



Employee Recognition Program Template



Build a Culture of Appreciation with an Employee Recognition Program

An employee recognition program is a structured way to make gratitude part of everyday work. When people feel seen and appreciated, they're more engaged, more connected, and more likely to stay.

It's not just about saying "thanks" — it's about building habits and rituals that bring teams together. Recognition sparks connection, and connection fuels engagement. That's why companies with strong recognition cultures see higher morale, stronger collaboration, and lower turnover.

At HeyTaco, we've seen thousands of teams transform their culture with simple, consistent recognition. It's not complicated: make appreciation visible, specific, and easy to give — and it will spread like confetti 🎉 (or tacos, in our world).

This template gives you everything you need to create your own employee recognition program, from setting goals and choosing recognition types to building rituals, adding rewards, and measuring success.

📖 Want more background? Read: [*The Complete Guide to Employee Recognition for Workplace Happiness*](#)



Employee Recognition Program Template

Build a recognition program that sparks connection, engagement, and belonging at work.

Step 1: Define Your Purpose

Mission Statement

Why does recognition matter at your company?

Example: “We recognize everyday wins to build connection and belonging at work.”

Example Program Goals

- Increase engagement and morale
- Strengthen cross-team relationships
- Reinforce company values
- Improve retention

 Learn more: [Company Culture: What the Best Workplaces Get Right](#)

Step 2: Choose Recognition Types

Use a mix of recognition styles to keep things inclusive:

- Peer-to-Peer Recognition – Anyone can recognize anyone for contributions big or small.
- Leader Recognition – Managers spotlight wins in meetings or team channels.
- Milestone Recognition – Celebrate birthdays and work anniversaries.
- Values-Based Recognition – Tie recognition to company values using tags or emojis.

 Read: [33 Creative & Free Ways to Recognize Employees](#)

Step 3: Set Rules & Mechanics


- Each employee gets [X] recognitions per day/week to give
- Every recognition includes a specific reason (“what they did” + “why it mattered”)
- Recognitions are posted in a #recognition channel for visibility
- Optional: recognitions earn points (“tacos”) that can be redeemed for rewards

 Read: [The Power of Daily Recognition](#)

Step 4: Build Rituals

Rituals make recognition consistent and cultural.

- Weekly all-hands shout-outs
- Monthly roundup of milestones
- Quarterly recognition challenges
- Annual awards to top recognition givers and receivers
- Managers give 3 recognitions per week


 Read: [10 Rituals Remote Teams Use to Stay Connected](#) and HeyTaco's [Recognition Rituals Library](#)

Step 5: Decide on Rewards (Optional)

Rewards can boost engagement but should always come second to the recognition itself.

Examples:

- Company swag
- Digital gift cards
- Extra time off
- Charitable donations

 Tip: You don't need rewards to start a recognition program, and can add them at any point in the future. When do you set a monthly or quarterly budget for rewards to keep it sustainable.

 Read: [Employee Recognition vs Employee Rewards: Why You Need Both](#) and [HeyTaco's Rewards Library](#)

Step 6: Launch Your Program

1. Plan – Get leadership buy-in, choose your platform, and draft program rules
2. Announce – Share the purpose, process, and benefits company-wide
3. Sustain – Highlight great recognitions, celebrate milestones, and iterate regularly

 Read: [How to Launch HeyTaco](#)

Step 7: Measure Success

Track:

- Number of recognitions given
- Number of participants
- Cross-team recognition activity
- Employee sentiment (surveys)

Review:

- Metrics monthly
- Feedback quarterly
- Adjust program rules, rituals, or rewards as needed

 Read: [How to Measure the Success of your Employee Recognition Program](#)

Final Tip

Recognition is most powerful when it's specific, visible, and consistent.

Make it easy. Make it public. Make it meaningful.

Want a tool to power your new program? [Try HeyTaco](#).

Employee Recognition Program Checklist

Use this checklist to build your recognition program from the ground up.

Step 1: Define Your Purpose

- ☐ Write a mission statement: _____
- ☐ Set 2–4 clear goals : _____

Step 2: Choose Recognition Types

Select all that apply:

- ☐ Peer-to-Peer recognition (anyone can recognize anyone)
- ☐ Leader recognition (managers spotlight wins)
- ☐ Milestone recognition (birthdays, anniversaries)
- ☐ Values-based recognition (tie shout-outs to company values)

Step 3: Set Rules & Mechanics

- ☐ Choose a platform (Slack, HeyTaco, etc.): _____
- ☐ Decide how many recognitions per person per day: _____
- ☐ Require each recognition to include a specific reason/story
- ☐ Make recognition visible (public channel, dashboard, feed): _____

Step 4: Decide on Rewards (Optional)

- ☐ Determine if you'll offer rewards
- ☐ Set a rewards budget: \$_____ / month or quarter
- ☐ Choose reward types:
 - ☐ Gift cards
 - ☐ Extra time off
 - ☐ Swag
 - ☐ Charitable donations
 - ☐ Other: _____

Step 5: Build Recognition Rituals

- ☐ Weekly all-hands shout-outs
- ☐ Monthly milestone roundup
- ☐ Quarterly team challenge
- ☐ Leaders give at least 3 recognitions weekly
- ☐ Annual recognition awards

Step 6: Launch & Sustain

- ☐ Assign a program owner: _____
- ☐ Choose a launch date: _____
- ☐ Announce the program company-wide
- ☐ Spotlight great recognition examples early
- ☐ Gather feedback regularly and iterate

Step 7: Measure Success

- ☐ Track recognition volume (# given, # participants)
- ☐ Track cross-team recognition activity
- ☐ Run quarterly sentiment survey
- ☐ Review metrics monthly
- ☐ Adjust mechanics or rewards as needed