Best Nonprofit Winners Found A Way To Connect

continued from page 1 tools to support their success," according to Mary Gridley, vice president of human resources. "New employees are encouraged to keep in touch with their new hire cohort as they navigate their first weeks as a member of our team."

The category Training, Development and Resources was tied with Corporate Culture and Communications for the least number of positive reactions within the seven major areas examined for the 2023 NPT’s Best Nonprofits To Work For. The category Training, Development and Resources section received an overall approval rate of 86% at the organizations honored this year as the best. Small organizations were elite at a 95% approval rating and large organizations finished last with an 89% approval rating.

Participants were asked to react to five statements in the leadership category and positive responses were registered 92% of the time for nonprofits on the list and 38% for those not among the Top 50. Small organizations on the list came in at 96% positive responses.

Corporate Culture and Communications had 17 statements, with 90% of responses being positive from those on the list and just 81% of those not among the Top 50. Winning small organizations were four points above average at 98%. Among the areas that weighed on the positive perceptions were the reactions to the statement: "I feel I can express my honest opinions without fear of negative consequences." Just 85% of the responses were positive from organizations that made the list and 76% at organizations that did not.

The Alzheimer’s Association is taking on the task of taking the show on the road to underscore culture. "While the majority of our staff are not actively meeting constituents and partners in the community, we are regularly bringing staff together through team meetings and town halls," said Joanne Pike, president and CEO. "Two-way dialogue is an important part of those and other meetings. Next month we’re starting a series of regional meetings to visit staff and volunteers across the nation. Most of the organizations on the list survey staff at least annually to keep communication lines open." The Alzheimer’s Association launched an "inclusivity agreement to help determine how inclusive the organization is as a whole." This assessment also included individuals and opportunities to see if organizational members work to make these efforts. Pike added.

The Alzheimer’s Association had the most reactive statements, with winners receiving 92% positive responses versus 86% of those not on the list. The average was 97% at small nonprofits on the list. When it came to Work Environment, there were four reactive statements with positive answers from 94% of those on the list and 88% of those not on it. The most positive responses came in the small category with a near unanimous level of 99%.

Staff seem to get along with their superiors and within the nine related statements there was a positive response from 94% of those on the list and 98% of those not on it. Small organizations came in at 97%.

Large organizations got the most affirmative results in the Pay and Benefits category with 96% positive responses from those on the list and 82% for those not on it. But it lost all that great when employees responded to "My pay is fair for the work I perform" at just 82% of those on the list. Some perks are coming back. "We used to distribute gift cards for movie tickets to employees on their work anniversary, but discontinued that during COVID for obvious reasons," said Dill of the American Arbitration Association. "We are planning to start that practice back up later this year as COVID concerns subside." While few employers get a 100% rating when it comes to pay and benefits, nonprofit staffers are also feeling the productivity pinch from work piling up. When asked if staffing levels were adequate to provide quality products/services, just 77% of employees at nonprofits on the list and 62% of those that didn’t make the list gave a positive response. It was particularly hard at large organizations where the positive responses were just 74%.

Some of this also has to do with organizational culture, where newer employees haven’t had a chance to absorb the organizational Kool-Aid. Turnover averaged 16.2% but remove the three organizations reporting zero turnover and the number shoots higher to 17.3%. Reacting to the statement "I plan to continue my career with this organization for at least two more years," the average was 90% positive responses with medium-sized organizations dipping down to 89%.

"We saw a slight increase in 2021 (13.3%) but had our lowest rate of turnover in 2020 (9%) and saw turnover trending lower in 2022 (12.5%)," said Dill. "In terms of patterns, almost 85% of our turnover came from employees with three years or less of service, staff who joined just before or during the pandemic. There were various reasons folks left, like perceived better opportunity, relocation, pay, fully remote, etc. For comparison’s sake, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics on turnover at professional services companies in 2021 was 64%," he explained.

The turnover rate declined 4% year over year at the Alzheimer’s Association. "We have focused on expanding our efforts to attract and retain a diverse workforce. Staff retention is a priority, continued on page 6.
Remote Work Remains In Vogue

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A round robin where everyone shares one word that comes to mind when they think of that person. It’s really short and sweet, but pretty powerful.”

USTA-MAH has a culture committee which hosts quarterly in-person coffee chats where “anyone who wants to can show up and talk about whatever,” said Fitzpatrick-Navarro. “We also do three in-person retreats each year, where we pay for everyone’s travel and offer food, and also carve out time so people aren’t only focused on work but can also focus on playing and getting to know one another.” Recent retreats have included a painting party as well as a “speed social” where they took turns speaking to one another in two-minute bursts.

Community service can also play a role in fostering esprit de corps and job satisfaction at mission-focused nonprofits. Each USTA-MAH employee can work two paid days of community service each year in addition to quarterly group projects they all participate in collectively, such as a recent food drive they conducted for a local food bank.

