FINAL REPORT

PAY AND PROMOTION PROCESS TEAM

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Texas Transportation Institute
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Pay and Promotion Process Team was formed to examine issues concerning pay and promotion at the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI.) The focus of the process team’s efforts was to define a set of career paths for employees that would facilitate the following TTI objectives:

! Enhance the research and development performance of the Institute.

! Retain talented people and encourage them to advance in both skill and responsibility.

! Assure that levels of recompense provide proper incentives to accomplish the above objectives, thereby making TTI a good place to work and grow.

Team Membership

The process team was composed of a cross section of current TTI employees including representatives from each of the following groups: full-time research professionals, joint academic researchers, research support, and administrative support. Process team members selected from a group of volunteer employees, who expressed an interest in participating included:

Dock Burke (Chair)  Rodger Koppa  Russell Henk
Debbie Jasek  Anna Mitchell  Zane Goff
Patsy Astle  Greg Richmond  Roger Smith

Don Bugh served a dual role of process team member and sponsor for the team.

Objectives

The process team began meeting in August 1995 and met at least 1 to 2 hours a month until August 1996. During initial meetings of the pay and promotions process team, members created working objectives and tasks. These working objectives included:

! Develop an information base of current pay and promotions elements in TTI for each of the various classifications of employees, including research (full-time), research (joint academic), research support, and administrative support.

! Develop typical career paths for research staff and administrative staff members.

! Incorporate the following into career paths: recommended job titles, performance guidelines, and training needs.
Consolidate all recommendations and findings into a final report.

Once the objectives and tasks were developed, subcommittees of team members were formed to research the problem, and present progress reports and findings at each process team meeting. The initial information and findings were thoroughly discussed and refined by the process team as a whole. The final outcome of this process is presented in the subsequent sections of this report. Section 2.0 discusses the findings of a survey of former employees. Career paths, job titles, performance guidelines, and job security are addressed in Section 3.0. Section 4.0 addresses the faculty research program. Section 5.0 describes areas that need to be addressed by future process teams.
2.0 FORMER TTI EMPLOYEE SURVEY

Background

Before one can move ahead, it is sometimes good to look at where one has been. The team had access (and made use of) the SMT Survey of TTI employees. However, we also thought it important to get information from former employees. Thus, the first task assumed by the Pay and Promotion Process Team was to survey former TTI employees. Team members believed that prior to making recommendations relative to pay and promotion issues, an assessment of TTI through the “eyes” of former employees would be beneficial. The Human Resources Office identified a group of approximately 30 former employees that had voluntarily left TTI during the period of September 1, 1993 through July 31, 1995. These former employees were classified as follows:

- Research professional
- Administrative professional
- Research support
- Administrative support
- Faculty (addressed in Section 4.0)

A work group of the Pay and Promotion Team was formed to discuss the process of interviewing former employees. A phone interview questionnaire was developed to assess former employee opinions concerning their impressions of TTI as a place to work, as well as likes and dislikes about TTI and the general working environment. Specific questions were designed to measure opinions concerning:

- Training activities,
- Professional development,
- Career advancement,
- Pay and benefits,
- Accomplishment recognition, and
- Reason(s) for leaving TTI.

Each member of the work group was given a list of former employees to contact and was provided as much information as possible regarding each former employee. This information, which was made available through TTI records, included:

- Stated reason for leaving
- Last position held
- Date of hire
- Date of termination
- Phone number
- Supervisor
Research Professional Survey Results

The majority of the former research professionals contacted had a favorable impression of TTI noting that:

- TTI’s employees were a nice group of people to work with.
- The research projects were interesting.
- The benefits were good.

Overall, the group felt that TTI was a “good place to work.” Negative comments from the survey included:

- Pay seemed low relative to private sectors.
- No apparent career path/ladder.
- Poor project management/leadership.
- Limited advancement opportunities.
- Inadequate recognition for contributions.
- A feeling that researchers could be terminated with very short notice should research funding not come through.
- Little or no feedback from supervisors regarding overall job performance.

When the former research professionals were asked whether adequate training was provided, all said no. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Training on TTI purpose, structure and policies.
- Handbook on where to go for answers to particular questions/problems.
- Provide managers with leadership/management training.

