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By Andrew M. Seaman

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Finalists' ideas tackled how to save time, money

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USA TODAY

The Obama administration received more than 38,000 ideas from federal workers across the USA on how their agencies can save money and perform better, and today it announces the four finalists for the Securing Americans Value and Efficiency (SAVE) Award.

The winner, who will be selected by the public in online balloting, will meet with President Obama, says Kenneth Baer, associate director for communications and strategic planning at the Office of Management and Budget.

The finalists:

► Christie Dickson, 25, of the Social Security Administration in Birmingham, Ala., proposed allowing claimants to schedule or reschedule appointments online. “We set up appointments about two-thirds of the time on the phone. By having access to a schedule online that would allow us time to assist more people,” she said.

► Nancy Fichtner, 55, from the Grand Junction Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Colorado wants to allow patients to take their unused medications home instead of throwing them away. “Currently the inpatient medications such as ointments, inhalers, eye drops, and other bulk items are being disposed of upon patient discharge,” she said.

► Julie Fosbender, 48, a recreation manager for the Forest Service at the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia, hopes to change how visitor fees and other funds are deposited. Fosbender said the current process involves several unnecessary steps, ending with sending a package by certified mail to a bank in San Francisco. “Why can’t we just deposit our collection into a local bank?” she asked.

► Huston Prescott, 42, of Housing and Urban Development in Anchorage, proposed an end to redundant inspections on subsidized housing. Prescott said that each funding source requires its own physical inspection. He said that time can be spent in better ways.

In a video that will be posted to the White House’s website today, the president asks people to vote there for the best idea.

Baer said the next step is to find out how to implement the idea.

“Like any business or organization, before you actually implement an idea, you need to start by asking how to do it, what is the best way to do it, what are the ramifications of doing this,” he said.

Baer said many proposals are under consideration to be added to the fiscal year 2011 budget, which begins Oct. 1, 2010.