



RAISING THE BAR

**HR's Guide to Building Outstanding
Employee Recognition Programs**



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INTRODUCTION

A note from your friends at Bucketlist Rewards

How should we be approaching employee rewards and recognition?
What goes into designing a successful program?
How do I make sure people take the time to recognize each other?

If any of these questions have been running through your mind, you're in the right place!

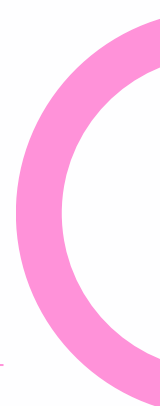
Welcome to our playbook Raising the Bar! We're so excited to have you join us and hope that you'll find exactly what you're looking for within these pages. 🙏

The goal of this playbook is to help you build a high impact recognition and rewards program. And so, we've broken it down into three parts:

- How to design a killer R&R Program
- How to plan an effective Program Launch
- How to get participation and engagement

We've crammed suggestions, templates, case studies, stories, and resources into each section.

Enjoy!



PART ONE:

How to Design a Killer R&R Program

Step 1: Conducting a Needs Assessment for your Rewards and Recognition Program

A needs assessment is a fundamental first step in the process of designing and implementing a successful rewards and recognition (R&R) program within an organization. It involves a systematic process of gathering information and data to understand your organization's current state and identifies gaps or areas where improvements are required.

The results from a needs assessment is crucial for effective program customization and effective resource allocation, which enhances employee buy-in. For example, you may find that people would like to be able to recognize their peers. You may find that there is a large group of people that prefer choosing their own rewards over receiving gift cards. By understanding what your team values when it comes to recognition will ensure that your program positively impacts your workplace culture.

How to Conduct a Needs Assessment

1. Identify Key Objectives:

The very first step is to determine why the organization is interested in an R&R program. Typically, organizations aim to improve retention rates, offer additional rewards, and enhance recognition within their workforce. By doing this first, it will guide you when conducting the steps to come.

University of Texas Arlington Example:

After conducting a Denison Culture Survey in 2016, the Office of Information Technology department at UTA knew they needed to make some changes. The survey pointed out two key areas of improvement:

1. People worked in silos
2. There wasn't much cross communication between departments.

Due to this, they knew they wanted to leverage a recognition and rewards program to help address these two pain points.

2. Conduct Surveys:

A needs assessment can be done through a survey that the organization distributes to its employees. While surveys are optional, they can provide valuable insights, especially when clients are uncertain about employee preferences. The survey should capture the type of recognition and rewards employees desire, as well as their preferred frequency.

A few examples of the types of questions to ask in these surveys:

1. How important is it to receive formal recognition for your contributions/achievements?
2. How important is it to be recognized by a manager or leader?
3. Have you ever been recognized for your efforts?
4. How would you like to be recognized and rewarded? Can you think of 3-5 ideas?



Need more inspiration for questions to include in your survey? Download our [employee recognition and rewards survey](#).

3. Analyze Survey Results:

Review the survey results to gain a better understanding of employee preferences and expectations. This data can be instrumental in customizing your Rewards and Recognition program to align with the organization's goals and the workforce's desires.

University of Texas Arlington Example:

After conducting a survey, UTA decided to customize some parts of their program to reflect feedback they learned:

Some of the unique customizations UTA made for their program:

- Instead of points for recognition, UTA's leaderboard comprises the top 8 recognition 'givers' and 'getters' each month. This motivates the act of giving recognition.
- Each month, the top 8 givers and getters get to choose an item from their custom reward store

Step 2: Setting Goals and Metrics for Effective Rewards and Recognition Programs

Recall the key objectives you've identified. What do you hope to achieve with your recognition and rewards program? Whether it's improved employee engagement, decreased turnover, or enhanced productivity, having a clear goal in mind will guide your strategy and help measure its success.

Some tips for R&R program Goal Setting...

Collect Benchmark Data:

Gather benchmark data during the first few months of program implementation to help establish a baseline for program engagement and effectiveness. This will provide valuable insights for the future on what's working and what might require improvement.

