Strategies for Managing a Research Unit

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❖ Introductions

❖ Overview of OPMR and GDOT Research Program

❖ Helpful Strategies for Managing a Research Unit

    1. Understand Program Requirements and Risks

    2. Perform Assessments (Workload, Resources, Self-Assessment)

    3. Develop an Action Plan

    4. Prioritize and Streamline

    5. Execute the Action Plan

    6. Monitor and Make Adjustments

    7. Document Processes and Lessons Learned

❖ Questions

Office of Performance-based Management and Research

PERFORMANCE – BASED MANAGEMENT UNIT

RESEARCH UNIT

Strategic Planning

Asset Management

Performance Management

Research

Define the strategy and a plan to achieve it

Explain how assets are managed and decisions are made

Measure, monitor, and manage performance

Administer and manage Research program

- ❖ ~$10M yearly budget used for participation in Federal, Regional, and State research activities

- ❖ GDOT Personnel

  - ➤ 6 FT employees

  - ➤ Chief Engineer

  - ➤ Research Advisory Committee (RAC) – Division Directors

  - ➤ Research Technical Advisory Groups (RTAG's): Policy/Workforce, Asset Management, Mobility and Safety

- ❖ Georgia Transportation Institute delivers Research Projects for GDOT

- ❖ Research Implementation
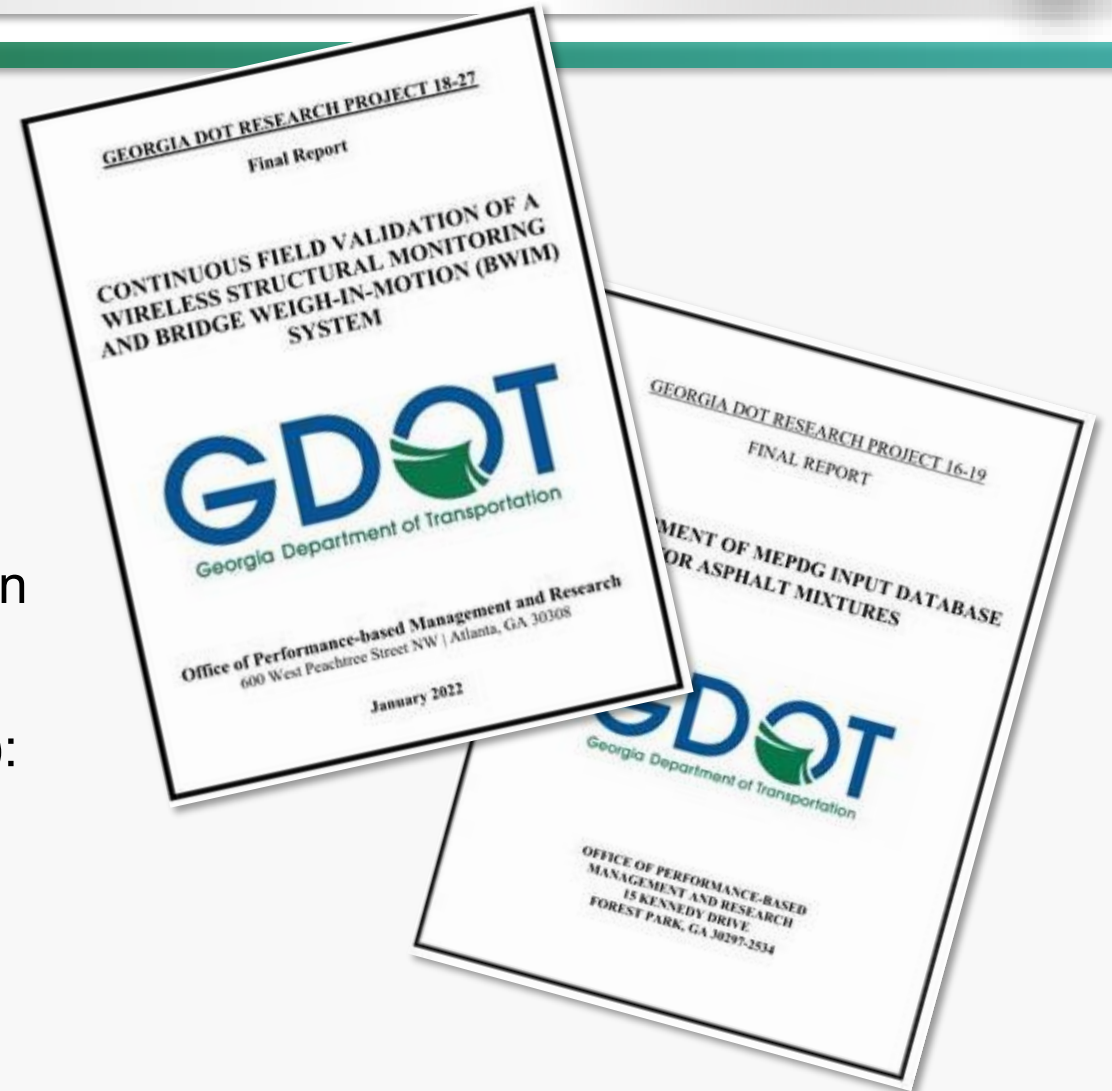
Creative

Resourceful

Innovative

Thoughtful

Collaborative

Manageable/ balanced workload

Clearly defined priorities

Higher productivity

Better retention rate

Higher employee and customer satisfaction

1. Understand
    a) Program Requirements and Risks
    b) HR Policies and Procedures

2. Perform Assessments
    a) Workload
    b) Resources
    c) Self

3. Develop an Action Plan
4. Prioritize and Streamline
5. Execute the Action Plan
6. Monitor and Adjust
7. Document Processes and Lessons Learned

Understand Program Requirements and Risks

- ❖ Federal/State regulations that govern research program

- ❖ Internal deliverables: Annual Research Work Program, Contracts, Invoices

- ❖ Stakeholders and Their Expectations
  - o Internal – Chief Engineer, DOT program recipients/technical committees and Research Employees
  - o External – academia/consultants, FHWA

- ❖ Understand HR policies and guidelines

- ❖ Identify and regularly assess Research Program Risks
  - o Financial
  - o Regulatory
  - o Staffing

Perform Assessment

WORKLOAD ASSESSMENT	RESOURCES ASSESSMENT	SELF ASSESSMENT
DELIVERABLES • Number/costs/duration of projects • Deadlines • Priorities (program and project level)	**EMPLOYEES** • Skills employees have vs need ➔ identify gaps and trainings needed • Employee assessment of quality and benefit of unit's deliverables	**SELF** • Time management • Areas for growth and development
CUSTOMERS • Customer profile and satisfaction • Number of projects initiated, area of study demanded, projects implemented, etc.	**INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS** • Chief Engineer • Advisory and Technical Committees	**MENTORS/ADVISORS** • Internal vs. external
