

PTO Proposal Project

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Why adopt PTO?

During the 2022 Compensation Study, the increased need for uniform practices throughout the county was brought up more than once. Recruitment and retention have been a significant topic that many organizations are focusing on, as it has become more challenging over the last several years. The County has identified some areas in which to become more competitive and has made an active effort to implement change. Compensation and the re-slotting of employees within their pay grades was completed and the merit pay process was revised to allow meaningful movement in pay grades and minimize in-range compression.

The next step is to ensure the County has a competitive paid time off plan to aid recruitment and retention efforts. Additional benefits include greater flexibility for employees, easing the administrative burden of the current system, and creating uniformity for all employees. The current system has inconsistencies with the number of paid days provided to employees. This plan allows standardizing time off amounts while considering years of service.

We want to be able to recruit talent to positions throughout the county, as well as recognize the contributions of existing employees and retain them. Human Resources conducted extensive research on paid time off benefits other counties were offering, and it was found that there is room for Winnebago County to become more competitive. Creating a plan that allows us to be more in line with other counties is a critical piece of why adopting PTO is so crucial. This plan would have a large impact for the greatest number of employees.

What other counties were compared?

HR Generalists, Jamie Luehring and Stephanie Stieg, sent out a questionnaire regarding paid time off benefits to all Wisconsin counties. 30 of 71 of counties responded. Of those 30, 11 currently operate under PTO models. Those counties are Buffalo, Calumet, Chippewa, Dodge, Eau Claire, Kenosha, Langlade, Marathon, Shawano, Vilas, and Washington.

The remaining 19 responding counties currently operate under a bucket system, meaning they have separate sick, vacation, floating holiday, etc. buckets. Of those 19 counties, 86% of them have more competitive paid time off benefits than Winnebago County currently does. It is important to note that at least 7 other counties are looking to switch to a PTO model soon. They are looking to us to set the framework. This is important to keep in mind, as we want to ensure our PTO plan will remain competitive after other counties make the transition. PTO will become the new common practice for paid time off within the next few years.

Did you consider private sector as well?

Human Resources reviewed comparable private sector organizations within our county, as we are all pulling from the same applicant pool. If we move to the proposed PTO plan, Winnebago would be more competitive than 7 out of the 9 compared private sector organizations and less competitive than two. It is important to note that some private sector organizations are able to offer less PTO, because they offer fully company funded alternative benefits such as short-term disability, paid parental leave, work from home benefits, etc. While some of those benefits may be able to be offered by the County in the future, not all are practical given the type of work that is done, or would incur significant expense and benefit a smaller number of employees.

What do you mean by uniform paid time off rules?

While most of our departments are no longer unionized, we still hold onto many old union practices. One of the biggest inconsistencies is floating holidays. Some county employees receive 0 floating holidays, while some receive 13, and there are numerous in between. There is an inconsistency with how many regular holidays employees receive. Most employees receive ten standard holidays, while other departments only get seven. In addition, some departments get all of their holidays prorated up front while others have to wait for the holiday to occur before they are paid.

There is a difference in the way that employees earn vacation time currently. Employees who were hired prior to 2019, must earn all their time, before they receive it on the first of the following year. Employees hired after 2019 are advanced all their vacation time on their date of hire or on the first of the year. This means that the post 2019 employees have not earned the time that they receive and may result in higher costs of using unearned time and leaves employment

Finally, the way that we count one year of service is different for departments. Some departments first year of hire, even if a partial year, counts as year one, and increases every January 1st. Other departments years of service is based on their hire date.

By moving to a PTO system, we would be able to streamline all these differences, and have all employees operate under the same earning schedule, based on their years of service. This would not only ease the administrative burden, but also increase morale.

What is PTO?

"PTO is a single bank of time, which is then used for sick, vacation, floating holidays, and bereavement time, instead of having different banks of time for different purposes" (Consultant). This gives employees more flexibility with how they use their time. Our end goal is to create an overall competitive package for our existing employees, as well as a comprehensive package to attract new talent. We would like to shift to a PTO model in combination with our wage study increases, and merit updates in order to offer a competitive overall package.

Is there a maximum accrual rate or cap to PTO?

