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CORRESPONDENCE MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 20, 2009 [Updated August 31, 2009]
TO: Executive Committee
FROM: Bob Conlin, Deputy Secretary
SUBJECT: Department Strategic Planning Effort: Update

This memo is for information only. No Committee action is required.

Every two years the Department of Employee Trust Funds (Department) engages in a strategic planning exercise to establish its administrative priorities for the following two-year period. Typically, the Department reports to the ETF Board in December of odd-numbered years on its plan. This year, we began our planning process earlier than usual. We felt it was important to go beyond our normal two-year plan and focus on a longer time period.

The process formally began in February when the Department's senior leadership team (executive team, administrators and office directors) held a half-day, off-site retreat. During the retreat, the team reviewed the results of an electronic survey of all Department staff that was conducted in January. The survey consisted of two parts. The first part of the survey asked whether staff agreed with the following statement: "ETF delivers quality services to our customers." Just over 50% of staff responded, and 84.9% of those responding "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement. In addition, we asked staff to list up to three things the Department could do to improve customer service. Approximately 50% of staff responded with at least one suggestion. The team also reviewed preliminary findings of the most recent report from CEM Benchmarking, Inc., and the Governor's budget proposal. It also discussed the Department's challenges and opportunities for the future. Finally, the team began coalescing around a vision statement for the Department for the next five years.

Subsequent to the retreat, the team finalized a vision statement and presented it to the remaining management staff in March. After discussion and input from managers, the vision statement and the statement were adopted. The vision statement and our mission statement, which will be the starting point of our strategic planning efforts over the summer, are attached.

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The next primary steps in the strategic planning process will be to identify a few key objectives that the Department intends to accomplish over the short, medium and long terms and to develop action plans and tactics for implementation. Managers were asked to think about what the vision statement means for their work areas and what possible changes they would like to pursue to achieve the vision.

The Department had intended to engage the services of a strategic planning consultant to assist with the next steps in planning. Operating budget constraints, coupled with the possibility of even greater across-the-board budget reductions due to declining state tax revenues, makes the need for planning ever more critical. However, it also makes it increasingly more difficult to afford planning assistance.

Over the course of the summer, with or without planning assistance, the Department will take steps to finalize a strategic plan, at least for the short term, and will deliver a progress report to the Board in September.

Update:

In early August, after the Biennial Budget activities had settled down, we provided Department managers with further direction regarding the vision statement. You will recall that the vision statement establishes ETF's commitment to providing members of the Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS) with service that is based on best practices in the industry. Many of the services we provide already meet this standard. However, one area in which ETF is notably lacking in best practice customer service is in the area of "self-service" – the ability of members of the WRS to transact business with us without actually having to interact with a staff person. Every day, people across Wisconsin are transacting electronic business with financial institutions, utilities, medical providers, merchants and governmental entities. Although ETF has an Internet site, it is relatively one-dimensional. That is, members can get good general information about their benefits on our site, but they can't get information about their personal account or change information about their account without contacting us. They cannot, for example, log into a secure account and download a copy of their *Statement of Benefits* or change their address or beneficiary. When they call or write to us to get this information, they often experience delays and frustration getting through to us or waiting for a response. Staff time spent with individuals who are able and willing to help themselves is time that is not available to assist those who truly need or want the help.

We told managers that it is time that ETF establishes a secure on-line service presence to serve those members willing to serve themselves and to better allow ETF to focus our resources on those who need more "hands on" service. To that end, ETF has committed to implementing on-line service over the next five years.

What will this on-line access consist of? We have asked managers and staff to be creative. We want a system that will meet our members' needs, employ best practice security and use resources wisely. ETF doesn't need to break new ground on this. Being a leader in this area does not necessarily mean being the first to try something. We will gauge our members' interests and needs, see what other service providers do, and move forward deliberately. This is an exciting opportunity that will require a department-wide effort. It has the potential to help fundamentally transform the way ETF delivers services.

On-line access, however, is only part of what's called for by the vision statement. The vision statement is not one dimensional and ETF's strategic plan won't be either. We have asked each major work unit (divisions and offices) to identify no fewer than three and no more than four other objectives to be accomplished over the next three to five years that will help ETF achieve the vision. We are stressing collaboration between work units and engagement of staff in the development of the plan.

On August 11, 2009, managers participated in a "Strategic Planning 101" session conducted by a local strategic planning consultant to highlight some of the key elements of a successful strategic planning process.

The strategic planning process will be wrapping up in October and November. We will use the priorities established through our strategic planning efforts to guide our supplemental funding request through the "section 13.10" process which we plan to submit later this year and to form our Biennial Budget request for the next biennium that will be submitted in September 2010. A final report on our strategic planning efforts will be presented to the ETF Board in December.

Attachment

Mission Statement

Our mission is to develop and deliver quality benefits and services to our customers while safeguarding the integrity of the Trust.

Vision Statement

In the next five years, it is our goal to become a leader among large public employee benefit systems by offering best practice customer services to our members. To achieve this goal;

- We will offer a suite of tools that will empower our customers to become better educated about their benefits, have access to meaningful, up-to-date information about those benefits, and to be able to enroll in, change critical information about, and apply for those benefits without reliance on staff resources;
- We will be more available to more members in more parts of the state to provide critical retirement planning, problem solving and direct education;
- We will build our infrastructure (human resources, information technology, facility, etc.) to ensure it has the capacity to support achieving our goal; and,
- We will make the most of our resources by incorporating modern best practices into our activities, by continually evaluating all of our processes for their effectiveness in meeting the needs of our customers, by safeguarding member data, and by delivering the best value to our members not only in the benefits we offer but in the services we provide.