Finally, when questioned why they left TTI, the common response given was for better opportunities and pay.

Administrative Professional Survey Results

The responses provided by the administrative professional group closely mirrored those given by the former research professionals. Notable comments included:

- Excellent working conditions
- Pay was adequate starting out but failed to keep pace with personal growth.

Lack of training and advancement opportunities/low pay were again cited by this group as a major problem area for TTI.
Research Support Survey Results

The former research support staff contacted were not as complimentary about TTI as were the professional groups. Of the former research support staff members contacted, only one had an overall favorable impression of TTI. Others felt TTI was an “ok” place to work, and one was extremely negative about TTI. Notable comments made by former research support staff included:

- Work was too stressful and demanding.
- Limited advancement opportunities.
- Poor pay for the amount of work expected.
- Inadequate feedback regarding job performance.

Administrative Support Survey Results

Most of the administrative support staff interviewed had a favorable impression of TTI and were satisfied with the areas in which they had worked. However, the group as a whole expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of training available. It was suggested that desk manuals be created to provide guidance to new employees and to serve as a point of reference.

Although professional development opportunities were provided for all former employees, the majority commented that specific training aimed at improving one’s job at TTI was inadequate. Similarly, the group stated that contributions and hard work were not recognized nor appreciated.

One former administrative support employee left because of a spouse transfer out-of-state but indicated they would have stayed as the pay and benefits were adequate. The others left for better paying positions.

As a final note, one former employee interviewed was so bitter about TTI that this person refused to participate in the survey.

Analysis and Summary

From the group of former employees interviewed, much was learned concerning their impression of TTI as a place to work. As one might expect, there were many similarities among the four classes of former employees interviewed. The majority of all former employees held a favorable impression of TTI but expressed concerns regarding:

- Inadequate pay.
- Lack of an apparent career path/ladder.
- Limited advancement opportunities.
- Inadequate recognition of individual contributions.
- Inadequate internal and external training opportunities.
Lack of job security.
Little or no feedback regarding overall job performance.

The research support group was stronger in their assessment of inadequate in-house training, low pay and individual recognition. This was the only group to mention high levels of stress.

The group of former employees interviewed voluntarily left TTI during the period of September 1, 1993 through July 31, 1995. Since that time, through the efforts of the Strategic Management Team, the Quality Council, TTI Administration, and others steps have been taken to improve working conditions for all TTI employees. Specific areas already addressed or in the process of being addressed include:

Awards Program - The implementation of the TTI Awards Program was created to annually recognize outstanding TTI employees at TTI Day. This program has done much to improve the recognition of individual employee contributions.

Performance Evaluations - This procedure requires supervisors to formally evaluate employees on an annual basis. Through the requirement that supervisors meet individually with employees to discuss and assess performance, employees receive information concerning job performance that previously was not always provided.

Professional Training - Although not fully implemented, a pilot program is underway to provide training to TTI’s professional and support staff. In addition, a new process team is being formed to further explore this area.

Of the remaining areas of concern as expressed by former TTI employees, the Pay and Promotion Process Team selected the following areas to address:

Career Path/Ladder (limited advancement opportunities).
Job Security

These two areas are addressed together in the next section of this report. The concerns of faculty members that were formerly associated with TTI are addressed in Section 4.0.
3.0 PROFESSIONAL, PARAPROFESSIONAL AND RESEARCH MANAGEMENT POSITIONS

Present Status of Research Titles in TTI

At the present time, the professional level positions in TTI follow the academic faculty model, with further differentiation between registered professional engineers and those who have other qualifications. There is a very loosely defined junior professional or paraprofessional category of "research associate," which connotes a subordinate and sometimes dead-end or temporary position. There is also a special title reserved for those who may have long experience and great responsibility within TTI, but who do not have the credentials normally associated with their job. They are called "specialists."

With the present three-level position ladder in TTI, a research staff member may plateau in 15 years or less as a "Research Engineer" or "Research Scientist." No further title or position progress is available for as much as 20 years more time in employment. Although a "Senior Research Engineer/Scientist" title now exists, it has only been implemented in one case.