Yes, the PTO bank will cap at 450 or 480 hours depending on if you are a 7.5- or 8-hour employee. This number was chosen intentionally, as this equates to 60 days of PTO. 60 days of PTO will allow for a fully paid FMLA leave if employees choose to bank that much time and use it for that purpose. Any time additional to 450 or 480 hours will go into the employee's Extended Leave Bank (ELB) bank. This model is common practice with other counties who offer PTO.

What is an Extended Leave Bank (ELB)?

An extended leave bank (ELB) is where employees paid time goes once they have reached the maximum number of hours eligible in their active PTO bank. For our purposes, this would be anything over 450 hours for 7.5-hour employees and 480 hours for 8-hour employees. The ELB will also house all of employees' current sick time. The ELB has parameters surrounding how one can access and use the time that they have in this bank. All Family Medical Leave and Leave of Absence qualifying events would warrant use of an ELB. Employees that have a balance in their ELB bank, would be able to access up to 5

days for bereavement leave after using 2 days of PTO time first. Finally, the ELB will be eligible for use for Military Leave. Because the ELB will house all current sick time, some employees will have frozen sick time in the ELB that will be eligible for payout upon termination. Outside of the frozen sick banks, the ELB will not be eligible for payout.

Why have a PTO and ELB bank, why not just have one large bank?

While it would be nice on the surface to just have one large bank of PTO, there are some issues we would run into. A lot of our long-term employees currently have hundreds of hours of sick time. If this all moved into PTO, some employees would have enough PTO time to take off a year or more. That is not feasible and is not the flexibility we are looking for by moving to a PTO model.

We want employees to have that time available as a safety net if they need it for emergencies such as FMLA, LOA, bereavement, or military leave. Currently, sick leave is restricted in how it is accessed (used for sick time and FMLA leaves) and is not eligible for a payout upon separation (except for "frozen" sick time). Time in the ELB is also not eligible for payout. However, some PTO is available for payout and used for all types of time off, including vacation days. Keeping this time separated is helpful for both payout and usage restrictions.

Additionally, while we may not be able to pay out the whole PTO bank currently, we are setting up a framework for the future. By having a cap of 60 days in PTO, we hope to get to a place in the future where we could become more competitive and increase the amount of the PTO bank that is eligible for payout upon separation.

Who developed this plan?

This plan was developed internally (not by the consultant). The Human Resources team worked closely with the executive team which included several department heads. In addition, a significant amount of work had previously been completed around 2016 by a team of supervisors and department heads when PTO was first considered after the recommendation to consider PTO after the previous compensation study.

Multiple employee meetings were held and feedback solicited after a draft plan was developed. Revisions based on that feedback has created the proposal before you.

This plan creates a framework of standardized benefits to which the County will be better able to adjust in the future based on changes to the labor market or to enhance benefit offerings for recruitment or retention purposes. Not all requests could be incorporated (for example, payout for unused sick time) but this plan allows flexibility in the future without needing a wholesale change to the system.

How did you gather employee feedback?

Eleven employee meetings were held including ones for department heads, supervisors, and all employees. Four of the employee meetings were held in person, while the remaining seven were held over Microsoft Teams (a virtual meeting software similar to Zoom). Human Resources took down feedback, and areas for further consideration from those meetings. From there, the plan was revised into the comprehensive plan being presented to you today.

What is the PTO Proposal?

Employees will earn Paid Time Off (PTO) based on hours in a paid status every pay period, similar to how paychecks work. Time (like pay) would be available as it is earned each pay period. The PTO accrual rate (how much PTO is earned each pay period) increases based on the number of years of service with Winnebago County. PTO accrual rates take into consideration vacation, sick time, funeral leave, and floating holidays. These categories would no longer be separate categories earned in separate "buckets" – all would be earned as PTO. Regular Holidays that are recognized by the County are NOT included in the PTO accrual rates and would be a separate benefit.

Employees will accrue PTO for every hour that they are in a paid status. This means that they will be accruing PTO while they are either working, using PTO time, or using ELB time. No PTO will be earned for hours that are unpaid. PTO will only be earned until full time status is hit (75 or 80 hours per pay period). PTO will not accrue in overtime. The purpose of this cut off, is so that employees do not earn more PTO than what is planned for on the earning schedule in a given year.