BBBS of the Midlands employees also take part in recurring community service projects. Prior to the pandemic, the organization “adopted” a city park where employees conducted monthly cleanups. “We also did another park cleanup together as a team on Earth Day last year and helped local food banks and schools with food distribution during the pandemic. And employees who volunteer in our mentoring programs can receive a bit of paid time for that, which they supplement with their own time,” Targone said.

“Remote work has been a major concern for many organizations, and it’s likely here to stay. Although it offers flexibility and can improve work-life balance, it can also lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection. Communication is key in keeping remote teams engaged and connected,” Targone concluded.
We seek the highest quality candidate and let the chips fall where they may," said Pittman of PHH’s role to female differential. "Public health is a more female-dominated profession, and the staff is reflective of the overall field.

The COVID-19 pandemic left its mark on the large nonprofits. It changed work patterns, scheduling how to work with clients and how staff dealt with the stress.

"Post-COVID, we now have more virtual offerings and are more comfortable face-to-face," said Michael Linnington, CEO at Wounded Warrior Project (WWP), headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. "We had a year plus of fully remote team members using the messaging platform Slack not just for work issues but also for affinity. Valerie McGann Woodson, senior vice president of human resources at PHH, participates in active Slack groups. "It is an open environment. Anyone can create a Slack group," she said.

Some groups are started by headquarters, but many others are launched by staff and do not have to be related to work. Some of the groups build off the organization’s D&I initiatives. "Conversations have evolved into a Slack channel," said Pittman.

PHH has a Racial Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and program, and as a federal contractor is compliant with 703 employees prior to COVID, expanded to 1,200 and thinned back down to 602. There is staff in six states and 20 locations in Florida.

While nonprofits strive to find a diversity in staff and that’s not just race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Life experience is also valued so applicants of a certain ripple can actually get hired.

"One of the fun things I love about my job, putting out job listings and on various channels— all age groups and demographics. We make sure we advertise everywhere so a potential staff member is able to find us," said Capote. There are no screens on a resume submission getting to the examination phase at PHH, said Capote, so it’s not what we do. We are in healthcare and value the experiences for those not from healthcare," he said.

"Over 15% of our staff are Baby Boomers. We include all ages in our D&I strategy. We have hybrid schedules and offer to reduce their hours to part-time rather than outright retirement," he said.

The design is for organizational diversity, being inclusive and welcoming. "It’s a family at work. They know and love, treating individuals who might not be accepted by societal norms," said Capote.

It’s a similar process at PHH. "We are deliberate seeking employees, multi-cultural, multi-lingual," who don’t necessarily need an academic credential, said Pittman.

Leaders at Wounded Warrior Project also strive for a diverse workforce and brought in outside help to make sure it happens. The organization is working with a vendor that supports recruitment of candidates with varying ethnic and cultural backgrounds. "This is accomplished by ensuring WWP’s open roles are actively fed to marketers across the country through sites that focus on diverse candidate pools (e.g., Veteran, Hispanic, Asian, Black, LGBTQ, Aging, Disabled, etc.)," according to information category offer 401k plans rather than the older 403b plans that are nonprofit specific but carry more restrictions.

Health benefits tend to be better at larger organizations and those this year's NPT's Best Nonprofits To Work For are not exceptions. At Wounded Warrior Project, healthcare benefits are covered 100% for all full-time teammates and their eligible dependents effective on the date of hire.

At PHH, the health benefits start on the first day of the month after hire with the organization paying 100% of the premium. At CAN, it is 60 days after hire. At the Alzheimer’s Association in Chicago, if the person is hired on the first day of the month the coverage is effective immediately. All others are the first day of the next month after hire.

None of the large organization leaders admit to monitoring employees’ social media accounts. Of course, elements of applicants’ profiles might include facts it is not legal to ask about in an interview, such as gender, race, ethnicity, disabilities, sexual orientation, political views, and religion.

Once the team is assembled, there needs to be connectivity and fun. CAN has a concierge service where they coordinate or offer services such as dry cleaning, meal catering, childcare arrangements, or automobile services. Then there are the parties and contests such as Halloween and St. Patrick’s Day dress-ups. They are judged in team and individual categories.

Wounded Warrior Project has a MissionConnect which helps teammates get together. "Bus Tickets" foster teamwork and strengthens the culture by providing staff with an opportunity to thank, recognize, or congratulate each other on a job well done. These can be left on a desk, delivered in person or sent virtually.

Wounded Warrior Project has "break zones" in each location which might include board games, ping pong, puzzles, etc., to encourage teammates to take a break and learn more about each other. PHH has a Connect & Engage newsletter where fun activities are highlighted, including virtual waterfront talks, game nights, and book clubs, among other activities. There is also "Mindful Monday," which gathers staff for meditations. "Wellness Wednesday" features live chair yoga sessions and information on healthy living practices. There is also all day access to the Calm app.

Asked if he had a magic wand that could change something, Linnington said, "an area that has all focused is on new strategic plans, finding warriors we are not yet serving. We’d love to figure out a way to get all of them." NPT