

MnDOT Innovation Case Study

The mission of the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is to plan, build, operate and maintain a safe, accessible, efficient and reliable multimodal transportation system that connects people to destinations and markets throughout the state, regionally and around the world. Minnesota has a large multimodal transportation system that includes roads, rail lines, airports, ports, waterways, pipelines, transit systems, trails, paths, and sidewalks. MnDOT's major divisions include State Aid, Engineering Services, Operations which fall under the Chief Engineer, and Modal Planning & Program Management, Corporate Services which fall under the Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer.

Interview Participants

Mark Nelson, Statewide Planning Program Manager
Brian Kary, Freeway Operations Engineer

1. Leadership

- **Wildly Important Goals (WIGs)** – WIGs are the central element to Sean Covey's *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, and this influential management approach has emerged as a key driver of innovation at MnDOT. It provides a simple, repeatable formula for executing on an organization's most important strategic priorities. The four disciplines include:
 - Focusing on the wildly important;
 - Acting on lead measures;
 - Keeping a compelling scoreboard; and
 - Creating a cadence of accountability.

In 2014, MnDOT launched its Wildly Important Goal (WIG) 1.0 called 'Enhancing Financial Effectiveness' which was designed to generate major improvements in financial management and included the following sub-elements: budgeting by products and services, efficiencies, asset management, project management and information and outreach.

In 2016 MnDOT's senior leadership began strategic planning for MnDOT's WIG 2.0. The WIG 2.0 approach will use lessons learned from Enhancing Financial Effectiveness WIG 1.0 and will be an agency-wide effort to identify MnDOT's customers, what customers value, and how MnDOT can measure and improve customer outcomes.

2. Empowerment

- **Giving Employees Exposure to External Opportunities** - Having MnDOT employees involved in national dialogue settings (such as AASHTO and TRB committees) or engaged in opportunities beyond their typical duties helps foster creative thinking and exposes staff to innovative solutions.
- **Management Groups** - MnDOT staff attends formal discipline-based group meetings as a way to brainstorm new ideas. Groups typically meet on a monthly basis and provide an opportunity to share innovation.
- **Making it Okay to Take Risks** – MnDOT wants its employees to understand that risk and failure are necessary components of innovation. One of the values MnDOT uses is “Be Bold” which is described by the statement: “I take risks and accept failure. I will use my failures to identify ways to get better.”
- **The Research Implementation Program** – The Research Implementation Program exists to help try new things in a test area in the agency. Limiting the scale at which the idea is implemented is one way MnDOT manages risk.

3. Communication

- **Newsline** – MnDOT’s weekly online newspaper is targeted to employees, but open to the public. Article topics include innovations, major projects, safety updates and a other relevant topics impacting MnDOT employees.
- **IdeaScale** - MnDOT’s Research Services team solicits new ideas for research implementation projects through Ideascade, which has improved the solicitation process and the quality of the ideas submitted. In the past, the team would send an email, with a form attached, to everyone on their lists. Now, Research Services sends an email with a link to the Ideascade website. This gives participants more context for their ideas. Participants can see what ideas other people are posting and they can also see the seven research categories in which MnDOT is looking for ideas. Because the research need statements are better quality, the proposals have also improved. In the past they would only get a handful of proposals that totally aligned with research needs.

4. Recognize & Reward

- **Above and Beyond Awards** – MnDOT recognizes employees who exhibit excellence in dedication, innovation, creativity, cooperation and excellent customer service.
- **Achievement Awards** –MnDOT is committed to recognizing and rewarding the outstanding work of its employees through issuance of achievement

awards and other recognition programs. Teams of employees are often recognized together. To achieve a more consistent approach to employee recognition, the following principles have been developed to guide decision-making relating to employee recognition:

- There will always be informal, ongoing recognition and appreciation of outstanding work;
- Formal recognition programs beyond achievement awards should also be utilized (e.g. Heroes of MnDOT and Above and Beyond awards, etc.);
- Recognition should be meaningful and should respect the preferences of the recipients;
- The recognition system communicates management's belief that employees are the agency's most valuable asset and that high performing employees are fundamental to achieving organizational goals and in making MnDOT a workplace of choice.
- Rewards are most effective when they are meaningful to the individual and are given as close to the actual activity as possible;
- Rewards should not be substituted for a competitive salary plan, longevity pay, or supplemental compensation;
- Recognition should be linked to the agency's and office/district's mission, goals and objectives. Recognition decisions must be aligned with MnDOT's strategic directions.
- Recipients receive rewards that range from \$50 to \$1600 in value..