 if the suggester wishes to remain anonymous during the evaluation process); and
- b. follow the procedures identified in NIH Manual 2300-451-3, Appendix 1, "Submitting Suggestions."

D. Definition

Employee Suggestion: An employee suggestion is a constructive idea, written on Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion (Appendix 2), and formally submitted by one or more employees, which directly contributes to economy or efficiency, or directly improves operations or services of the Federal Government. (Examples of types of suggestions excluded from the employee suggestion system are discussed in Appendix 1.) Employees who submit ideas that cannot be considered suggestions will be advised by memorandum that NIH is precluded from accepting these ideas but that their efforts to better NIH operations are appreciated and should continue.

E. Eligibility

All employees of NIH, except PHS Commissioned Corps Officers who have a separate program, are eligible to participate in the suggestion program. Private citizens are also eligible for an award certificate and letter of thanks but cannot receive a cash award.

F. Procedures

1. Individual Suggestions

The suggester prepares Form HHS-170, Employee Suggestion (Appendix 2) that describes a specific problem and offers a solution. In preparing suggestions, consideration should be given to the criteria identified in HHS Personnel Manual Instruction Exhibit 451-1-J (see Appendix 1). Benefits and/or savings should be shown,

if known. Any available clarifying information (photos, drawings, stock numbers, etc.) should be attached.

The suggester should sign the form and submit an original to the supervisor, IC Suggestion Coordinator or NIH Suggestion Coordinator. Supervisors do not have the authority to reject employee suggestions. This authority is reserved to suggestion coordinators and officials designated by the Director, NIH, to make suggestion awards. Suggesters should keep a copy of any suggestion submitted.

2. Group Suggestions

A group suggestion should be submitted using one completed Form 170, Employee Suggestion, designating "Group Suggestion" in item 1. In addition, each co-suggester should complete items 1-10 and 14-15 of a separate Form HHS 170, which will be retained by the suggestion coordinator. There is no limit on the number of co-suggesters who can be involved in the joint effort.

3. After-the-Fact Suggestions

After-the-fact suggestions are ideas that have been adopted informally or under some other program. They must be submitted in writing on a Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion, within six months after the date of implementation. The suggestion should identify the person(s) to whom the proposal was previously made, the place, approximate date, benefits, and circumstances so that a correlation between the suggestion and the implementation can be evaluated.

4. Receipt of an Employee Suggestion

The suggestion coordinator acknowledges each employee suggestion upon its receipt, assigns a control number, and records the date and time the suggestion is received. Next, the suggestion coordinator determines whether or not the suggestion meets the criteria identified in HHS Personnel Manual Instruction Exhibit 451-1-J (see Appendix 1). If these criteria are not met, the suggestion coordinator closes the suggestion and sends a memorandum explaining the action to the suggester. If these criteria are met, the suggestion coordinator forwards the suggestion for evaluation to the program official(s) responsible for the area that is the subject of the suggestion. A request for evaluation should include a copy of the evaluating suggestion guidance contained in HHS Personnel Manual Instruction Exhibit 451-1-L (see Appendix 3); Form NIH-2696, Evaluation of Employee Suggestion (see Appendix 4); and the cash award schedules (see Appendix 5).

5. Disposition of an Employee Suggestion

The decision on whether a suggestion is adopted or not ultimately rests with the NIH official with delegated authority. In cases where the suggestion coordinator and the evaluator cannot agree on the implementation of a suggestion which affects the evaluator's operations, the matter should be referred to the official with suggestion award authority for resolution.

Upon receipt of a complete evaluation, the suggestion coordinator prepares a memorandum informing the suggester of the action being taken. When a suggestion is not recommended for adoption, the memorandum should clearly and tactfully state the reasons for non-adoption.

In all cases the suggester should be advised in writing of the disposition of the suggestion.

6. Cash Awards

A minimum cash award of \$100 is made for adopted suggestions that result in benefits to the Government (see Appendix 5). This minimum cash award may be granted for tangible benefits only when the benefits reach or exceed \$1,000. The minimum award for intangible benefits require a comparably high standard.

For adopted suggestions, the suggestion coordinator prepares a Form HHS 171, Recommendation for Cash Award, (see Appendix 6), and a Form PHS 4314-1, Certificate of Appreciation, (see Appendix 7). These forms are forwarded with a copy of the suggestion, all in duplicate, to the appropriate approving official. For awards that are not within the IC delegation, the package is submitted to the NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator who will review the package and transmit it through channels to the appropriate office(s). Approvals of cash awards for employees who report to IC Directors must be submitted for OD, NIH approval to OHR.

When the award is approved, the suggestion coordinator notifies the suggester and the supervisor that the award has been approved. For awards of \$100 or over, the suggestion coordinator notifies The NIH Record.