The PTO accrual chart will allow employees to earn up to 25 days of PTO within the first year of hire. The number of PTO days earned increase every two years that someone is employed. The number of PTO days tops out at 43 days for 19 years of service and beyond.

In order to move existing employees from our current paid time off system to the new PTO system, we have made special transition rules for the year 2024. We wanted to smooth out the transition process as much as possible, taking into account a lot of employee feedback.

PTO Accrual Rates

Min Years	Max Years	Days Earned	Multiplier
1	2	25	0.096
3	4	27	0.103
5	6	29	0.111
7	8	31	0.119
9	10	33	0.126
11	12	35	0.134
13	14	37	0.142
15	16	39	0.150
17	18	41	0.157
19	+	43	0.165

Are Regular Holidays included in PTO?

No, all ten (10) regular holidays would remain a separate benefit, and those days are not included in the PTO accrual rate. Currently Park View only observes 7 regular holidays while the rest of the county observes 10. All departments would recognize 10 regular holidays under this plan.

What will be paid out for PTO?

Various payout plans were considered. Ultimately, this plan would keep payouts similar to current levels due to financial constraints. Employees who leave employment after less than one year will not be eligible for payout. Those who have 1-4 years of service will be eligible for up to 80 hours of PTO time paid out. 5-9 years of service will be eligible for up to 120 hours of PTO paid out. 10-19 years of service will be eligible for up to 160 hours of PTO paid out. 20-24 years of service will be eligible for up to 200 hours of PTO paid out. And 25+ years of service will be eligible for up to 240 hours of PTO paid out.

A consistent request from employees is to payout all earned but unused time, including sick time. While not included in this plan due to fiscal constraints, this plan establishes a framework to expand payout options in the future.

What is the cost of this plan?

No additional funds are being requested in the 2024 budget as a result of this proposal.

Currently there are expenses from vacation and frozen sick leave payouts. PTO payouts are similar to vacation payouts and frozen sick leave will still be eligible for payouts.

Under our current system, we advance benefit time for those who are hired post 2019. By advancing time, employees have not yet earned the time that they have been credited with. It is not uncommon for someone to use all their benefit time prior to earning it and leave our employment. In these cases, we will take back what is owed to us from their last paycheck, but often, that is not enough to cover all that is owed. That remaining balance is a lost expense that we can not recover. By moving to the PTO system, everyone will have to earn their time before it is eligible for use, therefore, eliminating the ability to overuse time and eliminating the potential for lost expense in this manner.

Similarly, we are requiring that employees remain employed with us for more than one year to be eligible for any PTO payout. Additionally, we are requiring that employees provide and complete a proper resignation notice in paid status to be eligible for PTO payout. This is a new policy, that would save the county money. The hope is, by offering a more competitive time off package, we will be able to fill our vacancies and retain our current employees, decreasing the large number of openings.

Are there transition year rules?

Yes, we recognize that this transition is coming late in the year, and that employees were not able to plan for this change. Because of this, we have created some transition year rules for 2024.

Vacation

Pre 2019 employees will get all their vacation time that they have been earning in 2023 dropped into their PTO bank on January first. In addition to that time, these employees will start accruing PTO

time for every hour that they are in paid status in 2024. This "drop" of time will only happen in the transition year. After that, everyone will be on the same earning schedule. Post 2019 employees will not have this large drop of time on the first of the year (because they have been advanced time instead of having to earn it first).

We understand that employees may have pre-scheduled vacations or absences planned for the early parts of 2024 and may not have any time to roll over into PTO. To help mitigate this, we will advance those who need it, up to 10 days PTO until June of 2024. This will allow employees to be in a paid status while they are off. The goal here was not to penalize anyone for taking time off.

Instead of only allowing 5-days of unused vacation to be carried over into 2024 as vacation (current practice), we will allow all unused vacation to be carried over as PTO.

Sick

Up to 8 days of unused sick time will convert to PTO time in 2024 for employees. This consideration point came from employee feedback. Employees wanted some of their sick time to be eligible for PTO to help get through the transition year.

