



RECOGNITION TOOLKIT



OVERVIEW

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

The Allegheny Intermediate Unit is committed to cultivating a culture of appreciation that celebrates our employees' achievements and contributions throughout the year.

Success relies on all of us!

Employee recognition has long been a cornerstone of effective management. Sincere recognition is one of the most powerful ways to let an employee know they are valued and their work matters.

Providing meaningful, timely, and relevant recognition encourages an environment where employees feel valued and can add value to the Allegheny Intermediate Unit's mission.

This interactive toolkit provides recognition resources that will help to build a culture of recognition among teams, departments, divisions, and beyond.

TIPS

- Use the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader.
- Download a copy of this document, which has several editable fields and allows you to save your work as you go.
- Click on the icons at the bottom of each page and the links in each section to easily navigate.

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ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

I WANT TO CREATE A CULTURE OF RECOGNITION WITHIN MY TEAM

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STAR Fund and certificates

WHAT IS MY CONTEXT?

What do we mean by recognition at the AIU?

Recognition at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit is part of the core of our culture of belonging, where employees feel valued and have the opportunity to add value to the organization.

All AIU employees are encouraged and empowered to recognize others by expressing appreciation for and acknowledging contributions made by other team members.

Through these actions, everyone affiliated with the AIU is able to achieve our mission of serving every learner.

Why Recognition Matters

Key Principles for Recognition

Recognition Roles

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WHY RECOGNITION MATTERS

Employee recognition has a direct impact on employee morale and drives engagement, fosters an environment of trust and reinforces organizational values. Recognition also leads to improvements of the top and bottom line, such as increased productivity, employee loyalty and retention.

1. Recognized employees are **happy** and **engaged**.
 - Being recognized at work helps to connect to a greater sense of purpose.
2. Recognition **improves** team **culture**.
 - Encouraging peer-to-peer, manager-to-peer recognition, builds a great team spirit and helps employees to see the positive attributes in one another.
3. **Meaningful** recognition **lowers** turnover and **improves** retention.
 - People are more likely to stay in a position and happy if their efforts are noticed and valued.
4. Recognizing others **supports** individual, team, and organizational **goals**.
 - Recognizing an individual's accomplishments and how they contribute to larger strategic goals help them to feel connected to the AIU's mission of serving every learner.

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KEY PRINCIPLES OF RECOGNITION

Exceptional employees know what is expected of them and continuously strive to improve the organization. They live the mission of serving every learner and demonstrate the AIU's standards in all they do.

The following principles help align recognition practices to our culture:

INCLUSIVE

Everyone deserves to be recognized for their contributions to the AIU's success.

SINCERE

A genuine thank you goes a long way.

INDIVIDUALIZED

Every person is unique in the way they like to be recognized.

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RECOGNITION ROLES

All employees at the AUU, regardless of their role, play a part in recognition.

LEADERS

- Make recognition a priority, and demonstrate what recognition looks like in action.
- Share access to recognition tools and templates that make recognizing team members simple.
- Understand your team's recognition preferences and adjust your approach as needed.
- Ensure recognition is inclusive, sincere and individualized.
- Ensure consistency in adherence to established guidelines.

EMPLOYEES

- Take the time to express thanks and recognition to coworkers for their contributions.
- Share positive feedback about an individual with them.
- Recognize and celebrate key milestones or achievements of fellow coworkers.
- Nominate a peer for an award to formally recognize their contributions.

HUMAN RESOURCES

- Provide tools, resources, and training to encourage formal and informal recognition practices.
- Encourage recognition at all levels: individual, departmental, leadership, organizational, etc.
- Participate in or facilitate formal recognition events.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS?

How to create a culture of recognition

Now that you have a good foundation of recognition at the AIU, let's go into what steps you can take to keep the momentum going.

This section offers checklists, questionnaires and resources to deepen your understanding of your team's needs and to help you build recognition practices that support your team's goals and the AIU's mission to serve every learner.

Manager's Checklist

Understanding Preferences

Languages of Appreciation

Recognize What Matters

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MANAGER'S CHECKLIST

Identify where you currently stand with your own recognition efforts.

Complete the Assess My Recognition Efforts Questionnaire.

Identify your own recognition style.

Complete the My Personal Recognition Style Questionnaire.

Get to know how your team likes to be recognized.

Send the Employee Recognition Preferences Questionnaire.

Add your employee's milestones to your calendar.

Review your team's preferences and plan ahead to celebrate them in the way they want to be celebrated.

