



ECO Canada's

# HR Best Practices Report

2009



ECO CANADA

Environmental Careers Organization



ECO CANADA

Environmental Careers Organization

## Thank you

ECO Canada would like to thank all of the organizations profiled in this report for their participation and contribution in sharing their human resource practices.

Cambria Gordon Ltd.

Ecology Action Centre

EcoMetrix Incorporated

Fielding Chemical Technologies

Fundy Engineering and Consulting Ltd.

Golder Associates Ltd.

Intellex Technologies Inc.

Maxxam Analytics

The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority

Odyssey Environmental Ltd.

Rescan Environmental Services Ltd.

Stratos Inc.

TERA Environmental Consultants

Terrapex Environmental Ltd.

Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

Urban and Environmental Management Inc.

Canada

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# Introduction



As environmental organizations prepare for the retirement of the baby boomer generation and struggle to retain top talent in a competitive industry, the need to develop effective recruitment and retention practices is becoming a top priority.

Employers are realizing that the success of an organization relies on more than hiring qualified candidates. Effective human resource (HR) planning and management is required at all stages of an employee's corporate lifecycle to help ensure employee growth and satisfaction. Employee satisfaction is vital to the success of an organization because of its direct impact on productivity. When employees are satisfied, they are more likely to produce high quality work, optimize performance, and exercise more critical thought and creativity. This combination of high satisfaction and maximum productivity amounts to employee engagement.

Engaged employees are invaluable assets since they are motivated to perform to the highest of their abilities because of their dedication and voluntary commitment to the success of the organization. Companies who effectively cultivate employee engagement benefit from low employee turn-over, greater customer satisfaction, a cohesive corporate culture, improved performance and communication, and higher employee commitment to the core values and objectives of the organization.

ECO Canada's HR Best Practices Report highlights innovative HR strategies used by Canadian environmental organizations to promote employee engagement. Categorized according to six HR practice areas, this report shares valuable insight while acknowledging several challenges unique to the environment industry, such as contexts for learning, organization structures, and types of projects and work.



## Learn and Adapt

While there are a variety of unique methods to carry out HR functions, the true value of these practices is in their tailored structure to support the unique goals, corporate culture, and objectives of each organization. By choosing appropriate methods and incorporating them into every day activities, HR practices become meaningful processes that reflect the corporate culture, clarify the roles and responsibilities of employees, and demonstrate how each individual's contributions tie in to the overall achievements of the organization.

The best practices featured in this report should not be considered as pre-established solutions to address HR challenges. Rather, they should be regarded as problem solving techniques that take into consideration employee engagement and corporate culture while supporting the core values and business objectives of the organization.

## Featured Companies

Committed to ongoing HR excellence and improvement, the organizations profiled in this report were selected based on the results of their employee satisfaction scores and HR practices. Using this assessment and personal interviews, ECO Canada has documented several HR strategies implemented by these organizations.

# Staffing and Recruitment

RESCAN ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES LTD.

## Reinforcing Company Values

With a staff of well over a hundred employees and averaging a growth of 30% per annum in recent years, Rescan has developed an effective recruitment strategy to attract qualified workers who are committed to the organization's goals. A key component of the process relies on hiring individuals who share the same values as the company and demonstrate key attributes that include flexibility, resilience, and commitment to excellence and dedication.

Rescan's recruitment strategy comes into play even before individuals enter the selection process. In order to attract individuals who share the same environmental leadership values, the company actively markets its achievements and awards to the public to raise its employer brand awareness. This provides candidates with a better understanding of the corporate culture and in turn, helps focus and reduce the candidate pool by appealing to a particular type of individual. The company's job postings further reflect this strategy by carefully articulating the nature of the work and the desired behavioural competencies in addition to identifying mandatory technical skill requirements.

Once short-listing is complete, pre-screening telephone interviews are held with all candidates who successfully meet the requirements. This step aims to quickly identify the applicant's outlook on work, their interest in joining Rescan, and their fit with the organization. Candidates who successfully complete this stage go on to participate in a number of face to face interviews with a selection of senior managers. This process acts as a safeguard by considering the perspectives and feedback of multiple individuals when assessing a candidate's fit with the organization.

To complement the recruitment process and help encourage staff involvement, Rescan also relies on its Employee Referral Program. This program provides employees with an opportunity to directly recommend candidates who embody the same values. If a staff member refers a candidate who is hired and stays with the company through the three month probationary period, they receive \$1000.

## Selective Recruitment Using Job Boards

Although staff turnover is not a major issue for the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (NVCA), the agency relies on selective recruitment techniques to maximize the use of limited hiring budgets.

To ensure the most appropriate methods of sourcing and attracting qualified candidates are used, the agency considers the following details for each position: level of entry (junior, intermediate, senior), level of education (degree, diploma), professional association, and technical requirements (Engineer, GIS tech). Using this information, the company determines which job boards, communication channels, and advertisement strategies are best for targeting candidates with the required skill sets.

A key component of this process is having an in-depth understanding of the variety of job boards in the market and what types of candidates they attract. Depending on the position, NVCA will either choose to advertise using a niche job board or employ a mass recruitment strategy that utilizes a variety of job advertisement services. For positions that require specific technical skill sets, the company often relies on niche job boards since they reduce the candidate pool by targeting a more applicable audience. On the other hand, the NVCA utilizes as many free job posting or partner sites as it can to maximize exposure and increase the number of applicants for other positions.



STRATOS INC.

## University Internships

Stratos—a consultancy providing businesses, governments, and organizations with expert advice, information, and tools to assist with the development and implementation of sustainable policies and practices—offers internships to Masters level university students as part of its recruitment strategy.

Using the internship program, Stratos can target students who excel academically and provide them with the opportunity to obtain practical work experience. This helps to train and develop the skill sets of interns at an early stage of their career while giving the company an opportunity to gauge the intern's skills, abilities, and inner drive. The program has proven beneficial to both the interns and the company, and is one way Stratos is helping build the capacity of new graduates in the environment industry.



USING THE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM, STRATOS CAN TARGET STUDENTS WHO EXCEL ACADEMICALLY AND PROVIDE THEM WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO OBTAIN PRACTICAL WORK EXPERIENCE.



TERRAPEX ENVIRONMENTAL LTD.

