

Chapter 4. Computer-related Suggestions

4-1. Introduction. The increase in the number of computer-related Ideas being submitted has raised several questions about how those Ideas should be handled. Because the use of computer technology in the Department is growing so rapidly, touching virtually every employee, the impact of that evolution on the IDEAS Program must be considered.

There are two primary factors that prompted these concerns:

- o Many suggesters are submitting floppy disks with computer programs that they have developed. Ideas awards must recognize the value of the Idea - not the implementation. Developing the actual program for a computer application is implementing the Idea. Managers in the Office of Information Policies and Systems (IPS) prefer to control the implementation of applications since modifying a program developed by a suggester, to make it useful to a broader audience or to incorporate additional features, may be more costly than developing the program from scratch.

- o Some suggesters are submitting very general Ideas to "automate this process." But employees should understand that most tasks, processes, and procedures can be automated. Management decisions regarding if and when to automate them are based on such factors as priorities, costs, and resources.

The point of this chapter is to discuss what kinds of computer-related suggestions can be considered for IDEAS Program awards. It is important to note at the outset that automation-related suggestions that are not eligible for IDEAS awards may be recognized with performance awards.

4-2. Background. Making computer technology available to the workforce has been, and continues to be, a major Departmental productivity initiative. Providing extensive training on mainframe systems, minicomputer systems, and microcomputers reflects the commitment of the Department to this initiative, in both time and money. Acquisition of equipment, especially of microcomputers and local area networks (LANS), continues to escalate. The Office of Information Policies and Systems has developed a long-range plan which identifies numerous initiatives to further the integration of computer technology in the Department's work.

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Already, the Department has achieved many returns on this investment through automated work processes and improved management information that have resulted in

increased effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of HUD's programs. The introduction of this technology has altered the jobs of many employees. By virtue of approving training on standard software applications such as dbase III, Lotus 1-2-3, Samna, etc., managers are asking employees to use this knowledge to improve and streamline operations. It no longer is uncommon to see vacancy announcements that list knowledge and experience in computers, even in using specific software and programming languages, as selective placement factors and quality ranking factors.

This trend will continue as HUD expands its computer capabilities and as more employees are trained on how to use computers. The Department's plans and budgets call for widespread availability of microcomputers-ultimately, about one microcomputer for every three employees. Microcomputer terminals connected to mainframes and to LANS will become more prevalent, enabling staff to access many computer systems in the Department. Managers already are being encouraged to provide both access and opportunity for employees to put these tools to use to improve productivity.

In this evolving automation environment, the development of automated solutions to problems will become an increasingly common part of normal job activities for all levels of employees.

4-3. Categories of automation Ideas. Ideas involving use of computers fall into two broad categories:

- o Category 1: Ideas which suggest modifications and improvements to existing applications and systems; and
- o Category 2: Ideas which propose new applications and systems.

4-4. Category 1: Ideas which suggest modifications and improvements to existing applications and systems

a. IDEAS awards for adopted suggestions for changes to existing computer applications or systems will be granted only if it is determined that the suggesters are not, as a normal part of their jobs, responsible for recommending changes to data systems, either explicitly or implicitly.

b. Ideas from Field Office employees suggesting changes to existing Regionwide or Departmentwide mainframe or mandatory microcomputer applications normally will not be considered to be job related since Field Office and Regional Office employees are not expected to develop

policies or procedures for implementation beyond their organizational level. Thus, Field Office employees usually are not expected to develop Regionwide initiatives, and Regional Office employees are not expected to develop Departmentwide initiatives. This is consistent with policy for other kinds of Ideas.

c. If Field Office or Regional Office employees specifically have been requested by IPS or by the Director, Management Information Division (MID), or Director, Management Systems Division (MSD), in the Regions to offer comments or recommendations about systems they use, however, they may not substitute submitting an Idea for completing that assignment.

d. Job relatedness will be determined by the Ideas staff, usually in consultation with the suggesters' supervisors or Regional or Office managers and/or with IPS or the MI/SD in the Region.

e. If an Idea falling into this category is determined to be job related, the suggester may be considered for a performance award.