Ensure your recognition efforts align to the AIU's framework of excellence

Complete the recognition alignment handout.

Schedule time with your team to review and recognize them regularly.

Need ideas? Refer to the IDEAS section in this toolkit for inspiration.

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UNDERSTANDING PREFERENCES

Employees are like fingerprints — no two are exactly the same. They have different personalities and come from different paths that shaped who they are, how they work, and even how they prefer to be recognized.

For example, some employees like to be praised publicly while others are more reserved and prefer private recognition.

Take a few moments to fully assess your recognition style and your team's recognition preferences.

Understanding the four Languages of Appreciation at Work →

My Personal Recognition Style Questionnaire →

Employee Recognition Preferences Questionnaire →



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LANGUAGES OF APPRECIATION

At work, people express and receive appreciation in different ways.

Words of Affirmation

Verbal or written praise and words that communicate a positive message of thanks and appreciation for a job well done.

Quality Time

Intentional, thoughtful, and focused efforts to connect. Examples might be regular check-ins and informal social catch-ups.

FOUR LANGUAGES OF APPRECIATION

Acts of Service

Pitching in and offering support with a task, such as a “thank you” or gesture of support and appreciation.

Tangible Gifts

Presents, treats, and tokens of appreciation to acknowledge contributions and milestones.

Source: Dr. Gary Chapman and Dr. Paul White, The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace

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RECOGNIZE WHAT MATTERS

Use this questionnaire to help you reflect on the ways you like to express recognition and your own personal preference.

Think about a time when you received recognition that was meaningful to you.

What were the circumstances (what, who, where, when)?	
What specifically made it meaningful?	
How could you repeat this experience with your team/employee?	
Which Language of Appreciation did this represent?	

Think about a time when you received recognition that was NOT meaningful to you.

What were the circumstances (what, who, where, when)?	
What made this experience not meaningful?	
Which Language of Appreciation did this represent?	

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RECOGNIZE WHAT MATTERS

In order to provide recognition for your contributions and achievements in a way that is meaningful to you, please fill out this questionnaire:

Name			
Job Title			
Important Dates (birthday, anniversary, ect.)			
Favorite Drinks and Snacks		Favorite Flower/Plant	
Favorite Restaurant		Hobby	
Favorite Sports Team		Other Interests	
What is your most preferred way to be recognized?	<div>Words of Affirmation</div> <div>Quality Time</div> <div>Acts of Service</div> <div>Tangible Gifts</div>		

STEPS

RECOGNITION TIPS

Recognition, when done correctly, helps connect employees to the big picture of the organization while helping them work toward accomplishing their goals.

- Notice opportunities: What doesn't get noticed, doesn't get recognized. The first step of meaningful recognition is a receptive mindset. Pay attention to the ways team members go "above and beyond" and make note of moments that deserve recognition.
- Do it frequently and make it timely: A casual "thanks" in passing once a month won't have much of an impact. Offer recognition regularly so that noticing and appreciating employee contributions becomes a habit. Make it timely—link recognition to a specific behavior, effort or result for the biggest impact.
- Make it meaningful: Nothing feels less genuine than constant praise for average work. Recognition should happen regularly but needs to be more than a checkbox on a to-do list to feel authentic.
- It's not just about the work: Recognize positive attitudes and behaviors as well as tangible results and work outcomes.
- It doesn't have to cost much: Financial rewards are great, but they're not the same as feeling genuinely recognized for going above and beyond. Feeling seen and valued for our efforts will always be a basic human need. Recognition, when done correctly, helps connect employees to the big picture of the organization while helping them work toward accomplishing their goals.

For more information about the organizational goals impacting your area, please contact Human Resources.

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RECOGNITION EFFORTS

Use this chart to identify how your recognition efforts align with the departmental goals and those of the AIU:

Recognition Effort:	Department/Team Goal:	Strategic Priority/ Initiative:

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DEVELOPING IDEAS

How to get started.

Employee recognition refers to all the ways an organization shows its appreciation for employees' contributions. It can take many forms and can be done in creative, engaging ways.

Organizations recognize employees for things like:

- Achievements
- Exhibiting desired behaviors
- Going above and beyond expectations
- Service milestones and anniversaries

This section will help inspire you and give you ideas to incorporate your own recognition practices. Select ideas that work for you and try them with your team!

In-the-Moment Recognition

Celebrations and Milestones

Formal Recognition

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IN-THE-MOMENT RECOGNITION

In-the-moment recognition efforts build and nurture a culture of recognition. These are those often unexpected gestures that are timely, authentic, and communicate sincere appreciation for all the little things.