## Orientation Checklists

Terrapex Environmental Ltd. appreciates the impact that a well structured orientation process can have on new employees and their ability to successfully integrate into the workplace. To help them get off on the right foot, Terrapex has created a detailed New Employee Orientation Checklist that helps new employees learn about basic workplace operations with the assistance of various staff members.

On their first day, all new employees receive the checklist as part of their orientation package. This checklist ensures that the employee receives information regarding the organization and department, internal network, passwords, HR policies and paperwork, safety equipment and training, and standard processes. However, rather than learning everything from their supervisor, the checklist requires new employees to consult with co-workers from various departments to learn about each topic. For example, Human Resources will help the employee complete induction paperwork while a senior field employee will conduct the health and safety training. Once a topic is covered, the new employee reports back to his or her supervisor who then checks off the task as completed. Upon completion, the orientation checklist is kept on record in the employee's file.



TERRAPEX ENVIRONMENTAL LTD. APPRECIATES THE IMPACT THAT A WELL STRUCTURED ORIENTATION PROCESS CAN HAVE ON NEW EMPLOYEES AND THEIR ABILITY TO SUCCESSFULLY INTEGRATE INTO THE WORKPLACE.



This system helps introduce new employees to staff members in other departments and also guarantees that the most knowledgeable individuals on specific topics are training employees in the appropriate areas.



TERA ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONSULTANTS

## New Hire Career Planning

Over the years, TERA Environmental Consultants has fostered a culture and structure that allows self-directed and engaged employees to find their perfect niche within the company. However, this can be difficult for new graduates as their professional interests evolve with exposure to diverse projects, skill sets, and career options within the organization. To help support them in identifying their niche area, TERA pairs each new hire with a senior mentor to receive coaching and career planning support.

By helping new hires discover their interests and professional goals at an early stage of their career, the company can begin to assist them with structured career development. This is done with the support of mentors who match the professional goals of new hires with the company's objectives. By providing new graduates with this information, mentors can further help them become more self-reliant and self-directed in their learning, resilient to change, and encourage skill development through structured practice and experience.

FUNDY ENGINEERING &  
CONSULTING LTD.

## Hiring For Fit

Being actively involved and creating strong relationships in the community is a core value at Fundy Engineering & Consulting Ltd. To ensure new candidates embody similar values, the company looks for key traits that support its community-focused corporate culture during the recruitment process.

Prior to interviewing candidates, all resumes are screened to ensure that there is some mention of volunteer experience. This information is further expanded upon during interviews using questions that ask candidates to describe their interests and reasons for volunteering, previous volunteer experience, and their ability to contribute to the organization.

Management also uses this opportunity to reinforce and clearly communicate the company's vision and core values. This provides potential candidates with an opportunity to reassess their fit and ensure their personal values also align with those of the organization.

INTELEX TECHNOLOGIES INC.

## Team Hiring

Intelex Technologies Inc. relies on the perspectives and opinions of its staff to help ensure that new candidates are a good fit for the position, department, and organization. This is done using a three-stage group interview approach that includes the feedback of multiple employees of whom the new hire will be working with.

During the first stage of the interview process, all candidates are interviewed by multiple members of the team that the candidate would eventually be a member of. Candidates who successfully advance through the initial screening process receive a second interview conducted by the team manager. Prior to sending a candidate to the final interview stage, all team members who helped with the interviews share their opinions with the team manager and discuss how they feel about the candidate's ability to work with the team and their compatibility with the workplace culture. Based on the team discussion, final candidates are selected to advance to the final stage of the interview process.

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DURING THE FIRST STAGE OF THE INTERVIEW PROCESS, ALL CANDIDATES ARE INTERVIEWED BY MULTIPLE MEMBERS OF THE TEAM THAT THE CANDIDATE WOULD EVENTUALLY BE A MEMBER OF.

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The third interview is with executive management, most often the President & CEO. This step helps ensure that all candidates meet the corporate-wide expectations for employee 'fit' and that they align with their vision of a perfect Intelex Team Member.

# Training and Development



ECOMETRIX INCORPORATED

## Hands-On Learning

EcoMetrix believes that hands-on experience is the best way for staff to develop professionally. To help encourage this professional growth in junior and intermediate employees, EcoMetrix includes them in challenging and complex work assignments shortly after they start with the company. Although these employees have little work experience, EcoMetrix believes that their direct involvement plays an important role in broadening their skill sets at an early stage of their career and also instills a desire to take initiative and advance in the company.

An example of this are two recent graduates that EcoMetrix hired in the fall of 2006. The juniors spent the fall traveling to various parts of Canada to support environmental effects monitoring programs at pulp and paper mills. Although the work was challenging, they quickly learned techniques for sampling water, sediment, and aquatic biota, and learned how to process and interpret these findings. Subsequently, they travelled to remote parts of Peru to support a baseline monitoring survey for a mining operation located in the Andes Mountains and port facilities on the Pacific Coast. Within their first year following graduation, these junior employees experienced a greater diversity of challenges than many professionals experience throughout their entire career.



ODYSSEY ENVIRONMENTAL LTD.

## 3-Step-Safety

Odyssey Environmental is conscious of the risks and hazards associated with field work. To help ensure that employees return home safe at the end of the day, the company has taken proactive measures by introducing a formal three-step safety mentorship program. The purpose of this program is to ensure that employees are conscious of the risks and hazards associated with field work and are well trained to perform a variety of job related tasks in a safe and reliable manner.

**Step One:** Prior to performing a particular task for the first time, employees must observe that task being performed. During this step of the safety program, the supervisor must explain the process involved, advise the employee of any risks, and provide the employee with an opportunity to ask questions. Once the employee and supervisor both agree that the employee fully understands the task at hand, they both sign off.

**Step Two:** During the second step of the safety program, the employee assists the supervisor in completing the task. This provides the employee with an opportunity to practice and receive feedback on the required skills. Once the step has been completed to their satisfaction, both the employee and supervisor sign off for a second time.

**Step Three:** The final step of the process requires the employee to complete the task independently while under observation from the supervisor. This allows the supervisor to provide the employee with feedback on his or her performance. Once the task has successfully been performed, both the employee and supervisor sign off for a third time and the three-step safety mentorship program is complete.