Participate in Iterative Goal Setting:

While you may enter the process with initial ideas about goals and metrics, consider setting specific targets after the program's initial phases - we recommend waiting at least a few months after the program was first launched. This allows time for feedback from your team to understand what resonates so that you can adjust the goals accordingly. It's also important to ensure your goals are realistic and achievable.

Have a flexible mindset for program evolution:

R&R programs are not static. Be prepared to adapt as you gain insights into what works best for your team. Being open to shifts in focus can lead to more effective outcomes.



Common R&R Program Goals and Metrics

Common goals and metrics for R&R programs include:

1. Engagement rates:

Measure employee engagement with the program to gauge how well it resonates. Metrics may include the frequency of point redemption, number of monthly active users, and the overall utilization of the platform.

2. Recognition:

Assess how effectively recognition is happening within the organization. Metrics may include the number of recognitions sent and received, the diversity of recognitions, and feedback on the quality of recognition from employees.

3. Budget Utilization:

Evaluate how well the allocated budget is utilized. Organizations often set a target for budget usage to ensure that rewards are distributed and do not go unused.

4. Managerial Involvement:

Understand how actively managers participate in the program and recognize their team members. Metrics here might include the number of recognitions from managers and the promptness of manager engagement.

While these common metrics may provide a good starting point, you may also consider specialized metrics that align with your unique goals to ensure that you're accurately measuring and understanding the impact of your R&R program.

Step 3: Enhancing Employee Recognition through Peer-to-Peer Recognition

What is peer-to-peer recognition?

Traditionally, recognition at an organization is given from the top-down. Peer-to-peer recognition allows employees at any level to acknowledge and thank their colleagues for their hard work. Peer to peer recognition is one of the most valued forms of recognition and will continue to prove its value especially given that 41% of employees want to be recognized by a peer

Why should you incorporate peer-to-peer recognition in your R&R program?

1

Improved Collaboration and Teamwork:

Recognition plays a crucial role in fostering collaboration and teamwork and when individuals are acknowledged for their contributions, they feel a sense of belonging and are more likely to collaborate, share knowledge, and support one another.

Peer-to-peer recognition increases the probability of a constructive team culture by 2.5x.

2

Increased Employee Engagement:

Peer recognition encourages active participation from all employees, breaking down hierarchical barriers.

90% of workers noted that a values-based, peer-to-peer recognition made them more satisfied with their work.

4

Boosted Innovation and Creativity:

Peer recognition creates a culture that values new ideas and contributions. Employees who receive strong recognition are 33% more likely to be proactively innovating. When employees know that their peers will appreciate and recognize their efforts, they feel empowered to share their innovative thoughts and solutions. This encourages a sense of psychological safety, where individuals are comfortable taking risks and thinking outside the box.

3

Increased Retention and Reduced Turnover:

When employees receive regular recognition from their peers, they feel a sense of pride and fulfillment in their work. According to a SurveyMonkey survey, 63% of employees who consistently receive recognition are unlikely to look for a new job within the next six months.

5

Strengthened Organizational Culture:

Peer recognition initiatives contribute to building a strong and positive organizational culture and contributes to greater organizational prosperity given that peer to peer recognition is 35.7% more likely to have a positive impact on financial results than manager-only recognition. Peer to peer recognition benefits not only the individuals involved but also the entire workforce.

How to enable effective peer-to-peer recognitions in your R&R program:

- Allow employees to add a monetary value to recognitions (eg. points) that can be accumulated and redeemed for something like a gift card, experiential reward, or even a donation to their favourite charity.
- Drive recurrence by encouraging people to recognize peers on a weekly basis. You can create an incentive for those who are actively recognizing their peers, such as an additional award or prize
- Ensure leaders draw attention to peer recognitions and celebrate them as well.
- Have a recognition leaderboard that showcases peer-to-peer recognitions.

How does Peer Recognition Motivate Differently?