This can include a range of efforts and encompass a variety of frequent, smaller initiatives that are low or no cost and can be implemented with little pre-planning. In-the-moment recognition is a cumulative habit: while it may only take a few minutes, little recognition efforts can still be high impact when they are authentic, timely, and specific.

In-the-moment recognition allows managers and peers to make a habit of recognizing and appreciating everyone's contributions. It allows employees to receive immediate feedback on performance and contributes to an internal culture of appreciation. When recognizing in the moment, remember individual recognition preferences and target your efforts according to what they like.

Consistently practicing in-the-moment recognition may only take a few minutes, but these small efforts can make a big impact.

In-the-moment recognition is:

- Timely
- Authentic
- Sincere
- Simple

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IN-THE-MOMENT RECOGNITION

In-the-Moment Recognition Ideas to Get Started:

1. Offer a genuine and timely “thank you” for a specific contribution.
2. Read out emails from happy clients, coworkers, students, etc.
3. Bring someone their favorite beverage for a job well done.
4. Send a printed or virtual “thank you” card.
5. Recognize an accomplishment by sending an email to your team to recognize the individual.
6. Have each member of your team share their proudest moment for the week at the next staff meeting.
7. Give encouragement when you notice them struggling with a task or project. Say “I know this will be hard, but I believe in you!”
8. Schedule an impromptu meeting, face-to-face or through Teams just to say thank you for something they recently accomplished.
9. Leave a hand-written note on the employee’s desk to recognize their contributions.
10. Reach out to someone outside of your department to say thank you for supporting your team’s efforts.

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CELEBRATIONS AND MILESTONES

Recognizing important milestones in your team members' personal and professional careers is a great way to build a positive environment and highlight significant moments or achievements.

These might be:

- Wrapping up a big project
- Meeting a goal
- Birthdays
- Weddings
- Arrival of a new family member
- Work anniversary
- Completing a development course

These types of milestones are less frequent than in-the-moment recognition, and are less structured than formal awards or celebrations.

Make sure to tailor the recognition for these events to your employees' preferences. Look back on the Recognition Preferences Questionnaire to see how your team prefers to be recognized.

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CELEBRATIONS AND MILESTONES

Celebrations and Milestones Ideas to Get Started:

1. Celebrate staff birthdays by bringing in cupcakes, or sending balloons or other gifts to their home if they are working remotely.
2. Set calendar reminders for career milestones and send a personal note, card, or letter.
3. Organize a bulletin board, virtual card, or Kudo Board and invite the team to post a nice message.
4. Create a swag bag of treats or themed giveaways for the employee.
5. Order pizza or lunch for the team to celebrate completing a big project.
6. Have your supervisor or a leader from another area recognize your employee for their accomplishments.
7. Let your team sign off work early on a Friday after they've completed a big project or event.
8. Create virtual water cooler moments. Send out a Zoom or Microsoft Teams meeting invite to connect over their favorite beverage.



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FORMAL RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

Formal Recognition and Awards are structured programs with clear criteria and processes, linked to big achievements or career milestones.

The AIU and its partner labor associations celebrate and recognizes faculty and staff for teaching, years of service, volunteering, and for various other reasons.

A few examples include:

- AIU Mission Possible Award
- Apple Award
- Annie Sullivan Award
- Award of Excellence
- World of Gratitude Award
- Helping Hands Award
- Heart of a Hero Award
- STAR Recognition Milestones

Nomination forms and information about for many of the awards are available on our website. Information on STAR Recognition Certificates is available in the RESOURCES section of this toolkit.

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Tools to make recognition easy.

The AIU has many existing tools to support you in your recognition efforts.

This section provides several examples, designs and links to tools that you may customize and use with your team.

Thank you cards and notes

Recognize a colleague

Praise through Teams

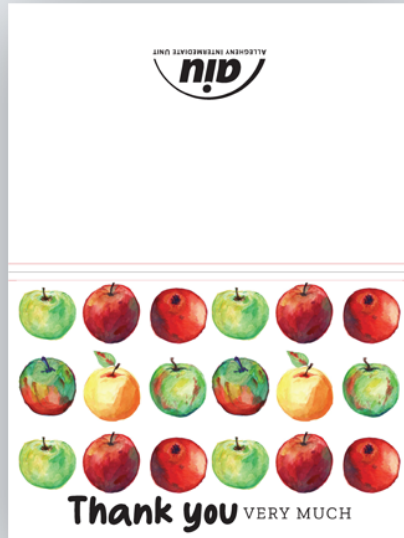
STAR Fund and Certificates

RESOURCES

SEND A THANK YOU CARD OR NOTE

Thank you cards and notes are great ways to show gratitude. You may purchase AIU-branded thank you cards through the PrintTech Portal in InSite. For access to a downloadable file to print in the office, contact Marketing and Strategic Communication at marcom@aiu3.net.