All other existing sick time will be placed in the ELB bank. We will allow employees to access the ELB for sick time in the transition year of 2024 if needed. Come 2025, the rules for accessing ELB will apply. The ELB will house all frozen sick time that remains eligible for payout as well.

Floating Holiday

All 24 hour operations will now receive PTO time for holidays as they fall on the calendar based on their status. Under the current system, all floating holiday is generally advanced to employees on January 1st of each year.

If I don't use all of my PTO, will I lose it at the end of the year?

No PTO will never be lost under this model. In our current plan, you can only roll 5 days of vacation over from year to year and the remainder turns into sick time. The idea of rolling time over goes away with PTO. Instead, you will continue building your PTO bank until you hit the max of 450 or 480 hours. Once you have hit that maximum, your time will start going into the ELB bank until your PTO balance goes below 450 or 480 again. This happens in real time, in line with payroll, it does not wait until the end of the calendar year like our current plan does.

Does this include a lateral transfer policy?

This plan allows us the flexibility to make competitive job offers based on market conditions. As it stands, this model is competitive, and we believe will attract valuable talent. In the event that our starting accrual rate is not competitive enough for an incoming employee, Human Resources will have the ability to make a competitive time off offer.

Are we offering too much time off with this plan?

While the PTO number may look alarming at a first glance, it is important to remember that PTO will now be used for all absences, whether that be sick time, vacation time, etc. The number of days that we currently offer employees is not competitive with the market and is hindering our ability to attract

and retain quality employees. While the plan is somewhat richer than some comparable counties, it is not the richest out of all responding counties and private sector organizations. Work-life balance has become a significant requirement of the workforce in recent years, and by increasing PTO time, we are able to provide that flexibility. In addition, our goal was to create a plan that would remain competitive in years to come.

Why are we not offering more?

Setting up a sustainable framework is crucial for the success of any plan in the long term. There is always more that can be offered, whether that be more time off, higher payouts, more flexibility, etc. However, if the plan is not sustainable, it will not last. When creating a plan, we wanted to become competitive with the market, while also remaining fiscally responsible. This plan allows for both of those to take place, while building a strong foundation that could be improved in the future based on market conditions and changes.

Why change this late in the year?

By the time this plan would get approved by the County Board, it will be early to mid – November, and we are looking at an implementation date of January 1, 2024. We understand that this is happening late in the year, but there are a few reasons why we are pushing to have this completed in 2023 rather than waiting an additional year. The first reason is that January 1st is a natural transition time. This is when employees currently receive their vacation, sick, and floating holiday time. It would not work to make the transition in the middle of a year, because of the magnitude of inconsistencies across the county regarding time off.

The second reason is that PTO is the final big component recommended in the compensation study. We have already accomplished updating the pay plan, as well as our merit system: PTO is the final piece. The importance of completing this final piece in 2023 is that we want the Board who started the compensation study, to get to see the project through to completion. This Board has been with us on this change journey, we would like to allow them to see their hard work pay off.

Finally, as we learned throughout our research, we are behind in time off benefits compared to other counties. We would be doing a disservice to our employees if we waited an entire year to make a change to time off benefits knowing that we are so far behind market. If we wait to implement this change, the research conducted by Human Resources will become obsolete and new research will need to be conducted, as many counties are revising their paid time off systems currently, or in the very near future.

What if we don't make the change to PTO?

We now know that our current plan is less competitive than other counties and private sector organizations. If we do not make this change to PTO, we will remain behind market and uncompetitive. In addition, without transitioning to PTO, there is no tactful way to uniform time off across departments. This PTO plan truly has considered all of the different time off schedules and offers the best solution to uniform time off and apply it equally to all departments.

Why not just increase vacation and sick time to become competitive?

While increasing vacation and sick time could be an option to consider, we are missing a few of the large goals we are looking to solve by moving to PTO. If we simply increased the number of vacation and sick days that we offered, we would still have ridged definitions on how this time could be accessed and used, and not creating the flexibility and autonomy that we want to give employees. It would not solve the administrative burden our current paid time off system is causing, and we wouldn't be able to implement any of the cost savings measures that PTO provides. Additionally, this would not help solve the issue of inconsistent time off for employees throughout the county. We would still have differing floating holidays, different regular holidays, and different earning schedules for pre and post 2019 employees. PTO is the only solution to solve all these problems at once.