G. Appeals

Employees may appeal the decisions concerning their suggestions, first to the IC Suggestion Coordinator who advised them that the suggestion was not adopted; next to the NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator; and finally, to the Associate Director for Administration, NIH. Appeals must be filed within 60 days of final action taken by a suggestion coordinator.

H. Presidential Awards

Adopted suggestions that are beyond job requirements and result in first year measurable (tangible savings) benefits of \$10,000 or more should be recommended to the Office of the Secretary (OS) for consideration for a Presidential Letter of Commendation. (See HHS Personnel Manual Instruction 451-1-50.)

I. Copies of Forms

For copies of the Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion, or the Form NIH 2696, Evaluation of Employee Suggestion, contact the NIH Employee Suggestion Coordinator, Office of Management Assessment (OMA), Division of Management Support (DMS), on 301-496-2832.

J. Records Retention & Disposal

All records (e-mail and non-e-mail) pertaining to this chapter must be retained and disposed of under the authority of [NIH Manual 1743](#), “Keeping and Destroying Records, Appendix 1, NIH Records Control Schedule,” Item 2300-450-1, “General Awards Records.”

NIH e-mail messages. NIH e-mail messages (messages, including attachments, that are created on NIH computer systems or transmitted over NIH networks) that are evidence of the activities of the agency or have informational value are considered Federal records. These records must be maintained in accordance with current NIH Records Management guidelines. Contact your IC Records Officer for additional information.

All e-mail messages are considered government property, and, if requested for a legitimate government purpose, must be provided to the requester. Employees' supervisors, NIH staff conducting official reviews or investigations, and the Office of Inspector General may request access to or copies of the e-mail messages. E-mail messages must also be provided to members of Congress or Congressional committees if requested and are subject to Freedom of Information Act requests. Since most e-mail systems have back-up files that are retained for significant periods of time, e-mail messages and attachments are likely to be retrievable from a back-up file after they have been deleted from an individual's computer. The back-up files are subject to the same requests as the original messages.

K. Internal Controls

1. **Office responsible for reviewing Internal Controls relative to this chapter** is the Division of Management Support (DMS).
2. **Frequency of review:** three years.
3. A small sample of employee suggestions will be reviewed every three years against the current policy to make certain the policies are being adhered to by the IC/NIH.
4. **Review reports are sent to** the Deputy Director for Management (DDM).

Appendix 1 - Submitting Suggestions, HHS Exhibit 451-J

The suggestion should identify the person(s) to whom the proposal was previously made, the place, approximate date, benefits, and circumstances so that a correlation between the suggestion and the implementation can be evaluated.

A. To be eligible for consideration as a suggestion, an idea must:

1. Simplify or improve operations;
2. Speed up production;
3. Improve working conditions, procedures, operating methods or equipment;
4. Save materials/property;
5. Enhance current technology or save money; or
6. Save energy (that results in tangible savings).

B. Ideas are not eligible to be considered as suggestions if they:

1. Call attention to the need for maintenance or repair work relating to buildings, grounds, or parking lots, such as painting, replacing, cleaning, etc.;
2. Relate to services or benefits to employees, such as vending machines, cafeteria services, restroom facilities, parking facilities;

3. Relate to normal safety practices, such as normal protective devices, removal of obstructions, installation of warning and traffic signs;
4. Are considered complaints;
5. Call attention to typographical or printing errors that normally would be corrected during scheduled review and do not cause misinterpretation or error;
6. Relate to stocking or re-stocking GSA Supply Store items listed in GSA Supply Catalogue;
7. Specify clarification of a manual or regulation; or
8. Relate to cosmetic treatment, format, construction, color, or selection of equipment for new or existing forms or publications.

C. Suggestions must be submitted on Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion, (Appendix 2). Suggestors must:

1. Describe a specific problem and offer a solution. Benefits and/or savings should be shown, if known. Attach all available information to clarify the proposal (sketches, photos, drawings, identification of specific buildings, stock numbers, etc.).
2. Sign the form to signify agreement that the United States may use their idea without incurring any further claims by the suggestors or their heirs.
3. Note on the form (item 9) if they wish to remain anonymous.
4. For a group suggestion, submit one completed form, designating "Group Suggestion" in item 1. Each suggestor should complete the top (items 1-10) and sign the back (items 14-15) of a separate Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion, which will be retained by the suggestion coordinator. There is no limit on the number of co-suggestors who can be involved in the joint effort.

D. After-the-fact suggestions are ideas that have been adopted informally or under some other program. They must be submitted in writing on a Form HHS 170, Employee Suggestion, within six months after the date of implementation.

E. The suggestion should be submitted through the immediate supervisor or may be submitted directly to the appropriate suggestion coordinator. Submission through the suggestor's immediate supervisor is encouraged since advice may be provided that could improve the quality and scope of the suggestion.