PRINT TECH



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RECOGNIZE A COLLEAGUE

Share a photo of your colleagues going above and beyond during the workday! Photos will be shared through Microsoft Sway in Teams. Select photos may be shared on social media and in our internal employee newsletter, AIU Spotlight.

[Click here to view the Sway.](#)

[Click here to complete the form!](#)

Have a special story about a coworker, leader, or team? Submit a request to highlight them in an upcoming newsletter! All requests can be sent to recognition@aiu3.net.

Caught in the Act! AIU Recognition Form

Tell us how a colleague has gone above and beyond in their work!

Start now

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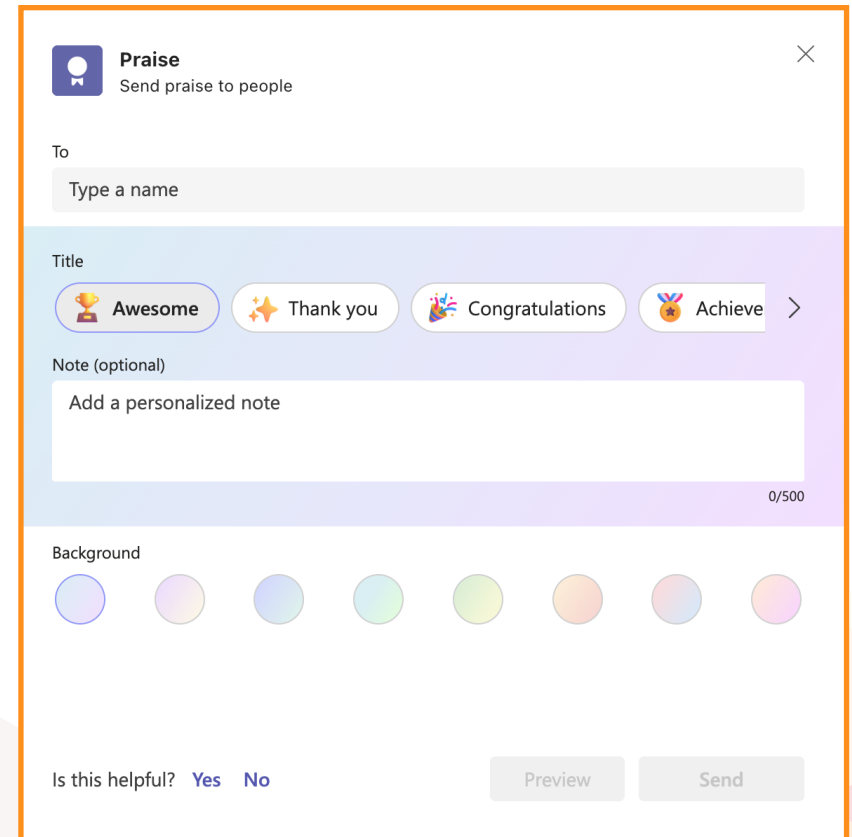
RESOURCES

SEND PRAISE THROUGH MICROSOFT TEAMS

Sometimes a quick, in-the-moment recognition is appropriate. For that, you can send Praise through Microsoft Teams.

To send Praise:

- Below the space where you write a new message or reply, select Praise or click the three dots to find it.
- Choose a badge.
- Add the name of the associate you want to praise and an optional note.
- Select Preview, then Send.



The screenshot shows the 'Praise' dialog box in Microsoft Teams. At the top, there's a header with the 'Praise' icon and the text 'Send praise to people'. Below this is a 'To' field with a placeholder 'Type a name'. The 'Title' section features four buttons: 'Awesome' (with a trophy icon), 'Thank you' (with a star icon), 'Congratulations' (with a confetti icon), and 'Achieve' (with a medal icon). Below the title is a 'Note (optional)' text area with a placeholder 'Add a personalized note' and a character count '0/500'. The 'Background' section shows a row of seven colored circles. At the bottom, there's a feedback question 'Is this helpful?' with 'Yes' and 'No' options, and two buttons: 'Preview' and 'Send'.