People are driven both by intrinsic (internally desire/ rewarding to self) and extrinsic (external factor/ earn a reward or avoid punishment) motivation. While manager-to-employee recognition is important, recognition from a peer is seen differently. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, peer recognition connects to both love and belonging needs and to self-esteem needs. In addition to receiving recognition from a coworker, the research shows that there is often a desire for reciprocity and triggers a pay-it-forward act. This drives far more acts of recognition for weeks and weeks. All that goodness for a minor investment!

Step 4: Elevating Employee Recognition through Custom Awards

Why are custom awards an important element of any recognition program?

Employee appreciation awards are an awesome way to let people know that they're being recognized for something specific. Years of service awards are a common example. To kick things up a notch, we recommend adding custom awards to the mix!

Create custom awards that:

- Fit the theme of your industry
- Include pop culture references
- Align with your core values
- Reinforce the workplace culture that you envision

Injecting a bit of fun and creativity is something that really engages people and keeps things memorable. A little effort goes a long way!

Quick examples:

1. The "Review Rockstar Award" to recognize the team member who generates the most positive Google reviews each month.
1. The "Shift Picker Upper" to celebrate those who always step in to support their colleagues.

Custom Awards Inspiration:

To get the creative juices flowing, here are some of the most common award types we see:

1. Work Anniversary Awards:

Employees take pride in their years of service and value the acknowledgment of their dedication to the organization.

Important note: be sure to clearly define the work anniversary award structure. For example, if you are only going to have anniversary awards for the 1 year, 3 years and 5 years mark, be sure to communicate this clearly to your employees to set expectations and avoid confusion

2. Personal Milestone Awards:

Celebrate significant milestones together – whether it's personal or professional. Milestone awards demonstrate that an organization cares about their team as whole people. A few examples of great milestone awards we've seen:



New Baby



Congrats on
your Marriage



New
Homeowner



Happy
Birthday



Certificate
Completion

3. Behaviour-Specific Awards

Leveraging behaviour awards is a great way to encourage the types of actions you want to see.

Some examples:

- Team player award
- Customer service champion
- Innovation awards
- Health and safety awards
- Culture advocate award
- Learning legend



4. Department-Specific Awards

Every department has their own goals and KPIs. Have some fun and give departments the freedom to create their own awards to recognize specific accomplishments.

Example: The engineering department at Bucketlist Rewards loves animals, so they made some of their department awards animal-themed:



5. Breathe new life into traditional awards with fun names

When recognition programs are enjoyable and engaging, employees are more likely to participate actively. You can add elements of fun just by spicing up the names of traditional awards. We've seen fruits and vegetables themed awards, and even ones with pop culture references. These awards can also give people an opportunity to bond over shared interests. Here are a few of our favourites:

Spice things up with Barbie



Any Star Wars fans on your team?

Whip these awards out to celebrate May 4th!



Step 5: Effective Budgeting for Reward and Recognition Programs

Setting an appropriate budget for employee rewards can be a challenging task, but it is essential to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of an R&R program. Here are some guidelines to consider:

1. Budget Calculator:

Using a budget calculator can provide a structured approach to determine how much money to allocate towards employee rewards. This tool can help organizations understand the financial commitment required for their program to run effectively.

2. Budget for monetary recognition

Some of the most successful programs we see are ones where monetary peer-to-peer recognition is an option; when people give shoutouts, they can attach points, which can be redeemed for tangible rewards. Point distribution and value differs from company to company. Some companies opt for a uniform monetary distribution, others choose to give more points to managers. Some companies want each dollar to equate to 5 points while others may choose a higher number. It can all be customized!

3. Flexibility:

Understand that not all employees will use their allocated recognition points every month. Your budget may experience fluctuations, with some months seeing higher expenses due to increased recognition activities and reward redemptions. It's essential to account for these variations in your budgeting strategy.

4. Incentivize Participation:

If you see that employees are not actively using their points, consider creating additional awards or incentives to encourage participation. For instance, you can introduce special recognition categories or bonuses to motivate employees to engage with the program.

5. Avoid Over-Complication:

While customization is valuable, it's crucial to avoid over-complicating the point allocation process. Keeping it simple ensures easier program management, especially when roles change, or employees leave the organization. For example, we recommend giving all employees the same number of points each week/month - avoid giving employees more points based on years at the company, job title, etc.



