

Building Pipelines and Career Paths

Proactive hiring approaches to protect
your organization's future

The strength of organizations like yours—those dedicated to making a positive impact on our communities—lies in the people that bring your mission to life every day: your employees.

It all starts with people. It always will.

But more and more we see organizations struggle to recruit and retain staff, especially among the younger talent pools that make up much of the community organization workforce.

Many organizations like yours are adopting new strategies to ensure they have a caring and capable team to serve members today, while at the same time preparing the organization for whatever staffing challenges may come tomorrow.



Talent Strategies for Mission-Driven Organizations

A recent Deloitte study showed 64% of millennials in the United States plan to leave their current company by the year 2020. That level of turnover is not only an inconvenience for you, the employer, but also puts your members at greater risk. As more experienced staff are replaced with newcomers, safety standards and procedures can fall by the wayside.

Two essential strategies can help ensure your most valuable resource remains engaged, empowered and inspired to stay with your organization—and keep delivering on your mission.

The first involves building a robust and diversified **talent pipeline** within your organization. The second, strategy involves developing a **career-pathing** program to structure how you put your pipeline into practice.





Understanding Your Talent Pipeline

When asked to identify the top staffing challenges faced by nonprofits, two clear themes emerged from the 443 respondents of the 2016 Nonprofit Employment Practices Survey:

1. Hiring qualified staff within limited budget constraints.
2. Finding qualified staff with limited time to recruit/interview in conjunction with other duties.

Creating and nurturing a robust and diversified talent pipeline is essential to overcoming these challenges and preparing your mission-driven organization for the future.

The phrase “talent pipeline” refers to a pool of qualified staff ready to assume future openings. As its name suggests, think of it as a direct source of staff within your organization who are prepared and available to take on more senior roles. Promoting existing staff from within is among the best ways you can ensure continuity within your organization. To keep operating safely. To continue serving communities. To make progress toward the future you want to create.

Talent—both current *and* future—look at employers the same way they look at products and companies: What’s the story you’re telling? What value do you provide that other employers don’t? What’s your reputation as an employer?

Understanding the “career product” your organization is selling will help you determine strategies that will help you resonate with more of the mission-aligned employees you want to bring onto your team—and how to keep them there.

Start your self-reflection by answering the following questions:

- Do you expect talent to come to your organization and stay for their entire career?
- Do employees stay in the same role for a long time, or is progression expected?
- Do people come to your organization for a couple of years and then move on to other opportunities?
- How does your organization contribute to employees’ broader career journeys (a journey in which you hope to be a meaningful stop)?

Knowing how current *and* future employees see you as *an employer* will better position you to develop talent strategies geared around building careers—not just hiring staff.



Developing a Career-Pathing Program

To build a strong talent pipeline strategy, it is valuable to have a strong career-pathing program within your organization.

As you plan for your organization's growth, don't forget to do the same for your team. Just as your organization aspires to bigger and better things, so do your employees. They want a clear path forward, to better understand their future within your broader purpose.

Look *downstream* in your pipeline to identify sources of talent ready to move up, but also *upstream* to identify the next landing spots for talent currently occupying other positions within your organization.

For example, in past decades college students provided valuable part-time staff for childcare organizations. Today's college students, however, are opting into the workforce at much lower levels. Many communities have found that this once dependable pipeline for staff has dried up. In this situation, new strategies and partnerships are needed.

Case in point: let's say there's a big pool of potential talent that isn't *currently* considered qualified to join your organization. Could you collaborate with your local community college to define an Associates Degree or Certificate program with intention to hire a number of their students each year? Or commit to providing internship hours necessary for students to achieve local licensing requirements?

Outside-the-box thinking is necessary for those facing talent shortages and retention challenges. Developing your career-pathing strategy will help reduce turnover, support skill development, develop internal employees for future growth and acquire higher-quality external applicants.

Here's a few tips to help you get started:

- **Define your development culture**
Does your organization hire externally or promote from within? Is advancement something every employee should expect at some point?
- **Assess your readiness**
Review job families and roles regularly and integrate them with a job competency model. Outline responsibilities clearly and help employees understand where skills could be developed.
- **Build a path: Lattice vs. ladder**
Advancement isn't just the next leadership position for today's generation of talent. They see value in new experiences that offer new skill sets and favor organizations with more flexible advancement opportunities over the traditional fixed, only-way-is-up ladder approach.
- **Set guidelines. Share them widely.**
Implement policies to ensure your career-pathing procedures are being followed by leadership and executed fairly. Publicize the program across your organization. Successful career pathing is visible and communicated to all.