What are the biggest benefits of switching to PTO?

There are many benefits to transitioning to PTO. The first is that all departments would now be on the same earning schedule, there would no longer be winners or losers regarding time off. Second, this plan would make us competitive with the market, which will help to attract valuable talent, while rewarding our current talent and aiding in retention efforts. Finally, PTO will allow employees to use their time off as they wish, creating greater flexibility and work-life balance. Everyone's situation is different, and they need time away from work for different reasons. This plan allows for the flexibility to structure time off in a way that is most advantageous for every individual's unique situation.

Do all years of service count?

PTO years of service is based on an employee's hire date, regardless of position changes, as long as there were no gaps in service, and as long as they were not a temporary employee at any point in time. If the employee started as a temporary employee, their hire date would be when they started working in a position that offers benefits, whether that be a project position or a regular position. If the employee transferred to a temporary position in the middle of employment, the hire date would be whenever the employee went back to a benefit eligible position.

Project positions are benefit eligible positions, where someone would be offered vacation time, so that counts towards years of service as it relates to PTO.

How does this impact part time employees?

Regular part time employees are currently eligible for time off benefits, and that will not change. The PTO multiplier is the same for all employees regardless of what their status is because the multiplier is based on hours worked. Therefore, someone who works 50%, will only work half of the hours of a full-time employee, therefore only earning half of the PTO. However, if a part time employee works more than their assigned status, they will receive PTO for additional hours worked until full time status has been reached. No employee will receive PTO for overtime hours (more than 75 or 80 hours per pay period).

How will supervisors staff with this generous PTO plan?

Expectations for how employees take time off do not change as a result of this transition to PTO. If an employee is sick, they must follow their department rules for calling in sick and may have to

provide a doctor's note upon request. An employee requesting time off for a planned absence must follow their departments rules for requesting time off. Supervisors hold the right to deny time off requests if they are not able to grant the time being requested for any reason. It is also important to remember that PTO has to be accrued, so employees are not receiving 25+ days of time off up front all at once. They will need to work throughout the year or be in a paid status in order to earn all of their PTO time for the year.

What are the downsides of transitioning to PTO?

Employees will be responsible for their time and will need to keep enough PTO time available for unexpected absences that may occur throughout employment. While this is a good thing, and provides flexibility, it will require employees to plan and monitor their time off benefits on their own.

PTO will operate under a earn as you go model rather than advancing all time up front. This is advantageous as an employer so that we do not lose money but could be seen as a negative for new hires in their first few months, as they will have little time to use until it is earned. However, we have come up with a plan that allows employees to earn a generous amount of PTO every pay period, so it will not take long for a new hire to build a suitable PTO bank. This is also why we have created transition year rules, to lessen the hardship that could occur due to changing between systems.

With all things, change can be hard. Our long-term employees have never experienced a PTO plan before, while some of our newer employees may have had experience with PTO in the past with different employers. PTO is different from our current system and is a big change. While we expect some hesitancy with the transition, we are confident that once everyone becomes familiar with PTO, it will be seen as an asset.

What is the new bereavement policy and how can I access the time that I need?

Our current system of funeral leave narrowly defines immediate and extended family members, and employees could receive 1-3 days off for those losses. We know that families look different in all situations and want to recognize that reality. Because of that, we are looking to moving to a bereavement model, in which an employee would utilize 2 days of PTO. If more time is needed, and the employee has an ELB balance, they could access up to 5 days of ELB after the 2 days of PTO for a total of 7 days. If more time is needed, employees would work with their supervisor to accommodate this time and pull from their PTO bank again. Bereavement leave is accounted for in the number of PTO days that we are offering employees. In order to be more expansive in the definition, we are allowing bereavement leave for the death of a human loved one.

Why not keep funeral a separate benefit for employees aside from PTO?

Funeral leave is not a benefit that every employee takes on an annual basis. In addition, as stated above, our current definitions of family are very narrowly defined and do not include a large portion of loved ones. We wanted to include bereavement in the PTO time that we are giving employees so that employees could plan for what is important to them and save time for their unique situations.