PART TWO:

Communication and Promotion Strategy: Building Excitement for a Successful Program Launch

Imagine your favourite work buddy, Taylor, is super into Halloween. Two days before October 31st, they let you know that they're planning a "really fun party" and would love it if you could attend. As much as you want to support them, you find that it's hard to muster the energy to feel excited and decline the invitation. Perhaps you may have felt more inclined to join if they gave you two week's notice that there would be a costume contest involved. Or if they let you know that Susie from Marketing was making her signature Witch's Potion mocktail.

Similar to hosting a highly anticipated Halloween party, you want your team to feel excited for the launch of their new rewards and recognition program. After all, it's supposed to be a fun initiative that helps everyone feel more valued and connected. A well-executed program launch is critical to the success of any Rewards and Recognition (R&R) initiative. In this section, we will explore how to develop an effective program launch plan.

Key takeaways in this section:

- How to develop a communications strategy to promote the program?
- How to train employees and managers for program success?
- What can a launch party look like?

Developing a communications strategy to promote your program

Why is having a communication and launch plan so important? It's the foundation for creating anticipation and excitement among your team, which will lead to a highly engaging program that people will enjoy on a regular basis once it goes live.



Here are our top tips on developing an effective plan to communicate your new program:

- Share what's to come and what to expect - Let the team know about the incoming R&R program well before it's launched
- Define the key messages - What is it you want people to know? Key messages should focus on the program's benefits, its alignment with company values, and how it will impact employees positively.
- Generate curiosity and excitement - Consider sending out teasers, posters, or initial announcements
- Tell people why they should be excited - Showcase all the fun that's coming their way!
- Increase the chances of being seen - Different people pay attention to different channels of communication, so draft up different templates for each channel (eg. Slack, email, social media, newsletter content)

Training employees and managers for program success

Training is a crucial component of planning an effective program launch for a Rewards and Recognition initiative. Training offers employees the opportunity to become familiar with the program, its features, and the process of recognition. Not only does it equip employees and managers with the knowledge and tools they need but also enhances their understanding of how to leverage the program effectively. Here are a few options on how team members can consume pre-launch training materials:

1. Teaser Videos:

Teaser videos can pique employees' interest and curiosity, providing a sneak peek into the upcoming R&R program. These short videos introduce the program's key elements and generate anticipation among participants.

2. Recorded Trainings:

Providing recorded training sessions offers flexibility to employees, allowing them to access training materials at their convenience. These sessions can cover program navigation, reward redemption, and the art of recognition.

3. Pre-launch Training:

Organize training sessions for employees before the program's official launch. These sessions can serve as a platform to build excitement, provide clarity on how the program works, and engage employees in the upcoming initiative. Conduct these sessions as close as possible to the launch date for maximum impact.

Manager Training: Leading the Way in Recognition

Managers play a pivotal role in driving the success of an R&R program; 53% of workers want to receive more recognition from their immediate manager. Recognition is an action that may not come easily for many people; it's a skill that requires practice. Training your managers with insights and practical tips on incorporating recognition into their day-to-day interactions with their teams will go a long way.

Here are four of our favourite tips to make recognition impactful:



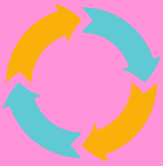
TIMELY

Make sure the recognition is given within a day of the good deed taking place.



SPECIFIC

Ensure that recognitions are as clearly defined as possible.



FREQUENT

Recognition should happen all the time. We recommend anywhere between a day and a week. Rotate between team members and departments.



CORE VALUE

Attach a core value to every recognition to keep them at the forefront of your employees minds.

Example: Good vs. Great Recognition



Maria was recognized for

Customer Centric

Thanks for the help on our project last week!

VS.



Maria was recognized for

Customer Centric

Thanks for the help on our project last week! I appreciate the time and effort you put in to ensure the success of everything. You are awesome!

Planning and hosting your very own launch party

Launching your new R&R program is an important milestone – and it should be celebrated as such! Consider hosting launch parties, contests, or other engaging activities to celebrate the program's introduction. These events can generate enthusiasm and reinforce the program's significance.

