Retention Toolkit
Resources for Nebraska’s Behavioral Health Workforce
2017
Nebraska Workforce Landscape

In Nebraska, there is a critical shortage of behavioral health professionals. The Nebraska Behavioral Health Workforce Dashboard illustrates that 88 of the 93 counties in Nebraska are designated behavioral health professional shortage areas by the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). To fill these gaps, we must recruit more professionals while retaining the ones we have. As we work to alleviate this shortage, we believe it is critical to understand factors that influence employee retention and job satisfaction.

At BHECN, our mission is to build a behavioral health workforce that meets the needs of Nebraska’s residents. To accomplish this goal, we understand every stage of the employment process—recruitment, training, continuing education, and retention—is critical to growing the workforce. Since BHECN’s creation in 2009, we have expanded the training pipeline of students to include a variety of disciplines, built continuing education opportunities, and helped to identify and mitigate barriers to recruitment. In this toolkit, we turn our attention to retention.

Recruitment, Retention, Competency

Recruitment, retention and competency are among leading predictors of workforce success, and many hiring managers consider them a top priority. Each organization faces complex factors within its workforce to meet the challenges of hiring and retaining talent.

The Retention Toolkit is a starting place for employers looking for help retaining employees. Use this guide to tailor a retention plan to fit the needs of your own organization.

After reviewing widely recognized best practices for employee retention, we came to the realization that, while there is an abundance of retention resources available online, the vast majority of these resources are not evidence based.

We have contacted organizations in Nebraska and across the nation that specialize in health professions, rural healthcare, and workforce recruitment. All of these organizations struggle to answer the questions: “What are effective retention practices for behavioral health professionals? Do effective practices differ between urban, rural and frontier areas?”

Without finding a definitive answer about effective practice in the national literature, we turned our attention closer to home. BHECN interviewed behavioral health employers and employees across Nebraska, inquiring about which strategies and practices have been effective in retaining them in their current roles. Their video responses are available on BHECN’s website at: https://unmc.edu/bhecn/workforce/retention.html

A list of additional resources is also available at the end of this toolkit. If you have comments or contributions that may be helpful, we’d like to hear from you at bhecn@unmc.edu.
Common Factors

Common factors that influence employee retention and job satisfaction in behavioral health include:

**Support**

- Close ties and open communication with superiors, co-workers and mentors while connecting with the community

**Involvement**

- A feeling of substantial investment in the organization and community

**Innovation**

- Enough flexibility to provide and improve the quality of care, such as the use of telehealth

Support, involvement and innovation help shield professionals from the everyday pressures of work, such as high caseloads and severity of patient problems.

Other important factors include:

- Availability of relief coverage
- Availability of quality housing
- Quality of public schools
- Availability of practice partners
- Employment opportunities for spouse or partner
- Student loan payback
- The opportunity to be a preceptor

While competitive compensation and benefits must be in place in order to build and maintain a quality workforce, compensation is not a main cause of turnover, retention, or job satisfaction.
A Leading Resource

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration) has developed a tool to assist in the building of a recruitment and retention plan. This tool takes employers through all the steps to establish a strategic plan to assist their organization with the challenges of recruitment and retention in the behavioral health professions.

The following information has been adapted from the SAMHSA website:

Building a Recruitment and Retention Plan

Self-evaluate
Employers with low rates of turnover have one thing in common—they are willing to critically, honestly, and consistently evaluate their own performance and make improvements and changes. According the SAMHSA Retention Toolkit, a good workplace assessment is important for several reasons:

- To identify the precise nature of staffing problems in various sectors of the organization
- To select strategies and interventions to address challenges
- To provide a baseline or point of comparison against which the results of an intervention can be compared
- To help identify what is and is not working

Collect Data
SAMHSA recommends organizations have an effective assessment of workplace recruitment and retention practices based on facts evidenced by data and information, which is not a guess or perception. The first step in building a recruitment and retention plan is to gather baseline information.

Several tools to collect this data are available through SAMHSA. By gathering this baseline information, you will be able to identify retention, turnover and vacancy rates along with effective and ineffective recruitment and retention practices.

Define the Problem or Challenge
Once the baseline data is collected and reviewed, problem areas or areas of focus should emerge allowing for the identification of the most critical position within the organization. Pulling in key stakeholders will be essential in developing and implementing a plan to address areas of concern, while promoting participation in the decision process and commitment to the solutions. SAMHSA has detailed instructions to assist in this process.

Employees who are "engaged and thriving" are 59% less likely to look for a job with a different organization in the next 12 months.

Analyze
Once identification of critical position(s) and key stakeholders takes place, clarification concerning the type of individual for the role is the next step.

This process will include identifying what knowledge, skills and abilities are best suited for the position while also reviewing what they will need to be successful. By working through this process, identifying qualified candidates and required support becomes a simpler task. Detailed methods to conduct the job analysis are available through the SAMHSA site.

Accurate Job Description
According to Susan M. Heathfield on About.com an accurate job description assists in successful recruitment in several ways:

- It encourages the supervisor and any other employees already performing the job to agree on the responsibilities and scope of the position.
- It informs human resources about the knowledge, skills, education, experience, and capabilities sought in the new employee so an effective recruiting plan can be formulated.
- It informs candidates about the duties and responsibilities of the position for which they are applying.
- It helps employees who are participating in the interview process understand what is required of the new employee and suggests questions to ask candidates.
- It can protect the organization legally because it demonstrates why the candidate selected for a position was the most qualified and best suited.

If you would like to follow the step-by-step instructional process, go to Write an Accurate Job Description Quick Tool.
**Identify the Strategy**

Start planning to meet the needs of the organization based on the data collected and choices made while identifying interventions within the selected strategy.

Re-sort the baseline data, review it from a perspective influenced by the knowledge gained through defining the problem, identifying the needs, resources and constraints, developing objectives and alternatives, and selecting the priority.

Some questions to consider when deciding which intervention to use:

- How big is your problem?
- Is it a problem of the whole organization, of a certain site or division, of one shift or all shifts?
- Do you need an immediate fix, or can you plan a longer intervention for a greater future outcome?
- Do you have to be concerned with running out of resources for long-term interventions? Can you complete the intervention in stages?
- Do you need to start with short-term objectives to show results and provide quick relief?
- What intervention could produce the biggest impact for your problem?
- What intervention would be the most realistic in terms of resources and successful task completion?
- Do you have key staff, contractors, or volunteers available to complete the necessary steps in the intervention, such as those who will be involved in developing, implementing, and evaluating the intervention?

**Develop the Action Plan**

SAMHSA describes an action plan as a documented strategy for solving a problem. They have developed detailed steps to assist in the development of a recruitment and retention plan covering everything from selecting a responsible implementer to communicating the outcomes.

More than one-quarter of employees are in a high-retention-risk category.

Additional Resources

Looking for more information and best practices on retention? Here are a few resources to get you started:

**Building a Recruitment and Retention Plan**  
SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration)  

**Retention Toolkit: Resources for Retaining Valued Staff**  
University of Michigan  
https://hr.umich.edu/working-u-m/management-administration/additional-resources-supervisors-managers/retention-toolkit-resources-retaining-valued-staff

**Midwest Retention Toolkit**  
3RNet  
https://www.3rnet.org/Portals/0/About/PDFs/MidwestRetentionToolkitFinal.pdf

**Enhancing the Peer Provider Workforce: Recruitment, Supervision and Retention**  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  

**Recruitment, Onboarding, & Retention: A Toolkit for Health Centers**  
National Association of Community Health Centers  
Retention Toolkit
https://unmc.edu/bhecn/workforce/retention.html