CONTRACTORS • Projects conducted/funded, project durations, areas researched, etc. • Stakeholder satisfaction	**EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS** • FHWA • Other State DOTs	
DESIRED OUTCOMES • Calendar of deliverables • Customers/contractor profile	**DESIRED OUTCOMES** • Employee/stakeholder feedback • Strategies to successfully deliver the program	**DESIRED OUTCOMES** • Self improvements identified • Plan of action developed

Create a Plan of Action – Set Expectations

❖ Develop a Calendar – list deliverables, due dates and person(s) responsible

  o Delegate - Assign specific duties, break bigger projects into smaller milestones

❖ Prioritize and Streamline

❖ Conduct regular follow ups (one on one or team meetings) to ensure projects' progress and that employees are receiving regular feedback and coaching

❖ Clearly define quality standards to avoid mistakes and rework

❖ Define customer service expectations

❖ Review employee performance criteria and periodically mentor and coach your employees – provide regular performance feedback

❖ Identify processes that need to be documented

- ❖ Categorize deliverables (internal/external; funding related; customer related)
  - ➢ Further break the categories into high, medium, and low priorities

- ❖ Plan to deliver projects ahead of their due dates

- ❖ Determine which deliverables have multiple stakeholders involved (risk of running late)

- ❖ Determine if there are items/projects/requests that could be done simultaneously

- ❖ Develop a unit priority list and assign the delivery dates based on priorities

- ❖ Share the list with the team members

How to Manage a Research Unit – Execute

❖ Ensure that appropriate QA/QC took place

❖ Dry run the presentations (review final deliverables) with the team

❖ Require the team to deliver the product with better quality and standards each time

❖ Document feedback, lesson learned and 'new ideas/items to incorporate in the future'

How to Manage a Research Unit – Monitor and Make Adjustments

❖ After each project, conduct a project debrief with the team

❖ Survey your customers/stakeholders

❖ Determine what went well and what needs improvement

❖ Document feedback and institute improvement steps immediately

- ❖ Routinely document current processes and any lessons learned

- ❖ Test your documentation

- ❖ Make knowledge management a requirement (use it as one of the performance criteria for your employees)

- ❖ Keep it simple, easy to use, and accessible to everyone

- ❖ Periodically (annually) review and make modifications

- ❖ Use it as a training tool for your current and new employees

❖ Don't be afraid of mistakes/failures; treat every challenge as a new opportunity

❖ Mandate Excellence, Engagement, and Teamwork

❖ Learn to think [and act] outside of the box

❖ Pilot new process or new technique prior to implementing

❖ When implementing changes, start with current processes and practices first

❖ Always have your 'elevator speech' ready

Questions?

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