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THANK YOU SCRIPTS

Sometimes we don't always know the right words to say. Use these sample scripts as inspiration to write something personal for your employee.

Work Anniversary:

Happy anniversary, NAME! As we continue to grow as a team and organization, I am increasingly thankful for all of your contributions and effort to fulfill our mission of transforming lives. You continue to add so much value to this team, and I appreciate how you approach every day with the same energy, focus, and enthusiasm as the first day you arrived.

Thank you for everything, and I am looking forward to celebrating many more years together.

Thank You Message #1:

NAME, thank you for your positive attitude and incredible effort on PROJECT OR TASK. I appreciate the way you approached this complex situation and worked with the team to get the job done.

Thank You Message #2:

Thank you NAME for your recent effort on PROJECT OR TASK. Your contributions resulted in IMPACT. This is the type of commitment we need to achieve our mission of transforming lives. I look forward to seeing what else you can do!

Thank you Message #3:

I could not have completed the PROJECT OR TASK without your expertise in SPECIFIC AREA. I know I speak for all of us when I say that I feel lucky we had you on the team leading the way. Excellent work!

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THANK YOU SCRIPTS

Quick Phrases to Add to a Card, Email, or Note:

1. Your hard work and dedication is an example to everyone on our team! Thank you for being your best every day!
2. It's a great relief to work with someone who is an excellent manager as well! Your effort is deeply appreciated.
3. I'm so grateful for all of your hard work. It definitely hasn't gone unnoticed!
4. The perfect employee lifts others up. Thank you for being a positive influence!
5. I'm so grateful that you always take the time to help your coworkers. It's really made our team come together.
6. Thank you for being such a team player. We wouldn't be the same without you!
7. Your unique perspective adds so much to our team. We're so grateful to have you with us!
8. You did a fantastic job helping our team reach its goal. Thank you for setting such a fantastic example!
9. I'm so grateful that you're not afraid to ask questions! It helps me be a better leader.
10. Watching you strive to improve has been an inspiration for both me and the entire team. You're amazing!



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STAR FUND

In an effort to support leaders with their team appreciation efforts, the Human Resources department has established a STAR Fund. The STAR fund provides leaders with the ability to draw down from a centralized pool of money to support programs such as team lunches, food trucks, coffee trucks, AIU swag, and other team oriented appreciation events.

For the 2023-24 school year, funds are allocated to each division based on headcount, with \$10,000 available to supplement existing and ongoing recognition efforts.

Programs may fill out a STAR Fund request form and submit it to human resources to secure funding for a proposed activity.



DOWNLOAD

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Staff Appreciation and Recognition (STAR) Fund Request Form

The Allegheny Intermediate Unit is committed to cultivating a culture of appreciation that celebrates our employees' achievements and contributions throughout the year. Success relies on all of us!

In an effort to support leaders with their team appreciation efforts, the Human Resources department has established a STAR Fund. The STAR fund provides leaders with the ability to draw down from a centralized pool of money to support programs such as team lunches, food trucks, coffee trucks, AIU swag, and other team-oriented appreciation events.

Requester's Name:	
Department:	

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STAR FUND

Process:

1. Leaders that elect to utilize STAR Funds to support a team engagement and appreciation event, must complete and submit a request form to their division director. The form must document how the funds will be utilized, when the event will occur, and who will participate in the event.
2. Division directors must support the use of STAR Funds authorize in writing on the request form and route the completed form to recognition@aiu3.net and to the submitter.
3. Human Resources will review the request and provide final approval.
4. Leaders must indicate in the comments section of their expense report the use of STAR Funds and attach a copy of the approved form with their expense report.
5. Human Resources will notify the respective Fiscal representative to code the expense to the appropriate cost center.
6. Human Resources will share a quarterly utilization report with division directors.

Ineligible Expenses:

1. Funds cannot be utilized to provide gift cards or cash awards.
2. Appreciation gifts cannot exceed \$25 in value.
3. Purchase of alcohol is prohibited.