*Odyssey Environmental Ltd. recently merged with Matrix Solutions Inc.*

ECOMETRIX INCORPORATED

# Transferring Senior Knowledge

Senior staff are one of EcoMetrix's most valuable resources for developing the skill sets of junior and intermediate employees. With most senior staff members holding advanced degrees at either the Masters or Doctorate level—along with many years of experience working on diverse complex assignments—the company has made its mentorship program a key priority.

As part of the program, each senior staff member is responsible for the professional and personal development of one or two junior/intermediate employees. This ratio provides ample opportunity for interaction and results in quick staff development through progressive learning.

The mentorship program also supports the company's goal of instilling a sense of personal responsibility for one's own performance management. As part of the mentorship role, senior staff encourage employees to take initiative of their careers by identifying opportunities to be more involved in company operations, discovering new projects, and determining skill sets that they deem important and want to improve. Rather than relying solely on the guidance of mentors, employees must also communicate their interests and outline how they can be better supported. To assist with these initiatives, mentors help employees plan and set long term career objectives to help staff achieve their goals.



# Training and Development

STRATOS INC.

## Stratos Academy and Forum

Stratos is a company that prides itself on attracting and retaining passionate and highly skilled employees. In support of these values, the company has fostered a culture of learning and ongoing professional development through the implementation of several unique internal educational activities.

### **The 'Stratos Academy'**

The 'Stratos Academy' is a series of half or full day training sessions that occur three or four times per year. The sessions are hosted by fellow Stratos employees and are designed to help staff master skills that are used in everyday activities but not always covered in standard training programs. Previous sessions have included topics such as proposal writing and management systems. The Academy also assists presenters by providing them with the opportunity to develop their skills as group leaders and trainers.

### **The 'Stratos Forum'**

The 'Stratos Forum' is a bi-monthly opportunity for teams to present information on projects to their colleagues and share best practice insight. This initiative keeps staff informed about current projects and also provides them with a venue to ask questions, share insight, and discuss how to maximize the impact of the work. This activity also assists presenters by providing them with the opportunity to develop their skills as group leaders and trainers.



TERRAPEX ENVIRONMENTAL LTD.

## In-House Seminars

Sharing and building knowledge among employees is a key priority at Terrapex Environmental Ltd. In support of this initiative, mid-level employees arrange or present in-house training seminars over the lunch hour every six to eight weeks. Presentation topics are chosen based on employee suggestions, requests, and need-to-know information. Previous topics have included: Gastech care and maintenance, utility locates, and new PCB regulations. Employees who have recently taken a course are also encouraged to lead a seminar to share important information and material. If the company feels that they do not have the internal ability to address a topic, an external expert is often brought in to conduct the seminar.

In addition to learning something new, employees receive a company-provided lunch and also have the opportunity to discuss the topic and socialize at the end of the presentation.



SHARING AND BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AMONG EMPLOYEES IS A KEY PRIORITY AT TERRAPEX ENVIRONMENTAL LTD. IN SUPPORT OF THIS INITIATIVE, MID-LEVEL EMPLOYEES ARRANGE OR PRESENT IN-HOUSE TRAINING SEMINARS OVER THE LUNCH HOUR EVERY SIX TO EIGHT WEEKS.



# Communications

GOLDER ASSOCIATES LTD.

## GoldNet

Employing over 7,000 people who operate from more than 160 offices located throughout Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and South America, Golder Associates relies on innovative technology to maintain open communication and dialogue among employees. To support this initiative, Golder developed an extensive intranet called GoldNet that, among many other things, allows employees to access important company notices, read about project wins, find common administrative documents and forms, zero-in on home office information, complete timesheets, track project costs, and find colleagues in other offices.

The intranet site that services Golder's Canadian offices also has a creative blog titled "Conversations with the President." The goal of this blog is to engage employees on various issues and topics concerning the business and communities within which the company operates. The President makes monthly posts and employees can comment or pose questions on the topic presented for discussion in an open forum.

The intranet site has also been recently updated to include live podcasts on important topics such as mentoring and health and safety. In addition, the site includes many market indicators that are important to the company's business such as the Canadian dollar, the TSX, the price of oil, etc. These feeds are updated daily and are a popular addition to the site.

FIELDING CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGIES

## Social Hours

Fielding Chemical Technologies bridges work and fun using monthly "Social Hours". The goal of these informal gatherings is to improve organizational communication while providing a light-hearted environment for employees to build personal relationships and celebrate their ongoing achievements.

Each 'Social Hour' begins with informal remarks from the CEO who shares important news and information about the company, recognizes new and departing employees, and announces upcoming staff birthdays. Following these highlights, employees have the opportunity to socialize, enjoy refreshments, and occasionally lunch is provided.

To add a special twist, these meetings also recognize and promote the diversity of cultures within the organization. Often, Social Hours take on a unique cultural theme that allows employees to learn more about the backgrounds of their colleagues. For example, Fielding employees celebrated the Chinese New Year in their February meeting with traditional decorations, food, music, and group festivities. The June Social showcased the Maritimes.

ECOMETRIX INCORPORATED

## Blue Sky Meetings

Obtaining employee feedback and perspective is an important component of the decision making process at EcoMetrix. Because employees are viewed as the heart and soul of the company, senior management strives to include all or the majority of employee perspectives when making important decisions.

To encourage open communication and employee involvement, EcoMetrix hosts bi-annual "blue-sky" meetings. These moderated and informal meetings provide staff with an opportunity to interact with one another and discuss overarching goals and future objectives of the company. The meetings are also used as a forum to discuss significant company decisions that may personally affect staff. As an example, when EcoMetrix was purchasing a new office building, senior management consulted staff and invited twelve of the fifteen staff members to tour four of the short-listed buildings before making a decision.



BECAUSE EMPLOYEES ARE VIEWED AS THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE COMPANY, SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRIVES TO INCLUDE ALL OR THE MAJORITY OF EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES WHEN MAKING IMPORTANT DECISIONS.



CAMBRIA GORDON LTD.

## Stress Meetings

Working in the environmental consulting industry can be both challenging and taxing on employees. Because projects are based on client needs, workloads tend to fluctuate throughout the year, resulting in occasional periods of high stress and pressure. Cambria Gordon closely monitors the stress levels and morale of employees during these chaotic times to ensure that employees feel supported and maintain an appropriate work-life balance.