4-5. Category 2: Ideas which propose new applications and systems

There are two subparts within this category:

Subpart A: Ideas which propose the concept for new applications and systems; and

Subpart B: Ideas which present fully- or partially-developed applications and systems.

4-6. Subpart A: Ideas which propose the concept for new applications and systems

a. An Idea that presents only the basic concept: "automate this task (or process or report)" normally will not be accepted and processed under the IDEAS program, since it does not offer a specific solution to a problem.

b. This is not to say that, in order to be eligible for an IDEAS award for an automation suggestion, a suggester must present a fully-developed application. Ideas which suggest that a process should be automated must provide sufficient detail and must be presented with such persuasion that the Decision Official can determine whether or not to pursue the automation application or system based primarily on the Idea. Suggesters should describe why management should automate this task or process now and should, if possible, describe how management might approach the effort.

If such an Idea proposes a fundamental change to a policy or system or prompts management to take action on an evolutionary concept sooner than would have happened without the Idea, it may be eligible for an IDEAS award. Absent the level--of detail which could persuade management to act, the Idea will be rejected.

c. It is not the intention of this policy to discourage new concepts for automation. If they lack the skill or knowledge or time to develop their concepts into acceptable Ideas, employees certainly should submit their concepts for new applications or systems to their program managers for consideration. Such initiatives normally should be recognized through the performance award system.

4-7. Subpart B: Ideas which present fully- or partially- developed applications and systems. Ideas which fall into this Subpart have presented some of the most complex policy issues for managers of the IDEAS Program, in the context of the evolution of automation. The ever-growing number of employees who are becoming skilled in developing their own programs for microcomputers, LANS, and even mainframes has resulted in an increasing number of applications which are submitted to the IDEAS Program.

The key factor in determining whether or not an Idea falling into this Subpart will be eligible for an IDEAS award is job relatedness.

a. Job-Related Computer Applications

(1) If the Idea meets one of the two following criteria:

- o A computer application which was developed as a result of a specific assignment, or
- o A computer application which was developed fully or partially during normal duty hours, presumabiv with the direct or tacit approval of the supervisor,

Then, the Idea is considered to be job related and may not be considered for an Ideas award unless:

- o For Field Office employees (or employees in a Regional Office who primarily perform Field Office functions), the Idea is adopted for mandatory Regionwide or Departmentwide use, or
- o For Regional Office employees, the Idea is adopted for mandatory Departmentwide use.

The reason for these two exceptions is that, as a rule, Field Office and Regional Office employees are not expected to develop policies or procedures for

implementation beyond their organizational level. Thus, Field Office employees normally are not expected to develop Regionwide initiatives, and Regional Office

employees are not expected to develop Departmentwide initiatives.

(2) Computer applications developed by Headquarters employees, either fully or partially during working hours or as a result of specific assignments, normally are not eligible for IDEAS awards since it is the job of Headquarters employees to develop or carry out Departmentwide policies, procedures, and operations.

(3) Employees are encouraged to submit their applications or any other automation suggestions to the Director of the Management Information Division or the Management Systems Division in their Regional Offices (see the Department telephone directory for names and phone numbers) or to the Director, Resource Management Staff in IPS regardless of whether or not they are eligible for IDEAS awards. Microcomputer applications may be considered for publication in the Microcomputer Applications Catalog, prepared by IPS.

(4) The process for submitting computer applications or systems in the Field is different from the process for normal Ideas submissions:

- o Ideas proposing computer applications or systems developed by Field Office or Regional Office employees either during working hours or as direct assignments must be submitted to the suggesters' supervisors, Division Directors, or Regional program managers.

- o Supervisors, Division Directors, or Regional program managers will include their endorsements of the Ideas, clearly stating the reasons that the applications or systems should be adopted for broader implementation, and submit both the Ideas and endorsements to the Regional Ideas Officers.

(5) If the Region decides to mandate use of the application or system Regionwide, a Regional IDEAS award should be determined based on the tangible or intangible benefits.

