Bright Ideas

This toolkit is designed to explain “Bright Ideas” – what it is and how it works. It covers:

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1. What is it?

**Bright Ideas** is a program of encouraging and harvesting staff-generated ideas on how to improve the organization and the care it provides. Bright Ideas taps into front line employee creativity and ownership to generate ideas on how to better serve patients and each other. It is a hardwired program that promotes, tracks, implements and rewards creative problem solving. When the Bright Ideas program is supported by senior leadership and publicized, it can be a prime mover in pushing an organization from good to great.
2. Why do it?

Why start a Bright Ideas program?

Because Bright Ideas result in...
- Improved clinical outcomes
- Increased efficiency
- Greater employee involvement
- Increased satisfaction scores
- Increased retention
- Increased profitability

What stops a Bright Ideas program?
- Excuses: “I don’t have the staff…money…time.”
- Victim thinking: “We’ve tried it before and it didn’t work.”
- Blame: “No one will ever read it.”
- Lack of response: “I never heard anything about the idea I submitted.”
- Fear: “Everyone will think it’s stupid.”
3. How and When is it set up?

The Bright Ideas program will be most effective if it is introduced in the second phase of the initiative, once the leadership is committed to the Nine Principles and employees have begun to participate in changing their culture to one of excellence.

Each hospital may customize the process to its own needs, but the steps are usually:

- CEO selects a Bright Ideas Champion, someone who will be responsible for overseeing the program.
- Determine who will be on the Bright Ideas team. Decide which members who will participate on the Idea Review team.
- Meet with team and senior leaders and determine the needs for the program: will you need a point person for coordinating effort and data entry? What resources will be available for reward and recognition? Who and how should cost savings be figured?
- Meet with the team and decide theme, logistics, communications, publicity, and timelines. Creating a specific action plan or timeline will help. If you are creating from scratch, allow 3-4 months for planning, developing materials, and training employees and leaders.
- Design and distribute a Bright Ideas form or card that includes the idea description, Pillar it would impact, cost savings (if any), the date, the contributor and his or her department. Determine how ideas will be collected.
- Develop an accountability chart on which each department’s employees can be credited for each submission. (See “Evaluating” below and Resource B.)
- Emphasize senior leadership commitment to Bright Ideas: are they willing to have Bright Ideas as a standing agenda item at all department level and above monthly meetings? Will they endorse the support of Bright Ideas on their leaders’ 90-day action plans?
- Publicize the program through newsletters and employee forums.
- Reward and recognize leaders and departments as well as employees for each submission. Reward, recognize and publicize any ideas that are implemented. A fiscal year end celebration might be held with the CEO presenting awards.
4. Where do ideas come from?

Bright Ideas generates ideas from all employees; all levels of staff are encouraged to generate innovative and cost-cutting ideas. All employees should contribute and be involved... the program should “belong” to all staff.

How to get Bright Ideas is sometimes the result of a bright idea. At one Leadership Development Institute at Cleveland Clinic, each leader had to submit a Bright Idea Admission form. The idea had to align to one of the five Pillars of excellence the Cleveland Clinic has established as part of the Pillar approach to goal setting. By 8 a.m. the first morning of the sessions, the CCF had 1200 bright ideas and had kicked off their Bright Ideas Initiative. By noon, all 1200 ideas were collated by Pillar and three were selected to be implemented. At the closing session, the three ideas selected by the steering committee were presented to the entire group and the leaders who proposed the ideas were recognized in front of their peers. In addition, the steering committee committed to reviewing all 1200 ideas over the coming weeks.

One of the Cleveland Clinic Bright Ideas was a recommendation to install holders in the bathroom to give patients a safe place to store their films while using the bathroom. It was a suburb quick hit as not only did it help retain quality and improved safety but it will also be a very visible sign to all employees of ideas in action.

All employees participate in the Bright Ideas process, but the leadership critical to success.
5. Who makes it happen?