Some fun activities to organize for launch day:

- Give out awards to instantly engage the team
 - Eg. Milestone Awards / Service Awards – Something to celebrate on the big day!
 - Employee of the Month Award
 - Early Bird Gets the Worm – Awarded to the first 10 people to send out a recognition on the platform
- Share some public recognitions at the launch party. We've seen this inspire people to then use the platform to give their own shoutouts.
- Give team members enough points to redeem a small gift (eg. company swag) to entice people to test out the platform



PART THREE:

Optimizing Engagement: 7 Strategies to Boost Participation

Once you launch your new rewards and recognition program, it's time to make sure that people are using it and enjoying it! When recognition hits the mark, employees are 5x more likely to be connected to company culture and 4x more likely to be engaged.

Here are 7 tried-and-true strategies that encourage participation and employee engagement with R&R:

- Give people the space and freedom to express gratitude
- Understand how different people want to be recognized
- Implement ways to make R&R easy for deskless workers
- Utilize peer-to-peer recognition
- Encourage program feedback and be willing to adapt
- Update the program periodically to keep things interesting
- Incorporate R&R training into new employee onboarding

Strategy 1: Give people the space and freedom to express gratitude

Feeling micro-managed at work is never a pleasant experience. The same goes for recognition! Empower your employees with space and freedom to express their appreciation in the way that feels most genuine for them.

Don't's	Do's
Don't delete recognitions because they aren't "good enough".	Embrace the diverse ways in which people express their gratitude. Typos, grammatical errors, slang, one-liners, and inside jokes are totally fine!
Don't impose too many rules or restrictions, like minimum word count for each recognition.	Trust employees to use the platform appropriately and responsibly.
Don't allow negative and disrespectful behaviour.	Moderate with caution. Ensure that the platform is being used for its intended purpose and that participation aligns with your company's values and guidelines.
Don't be afraid to keep things light and happy	Have fun with recognition! It's an emotionally charged process. Use those emojis and gifs to celebrate together 🥳



Strategy 2: Understand how different people want to be recognized

Recognition is not something that's a one-size-fits-all. Think about the way that you prefer to be recognized.

- In private VS In public
- Through email VS A verbal conversation
- Birthday acknowledgement VS Please-don't-mention-my-birthday

Understanding and accommodating the diverse preferences of your workforce when it comes to recognition is essential for employees to engage with the program. Here are a few areas to consider when taking a more personalized approach to recognition:

1. Conduct a survey to understand how people want to be recognized so that you can create opportunities for people to give recognition in the way that's best for them.

Some questions that may help you gather valuable insight are:

- Would you rather receive recognition in private or in front of a large group of people? Giving/Getting Publicly VS Privately
- Would you rather give recognition publicly or privately?
- Would you prefer to write out your recognitions or call them out during a meeting?



Story example: In theory, picking recognitions from the company-wide newsfeed to showcase during a company-wide huddle sounds like a great way to celebrate together. However, it may be stress-inducing to the individuals involved and people may avoid giving recognition prior to the upcoming meeting so that they aren't called upon to discuss it. This is a valuable lesson in understanding the unintended consequences of certain recognition practices. Be willing to adjust your approach based on these insights!

2. Consider different personality types to ensure that everyone feels comfortable engaging with recognition.

Some people may feel anxious speaking in front of large crowds. If that's the only way to express their appreciation, they will likely not participate. Offering the option to send recognitions digitally on a public newsfeed will likely help those participate. Identify potential barriers to participation and give people options to engage in the way they feel most comfortable.

3. There are many ways for people to show their appreciation.



Creating a new recognition isn't the only way to celebrate your colleagues! Adding on to a recognition that someone else has shared and celebrating together is another great way to participate.