If we kept funeral leave as a separate benefit, we would reduce the number of PTO days across the board for all years of service. We thought it would be best to give employees greater flexibility with their earned time and prioritize it in the manner that best suits them. We also would not solve the issues that occur with the limited definitions under funeral leave.

What about the loss of a pet?

While we acknowledge that pets and animals can play a significant role in our personal lives, the definition had to be capped somewhere. We encourage employees to take PTO time for the passing of a loved pet or animal.

How did you incorporate employee feedback?

Each presentation included time for questions and feedback. In addition, all employees were encouraged to email questions, comments, and concerns to Human Resources. All points were considered and there were several changes made to the plan based on employee feedback.

The first was regarding employees who have pre-planned FMLA leaves scheduled at the end of this year, into the beginning of 2024. These employees were concerned that they were not going to receive the amount of time that they had planned for on the first of the year in vacation, sick, and floating holiday which would result in a loss of pay while they are out on FMLA. Based on this feedback, we are going to advance these employees up to the amount of time that they would have received under the current system. For example, if someone planned on receiving 21 days of benefit time on 1/1/2024, they would receive 21 days of PTO advanced to them on the first of the year to account for this situation. By the end of 2024, those employees will have earned back the time advanced to them plus any additional PTO based on years of service.

Second, employees were concerned that they would have no time to rollover into PTO, giving them a balance of 0 at the start of the year. In addition to advancing employees up to 10 days of PTO (allowing a negative balance), they will also be able to roll any remaining vacation and floating holiday time from 2023 into their 2024 PTO bank. However, this is strictly unused benefit time that was earned in 2023, no more.

Third, some employees negotiated additional vacation time upon hire than what is normally offered. These employees were concerned that they would be losing time by moving to the PTO model where vacation is no longer available, and years of service is the indicator of the number of PTO days received. To account for this, we will consider how many total days these employees have currently and move them up the accrual schedule to the nearest point to which they would not be losing any time. They will remain at that earning rate until they have caught up to the years of service portion and continue to advance on the model. We are also allowing for the flexibility to offer lateral transfers for experienced external employees looking to come to Winnebago County in the future.

Was there any employee feedback you were not able to address?

We were not able to cover all employees' areas of concerns based on different reasons. However, we believe that this plan provides the biggest impact for greatest number of people. There were some common themes that came up.

The first concern that there will no longer be a difference in benefit time for supervisors and employees. There is no policy in our current handbook that supervisory positions earn more vacation than non-supervisory positions. Based on market conditions, it has been a common practice over the past several years to offer additional vacation the first several years for supervisory positions. Those differences are eliminated by the 5th year when all employees earn 3-weeks of vacation in the current system. One of the goals of PTO is to unify all processes, including this difference. However, Human Resources will still have the ability to take into consideration market forces when extending job offers to both supervisory and non-supervisory positions.

Second, employees would like to see a higher PTO payout and payout of the ELB. While that would be a great benefit to offer, we did investigate paying out the entire PTO bank of 60 days, and that was simply not fiscally possible. The cost associated with that level of payout is far too high at this point. Again, we are looking to set up a framework that allows for some of these improvements to potentially be made in the future depending on market.

Third, there was a concern that the PTO accrual starts at 0 and that employees must earn time before they use it. PTO is a common practice for most private sector organizations, and new hires coming here from private sector will be used to this way of accruing time off benefits. Our time off plan is robust enough that even new hires will be able to save up reasonable amounts of time within their first few months of employment. We do not want to continue this practice as it loses too much money and it is not consistent with how pre 2019 employees earn time off. However, this plan does allow us flexibility to potentially advance a new hire some time in the offer negotiation phase if we find that advantageous.

We heard some feedback from some long-term employees that they would like to be provided a richer benefit above 19 years of service. Under the current system, an employee reaches the top of the vacation schedule at year 20. We could have suggested a system that would have increased the number of years between accruing additional PTO days (taking longer to reach the maximum) and making it appear that longer years of service would earn additional PTO. However, for recruitment purposes, shorter earnings intervals are advantageous; and for retention purposes, reaching the maximum more quickly provides a greater benefit the longer an employee stays with the County.