

Innovation Award Application 2014



TOTAL ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

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Describe the Program/project/ product/ service innovation:

Placer County implemented a Disability/Leave Management program which includes administering and coordinating a countywide leave management and return to work program that complies with all local, state, and federal leave management regulations (including Americans with Disability Act, Family and Medical Leave Act, California Family Rights Act, California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, etc.).

Short description of the importance, internal impact, and community benefits:

Program outcomes include: reducing the number of employees on extended leaves of absence and long-term modified work assignments while adhering to all local, state, and federal laws; providing opportunities for employees to continue working and performing successfully in their positions when impacted by a medical condition; providing a win-win situation for both the employee and the employer; meeting the employee’s need to continue working while meeting the business needs of the agency; and, effectively managing the workforce and treating people fairly and equitably. An engaged, productive, and staffed workforce allows Placer County to provide a high level of customer service to the community.

What makes this a quantum leap of creativity?

The program encourages stepping outside the typical boundaries and identifying creative approaches in temporarily modifying an employee’s job duties/assignment. Actively collaborating and brainstorming to identify the best possible options, implementing, and continually meeting to assess and monitor outcomes. In addition, in order to become a successful program with full possibilities captured, partnerships needed to be established and grown. The Disability Management Administrator collaborates and partners with county department heads, supervisors, managers, and employees; county counsel; the county workers compensation administrator; the county executive officer; the personnel department; and, local union representatives.

Who benefits?

Employees tend to be more engaged, thereby increasing morale and allowing for a more productive workforce. Co-workers support each other which increases their commitment to the agency. The more motivated employees are to get back to work, the quicker their overall recovery and return to work at full capacity. The County benefits by maintaining an increased work force with a reduction in costs associated with extra help/temporary workers, temporary disability benefits, health benefits, etc., and the ability to continue to provide services to the community.

How was the program/project/product/service initiated and implemented?

Being a Risk Manager, Maryellen Peters saw the need and ability to reduce overall leaves of absences and workers’ compensation costs for the County. Together with the CEO at the time, Tom Miller, they received support from the Placer County Board of Supervisors. The Board acknowledged the need, agreed upon the concept, and created a position within the Risk Management Division of the County Executive Office. In her role as the Disability Management Administrator, Nicole Lopez established and grew the program to become a comprehensive leave management and return to work program. The current CEO, David Boesch, and the Board continue to support the program.

What risks were taken?

While adhering to the multitude of laws, regulations, and protections covering employees with medical conditions, Placer County took a proactive approach with employees on medical leaves of absences or working with medical limitations that allows for meeting employee needs as well as meeting the business and operational needs of the agency within a civil service system.

What, if any were the costs and/or savings?

In the first year of implementing the program, the County reduced the number of long-term leaves of absences (over one year in duration) from 42 employees to 1 and reduced the long-term modified duty assignments by 50%. The County significantly reduced their worker’s compensation Total Temporary Disability (TTD) payments because of the implementation of a total absence management program. In the first five years of implementing the program, the TTD benefits paid out decreased by 74% and the public safety disability benefits (LC4850 leaves for Sheriff and Probation) paid out decreased by 90%. With the work related industrial injuries only accounting for 2% of the County’s leaves of absence and 22% of the modified duty cases, the leave management/return to work model made a significant impact on the overall outcome of claims and the County’s workforce.

What are the lessons learned that other local governments can learn from?

Although bound by a multitude of laws, regulations, and protections, the employer can take a proactive and positive approach to addressing long-term leaves of absences and modified work needs for industrial and non-industrial injuries and illnesses that provide fair and equitable work while still holding employees accountable for their work efforts.

What department and/or individual(s) championed the innovation? If a contractor was used, please list the name and their contact information.

Placer County Risk Management and the focus of their Disability Management Administrator established and grew the program to become a comprehensive leave management and return to work program.

Any additional information you would like to share?

Placer County continues to benefit from this innovative total absence management program both financially and through continued engagement with our workforce and partnerships.