During a unique instance in 2008 when the workload became too overwhelming and demanding on employees, the owners of the company held an impromptu "Stress Meeting". With the inclusion of all staff members, management openly acknowledged the heightened workload, spoke to staff about maintaining work-life balance, and offered perspective and direction as to when the workload was expected to settle. Employees further supported one another by openly discussing their concerns and addressed problem areas by employing work-sharing and offloading.



EMPLOYEES FURTHER SUPPORTED ONE ANOTHER BY OPENLY DISCUSSING THEIR CONCERNS AND ADDRESSED PROBLEM AREAS BY EMPLOYING WORK-SHARING AND OFFLOADING.



The meeting resulted in a collaborative effort between staff to ensure all of the work was completed on schedule and that no employee felt discouraged or unappreciated during this time. It was a true demonstration of the company's mutuality shared values and respect for one another.



## MAXXAM ANALYTICS

# Sharing Satisfaction Results

Similar to many other organizations, Maxxam Analytics collects employee feedback on HR policies, procedures and leadership practices using an annual employee satisfaction survey. Although the evaluation process is valuable in itself, Maxxam Analytics goes above and beyond to demonstrate the significance and importance of the process to its employees by sharing the aggregated survey results—whether scores are high or low. This act of transparency helps employees understand the rationale for upcoming HR initiatives and also demonstrates how employee feedback is considered and used when addressing HR improvements.

Each office receives a tailored in-house presentation given by the Vice-President of Human Resources who discloses the results on a company-wide scale and also breaks down individual scores for the specific office location. Not only do the results highlight important information for the current year but trends using historical comparisons from the previous two years are also discussed. Following the presentation, employees are informed of upcoming HR initiatives for the New Year and are provided with an opportunity to ask questions.

# Performance Management



FIELDING CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGIES

## Brainstorming Workshops

To support the company's innovative and progressive culture, Fielding Chemical Technologies hosts brainstorming workshops with its employees twice a year. These workshops are used to get employees thinking about continuous improvement through collaborative discussions.

About a month prior to each workshop, the company announces a specific topic that will be addressed in the upcoming session. These topics typically focus on an area for improvement, for example 'Eliminating Redundant Activities'. On the day of the workshop, employees are put into groups composed of 10-15 people. Each group has representation across all departments and from all levels of the organization. All employees are expected to participate. The discussion begins with a brief explanation of the topic and is then opened up to each participant to provide one idea. This process continues until all ideas have been expressed, and every idea is recorded and grouped into similar categories. Following the sharing of ideas, each group engages in a collaborative discussion to evaluate all of the ideas and develop preliminary plans to implement the best ones.

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FOLLOWING THE SHARING OF IDEAS, EACH GROUP ENGAGES IN A COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION TO EVALUATE ALL OF THE IDEAS AND DEVELOP PRELIMINARY PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THE BEST ONES.

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ECOMETRIX INCORPORATED

## Flat Hierarchy Project Management

EcoMetrix used to conduct detailed performance appraisals by outlining the specific career related objectives of an employee and then later reviewing the employee's ability to achieve them the following year. Although this method is effective in a number of other organizations, it presented several challenges for EcoMetrix since yearly objectives often changed in response to client needs and the types of projects undertaken by the company.

To help adjust and accommodate EcoMetrix's project-based environment, the company now provides direction and review at a project level through a project manager. Using this form of performance appraisal, all team members of a particular project participate in the preparation of work plans and proposals. This joint effort helps make employees more aware of their responsibilities and also encourages them to take ownership of their component within the project.

To evaluate performance, the team frequently engages in collaborative discussions to outline project objectives, areas of improvement, and individual roles and responsibilities. This flat hierarchical structure allows each team member to provide constructive feedback and present recommendations and/or suggestions to the team. Rather than relying on the guidance and feedback of the project manager, this structure places accountability on each individual and encourages the team to work as a unit while utilizing each others' skills.



UPPER THAMES RIVER CONSERVATION

## Diversifying Teams

Much of the work done at Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) is within teams – whether it is technical, employee-focused, or health and wellness-focused. To ensure that divisions do not work in a vacuum and also to provide employees with the opportunity to pursue projects that are of interest to them, even if they are not directly related to their position, UTRCA ensures that teams are created with representation from several divisions in the organization.

An example of this structure is the Property Assessment team that was formed to oversee properties owned and managed by UTRCA. The team consisted of representatives from every division within the organization including Planning and Research, Hydrology, Lands and Facilities, Conservation Areas, Conservation Services, Source Water Protection, and Corporate Services.

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MUCH OF THE WORK DONE  
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STRATOS INC.

## Supporting Professional Development

The professional growth and on-going training of employees is a top priority for Stratos. To support this, the company has incorporated professional development components into HR policies and its performance appraisal process. This places accountability on both the employee and manager to ensure that appropriate training and skill set development is received on an annual basis.

Stratos has an annual professional development (PD) budget which each employee can access. To ensure that PD budgets are used, employees participate in mid-year and annual performance evaluations. These discussions provide management and employees with a structured opportunity to review and discuss an employee's performance and progress related to corporate and personal goals. Managers also provide support by actively helping employees find courses, conferences, and training opportunities to build their skills, support their long term career objectives, and address areas that need improvement.

To ensure that employees receive relevant information and support, Stratos continuously seeks feedback regarding its performance appraisal process. Recent innovations have included a performance matrix that clearly defines all of the areas in which employees are assessed and evaluated. The company has also introduced a peer feedback system where three colleagues anonymously submit information on an employee as part of the performance appraisal process to ensure an accurate reflection of their work.

TERRAPEX ENVIRONMENTAL LTD.

## Pooling Resources

Cross exposure to different projects and work experience plays an important role in staff development at Terrapex Environmental Ltd., a Canadian engineering and geosciences company providing specialized environmental consulting services.

To help expand and diversify the skill sets of employees, Terrapex relies on a pooled resource structure. This type of structure allows project managers to assemble teams using any available staff members in the organization. This is done by accessing an on-line company intranet with a calendar scheduling tool that lists all of the company's active projects and the staff members who are booked to do the work. While referencing this resource, project managers can see the project status and workload of all staff members and then assign available individuals to work on their project.