Strategy 3: Implement ways to make R&R easy for deskless workers

One of the most common questions we get is how to make it easier for deskless workers who don't work at a computer to participate in the R&R platform. To ensure that your program is accessible and enticing to everyone, consider the following strategies:

- If you're using Bucketlist Rewards, utilize our mobile app and the available integrations with common channels like Slack and email
- Provide computers or tablets that employees can use in break rooms or other communal spaces.
- Leverage break room TVs to make the recognition newsfeed visible to everyone (via HTML files that can push recognition data). Display recognition from the platform in real-time.
- Place posters or flyers in common areas highlighting the importance of recognition as well as a QR code that people can scan to access the platform from their mobile devices.



Strategy 4: Encourage program feedback and be willing to adapt

For a Recognition and Rewards program to thrive and remain effective over time, continuous feedback is essential. We know that soliciting good feedback can be hard, so here are strategies to try:

1. Let people know that feedback is welcomed

People may feel uncomfortable giving constructive feedback if they don't think you're looking for it. It's important to explicitly state that feedback is more than welcome. After all, the purpose of this program is to keep people engaged. If it's not meeting their needs, it won't be used!

2. Be specific about the feedback that you're looking for

If you find that you're not getting enough input by asking for suggestions overall, try asking more specific questions. Some examples may be:

- Do you find that you have enough points to give away each week?
- Are there any rewards you want to see in our marketplace?
- What's your favourite award? Are there any you think are missing?

3. Be adaptable - Don't double down on something that's not working

Be open to change, especially when you identify something that isn't working. Evolving your program to fit the team's needs and preferences will result in increased engagement.

6. Refresh and update your program periodically

Keep things interesting by changing things up! It can be as simple as adjusting the platform banner to reflect a new theme or season. Consider adding additional awards. Remember to communicate new updates to the team; hype it up so that people feel excited to log into the platform to participate.



Example of a banner Bucketlist did for the Autumn season

Strategy 5: Incorporate R&R training into new employee onboarding

Building a Culture of Recognition starts from day one. As new hires embark on their journey with your organization, they need to understand how they can correctly contribute to the company culture. Here's how you can make recognition an integral part of the employee onboarding process:

1. Create an award that's given to new team members

Showing is always better than telling! Emphasize that recognition is a part of the company culture by giving new employees a platform award on their first day to welcome them to the team.

2. Include recognition program information in onboarding materials

Incorporate details about your Recognition and Rewards program into your onboarding materials. Provide information about how to use the platform, appropriate behaviour, and the available awards.

3. Consider providing recorded training videos

There is always so much information given to new employees over the first few months. Creating recorded training videos that they can come back to will serve as a helpful resource. These videos should explain how the Recognition and Rewards program/platform works, the types of awards available, and the benefits of active participation.



4. Showcase success stories

Share examples of current employees who have benefited from the Recognition and Rewards program. These stories can illustrate the positive impact of recognition on employee morale, motivation, and job satisfaction. You can even share your own personal experiences with the platform to really show how the recognition program has impacted you. Hearing firsthand accounts can inspire new hires to engage with the program.

“

“We are absolutely amazed by the engagement we’ve gotten on our recognition program, it’s not just a number percentage of engagement, but it’s people coming to me a few times a week saying thank you so much for implementing this program, it’s been a life changer for me”

— Jean Lynn, Director of Human Resources at Velocity Clinical Research

5. Encourage immediate participation

Allow new employees to participate in the program as soon as they join and make sure that they start receiving points to distribute from the get-go. Encourage them to give recognition to colleagues who have helped them during the onboarding process or who have made them feel welcome. This immediate engagement sets a positive tone and reinforces the importance of recognition from day one.

6. Provide ongoing support

Ensure that new employees know where to find support and resources related to the Recognition and Rewards program. It may come in the form of a company resource hub, R&R program manager, or recurring program info sessions. Make it clear that the program is something that will always be an ongoing part of their employee experience.





Recognition doesn't just feel good, it's good business.

At Bucketlist, we're not just a rewards and recognition platform – we're true partners in building your recognition strategy.

We'll help you retain talent and inspire employees to bring their best every day; Employees love our fun shoutouts, personalized rewards, and once-in-a-lifetime experiences. HR leaders love our automations and industry-leading service. CFOs love the ROI.

Create a vibrant culture of recognition and unlock the potential of your workforce with Bucketlist.

Learn More