Faculty Members in TTI

Faculty members who do most or all of their research in TTI are given titles that mirror their academic level in their respective departments, unless they are non-tenure-track faculty. This policy leads to the anomalous situation for tenured or tenure-track faculty that their position and responsibilities in TTI may be much higher than their academic position, nevertheless the academic title determines their TTI title, e.g. Associate Professor linked to Associate Research Engineer title.

Tenure

There is no policy in TTI that corresponds to the tenure granted to academic faculty meeting College and University criteria. Those in TTI who are also tenured faculty members feel a measure of security and independence with respect to their academic employment, but no such consideration is accorded those who are not tenured faculty members but are just as crucial to the success of TTI. Thus senior staff members with comparable or superior qualifications to tenured faculty members sometimes think that absence of tenure creates a less-than-equal status. Surveys and contact with newer members of the TTI staff suggest that some staff members have the impression that there is no stability or security to TTI. Although such an image is consistent with the competitive, downsizing, and bottom-line mentality of much of American business in these times, it is not consistent with our organization whose sole product is intellectual and creative: applied and basic research.
Management/Administrative Incentives

In earlier times, TTI was largely a research outgrowth of the Civil Engineering Department of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, with some admixture of economics research. We developed a concept of management which utilized principal investigators (of loosely defined areas of effort) who “donated” the time needed for management. That system worked well for years and little time or training was devoted to management of such a small organization. Now, however, Program Managers and Division Heads supervise from a dozen to over a hundred people at all levels within the very large research organization TTI has become. Some Program Managers and Division Heads do not perceive any identifiable advantage for performing their administrative functions, and in some cases receive no extra pay for such functions.

The result of this situation contributes to uneven and unpredictable performance from management in the Divisions and Program Offices of TTI. Some Program Managers and Division Heads take the extra time and effort required from their personal lives to do their management jobs, meanwhile keeping up a full-time load of research and often teaching as well. It is hard for TTI administration to hold Program Managers and Division Heads to account under such a system of donated, largely unpaid time.

The following proposals address these four areas of concern. None of these proposals can be implemented overnight, but will take careful consideration and planning to phase them in such a way as to gain general acceptance and avoid excess cost. In the long run, we believe that they will help TTI in growing to full maturity as the largest university affiliated transportation research agency in the world.

Proposal 1: A New Improved Research Professional Progression

Seven levels of research titles are proposed. Levels are added at both the upper and lower ends of the current progression. The Senior Research Fellow and the Research Fellow are new titles. The Researcher and Junior Researcher are also new titles, which would replace the present anomalous Research Associate.

Levels 6 and 7 address the problem of "plateauing," in which many very senior and productive researchers (both TTI staff and affiliated TAMU faculty) have been at the same position for over 20 years. Other TAMU System organizations use the "fellow" designation in various ways, and other research agencies also use "fellow" to denote distinguished and senior research staff.

Levels 1 to 3 reflect the practice in both private industry and in government agencies to provide promotional steps at 2 to 3 year intervals to individuals that are progressing technically and undertaking increased responsibilities. Such steps allow management to assess and evaluate the new researcher's progress, assign increased responsibilities, and discuss appropriate career goals after an acceptable period of evaluation. Accomplishments specifically include attaining professional licensure or certification. Without such visible reassurance of progress, young career professionals are often
left with the feeling that the position they occupy is a "dead-end," and begin searching for new positions outside TTI. This is especially true when classmates are peers that are employed by other companies or organizations are receiving these initial promotions. The implementation of these promotional steps in the professional career ladder will facilitate the retention of young researchers, who often seek other positions after an initial employment period.

The custom of maintaining the same level of title as the equivalent academic title for TAMU Faculty administratively located in an academic department would no longer be observed, although salary level, of course, would remain a prerogative of the academic department.

The distinction in position title between those who are registered as professional engineers and those who have other specialties is preserved in this progression. Nothing in this progression should be interpreted to prevent any researcher in TTI from identifying himself or herself with a particular research specialty area, such as "economist," or "librarian," or "sociologist." Thus a Level 5 Research Scientist could have a job title of Transportation Planner in the technical program of which he or she is a part.

The present career ladder of Program Manager, Division Head, Center/Office Director, and TTI (Assistant, Associate, Deputy) Director which is superimposed on the research professional progression described below, is unchanged and not further addressed in this Proposal. The present professional progression in Administration is also not addressed.