Leaders must encourage their employees to contribute, and they need to create a climate in which Bright Ideas are welcome and “safe.” This means that leaders track Bright Ideas and hold every employee accountable for producing some. Every leader should have “Bright Ideas” on his or her 90-day plan, and should be accountable for producing a specific number of Bright Ideas per FTE.

To encourage ideas, leaders will need to:

- Encourage all employees at every level to contribute.
- Create a climate in which ideas are welcome and safe.
- Hold every employee accountable for making a specific number of suggestions within a specific time frame.
- Develop an atmosphere of respect.
- Train leaders in how to encourage creative problem solving.
- Set clear expectations as to what the leaders need to do.

**Bright Ideas work** when employees see that their ideas are implemented and make a difference, when employees are recognized for their innovation and contribution, and when their ideas are integrated into all the hospital activities.

**Bright Ideas die** when ideas are lost or not processed, when no one ever explains why an idea wasn’t implemented, when an idea is implemented and then never reinforced or hardwired, when the results of the idea are never reported and, most devastating, when the thinker is criticized.

**Points for Leaders**

1. Energize ideas and thinkers
   - Encourage fresh ideas: “Are there systems or communication tools you’ve encountered that work well?”
   - Create solutions: “Your comment brings up a good point—do you have any ideas on how we might improve?”
   - Seek observations: “Is there anything you see that could work better?”
   - Re-recruit more ideas: “Your idea has recently been implemented and resulted in…. Have you seen any improvement? Do you have more ideas?”

2. Encourage thought
   - Explain a situation, then give employees time to think: “Our patient satisfaction has been trending down in the area of attention to personal needs. Over the next week, be thinking about how to improve this situation. Let’s get together next week and review your ideas.”

3. Get it now: “We are experiencing an increase in medication errors and I need your help.” “I value your opinion and experience and would like your input…” “Any ideas
on how we might improve this issue?” “Do you have a few minutes to help me with a situation?”

4. Don’t say NO, dig deeper: “Let’s talk about your idea further.” “Let’s focus on the part of the idea involving…” “Your idea brings up a question…” “Could you think about it further and get back with me again next week?” “This is thinking out of the box…Let’s explore…”

“Post-It Notes” are the result of a “failed” formula for glue at 3M. All leaders can foster such innovative ideas and should be expected to do so. The most important concept is that the process of eliciting and supporting ideas must be conscious and used consistently by all leaders, not just published in a memo.
6. Putting it all Together

Once we’ve got the idea, then...

**Evaluating the ideas: three steps**

**STEP ONE:** As soon as a suggestion is submitted, the responsible leader gives each idea a tracking number and logs it onto a Bright Ideas chart or display. *(The format for this can be anything from an Excel spreadsheet to a bulletin board. One example is shown in Resource A.)* Information should include:

- an idea (tracking) number
- submitting employee’s name and number
- employee’s department and supervisor
- date of suggestion
- brief summary of the idea
- Pillar which idea is associated
- approximate cost savings, if applicable
- Leader idea was assigned to...

**STEP TWO:** The responsible leader should review the idea or refer it to a departmental team for review. Ideas should be evaluated and moved forward within 30 days.

**Evaluation criteria** would include:

1. Does this align to our Pillar goals?
   - A Bright Idea enhances the goals of the hospital under the five Pillars: People, Service, Quality, Growth, or Cost.
   - “People” ideas support employee recruitment and retention, increase employee and physician satisfaction, and stimulate leadership development.
   - “Service” ideas promote the highest standards in the healthcare industry.
   - “Quality” ideas improve the quality and effectiveness of care.
   - “Growth” ideas help achieve increased service volumes/market share or increase the scope of services.
   - “Cost” ideas generate revenue, capture lost revenue, or optimize reimbursement.

2. What are the benefits of implementing this idea?

3. Will implementing this idea improve our services/efficiency/outcomes or improve patient, employee, and/or physician satisfaction?