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TO HELP EXPAND AND  
DIVERSIFY THE SKILL SETS  
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RELIES ON A POOLED  
RESOURCE STRUCTURE.

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This structure provides staff members with the opportunity to work with multiple managers on a variety of projects for many different clients. It also benefits junior employees since they avoid being 'pigeon holed' into one specific type of work.

ECOLOGY ACTION CENTRE

## Organizational Support Structures

Rather than relying on a typical organization structure where responsibilities are cascaded downward from management, Ecology Action Centre (EAC) operates using an approach that combines internal support structures, grassroots input, and employee autonomy. This approach is tailored to EAC's unique line of work as a non-profit environmental watchdog. The organization's structure is centered on seven action committees and their projects. Each committee focuses on a different environmental area such as Coastal, Energy, Wilderness, Marine, etc. and bases its programs on initiatives to create sustainable change. The majority of project planning and decision making occurs at the Project Coordinator level, with two other levels that provide support, direction, and expertise.

For additional support, ranging from administrative to strategic planning, Coordinators can consult the Core Support Team. This team includes three staff Directors who specialize in the areas of finance, internal operations, and policy. Throughout the year, project teams meet with members of the Core Team on a quarterly basis to discuss the project's direction, objectives, and strategy.

Project Coordinators also rely on the assistance of over 250 volunteers with the EAC. To help carry out frontline activities, connect with the grassroots, and set strategic priorities, Project Coordinators work closely with their volunteer-run action committees. Volunteers play active roles throughout the organization by assisting with event and outreach initiatives, supplying special skills, report writing, and sub-committee planning.



MAXXAM ANALYTICS

## 360 Degree Feedback

Employing over 1,600 employees in 26 laboratories and service centres across Canada, Maxxam Analytics recognizes the importance of developing knowledgeable and skilled senior leaders throughout the organization.

To accommodate unique developmental needs, workplace demands, and contexts for learning, Maxxam Analytics relies on a 360 degree feedback tool. Every two years, all Vice-Presidents, Directors and General Managers in the company participate in the assessment which consists of self ratings, peer evaluation, and upward evaluations. Although it is an extensive and lengthy process, the tool provides these individuals with an all-around perspective that clarifies how they are seen by others, feedback on their skills and abilities, and insight into their communication styles.

Using this information, a gap analysis is performed to identify areas of improvement that require additional training or coaching.

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EVERY TWO YEARS, ALL VICE-PRESIDENTS, DIRECTORS AND GENERAL MANAGERS IN THE COMPANY PARTICIPATE IN THE ASSESSMENT WHICH CONSISTS OF SELF RATINGS, PEER EVALUATION, AND UPWARD EVALUATIONS.

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INTELEX TECHNOLOGIES INC.

## R&D Committees

Due to the competitive nature of the industry, Intellex Technologies Inc.—a software solutions provider for environmental, quality, health & safety and business performance management—continuously immerses its employees in new and rapidly evolving ideas. To help reduce turn-around time and streamline the development of products from concept to commercialization, the company relies on the efforts of its Research and Development (R&D) Committees.

The R&D Committees consist of employees from various departments, backgrounds, and disciplines who collectively work on the planning and execution of a new product. They are completely self-managed and responsible for overseeing all stages of the product development cycle including research, development, testing, implementation, and maintenance.

Upon receiving a project, each R&D Committee begins by brainstorming new ideas for software development. Once these options have been fully explored, a final product is specified and an implementation plan is created. This plan addresses all stages of the product development cycle and outlines the responsibilities of each member.

In addition to streamlining the operations of the company, the collaborative structure of the R&D Committees plays an important role in contributing to professional development. While helping employees develop critical skills required for product development, they also learn important project management techniques through exposure to new challenges and ways of thinking.

# Organizational Development



FIELDING CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGIES

## IMPROVES Program

Fielding Chemical Technologies– a cutting edge Canadian family-owned chemical and refrigerant recycling company– recognizes that employees are one of the best resources to collect new ideas regarding company improvements. Because they perform the majority of "hands-on" work and act as experts in their fields, the company places high value on the suggestions and recommendations of employees regarding company operations. To ensure these new ideas are heard, Fielding Chemical Technologies relies on its IMPROVES (**I**deas, **M**ethods, **P**rocesses, **O**perations while **V**aluing the **E**nvironment and **S**afety) program.

The goal of the IMPROVES program is to encourage creative, innovative, and resourceful thinking while providing a forum for employees to share ideas with management. When an employee has an idea that they believe will save the company money or generate additional income, they can present their idea by submitting an IMPROVES form which is tracked and monitored. These ideas can range from suggesting new processes to streamline operations or providing recommendations to improve the efficiency of current processes and/or production equipment. Each idea is separately evaluated by management and if applicable and feasible, the development is put into place. Following implementation, the savings and/or revenue generated by the idea is tracked for one year. If the development is successful, the company shares up to 10% of the savings/increased revenue with the individual. On average, employees have received between \$1,000 and \$1,200 dollars.

One outstanding example of this program is an employee who suggested an equipment modification designed to increase production yield. What initially seemed like a small improvement resulted in a combined cost savings and increased revenue for Fielding of over \$100,000 in one year. To celebrate this achievement, the employee received a cheque for \$10,000 at Christmas time.



ODYSSEY ENVIRONMENTAL

## Personal Interests as Business Opportunities

To help encourage creative thinking, Odyssey Environmental has developed an innovative strategy to generate new corporate ideas. This is done by allocating time during regular working hours for employees to research personal interests related to the company mandate and/or environment industry.

The process begins with a one-on-one discussion between managers and employees to identify potential research projects. As new ideas are brought forward, management works with employees to determine feasibility, development, and implementation planning. When successful in field trials, the new idea is often incorporated into company operations.

A great example of this was an employee's personal interest in remote controlled helicopters. While researching methods of aerial photography, the employee suggested that the company invest in a high resolution camera that could be mounted on a remote controlled helicopter to provide high resolution images of project sites. After further research and several field trials, the company now relies on a fleet of 2 remote controlled helicopters and 2 remote controlled airplanes to perform aerial photography for various environmental projects such as spill response. What initially began as a personal research project is now a specialty service that Odyssey Environmental provides to a wide variety of clients, including competitors.

