Inventory of the California Merit Award Board Records

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Inventory of the California Merit Award Board Records

Collection number: R321

California State Archives
Office of the Secretary of State
Sacramento, California

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Descriptive Summary
Title: California Merit Award Board Records
Dates: 1953-1978
Collection number: R321
Creator: California Merit Award Board
Collection Size: 3 cubic feet of textual records
Repository: California State Archives
Sacramento, California

Abstract: The California State Merit Award Board was created by the State Board of Control in 1950 to make awards to state employees who submitted suggestions, which, after adoption, resulted in eliminating or reducing state expenditures or improving operations. The records of the California State Merit Award Board consist of 3 cubic feet of Meeting Files and Proposal Files that cover the years 1953-1978.

Physical location: California State Archives
Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access
Collection is open for research.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], California State Merit Award Board, R321.[Series Number], [box and folder number], California State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento, California.

Acquisition and Custodial History
The California State Archives acquired the California State Merit Award Board Records according to state law.

Administrative History
The 1949 Legislature authorized the State Board of Control to make awards to state employees who submitted suggestions, which, after adoption, resulted in eliminating or reducing state expenditures or improving operations. The State Merit Award Board (MAB) was created by the State Board of Control in 1950 to administer this program.

Originally, the Merit Award Board was part of the Department of Finance, under the Organization and Cost Control Division. In 1963, the service functions of the Department of Finance were given over to the newly created Department of General Services (DGS). Since 1963, the Merit Award Board has consistently been under the administration of the Department of General Services. The five-member MAB was composed of a representative of the Department of Finance (1950-1963) or the Department of General Services (1963-1978), designated by the Director of Finance (1950-1963) or the Director of...
General Services (1963-1978) to serve as chairman. The other four members were appointed by the State Board of Control to serve two-year terms. These four members consist of three state employees and a representative of an organization of state employees.

The State Merit Award Board received and evaluated suggestions submitted in accordance with rules and regulations adopted by the Board of Control and the State Personnel Board. With the passage of AB 3265 on June 11, 1957 the scope of the program was expanded to provide awards for state employees who perform special acts or services in the public interest, by their superior accomplishments making exceptional contributions to the efficiency or economy in the operations of the state government. The State Merit Award Board then recommended to the Board of Control those suggestions, acts, services, or accomplishments, which justified an award.

**Scope and Content**

The records of the California State Merit Award Board consist of 3 cubic feet of Meeting Files and Proposal Files that cover the years 1953-1978. Researchers should note that these records were sampled upon arrival at the Archives and therefore many proposals are missing from this collection. Also, each series of Proposal Files has been divided between the Employee Suggestion Program (ESP) and the Work Improvement Program (WIP). The bulk of this collection dates from 1953-1972 and the majority of records are proposal files, both accepted and rejected. Proposal Files include the original suggestion form, which provides the name, title, and agency of the employee, as well as the date and full text of their suggestion. The files also include analysis by the affected agency, and various related correspondence. Many files also include samples of the proposed changes. These samples include items such as maps, photographs, drawings, altered forms or labels, and a toothbrush. Photograph negatives have been separated to a cold-storage vault for preservation purposes and separation sheets are in the proposal files to alert the researcher to the existence of these items.

A noteworthy feature of the meeting files was the ongoing discussions of the passage of AB3265 in 1957. The purpose of this incentive program was to provide awards for state employees who perform special acts or services in the public interest, by their superior accomplishments making exceptional contributions to the efficiency or economy in the operations of the state government.

The majority of proposals, both accepted and rejected, relate to the creation or revision of various administrative forms and letterhead. Several frequently suggested proposals were: the standardization of official stationary by the removal of the name of the governor/agency/director, saving energy by turning off lights during non-peak work times or changing the type of light bulbs used, using envelopes with address windows in order to increase typing efficiency, and re-using manila envelopes for inter-agency correspondence. Some rejected proposals of interest include: the use of safety belts in all state vehicles (ESP, 1953, #4252), the exclusive use of No. 2 1/2 pencils by state agencies (ESP, 1953, # 4266), automatic shut-off valves on drinking fountains (ESP, 1954, #5816), the isolation of cold sufferers in the workplace (ESP, 1954, #6486), and the statewide use of self-operating elevators (ESP, 1953, #4269).

By far the most significant proposal of this collection is ESP # 35055, covering the years 1963-1972. This accepted proposal began with the relatively simple suggestion of Fred Clawson and ended with passage of ACR 72 and ACR 75 in 1972. Clawson was employed by the Department of Water Resources during the construction of the Oroville and Thermalito power plants. Clawson submitted his suggestion whereby the two plants would operate in tandem, rather than individually, thereby ensuring a continuous power supply and saving the state a substantial amount of money. While Clawson was originally awarded $150, he continued in his attempts to obtain his full 10% of the first years' savings, as stated in the Board's policies. This conflict led the Director of General Services, Lawrence R. Robinson, Jr., to call for an evaluation of the uniformity of the Board's awarding procedures in January 1972.