4. Is this idea a work order or a complaint? If an idea is to replace light bulbs in a hallway, then there are operations issues to address, and credit should not be given to an individual for suggesting that someone do their job. If trends are spotted with submitted ideas of this type, it provides yet another opportunity to improve on performance.
5. Does this idea save us time, money, stress or hassle?
6. Will implementing this idea help us to be a better organization? How?
7. If an idea saves money or time, how will this impact next years’ budget?
8. Try to look at each idea with “fresh eyes,” meaning resist the urge to summarily dismiss an idea because you did not think of it. Harnessing the collective intellectual capital of an organization is synergistic and powerful. Some of the best ideas are often submitted by the line level staff who previously did not have a voice, which empowers them as well as tapping into their expertise. Who better to know what works than those who are doing the work?
9. Explore the feasibility of the idea with the person who generated the idea. Think of it as an elevated version of rounding with purpose. Have the person "walk you through" the idea and show its value. This, in and of itself, is a win with staff - shows you care and connects to purpose as well as validates the associate’s worth in the organization.
10. Ask: Is this the right thing to do at the right time?

**STEP THREE:** After evaluating the idea, the leader can then either:

- Implement the idea
- Close the idea (not able to implement), summarize reason and forward the suggestion to the Idea Review Team
- Refer the idea to another leader who is more appropriate for review and notify the Idea team of the referral
- Assign the idea as “in progress” and give a time frame for implementation

Monthly, the Idea Review team should meet to review the “unreviewed” ideas—those ideas not addressed by the assigned leader. This helps identify trends and opportunities for improvement in responding to submitted ideas.

**Responding to the Ideas**

- Recognition is an important aspect of Bright Ideas. Reward and recognize leaders and departments as well as employees for each submission. People should be recognized for participating in the program even if their ideas are not implemented. A thank you letter should **automatically** be sent to anyone submitting an idea. Some hospitals have “bright idea” stars or light bulbs that employees can fix onto their nametags; other hospitals have had drawings in which all contributors are entered.

- Ideas that are implemented should be recognized according to individual and also by department. Some hospitals recognize departmental “superstars” quarterly and at the end of the year. Reward, recognize and publicize any ideas that are implemented. A fiscal year end celebration might be held with the CEO presenting awards.

- Ideas that are not implemented should be responded to with some explanation, either verbal or written. The employee who submitted the idea should be recognized for submitting it and encouraged to refine the idea or continue to contribute new ones. Departments need to be encouraged to track the number of ideas they submit and recognized for fostering a climate that encourages ownership and enthusiasm. The more ideas that are submitted, the more likely it is that an innovative idea will
be practical. The program should emphasize idea generation as much as idea implementation.

- If an idea has a financial impact, “dollars saved” should be defined as part of recognizing that idea. Some hospitals give special recognition to the idea that has resulted in the greatest cost benefit.

### Keys to Success

**Make the program a leadership responsibility**

Leaders must understand that if their department does not generate any Bright Ideas, it will be seen as a reflection on their ability to create enthusiasm and ownership.

**Reward participation**

Every suggestion should be nurtured, and the ones that are implemented should be recognized.

**Make the program a “Big Deal”**

One hospital with a successful program picked the third Friday of every month to have a senior leader host a drawing in the cafeteria. Everyone who submitted five ideas gets a raffle ticket, and the raffle ticket winner gets to spin wheel for prize. Another hospital recognizes those who have submitted implemented ideas during the Employee forum under People: they project the Bright Idea on slide with (surprised) submitter’s name. Another organization has a large gumball machine in the middle of the cafeteria. Every submitted idea is good for a gumball and different colored gumballs are redeemable for various prizes.

The Bright Ideas program increases the respect employees have for themselves and each other as front line experts. It emphasizes that everyone can make a difference. It also generates cost saving innovations. Real life examples include:

- An IV Needle-less system vendor was changed: $125,000 saved in one year by a 450-bed hospital.
- IV fluid bag labels were researched: an employee found an equal alternate and saved $2,000 in one year.
- An NCS scanner was returned and an employee negotiated a 10% restock fee for a savings of $7,300.
- An idea to keep IV ICVL repair kits available saved $8,400 in unnecessary central line changes.