*Odyssey Environmental Ltd. recently merged with Matrix Solutions Inc.*



## ECOLOGY ACTION CENTRE

# Motivation by Personal Goals

In many organizations, project goals and objectives are determined and outlined by management without the inclusion of employee opinions. At Ecology Action Centre (EAC), projects are often initiated at the grassroots level and project coordinators are empowered to set their own project goals. This is possible in part because EAC and its employees share the same vision and purpose to create a more sustainable environment.

An example of this mutually shared values system is the group of volunteers and staff who realized their personal goals of increasing the prevalence and importance of recycling in Nova Scotia by launching Nova Scotia's first paper recycling program. This work not only supported EAC's mandate, but it was instigated and propelled by the personal aspirations and passions of the people involved. Other examples of projects that were proposed and developed on the grassroots level include:

- Protecting and restoring over 30 hectares of ecologically significant Bay of Fundy salt marshes through the Cheverie Creek pilot salt marsh restoration project.
- Completing tidal barrier audits for the Nova Scotia portion of the Minas Basin and Bay of Fundy allowing the identification of priority restoration sites.
- Initiating and delivering the HRM by-law restricting the cosmetic use of pesticides, reducing restricted pesticide permits by 80% since 2004.

URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT INC.

## Young Professionals Group

Urban & Environmental Management Inc. (UEM) recognizes the positive effects generational differences have on diversifying workplace communication and operations. After hiring several new, younger employees and witnessing how their fresh perspectives contributed to the company's baby boomer-dominated workforce, UEM invited all of its new recruits to form a "Young Professionals" group.

The "Young Professionals" group meets on a monthly basis to share new ideas, provide constructive criticism, and offer perspective and opinions on the organization. To help focus the discussion and collect valuable feedback, management supplies the group with a list of questions prior to each meeting. These questions explore issues such as: what the group expects from the company, how their positions contribute to the company's strategic goals, suggestions for improvements, etc. Although the meetings are confidential, the group is required to take notes and prepare a series of recommendations which are later presented to management. Occasionally and upon notice, the company's President will also join the discussions to hear firsthand what is being expressed and discussed by younger employees.

Overall, the results of this initiative have led to many constructive improvements. For example, after expressing that more communication was needed between layers of the company to keep all employees informed of current organizational activities, management used the feedback and recommendations of the group to implement a monthly internal newsletter. Management also began sending organizational communiqués more frequently.

Members of the Young Professionals Group also benefit from the opportunity to build relationships, help shape the organization, and learn from management.

# Compensation and Benefits



UPPER THAMES RIVER CONSERVATION

## Benefits of Not-for-Profit

As a not-for-profit organization, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) does not have the financial resources to pay top wages and benefits. However, these barriers have not stopped the company from attracting qualified workers. To remain competitive in the industry, UTRCA has successfully marketed its employee-focused corporate culture as a benefit that cannot be bought.

One key element of UTRCA's employee-focused corporate culture is its flex-time program. Working an extra half hour per day, staff then has the flexibility to take the banked time off when they need it. This flex-time program reduces the stress of trying to balance work and family/home life, and allows the employee more control over his or her work day.

UTRCA also relies on a sequential process, beginning at the grassroots level, to ensure that employee input is represented in the development of HR policies and projects. An example of this is UTRCA's job evaluation team. This team is represented by staff from all job levels and departments, who rank all of company's positions on a salary grid. The Management Team takes the recommendations from this team and puts them forward to the Board of Directors for approval. Employees from all levels of the organization often make suggestions for policy changes and these suggestions are then investigated for possible adoption.



RESCAN ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES LTD.

## Green Rebate

To demonstrate the company's commitment to environmental change and sustainability, Rescan has implemented a unique rebate program to increase the value of its already comprehensive benefits package. The Green Rebate, initiated by the company's internal "Green Ideas Committee", encourages employees to 'live green' by subsidizing environmental consumer choices.

Each year, the committee reviews and creates a list of qualifying purchases that are considered environmentally friendly. When employees purchase items on this list, they have the opportunity to be reimbursed by 25% for purchases up to a maximum of \$250/annum.

To date, approximately 30% of staff members have participated in the program for 2008. Energy Star and EcoLogo products are among the most popular purchases, followed by bicycles and bicycle parts/tune-ups.

### 2009 Qualifying Purchases:

- Product certified by the EcoLogo or Energy Star Programs\* (e.g., LED Christmas lights, energy efficient light bulbs)
- Push mower
- Composting equipment
- Water barrel
- Trees, plants and seeds
- FareSaver booklet/monthly bus pass
- Bicycle(new or used)
- Bicycle tune-up, parts and repair
- Hybrid car
- Clothes drying rack
- Motion-control sensor for lighting
- Programmable thermostat
- Solar panels
- Hand-powered flashlight or radio
- Low-flow showerhead
- Diaper service
- Cloth diapers
- Shoe repair
- Community sustainability course
- LEED certified home

## THE NOTTAWASAGA VALLEY CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

# Compensation Sharing

The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (NVCA)—a public agency dedicated to preserving and restoring watershed resources—understands the importance of relevant and up-to-date compensation information. To remain competitive in the market and reduce higher than average turn-over in salary-sensitive positions, the agency collects and researches salary and benefits information in two ways.

Once per year, the NVCA conducts a compensation survey with regional municipalities and other conservation authorities in the area who mutually agree to share their information. All participating organizations are required to complete the same survey and upon completion, receive a copy of the results. The survey is conducted by NVCA's internal HR staff who coordinate with the HR departments of other organizations. This method of collecting information not only provides the agency with a regional comparison but also provides salary and benefit information that is applicable to the public sector. The NVCA uses this information to create salary grids that are regionally competitive and in the short term, provide enough base information to make small adjustments.

In addition to the agency's annual survey, the NVCA also hires an external contractor to complete a more formal and extensive compensation survey every three to four years. This analysis often includes other public sector comparators that aren't used on an annual basis and also asks for job specific details. The results from this survey are used to justify salary grid changes that affect all positions within the NVCA.

The NVCA also uses a pay-for-performance salary model to complement its compensation research and development. Using this structure, staff are provided with annual objectives and are paid according to their performance and success in attaining their goals. The pay-for-performance model includes a potential >10% onetime lump sum payment for exceptional staff.

