



WellSpring

Sharing physical activity knowledge

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Using wellness ambassadors:

A success story for promoting workplace health

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The City of Grande Prairie (CofGP) Wellness Committee was established in 2012 to provide year-round wellness activities, events, and seminars to all city employees. Prior to the establishment of the CofGP Wellness Committee, the Human Resources department organized a Wellness Week where all wellness activities were held in one seven-day period, usually in the fall of each year.

The mission of the CofGP Wellness Committee is to create a work environment that values both wellness and work-life balance all year long. The Committee provides various programs, community health information, and initiatives with the goal of increasing the health and wellbeing of all city employees. Examples of some of the programming offered include: Wellness Challenges, Food Preparation Seminars, Stress and Sleep Management, Introduction to Yoga, Gardening 101, Self-Defense, and Pottery Classes.

To reach CofGP employees, the Wellness Committee traditionally used email and the CofGP's homepage to advertise the various upcoming wellness activities. However, it was found that participation was primarily from those working within its office settings. From the beginning, the Wellness Committee struggled with the challenge of finding a way to reach the unreachable CofGP staff; those staff members who do not sit at a desk and/or do not have daily access to a computer. These included employees working within the trades, transportation, operations, off-shift employees, and those in the parks and recreation departments.

The CofGP Wellness Committee fought long and hard to make their programs accessible to all city workers. One strategy implemented in 2015, with the help of the Corporate Leadership Team, was to provide a monetary incentive to employees for one hour of their attendance to most wellness events organized by the Wellness Committee. Most events or programs are set up for two hours, where the CofGP pays half and the employee commits to an hour of their own time. This was a great initiative for getting staff to attend programs. Yet, the Wellness Committee still faced the challenge of reaching employees who did not have access to the Committee's online advertising.

S U M M A R Y

Developing strategies to support workplace wellness can be rewarding for both employees and employers. However, it can be difficult to reach and engage all employees.

This WellSpring article provides an overview of the City of Grande Prairie's Wellness Committee and highlights their program and strategies utilized to reach all City employees with wellness activities.

The Wellness Committee re-assessed their approach to ensure broader reach and participation of city employees. Understanding the various stages of change, the Wellness Committee believed that in order for an individual to find success in their work-life balance, they first have to be presented with an opportunity. From this initial opportunity, the individual can make an informed choice if they want to participate or not. After much discussion, the Wellness Committee determined that the development of Wellness Ambassadors in each city department would help broaden their opportunity to reach all city employees.

Wellness Ambassadors

In early 2016, the Wellness Committee decided to develop a team of Wellness Ambassadors, whose job would be to help spread the Committee's information far and wide amongst the ambassadors' co-workers. These ambassadors provide a "go-to" person who would answer questions about any particular event being held, if needed. This team of Wellness Ambassadors is made up of "wellness warriors", motivated people who enjoy empowering others to be their best selves.

Once again, the Corporate Leadership Team provided support and consent for the Wellness Committee to enlist one individual from every department within CofGP to act as a Wellness Ambassador. Duties and expectations were outlined and included:

1. Attend annual or bi-annual Wellness Ambassador Meetings.
2. Help share the committee's current events.
3. Provide support and feedback to committee regarding current and future events.
4. Pass on the committee's monthly emails to fellow co-workers.
5. Speak on behalf of the committee at department staff meetings.

To date, there are 19 Wellness Ambassadors from the various departments within the CofGP.

Implementing Wellness Committee events and programs

When developing an event or program, the Wellness Committee consults the Wellness Wheel to appeal to the diverse needs of various people. The Wellness Wheel includes the emotional, social, financial, academic, environmental, spiritual and physical components of wellness (Figure 1).

The wellness programs offered by the Committee vary from season to season. In winter, especially during the holiday season, the focus is on sleep clinics, stress management seminars, and work-life balance sessions. In the New Year, fitness challenges, introduction to yoga, and food preparation seminars take place, followed by Gardening 101, mindfulness seminars, and yoga seminars in the spring. In autumn, the focus is again on healthy eating and physical fitness, with a fall fitness challenge, food preparation classes, and Smoothie 101 events.



Figure 1: Wellness Wheel utilized by the CofGP

The CofGP Wellness Committee's mission is to create a work environment that values both wellness and work-life balance all year long.

The Committee aims to offer 18 events per year ranging mostly from fall to spring, with only a couple of programs in the summer. The Committee also provides three, free fitness classes per week through “What a Waist Fitness” and a weekly after-hours yoga class for CofGP employees. All programs, events, and seminars are chosen based on city staff suggestions and preferences, which are obtained through an annual survey sent out to all city staff. Programs that were well-attended in the past are continued, and when a new suggestion is mentioned by multiple sources, the Committee works to make it happen.

Through the annual survey and attendance tracking, the Committee has seen a 20% increase in participation since implementing the Wellness Ambassadors. While the survey is anonymous and there is no way to track which departments are represented, it helps the committee gather feedback, information, and suggestions from CofGP employees.

The majority of the wellness events offered via the Committee fill to capacity (20–30 people), and the Committee has seen an increase in their targeted “unreachable” audience. For example, the last event offered by the Wellness Committee saw a 17% increase in their target audience compared to similar events in the past. In the future, the CofGP Wellness Committee will continue to track employee engagement, work with Wellness Ambassadors, and survey the city workers in an effort to better serve the wellness needs of city employees.



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Recognizing the wellness ambassadors

Celebrating the Ambassadors and their passion for wellness is key in keeping them engaged. Recognizing their hard work and giving them the ability to make decisions works to keep their interest in being an Ambassador for the Committee.

While the Wellness Ambassadors dedicate their own time to this role, a yearly Wellness Roundup is held where all ambassadors and Committee members gather together for an afternoon of food, fun, and wellness. Wellness Ambassadors are paid for their time during the Wellness Roundup as a “thank you” for their help and commitment to the Committee and its mission.

The Ambassadors have become wellness spokespeople within the CofGP, and their “footwork” has allowed the Wellness Committee to have a more engaged work force and, most importantly, engagement of those employees who previously would not have been reached.

Developing wellness programs and ambassadors in your workplace

When seeking to develop your own Wellness Ambassador program, consider the following tips:

- Seek support from upper management to implement a Wellness Ambassador program.
- Create an email outlining the roles and responsibilities of a Wellness Ambassador and have managers/supervisors distribute the email to their staff.
- Recruit ambassadors from the various departments within your workplace.
- Keep the Wellness Ambassadors updated with monthly emails regarding the different Wellness Events in your corporation.
- Provide Wellness Ambassadors independence and let them lead the way!
- Celebrate Wellness Ambassadors annually in an afternoon of celebration and learning just for them!

Conclusion

Developing a Wellness Committee and Ambassadors are a couple of ways to support employees' health and wellbeing. This strategy employed by the CofGP can be adapted and adopted in many other workplace settings to support a culture of wellbeing among employees.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Rick Demaray, CRSP, is the Chairman of the City of Grande Prairie Wellness Committee. Rick has been involved in health and safety in some capacity for over 30 years. He achieved his National Construction Safety Officer (NCSO) status in 2010, and his Canadian Registered Safety Professional (CRSP) status in 2014. He enjoys helping others, and his position at the City of Grande Prairie provides many opportunities to direct others in safety and wellness.



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