Bright Ideas programs save money, maximize resources, increase dignity, and harness innovation. If you have questions about this or other Studer Group ideas for facilitating the journey to Service Excellence, please visit our website at [www.studergroup.com](http://www.studergroup.com).
7. Resources

A: Flow chart of Bright Ideas process
B: Example of a Bright Ideas tracking sheet
C: Example of pamphlet explaining Bright Ideas
D: Text of Resource C
E: Sample “admission ticket” for Bright Ideas collection
F: Information regarding Studer Group PowerPoint slide presentation
Resource A: Flow chart of the Bright Ideas process

1. Employee submits Idea
2. Assign Tracking number to Idea and log to chart
3. Forward Idea to assigned department leader for evaluation
4. Review Idea and evaluate within 30 days
5. Does Idea meet evaluation criteria?
   - Yes
     - Implement immediately?
       - Yes
         - Bright Idea Implemented
       - No
         - Team member and leader revisit Idea
     - No
       - Assign “in progress” and timeframe for implementation
       - Reward and Recognize Employee for Implemented Idea
6. No
   - Does Review Team agree with closing?
     - Yes
       - Close Idea
     - No
       - Forward to Idea Review Team
       - Does Review Team agree with closing?
         - Yes
           - Close Idea
         - No
           - Give Reason and feedback to employee who generated Idea
Resource C:
Example of pamphlet explaining Bright Ideas
Resource D:
Example of a Bright Idea explanation available to staff at Cleveland Clinic

The Cleveland Clinic possesses a vast amount of potential in our most important resource—our employees. Our commitment to become a world-class organization involves formalizing a system that encourages employees to submit ideas on a regular basis and a process through which to implement these ideas.

This process not only lets you share your ideas directly with the people who can facilitate change, but it allows you to receive recognition and rewards for your creativity. Through this process, you can strive to improve any aspect of life around The Cleveland Clinic. Your suggestions will be distributed to the leaders of those areas for consideration. The leaders will be responsible for responding to your request and sharing your enthusiasm through implementation, or explaining why the idea cannot be implemented at this time.

Remember: Never underestimate the difference you can make.

World Class Ideas: Five Pillars of Excellence
The Cleveland Clinic is committed to incorporating these five pillars into daily use. Your ideas should reflect an improvement in at least one of these pillars.

Service – providing patients with the highest standards of efficient and friendly service
People – raising employee morale, promoting employee recruitment and retention, increasing employee satisfaction and stimulating leadership development
Quality – ensuring every aspect of service and clinical care is world-class
Growth – growing as a world-class institution through increased scope of services and/or market share
Financial – finding ways to save costs, generate revenue and optimize reimbursement

The Process for Your Idea
You have an idea for an improvement in one of the five pillars. Here’s how it works:

1. Forms are available from your division/department administrator, on the internet at intranet.cc.org/worldclassservice, and at specific locations throughout the main campus and family health centers.

Remember: Never underestimate the difference you can make.

World Class Ideas Program
The Cleveland Clinic is one of the plains Service People, Quality, Growth, Financial.

World Class Ideas Process
Your idea is one of the plains Service People, Quality, Growth, Financial.

Recognizing World Class Ideas
When you submit your first idea, you'll receive a green badge backer to be worn attached to your Cleveland Clinic badge. For your first implemented idea, you'll receive a bronze badge backer. For five implemented ideas, you'll receive a silver badge backer, and for 10 implemented ideas, you'll receive a gold badge backer.

For an idea that is implemented in a new pillar, you'll get a light bulb to attach to your badge backer relating to that pillar.

Employees who achieve implemented ideas in all five pillars categories will automatically be inducted into the World Class Ideas Hall of Fame and will receive additional recognition.

There is no limit to the number of ideas you can submit. You are encouraged to aim beyond getting implemented ideas in each of the five pillars.
Resource E:
Example of a Bright Ideas admission ticket to Cleveland Clinic Leadership Development Institute
Resource F:

A PowerPoint presentation incorporating this information is available from your Studer Group coach or by contacting Studer Group at 850.934.1099 and asking for Knowledge Management. If you are using the Bright Ideas Toolkit CD, click here to access the presentation.