Best Practice #72
Post-doctoral Professional Development Program (PD2P)

Facility: Sandia National Laboratories

Title: Post-doctoral Professional Development Program (PD2P)

Point of contact: Dominique Foley Wilson, Consultant, Laboratory Critical Skills Development Programs, 505-844-1315; dfoley@sandia.gov

Brief description of Best Practice: Without adding administrative burden, create a post-doctoral organization to advance Sandia's research enterprise by fostering a robust post-doc community and enhancing the quality of the post-doc experience for all participants. Its goals are two-fold:

- to facilitate post-docs transitioning into careers as outstanding independent researchers by providing resources for professional development
- to formalize a visible program to organize and network post-docs and highlight their work

Activities include a monthly technical series delivered by a post-doc or recent staff member; a career development workshop series; annual poster session; annual all hands meeting; social networking; career fairs; survival guide for new hires. The PD2P website serves as an important communication/outreach tool, with added functionality for internal users. The program fosters interaction with technical staff and personal growth via its groundbreaking Individual Development Plan (as limited term employees, post-docs are not subject to the same performance evaluations and feedback as regular employees).

PD2P's framework is comprised of three central committees: ST&E Program Management, an Advisory Committee, a Post-doc committee. The latter has representatives from both sites (NM & CA) and meets bi-monthly via teleconference. Post-doc appointments are generally 1-3 years in length; hence, succession planning and transition are important characteristics to sustainability. PD2P is a member of the National Post-doc Association and has leveraged this membership to partner with post-doc programs at other national laboratories.

The program embodies two elements making it worthy of a best practice: it is administered and run by the post-docs for the post-docs with input from its Advisory and ST&E committee; it generates matching funding from the line to augment its annual budget. Senior level management of all organizations hosting post-docs are solicited by a PD2P member and provided with feedback from the post-docs in their respective organization. The additional funding generated is used to enhance the program based on post-doc feedback. PD2P's budget has trebled over the three years of its existence.

Why the Best Practice was used: Approximately 10% of Sandia's post-docs transition into Sandia employees. Their work is primarily research and their lives fairly isolated.

This model is used to:
- provide professional development for a post-doc to become the best candidate for the next opportunity
- offer networking opportunities with technical staff, management, and other post-docs
- showcase post-doc research
- showcase post-docs as viable lab staff
- enable leadership and program management qualities in the post-doc population

What are the benefits of the Best Practice:
- post-docs taking charge of the career track
- technical and professional recognition
- personal networking
- no additional administrative burden incurred
- leveraged funding = maximized ROI for participants and contributors
- extended "interviewing" opportunity for both parties
- familiarity with lab culture and processes
- targets diverse population
- two sites, one lab/program

What problems/issues were associated with the Best Practice: 1) Ensuring equal responsibility amongst committee members; 2) Adequate administrative help for facilitating activities across two sites; 3) Access for Foreign Nationals; 4) Incompatible videoconferencing equipment between the two sites.

How the success of the Best Practice was measured: 1) number of post-docs participating; 2) number of hits on website; 3) number of post-docs entering full-time employment subsequent to their Sandia experience; 4) number of centers hosting post-docs supporting the program

Description of process experience using Best Practice: see "why" above

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