(6) If the Region decides to make the application or system available to other offices in the Region or to other Regions, but does not mandate use, no Regional IDEAS award may be approved.

(7) Even if an application or system is adopted by one or more offices outside of the suggester's office, the suggester is not eligible for an IDEAS award. An

IDEAS award for a job-related automation Idea is contingent upon mandatory Regionwide or Departmentwide adoption and implementation, since that accomplishment is considered to be so significantly beyond job

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expectations that an award is warranted. It is important to understand that "mandatory implementation" means that a manager has decided that every Office in that Region (or in the Department) will be required to implement that Idea when, if ever, it has the equipment and any other resources necessary to implement it.

(8) Employees who develop computer applications or systems which are not adopted for mandatory use Regionwide or Departmentwide may be recognized by their supervisors via performance awards.

(9) Computer applications or systems submitted to Regional Ideas Officers should be submitted to the Departmental Ideas Officer for Departmentwide consideration after a Regional evaluation has been completed. When the Regional Ideas Officer refers the Idea, the Regional evaluation and the endorsement of the suggester's supervisor should accompany it.

b. Computer applications or systems developed outside of work

(1) Computer applications or systems developed by employees on their own time are not considered job related and are eligible for IDEAS awards at the local level, as well as at higher levels.

(2) Applications and systems developed by employees on their own time should be evaluated in the local office first. If they are adopted, a local IDEAS award may be determined and presented.

(3) Computer applications and systems adopted at the local level should be submitted to the next higher level organization for review. Thus, computer applications and systems adopted in Field Offices should be submitted to Regional Ideas Officers; and adopted computer applications and systems developed by Regional Office employees should be submitted to the Departmental Ideas Officer.

(4) If the Region decides to mandate Regionwide use of an application or system developed by a Field Office employee, a Regional IDEAS award should be determined based on tangible or intangible benefits. Likewise, if Headquarters decides to mandate Departmentwide use of an application or system developed by a Regional Office employee, a

Departmental IDEAS award should be determined.

(5) If an office at any level decides to make the application or system available to other offices, but does not mandate use, no IDEAS award may be approved.

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(6) Appropriate IDEAS awards for adopted applications should be based on tangible and/or intangible benefits and should be determined at each level. In other words, Field Office employees who receive awards based on the value of their suggestions to their own Field Offices, may receive additional awards based on the value of the suggestions to the Regions and still more awards based on the value of their suggestions to the Department. As each award is approved, however, the amount of previous awards will be deducted from the payment due to the suggester, as is the practice for all IDEAS awards.

4-8. Implementation of automation Ideas. Managers who adopt automation Ideas have three basic choices for implementing the suggestions. The decision on which of the three choices to use must be a joint decision made by the Decision Official and the Director of IPS (for Departmentwide implementation) or the MI/SD (for Regionwide implementation).

An automation Idea may be implemented by:

- o Asking the suggester to implement it. This includes asking the suggester to make modifications or changes required by management or to develop documentation necessary for implementation. If this option is selected, it will be considered a job assignment for the

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suggester; and the suggester must be permitted to complete it during working hours. The Decision Official must confer with the intermediate supervisors to secure agreement that the suggester can be given the assignment to implement the Idea, before making the decision to use this alternative.

- o Asking IPS or the MID to implement it. In most cases, this will be the preferred alternative.

- o Implementing it within the program area. If the application requires no refinement and if the Decision Official prefers to prepare the documentation for implementation him/herself, this may be the best

alternative for implementation.

4-9. Compensation for development or implementation of automation Ideas. As with all adopted Ideas, suggesters will be paid for the suggestions - not for the effort it takes to develop or implement them. Suggesters will not be reimbursed for materials or paid hourly wages for time spent developing or implementing Ideas after normal working hours. The Department considers the award for the Idea to be adequate recognition of the benefit of the suggestion to the Department. If program managers want to acknowledge the level of effort that went into developing or implementing the Idea, they are encouraged to do so through performance awards.