The primary program under the administration of the Merit Award Board was the Employee Suggestion Program (ESP). A suggestion which described a specific problem, offered a workable solution, and was intended to be of benefit to the operations or safety of the State would be accepted for evaluation except for those suggestions which: recommend fees, taxes, or a change in pay; recommend a "study" be conducted; involve a personal grievance; or involve terms which were subject to the collective bargaining process. An employee was not eligible for an award for a suggestion pertaining to a subject assigned to him/her as part of his/her normal job requirements. The total amount of a cash award allowed for an employee suggestion, to the extent it can be measured in terms of savings to the State, may not be less than $10 and may not exceed 10% of the estimated net savings during the first year following adoption of the suggestion, up to a maximum of $150. An award of more than $150 may be awarded with the approval, by concurrent resolution, of the Legislature.

The Governor's Work Improvement Program (WIP) was a special promotional effort that took place from 1958-1960. This program differed from the usual Merit Award Board procedure in that the immediate supervisor of the employee was supposed to advise the suggester as to the rejection of the idea. The department only advised the MAB on acceptances and those recommended for an award.

**Indexing Terms**
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library’s online public access catalog.
California. State Merit Award Board
California State Personnel Board
California. Dept. of Finance. Division of Personnel and Organization

ID R321.1, Box 1, Folders 1-14  
Series 1 Meeting Files 1955-1978
   Physical Description: 14 file folders
   Arrangement
   Arranged chronologically.
   Scope and Content Note
   These files include agendas, minutes, correspondence, reports, and schedules of future meetings. Many of the meeting files only contain the minutes of the previous meeting. The minutes include lists of suggestion numbers categorized by action type, such as: authorized cash payment, awarded a Certificate of Commendation, issued a complimentary letter, etc. The majority of reports pertain to the tracking of the number of suggestions received, accepted, and rejected for the month or year. A noteworthy feature of the meeting files was the ongoing discussions of the passage of AB3265 in 1957. The purpose of this incentive program was to provide awards for state employees who perform special acts or services in the public interest, by their superior accomplishments making exceptional contributions to the efficiency or economy in the operations of the state government.

ID R321.2, Box 1-2, Folders 15-12  
Series 2 Accepted Proposal Files 1954-1972
   Physical Description: 21 file folders
   Arrangement
   Divided into subseries ESP and WIP and arranged chronologically thereunder.
   Scope and Content Note
   Accepted Proposal Files include the original suggestion form, which provides the name, title, and agency of the employee, as well as the date and full text of their suggestion. The files also include analysis by the affected agency, and various related correspondence. Many files also include samples of the proposed changes. These samples may include maps, photographs, drawings, altered forms or labels, and a toothbrush.

The Employee Suggestion Program (ESP) Files relate to the ongoing program whereby state employees submitted their suggestions directly to the Merit Award Board, whereas the Governor’s Work Improvement Program (WIP) was a two-year promotional project (1958-1960) whereby employees would submit ideas to their supervisors for approval or rejection. Only those suggestions recommended for an award were advanced to the MAB. A suggestion that described a specific problem, offered a workable solution, and was intended to be of benefit of the State would be accepted for evaluation. An employee was not eligible for an award for a suggestion pertaining to a subject assigned as part of normal job requirements. The total amount of a cash award allowed may not be less than $10 and usually would not exceed $150.
Series 3 Rejected Proposal Files 1953-1966

Physical Description: 22 file folders

Arrangement

Divided into subseries ESP and WIP and arranged chronologically thereunder.

Scope and Content Note

Rejected Proposal Files include the original suggestion form, which provides the name, title, and agency of the employee, as well as the date and full text of their suggestion. The files also include analysis by the affected agency, and various related correspondence. Many files also include samples of the proposed changes. These samples may include maps, photographs, drawings, altered forms or labels, and a toothbrush. A suggestion was typically rejected for unoriginality, infeasibility, or insufficient cost savings. Photograph negatives have been separated to a cold-storage vault for preservation purposes and separation sheets are in the proposal files to alert the researcher to the existence of these items.

The Employee Suggestion Program (ESP) was an ongoing program whereby state employees would submit their suggestions directly to the Merit Award Board, whereas the Governor's Work Improvement Program (WIP) was a two-year promotional project (1958-1960) whereby employees would submit ideas to their supervisors for approval or rejection. Only those suggestions recommended for an award were advanced to the MAB. A suggestion that described a specific problem, offered a workable solution, and was intended to be of benefit of the State would be accepted for evaluation. An employee was not eligible for an award for a suggestion pertaining to a subject assigned as part of normal job requirements. The total amount of a cash award allowed may not be less than $10 and usually would not exceed $150.