CAMBRIA GORDON LTD.

## Flexible Benefits

Connected by meaningful relationships and close personal ties, the employees at Cambria Gordon consider themselves a functional and interdependent team. This mindset has resulted in a trusting and approachable work environment where employees are direct, honest, and candid about expressing their personal needs to management.

To better respond to the unique challenges and needs of its employees, Cambria Gordon relies on a practical employee-focused benefits structure. This allows management to be flexible and offer employees the precise services or benefits that they require.

As part of the company's compensation structure, each employee receives an annual Health Spending Account. This provides employees with a lump sum of money that can be spent at their discretion on various medical and dental services and products (the only exception is that the expense must be in accordance with the Canada Revenue Agency). Rather than relying on a defined benefits package that may limit coverage in certain areas, this approach allows employees to maximize the use of their benefits and spend it on areas that matter most. This includes paying for orthodontic services, purchasing medicine, or caring for a critically ill family member.

Cambria Gordon also remains open-minded about implementing new benefits to accommodate unique circumstances. For example, when approached by an employee who discovered their child had a critical illness, the company reacted by offering the individual a flexible working schedule that allowed daily hour adjustments, extra time off, and work from home options. Another example was an employee who was recruited from a long-distance location and didn't want to disrupt his family during the transition. While providing his family with extra time to prepare for the move, the company paid for his flights back home during the transition period.



CAMBRIA GORDON LTD.

## Celebrating Profits Equally

It is common for companies who participate in profit sharing to only award select employees or distribute weighted proportions reflective of base salaries. Cambria Gordon differentiates itself by awarding all positions in the company with the same percentage of profit sharing.

This decision is based on the fact that all employees play an important role in contributing to the overall success of the organization. Because of this, Cambria Gordon shares and celebrates its financial successes equally among employees.

“

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”

# Culture and Engagement

GOLDER ASSOCIATES

## Employee-Initiated Events

To encourage team building and reward employees for their hard work, Golder Associates celebrates staff achievements through a variety of social events. Two of the most popular include the company's annual hockey tournament and musical talent show.

### **Prairies Hockey Tournament**

Every year Golder invites its prairie offices to participate in its annual hockey tournament. During this weekend-long event, the company rents a community hockey arena and hosts a series of friendly hockey games formed by teams from various office locations. Employees and their families are invited to attend and watch the entertaining demonstration of sportsmanship and teamwork.

### **WAAMStock**

To showcase the talents of Golder's musically inclined employees, the company hosts an annual concert called WAAMStock. To support this event, Golder rents a performance venue, typically a restaurant or bar, and all employees are invited to attend. However, the main attractions of the night are the various bands formed by employees who practice for months prior to performance day. The result is a fun-filled evening of surprisingly talented artists who provide entertainment for all employees and their guests.



ODYSSEY ENVIRONMENTAL LTD.

## Family First

Odyssey Environmental appreciates that employees work more effectively when family and professional responsibilities are not conflicting. As a result, the company has developed several policies to create a supportive and flexible work environment that promotes work-life balance.

To help accommodate outside of work priorities, Odyssey Environmental allows employees to adjust their work hours on a daily basis and bank hours for future instances where more time is required. This added flexibility makes it possible for employees to accompany family members to appointments or attend special events such as school plays or sporting competitions.

The company's remote access network also helps support family obligations. This system allows employees to work from home when they are sick or need to care for family members. To further compliment the network, each employee receives up to 15 paid sick days per year that can be used for personal or family illness. This allows employees to care for sick children and/or support ill parents without having the stress of choosing between family and financial stability.

*Odyssey Environmental Ltd. recently merged with Matrix Solutions Inc.*



UPPER THAMES RIVER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

## Health and Wellness Team

Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) relies on the creative ideas of its Health and Wellness Team to encourage healthier lifestyles among employees.

Some of the unique ways in which the team promotes healthy living is by:

- Organizing activities over the lunch hour such as bike rides, yoga, and walking groups
- Inviting guest speakers to discuss wellness topics and provide fitness demonstrations
- Offering one year interest-free fitness loans to purchase exercise equipment
- Providing shower facilities and bike racks to accommodate work-out routines
- Hosting healthy lunches for employees to enjoy

UTRCA efforts to create a healthy workforce have not only resulted in healthier employees, but they have also played a significant part in lowering the health care costs for the organization's group insurance plan.



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RESCAN ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES LTD.

## Green Ideas Committee

A product of Rescan's corporate culture is the company's employee-led Green Ideas Committee. This committee is made up of eight members representing a variety of business units and staff seniority who are responsible for introducing green initiatives to the workplace and business practices.

Some of the committee's initiatives to date include:

- Educating employees on fuel efficient vehicles and letting them experience the benefits first hand through the purchase of a Toyota Prius hybrid car that is accessible to employees.
- Expanding the company's recycling program to include computer equipment, batteries, and other materials, in addition to paper, plastic and metal containers, printer cartridges, and other sundry office items.
- Initiating a "Greener Thinking" campaign that encourages office-wide energy-saving by posting reminders for staff to turn off office equipment (including computers, monitors, overhead lights, desk lamps, scanners, copiers, fax machines, and printers) at the end of the day.
- Instilling social consciousness by providing organic teas and Fair Trade coffees, using paper that contains post-consumer content and that is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) as being produced from a well-managed forest, choosing energy-efficient computers and electrical appliances, and purchasing office products made from recycled (and recyclable) plastics and that are FSC-certified.
- Participating in environmental activities such as shoreline cleanups, Earth Day events and Bike to Work Week.

TERA ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS

## Volunteer Matching Programs

Work at TERA Environmental Consultants goes beyond day-to-day office activities. To bring added fulfillment and support the values of employees, the company has made community and volunteer work a key priority. These goodwill initiatives have stimulated employee engagement in multiple ways and have also played a direct role in shaping the culture of the organization.

To support individual contributions, the company offers a Donation and Volunteer Matching Program. This program matches dollar for dollar any donation made by an employee to a qualified charity throughout the year (to a maximum of \$500). Employees can also record their volunteered time which the company will also match with a cash donation.