F. If a suggestion is not adopted, the suggestor may request reconsideration if additional evidence is provided, such as new material/information, or if significant issues or questions are clarified. The reconsideration request may be submitted any time during the two year award entitlement period.

Appendix 2 - Form HHS-170 Employee Suggestion

Form HHS-170 Employee Suggestion

Appendix 3 - Evaluating Suggestions HHS Exhibit 451-1-L

The office that has the primary responsibility for a specific operation, procedure, system or program must evaluate a suggestion based on its value and usefulness to the Government when the subject of the suggestion falls within the office's area of responsibility. The office will assign an evaluator at an appropriately responsible level within the organization.

A. The evaluator must:

1. Give due consideration to a suggestion;
2. Decide whether or not to adopt it; and
3. If the suggestion is adopted, consider granting an award.

B. In evaluating a suggestion and deciding whether or not to adopt it, the evaluator should:

1. Discuss it with the suggester if necessary to gain a clear understanding of the intent, etc.
2. Discuss with the suggestion coordinator any questions on the suggestion program (i.e., evaluation procedures, decision to adopt/not adopt, granting of an award, and amount of awards).
3. Complete a Form NIH 2696, Evaluation of Employee Suggestion (see Appendix 4). The explanation of the decision to adopt or not adopt should state specific reasons which may be passed verbatim to the suggester.
4. Promptly, objectively, and fairly consider the suggestion and not disapprove it solely because:
 - a. the suggestion is job-related. The evaluation must be confined to the merits of the suggestion;
 - b. an existing directive precludes the idea suggested. A directive may sometimes be changed by a suggestion if it proves beneficial to the Government. If the proposal is contrary to law, regulation, Executive Order or similar requirement, identify the requirement;
 - c. the suggested idea is already covered by an existing directive. The evaluator should consider adoption of the suggestion if adoption would cause implementation of a requirement which was previously unknown or which had not been put into use because of a misunderstanding or misinterpretation; or
 - d. the idea is under prior management consideration or in use. The suggestion should be evaluated carefully to determine any correlation between the suggestion and the actions taken.

5. Check for duplication of another suggestion. An idea which duplicates one already under consideration may not be considered. An idea which duplicates one that was previously considered and not adopted may not be considered for two years after the date of final action on the first suggestion. (However, if the second suggester is responsible for the implementation of the previously not adopted suggestion, both the first and second suggesters should share in the award as merited.) If the second suggestion is similar to the first, but based on different conditions, it may be processed at any time and may be eligible for an award, if adopted.
6. Credit the suggester with a partial adoption if evaluation of the suggestion caused the development of a more feasible solution.
7. If the suggestion is adopted, state how it might be used elsewhere throughout the Government.

C. The evaluator should forward the completed evaluation report, along with the suggestion package, to the suggestion coordinator. If the suggestion is adopted, the evaluator should also arrange for preparation of the award recommendation (see Appendices 6 and 7).

D. Suggestions should be referred by the appropriate suggestion coordinators as follows:

1. Suggestions that require evaluation by another part of HHS, or another Federal agency other than the one in which they originate should be forwarded by the originating suggestion coordinator to the NIH Suggestion Coordinator in the Division of Management Support, OMA.
2. Suggestions that require Department level evaluation or evaluation by another Federal agency should be forwarded through appropriate channels to the Department Incentive Awards Office. If adoption of the suggestion will affect the operation of the originating organization in any way, an evaluation by the originating organization should be made before it is forwarded. If the originating organization has authority to implement at least part of the suggestion, the suggestion may be adopted and an award may be granted before forwarding to the Department for wider consideration.

E. Suggestions should be processed within the following time frames:

1. Suggestions processed within the same organization in which they originated should be completed within 30 days from the date of receipt by the suggestion coordinator; within 60 days if the suggestion requires higher level consideration; and within 90 days if the suggestion requires consideration at the Department level or other Federal agencies.
2. If a testing period is necessary before adoption is final, the evaluator shall notify the suggestion coordinator in writing, stating an estimated time frame for testing. The suggestion coordinator shall notify the suggester of this action.
3. If there are delays beyond the established time frames, the evaluator should notify the suggestion coordinator.

F. If a suggester requests reconsideration of a suggestion that was not adopted, the reevaluation should be made at the next level above where it was last evaluated.

Appendix 4 - Form NIH-2696 Evaluation of Employee Suggestion

[Form NIH-2696 Evaluation of Employee Suggestion](#)

Appendix 5 - Scale of Awards

[Scale of Awards - scroll down to page 2](#)

Appendix 6 - Form HHS-171 Recommendation for Cash Award

[Form HHS-171 Recommendation for Cash Award](#)

Appendix 7 - Form PHS-4314-1 Certificate of Appreciation

[Appendix 7 - Form PHS-4314-1 Certificate of Appreciation](#)