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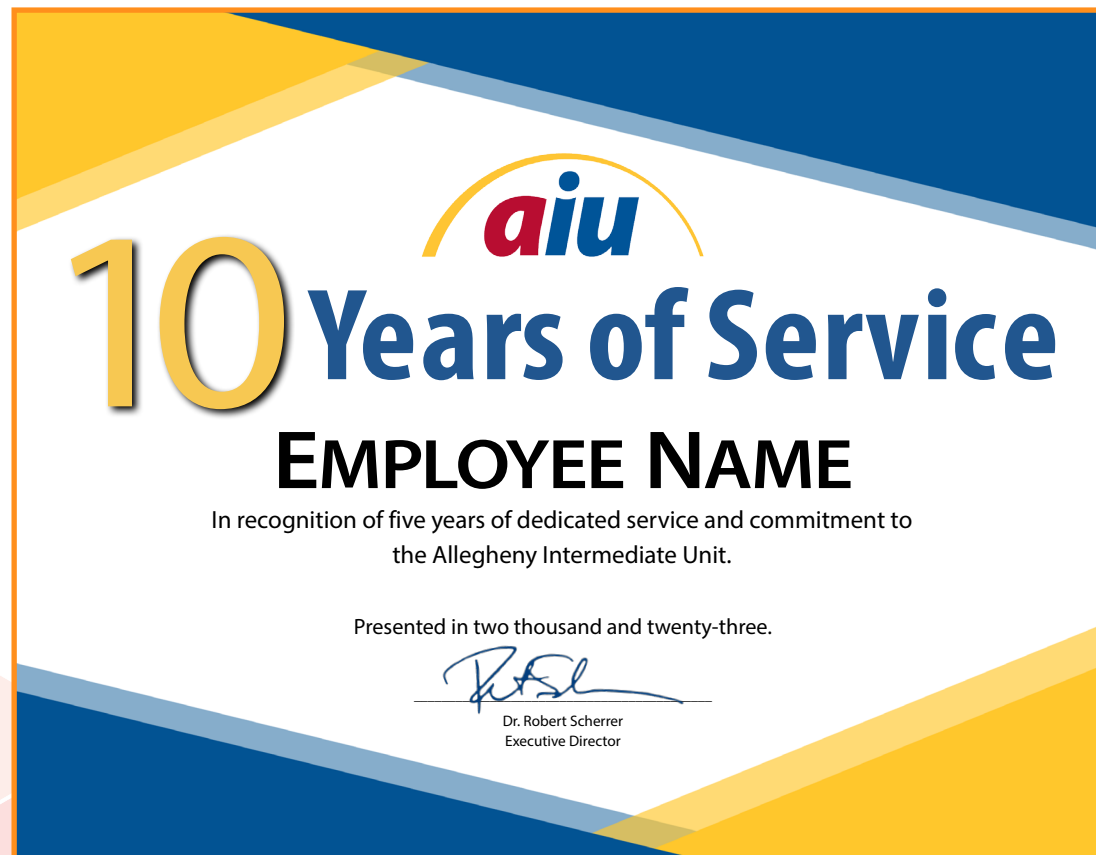
RESOURCES

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STAR RECOGNITION CERTIFICATES

The AIU will recognize years of service milestones each year in the spring. All employees reaching 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and 35 -year milestones during the school year will be recognized with a digital certificate.

Department and program leaders will be able to order printed certificates for their employees through the AIU's website. This function is expected to be implemented this school year.



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ONGOING EFFORTS

The AIU has a number of organization-wide recognition efforts that we will continue to add to in the future. Some of those efforts include a Welcome Back to School picnic at the start of the school year, early release for appreciation days, and an Employee Appreciation Week in November.



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EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION WEEK

Coinciding with American Education Week, the AIU's Employee Appreciation Week is an opportunity to celebrate all of our employees, regardless of their job title. The week is celebrated in November during the week before Thanksgiving.

The inaugural Employee Appreciation Week in 2023 featured the following schedule:

Nov. 13 — Mindful Monday!

Employees submitted photos of their work location at 3:15 p.m. These photos were then added to a Sway to highlight the various programs at the AIU. Those who submitted a photo were entered into a raffle to win one of four AIU-branded Yeti tumblers.

Nov. 14 — T-Shirt Tuesday!

Employees wore AIU t-shirts that were provided along with an appreciation bag and thank you card.

Nov. 15 — Wellness Wednesday!

All programs were encouraged to participate in wellness activities that fit their respective schedules and capabilities. This includes both physical and mental well-being.

Nov. 16 — Thoughtful Thursday!

Employees were asked to leave a kind message for a colleague. Note sheets were provided so employees can easily share a message of praise.

Nov. 17 — Fanatic Friday!

Employees showed their team spirit by wearing their school or favorite hometown team colors! This showcased the AIU's connections to communities throughout the region.

RESOURCES

EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION WEEK





For more information, email recognition@aiu3.net.