Level 7: Senior Research Fellow (in Specialty)*

Level 7 is the Senior Research Fellow (in Engineering for P.E.’s, in other scientific, technical or research discipline if not a P.E.), which is reserved for the truly outstanding long-term performer in the Institute. A Senior Research Fellow has major research to his or her credit, has broken new ground in innovative technology, and has brought national and international credit to TTI and the TAMU System. They have usually served or are serving in a managerial capacity in TTI in addition to their research work. They usually have many years of experience, as well as service in the TAMU System to their credit.

Level 6: Research Fellow (in Specialty)

Level 6 is the Research Fellow, a researcher who has consistently brought in a very substantial amount of research funding, has significantly advanced his or her field of transportation research, and serves as an advisor to researchers throughout TTI in their specialty area. They have usually served or are serving in a managerial capacity in TTI in addition to their research work. They usually have a considerable amount of experience, as well as service in the TAMU System to their credit.

* Parentheses denote words that could be used in a work or job title, but would not appear as part of the position title. The position title is "Senior Research Fellow"

Level 5: Research Engineer/Scientist
Level 5 is the full Research Engineer or Scientist. This Principal Investigator is a consistent high performer for a considerable period of time, has served or is serving in a managerial capacity, and/or has many projects which support other researchers and staff in TTI.

Level 4: *Associate Research Engineer/Scientist*

Level 4, the Associate Research Engineer or Scientist possesses doctoral level qualifications or their substantial equivalent in experience and/or significant accomplishments. Associate Research Engineers or Scientists generally have their own programs of research as Principal Investigators. They may also take on a managerial capacity within TTI.

Level 3: *Assistant Research Engineer/Scientist*

Level 3 is the "journeyman" Principal Investigator, resident in all Programs of TTI. Normally an Assistant Research Engineer or Scientist will have at least a Master's degree in a relevant discipline, plus several years experience, or their substantial equivalent in experience and/or significant accomplishments. They will have developed and directed research projects of their own as Principal Investigators.

Level 2: *(Specialty) Researcher*

Level 2 is the Researcher, an entry level for those with the Master's degree in a relevant discipline, or the substantial equivalent in directly relevant experience. It is also a promotional step available a few years after entry into TTI. Researchers serve as task leaders and co-principal investigators.

Level 1: *Junior (Specialty) Researcher*

Level 1 is the entry level for those with a Bachelor's degree or the substantial equivalent in directly relevant experience. A Junior Researcher provides technical support to projects under the direction of a principal investigator, and progresses to task leader status.

**Proposal 2: A New Paraprofessional Progression**

Four levels of paraprofessional positions are proposed. Paraprofessionals are those who perform support functions that may be highly specialized and technical, but not at a principal investigator level of expertise or responsibility.
**Level 4: Senior Research Specialist**

Level 4 is the Senior Research Specialist. The Senior Research Specialist is an extremely experienced technical support specialist with either 15 years of experience, or 10 years with specialized training.

**Level 3: Research Specialist**

Level 3 is the Research Specialist, who may have 10 years of related experience or 5 years over a course of specialized training. A number of people currently titled as Research Associate would actually fit this classification. Presently a number of individuals who are dead-ended as Research Associates, would be permitted to advance under this progression.

**Level 2: Research Technician**

Level 2 is the Research Technician. The Research Technician is a person with specialized training such as a certificate from a technical school, or at least 5 years in a classified title.

**Level 1**

Level 1 in this progression is the highest classified position for the particular technical specialty. For example, an Electronic Technician II would be at Level 1, and would promote into the paraprofessional Research Technician position.

Movement of individuals from this paraprofessional ladder to the professional ladder would be dependent upon responsibilities and initiative, and not on whether or not the person possessed an academic degree.

**Proposal 3: Research Support Staff**

The creation of 2 new research support titles are proposed. Persons in these positions perform standard administrative duties in the support of the manager of a research program, division or center.