For hands-on activities, TERA supports its employees by providing time off work. Some of these initiatives have included preparing and serving meals at the local homeless shelter, raising funds to support families in need, and supplying man-power for local clean-up events. TERA has participated in numerous other charity events including:

- Calgary Corporate Challenge
- *Trout Unlimited Annual Fish Rescue*
- The Great Canadian Shoreline Clean-up
- Blood Donor clinics
- Cassie Campbell Street Hockey Tournament
- Homeless Partners Wish List
- YWCA Adopt-a-family
- Calgary Herald Christmas Fund

FUNDY ENGINEERING & CONSULTING LTD.

## Supporting Employee Values

Fundy Engineering Et Consulting Ltd.'s corporate culture is largely based on the impassioned values of its employees to be actively involved in the community. This desire has transcended throughout the organization and led to the creation of multiple HR initiatives.

To provide employees with the necessary time to build relationships in the community, Fundy Engineering allows each employee to spend up to 10% of their paid work time on volunteer activities. This has made it possible for employees to take on more active roles such as becoming members of various not-for-profit committees and assisting with the execution of charity events.

Fundy Engineering further incorporates the interests of employees into annual event planning and philanthropic decisions by encouraging them to research and present new volunteer opportunities. This consideration helps diversify volunteer efforts, broaden community exposure, and also ensures that the core values of employees are always represented.



TO PROVIDE EMPLOYEES WITH THE NECESSARY TIME TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS IN THE COMMUNITY, FUNDY ENGINEERING ALLOWS EACH EMPLOYEE TO SPEND UP TO 10% OF THEIR PAID WORK TIME ON VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES.



# Rewards and Recognition

GOLDER ASSOCIATES LTD.

## ROC Program

Golder Associates—a global organization specializing in ground engineering and environmental services—recognizes the collaborative efforts of its team. To provide employees with a means of thanking and recognizing one another's contributions, the company created its Recognition of Our Colleagues (ROC) program.

ROC is a new on-going program that allows employees to express gratitude to their colleagues throughout the year. Through the program, employees can access thank you cards and gift certificates (ranging from \$25-\$200) from the Human Resource Department. The gift certificates are for the Gift Boutique website which allows employees to choose a certificate for a location of their choice. Options include various retailers and restaurants including Sears, The Keg, The Shoe Company and Mountain Equipment Co-op. There is no cost to the employee to participate and employees are never required to provide a reason or the name(s) of the co-worker(s) whom they want to thank.

In addition to the on-going ROC program, Golder sponsors one special Thank You Day per year where employees have an opportunity to thank their mentors. Golder provides wine, boxes of Bernard Callebaut chocolates and thank you cards to employees. To participate, employees submit a request to Human Resources indicating how many bottles of wine and boxes of chocolates they require for their mentor(s). The wine and chocolates arrive at the office in time for the designated Thank You Day where employees have the opportunity to collect their gifts and personally deliver them to their mentors. Employees are encouraged to participate in the program and are never questioned when requesting their gifts of thanks.



TERA ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS

## Vacation vouchers

It is common for professionals in the environmental consulting industry to work long hours and manage heavy workloads. To reward staff for their outstanding effort and achievements, TERA Environmental Consultants presented each employee with a \$500 vacation voucher and an extra paid day off. The only stipulation for the bonus was that it had to be used for something "restful." This was further encouraged through a follow-up contest that recognized the employee who used their vacation voucher most creatively.

CAMBRIA GORDON LTD.

## The Gong Award

Cambria Gordon—an environmental consulting firm situated in northern BC—inspires its staff to approach challenges with creativity and enthusiasm by upholding a culture that is forgiving of mistakes. Rather than dwelling on the errors of employees, Cambria Gordon recognizes the effort behind the act and prompts employees not to be discouraged about trying something new and making a mistake in the process.

To celebrate and laugh about the innocent slip-ups of employees, Cambria Gordon circulates its "Gong Award". The Gong Award is given to employees who commit trivial errors such as dropping an expensive GPS unit out of the helicopter or driving the jet boat away while the anchor is still out. The award is presented in a unique fashion by ringing the gong in the office for everyone to hear. Once all of the employees have gathered to hear the funny story, the giant gong is presented to the individual at fault. Once an employee receives the gong it is his or her responsibility to pass it on to the next individual.

## MAXXAM ANALYTICS

### Values Awards

Maxxam Analytics recognizes exceptional employees who embody and uphold the core values of the organization with its annual "Values Awards." To be considered for the prestigious and internally sought-after award, employees must be nominated by their peers. Only seven to ten Values Awards are given per year. Senior management selects the winners based on the peer nominations and demonstrated excellence in the company's core values such as innovation, customer service, creativity, teamwork, etc.

Each award is personally presented by the President of Maxxam Analytics, Jon Hantho, and consists of an engraved plaque, \$4,000 after-tax award to be spent on a dream vacation, and an extra week of vacation time.

INTELEX TECHNOLOGIES INC.

## Ted Grunau Day

Named in honor of the company's former CEO, "Ted Grunau Day" is dedicated to celebrating the achievements and contributions of staff at Intelix Technologies Inc. The formal event includes a catered lunch and an awards ceremony that recognizes employees who have demonstrated excellence during the previous year.

Based on the results of staff nominations, 11 different internal Excellence Awards are given to employees. They include:

- Business Builder of the Year
- Rising Star Award
- Operational Excellence Award
- Most Reliable
- Dedication to Client Satisfaction
- Commitment to Quality
- Technical Innovator of the Year
- Product Innovator of the Year
- Coworker of the Year
- Hard Worker of the Year
- Employee of the Year

Each recipient is presented with a glass award and also receives a cash bonus.

## Get Your Company Featured in ECO Canada's 2010 HR Best Practices Report!

Want to feature your organization's innovative HR practices in ECO Canada's HR Best Practices Report? All organizations included in the report are required to demonstrate their commitment to HR excellence by completing ECO Canada's Employee Satisfaction Survey.

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1. Human Resource Function and Policies
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3. Performance Management
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5. Employee Benefits and Compensation
6. Employee Relations, Welfare, and Fulfillment

All results are confidentially reviewed by ECO Canada's HR selection committee. If selected, your organization will be required to submit an essay that highlights the company's HR pursuits and goals.

For more information, please email [HRservices@eco.ca](mailto:HRservices@eco.ca)  
or go to ECO Canada's website at [www.eco.ca](http://www.eco.ca).



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