

# BEST PRACTICES FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT COMPETITIONS

The best practices below were distilled from sector-specific interviews conducted with signatories to the U.S. Food Waste Pact and from employee engagement projects completed within the food manufacturing industry. These practices, shown in general chronological order, can be tailored to any sector in the food supply chain.

## Educate and Train All Participants

Before launching any employee engagement competition or challenge, educate your employees on the topic of food loss and waste, why reducing FLW matters, and how employees—being most familiar with day-to-day operations—play a vital role in finding and implementing solutions.

FLW training videos provide essential guidance on how and where to identify FLW reduction opportunities in the workplace. These training videos should be required viewing, as this ensures that all employees have the same knowledge and are aligned with company goals and initiatives.



## Conduct Facility Walkthroughs (AKA “Gemba” Walks)

Conducting [Gemba walks](#) before any competition catalyzes employee involvement in generating meaningful and impactful food waste prevention ideas. Employees become active participants instead of passive observers. Gemba walks help employees understand the types of solutions that they need to be looking for during a challenge.



All ideas generated during Gemba walks should be documented on [Food Waste Reduction Forms](#). All ideas submitted through these forms will be added to the Food Waste [Opportunity Register](#) for further analysis and prioritization.

## Set the Parameters for the Project

Set measurable goals before conducting an employee engagement competition. Goals are critical to the success of the competition and shape key aspects of the program, such as:

- **Who will participate** in the competition, including the Gemba walks
- **The length of the challenge** (i.e. number of weeks/months)
- **Incentive structures**
- **Employee talking points**
- **Set competition success metrics** such as participation rate (percentage of employees who submitted ideas out of all employees included in the project) and number of clues submitted



## Plan the Project Structure and Timing

A total of 6–7 weeks should be allocated for the engagement competition: 2–3 weeks for preparation and 4 weeks for the competition itself.

The 4-week competition period allows all employees ample time to participate, provides room for communication adjustments, and includes a midway milestone to sustain motivation and excitement toward the end goal.

The following structure and timeline is suggested for a workplace operating Monday through Friday:

### Preparation Phase (2–3 Weeks Before Competition Start)

1. **Show the training video** to employees in a group or small groups.
2. **Conduct Gemba walk(s)** after the video and before the competition starts.
3. **Create banner, briefcase box, submission slips and the initial posters** These will need to be posted before the competition commences.



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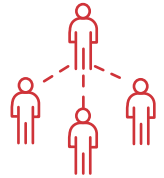
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## Competition Phase (4 Weeks Total)

1. **Start the competition** on a Monday and end on a Friday (or the last workday of the week).
2. **Collect submission forms** every Friday by noon.
3. **Enter collected ideas promptly** into the [Opportunity Register](#) by the following Monday. Submissions received over the weekend will count toward the next week.
4. **Translate all non-English submissions** before adding them to the Opportunity Register.
5. **Determine winner(s)** by Tuesday and announce them on Wednesday through all communication channels.
6. **Update posters and banners** by Wednesday to show participation progress, the number of clues submitted, and winner announcements.
7. **Distribute prizes** immediately after the winner announcement.
8. **Monitor** participation rate and number of ideas submitted weekly, adjusting communication strategies as needed. If engagement drops, managers should reinforce participation through additional messaging and team huddles.

## Assign Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Clear roles and responsibilities are the foundation of a successful employee engagement competition. By identifying key contributors and defining their duties early on, organizations can ensure smooth implementation and maximum participation.



1. **Point Person:** Responsible for updating and monitoring the competition materials, opportunity register, and waste audits throughout the initiative. The ideal candidate has time to include this in their existing work schedule, has an interest in or affinity for sustainability, and works a consistent work week. Positions suited to this role include a supervisor or team manager. It is important to have a backup team member available when the key point person is out of the office.
2. **Managers:** The managers need to understand the goals of the employee competition and be able to communicate those to their team. Managers who are actively involved in the initiative has proven to be crucial to the success of these projects..
  - a. **Manager support during the competition:** Messaging updates and talking points should be developed and deployed by managers to employees every other day throughout the competition time frame.
  - b. **Manager support during the waste audit:** When new Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) need to be followed and waste levels accurately measured and recorded, managers are responsible for ensuring consistency.
3. **Frontline Workers:** Allow a wide range of employees to participate, including those from a variety of backgrounds, job positions, and levels of expertise. Before beginning the competition, decide whether the competition should include all employees at the organization, or only specific departments, depending on the structure of the organization.

## Prioritize Inclusiveness from the Start

- **Assess workforce diversity:** Consider employees' language fluency, educational backgrounds, and roles (e.g., company employees vs. third-party contractors).
- **Identify communication barriers:** Provide bilingual support. Offer training materials and engagement assets in multiple languages to encourage participation.
- **Offer alternative submission methods:** Allow employees to submit ideas through audio recordings, photos, or videos instead of written slips.
- **Designate a "food waste translator":** Assign someone to transcribe spoken ideas onto submission slips for employees who may struggle with writing.



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## Create Prizes and Incentives

Weekly prizes are extremely popular with employees, so much so that employees in past projects have rated them “the most effective” method for encouraging participation. Before deciding on prizes, establish a budget for the competition that includes any monetary/physical prizes as well as treats or lunches for whole-team prizes.



### Types of Incentives

**Prizes do not need to be monetary or material. Recognition is also a valuable incentive.**

Monetary prizes typically range in value from \$5 to \$25, offered in the form of gift cards. Internal rewards can be used as incentives as well, such as a prime parking spot, being a manager for a day, or fun company swag.

Prizes should be offered weekly. Offering coffee and donuts (or a similar treat) halfway through the competition helps keep employees engaged and excited about the final prize they could earn as a group.

**There are an array options for offering incentives:**

1. One employee can be recognized as a weekly winner and receive a prize, or many employees can receive smaller prizes.
2. At [Bob's Red Mill](#), a **tiered approach was employed** to promote a higher number of ideas submitted. Incentives were given at specific milestones, starting with 6 winners receiving a \$5 gift card, with the value of the prize increasing at each level, up to the main goal with one winner receiving a \$100 gift card. A grand prize raffle was the largest goal at the end of the contest and was open to all participants. Each submitted idea earned a raffle ticket for the main prize, creating the motivation to participate throughout the contest.
3. At [Fresh Del Monte](#), a **ranked leaderboard was used**, where 5 employees were awarded a prize each week of the competition. The prizes ranged in value depending on the quality or quantity of ideas submitted. The employee receiving the top prize received a gift valued at \$25; the lowest tier had a smaller prize value. The monetary value was not announced.
4. At [Land O'Lakes](#), **one winner was recognized each week**. Reaching the participation and submission goals was a team effort, which was rewarded with a mid-competition treat and a final catered lunch.

**Consider which criteria to use when choosing the master detective or winners, such as:**

- **Most ideas** submitted each week
- **Best idea(s)** submitted each week
- **Random selection** from everyone who submitted ideas each week.

Display the prizes, recognition, and other incentives on a poster at the start of the competition. When awarding prizes, motivate employees to submit ideas repeatedly and throughout the competition. However, to encourage broad participation, ensure that the same employee is not always the winner.

The names of winners each week should be announced in all communications: at pass-downs or group huddle meetings, in the company newsletter, on weekly posters, and on internal closed caption TV systems (where available). These public and prominent acknowledgments reward and encourage ongoing participation and friendly competition.