**Senior Administrative Assistant**

The Senior Administrative Assistant position would be filled by a highly experienced research/administrative support professional with 3 years of experience in an Administrative Assistant or equivalent position and whose duties and responsibilities exceed those normally expected of an Administrative Assistant.
Senior Staff Assistant

A Senior Staff Assistant would have 3 years of experience in progressively responsible positions, including 5 years of supervisory experience. The duties and responsibilities of this position would exceed those normally required of a Staff Assistant.

Proposal 4: Proposed Implementation of the Progressions

Research Associates

It is proposed to phase out the Research Associate position as soon as practicable. Present Research Associates who really fit the paraprofessional progression would be transitioned to this ladder. Present Research Associates who qualify would be transitioned into the appropriate categories of the Research Professional Progression.

Research Professional Staff

It is proposed to apply the new research professional progression to new hires and those presently on the staff (including faculty members) as soon as practical.

Paraprofessional Staff

It is proposed to implement the paraprofessional progression as soon as practicable. New hires and those who have been on the classified payroll for a long time would be transitioned into this new progression as rapidly as funding permits.

Research Support Staff

It is proposed that the titles Senior Administrative Assistant and Senior Staff Assistant be created, with the approval of The TAMU Employment Wage and Compensation Office. Persons who qualify for these positions would be transitioned in as funding permits.

Proposal 5: Employment Policy Statement

TTI should adopt an employment policy statement that incorporates the following provisions:

TTI provides a probationary period of 6 months duration for all new employees in nonstudent positions. This period allows time for adjustment to the job and an opportunity to determine whether it will be in the best interests of the employee and the employer for the employment relationship to continue. Before the end of the fourth month of employment, the employee's job performance will be evaluated in writing by the supervisor and discussed with the employee.
After the probationary period of 6 months, each TTI employee will be notified in writing that the probationary period is complete. For those who successfully complete probation, the employment is considered to be indefinite subject to the availability of funding.

The following steps will be followed in the event that funding becomes insufficient for support of the staff member (TTI employee or affiliated faculty) in the position and at the level of effort allocated for that person:

Step 1. TTI will make every effort to find suitable funding for the staff member in shortfall, in coordination with the person's supervisor. Not less than 30 calendar days must transpire before reduction in force (RIF) procedures are taken for any employee. For staff members with 5 years of service, the period of time before RIF procedures are taken will be not less than 60 calendar days. For staff members with 10 years or more of service, the period of time will be not less than 90 calendar days. This policy would not apply to persons in temporary positions where the staff member has been hired or funded to perform a specific task or work for a specific amount of time.

Step 2. If suitable funding cannot be found to support a position, the TTI employee will be given a minimum of 30 days notice prior to termination of their employment. Employees who have been with TTI for 10 years or more will be given a minimum 60 days notice prior to termination.

Step 3. If the effort to obtain suitable funding within TTI for an employee proves unsuccessful and notice of termination has been given, then TTI will assure that placement services within the TAMU System and then outside the System will be provided.

Proposal 6: Incentives for TTI Middle Management

Salary Adjustment

It is proposed that a salary adjustment be provided to each Program Manager and Division Head, Office Head, or Center Director during the period that he or she functions in that capacity. In those cases in which Division Heads also act as Program Manager, only the Division Head salary adjustment will be given. The adjustment for a Division Head or equivalent will be 10 percent of their base TTI salary in the fiscal year. The adjustment for a Program Manager or equivalent will be 5 percent of their base TTI salary in the fiscal year. The salary adjustment, like Longevity Pay, would be funded by the research programs to which the individual manager charges his or her time. The
salary adjustment will be terminated at the beginning of the next fiscal year after the employee resigns his or her appointment as Program Manager or Division Head.

**Middle Manager Training**

Consistent with moving the crucial function of middle management in the Divisions and Offices to a more professional status, it is proposed that in-service training be provided by TTI Administration. This training would better assure that Program Managers and Division Heads are fully acquainted with what is expected of them and what they can expect from Management. Consideration should be given to providing professional management training to Division Heads.
4.0 FACULTY RESEARCH PROGRAM

Purpose and Goal

The purpose of the TTI/TAMU Faculty Research Program is to establish, through mutual interests, a formal professional relationship between interested TAMU faculty members and the research staff at TTI. The goal of this program is to enhance TAMU faculty participation in TTI research projects, program development, and related activities.

Background and Rationale

TTI has always had an active interrelationship with “jointly-appointed” faculty members at TAMU. Typically, these joint-appointments have revolved around active, on-going participation in TTI research programs and projects. As such, the relationship between TTI and the TAMU faculty member has usually been defined by budgetary as well as technical research aspects. A more proactive approach would encourage interested TAMU faculty members to become and remain affiliated with TTI, regardless of the budgetary or active project status at any given time.

The result of this approach should widen the circle of potential jointly-appointed faculty members and make TTI a more continuously visible option when TAMU faculty members desire to pursue transportation research topics.

At present, there are 2 types of involvement of TAMU faculty members with TTI:

! Type A -- TAMU faculty members who have “joint appointments” with TTI and generally have a well-established research program, which often includes administrative responsibilities at TTI as well

! Type B -- TAMU faculty members who are affiliated on a project basis with TTI

The Type A faculty members regard themselves and are regarded by TTI as TTI researchers on a par with those who are full-time staff of TTI, and, in general, are comfortable with their dual roles. The amount of emphasis they may give their academic responsibilities versus their TTI research responsibilities varies from semester to semester, and is loosely tied to the percentages of time allocated to the 2 sectors.

Type B faculty members tend to be project-oriented, and may not be aware of the research program or Division of TTI through which their project is channeled. Apart from the immediate TTI staff contact, they may know little of the TTI organization or other related project efforts. Space limitations in most cases preclude their having an office or even a desk at TTI. They are not usually
on the Banyan Network, nor do they usually receive any TTI mail not related to the project(s) on which they work.

The picture that emerges with Type B faculty members is that of frequent isolation and insulation. They seldom visit TTI offices and feel themselves outsiders when they do come around. Type B faculty members are rarely invited to TTI meetings or other functions on a routine basis, but instead depend upon their TTI "counterpart" to look after their interests. Also, there is little knowledge of most TTI support services -- such as the Research Development Office or of ITEC -- among Type B faculty members. Type B faculty members perceive that as soon as a particular project is complete, their relationship with TTI is also over, unless another project is immediately available. When a project is over, these faculty members do not sense that there is any policy of continuing affiliation or contact with TTI.

On the fiscal side, Type B faculty members see a significant disadvantage in affiliating with TTI, when compared with TEES. TTI's current policy is to return to the responsible academic department, 15 percent of the indirect cost collected on tenured faculty member salaries when full indirect costs are being charged. For new initiatives, 33 percent of the net indirect cost collected is returned to the academic department with a recommendation that 10 percent go to the principal investigators. Obviously, TTI is at a disadvantage when the faculty member can choose to run the research project through TEES and be guaranteed to receive a certain percentage of the indirect funds generated by the faculty member's research activities for a discretionary account.

**Recommended Program**

TTI should enhance programs that encourage all TAMU faculty members to associate with the Institute to pursue transportation-related research or to offer professional talents needed by TTI for its program development. Communication, explicit commitment to faculty members, and further attention to fiscal incentives are all needed to improve relationships between TAMU faculty members and the Institute.

Once TAMU faculty members become actively associated with TTI research (either as part of a project team or through participating in a proposal effort) or express an intent to become active with TTI, they become TTI faculty researchers with an appropriate title as outlined in Section 3.0. As long as they remain associated with the Institute, they are assigned to an appropriate Program/Division unit; kept on mailing and e-mail address lists; receive invitations to participate in meetings and social events; and most importantly are encouraged in every way to continue and expand their research role in the Institute. This support specifically includes use of the Research Development Office's services, ITEC services, and program secretarial/clerical services. These faculty researchers are eligible to compete for TTI Excellence Fund Awards and other funding from TTI's national centers programs. In addition these faculty researchers would remain on the staff rolls of a Program for an agreed upon period of time (e.g., at least 1 year) after their last funded effort.
5.0 WORK REMAINING FOR FUTURE PROCESS TEAMS

Pay and Remuneration

Much additional work needs to be done with a focus upon the overall question: How can TTI, as a state agency, be competitive in its remuneration with private sector entities?

Faculty Participation

How to make TTI a compelling option for TAMU faculty members desiring to do transportation research?

Training

How can TTI “target” and deliver training programs that will increase employee productivity and job satisfaction?