Identify Core Staff Competencies

Before you begin your recruitment process, clearly define desired key competencies through a thorough job analysis. Job analysis (by direct observation, interviews, panels and questionnaires) not only helps you to specify the details of the position to be filled, but also illuminates the personal characteristics necessary to fill the position successfully. Make sure that the key competencies you identify are clearly reflected in the job description. The following competencies have been correlated with staff retention:

- the ability to engage others
- energy and persistence in overcoming obstacles to accomplish goals
- a defined self-care practice
- the ability to make quick and responsible decisions in the field
- empathy and personal responsiveness to the needs of clients
- a strength-based non-judgmental approach
- cultural competence

Develop Recruitment Strategies

Good recruitment strategies are critical in the successful retention of a competent work force. Hiring individuals who are committed and passionate about work in service organizations is vital to positive outcomes for children, families and communities. Below are a few examples of techniques that help recruit the right individuals.

- Regularly update job descriptions to adequately reflect new responsibilities, practices, and personal characteristics needed to do the job.

- Provide existing staff with incentives to recruit new workers likely to support the agency’s mission.
- Offer internships, and hire interns who excel.
- Capitalize on technology, such as web-based job postings.
- Participate in career and graduate school fairs.
- Include current staff in the recruitment interviews, in order to expose prospective employees to the staff culture and expectations. This will also provide management with staff feedback about employee candidates.
- Employ competency-based screening systems that focus on the attitudes, values, traits and motives that people bring to the job.
- Network within the community to recruit staff reflective of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the population you are serving.
- Regularly evaluate and enhance your organization’s recruitment strategies.

Screen and Assess Candidates

Highlight competencies central to the job description by employing valid and practical assessment and screening methods when recruiting staff. Some effective methods include training and experience (T&E) assessments, structured interviews, situational judgement tests, biodata tests, among others. For the best results, consider including a broad range of assessments. See “Staying Power! Selection Toolkit” or “Screening and Selection of Child Welfare Staff” for more information on interviewing and screening techniques.
Build and Strengthen a Positive Work Environment

Staff will be more satisfied, perform better, and remain on the job longer when their personal attributes and the work environment are congruent. The following factors are essential to creating a supportive, flexible and inclusive work environment within a peer support network that promote a sense of connectedness among the staff.

- Foster a climate of collaboration. Engage staff in decision making through staff meetings, case presentations, organization newsletters, staff retreats, discussion groups, and community presentations.
- Develop routines and rituals for welcoming new staff, such as a tour of the office, meet and greet tea, or staff interview in the organization newsletter.
- Establish policies that clearly delineate roles and responsibilities.
- Consistently acknowledge and value staff and the work that they do.
- Accommodate staff members' needs for sufficient preparation, reasonable workloads and flexible hours.
- Prioritize competitive compensation and benefits.
- Value self-care and the balance between work and life responsibilities. For example, provide flexibility so staff may attend their children's school functions or flexible work schedules after the birth of a child or other pressing family circumstances.
- Provide opportunities for networking, promotion, advancement and leadership initiatives.
- Link performance evaluations to critical competencies in a transparent manner.

Commit to Quality Reflective Supervision

AIA projects have found that quality supervision enables staff members to reflect on their work, learn from their experiences, remain faithful to the treatment goals, and find the support they need to sustain a positive regard.

- Provide reflective supervision, a collaborative reflection process that builds on the supervisee's use of her thoughts, feelings, and values. In a parallel process, this type of supervision creates the same safe, nurturing environment that staff provide for their clients when working through difficult issues.
- Plan regularly scheduled, protected time for supervision where the supervisee can set the agenda.
- Provide supervision consistently and on an as-needed basis to staff.
- Provide support for supervisors, such as performance expectations, competency-based development opportunities, supervisor support groups and incentives for attending classes or trainings on supervision.

Provide Ongoing Staff Training

It is important for organizations to budget for professional development opportunities, as staff members are more motivated to seek additional training if they are able to realize some personal benefit from it. Here are a few tips for enhancing training opportunities.

- Require a certain number of hours of training per year, or offer incentives (e.g., a pay rate increase) based upon completion of training or education.
- Create a culture that values professional development and education.
- Consider offering certification opportunities whereby staff have a chance to accumulate credits towards certification for a higher level positions.
- Include systems of support within the organization, such as mentoring and coaching. While coaching and mentoring use the same skills, coaching is short-term and task-based, whereas mentoring is a longer term investment in a person's personal and professional development.
- Offer tuition reimbursement or some type of reward system for degree attainment.
Keep Staff Safe

Safety measures increase a worker’s overall sense of well-being and competence in the field. Consider maximizing safety and minimizing worker’s concerns by employing some of the following safety measures when workers deliver services in clients’ homes or communities.

- Provide cell phones for staff members to use for work-related calls and in the case of emergencies.
- Use weekly calendars and an in/out board so that the supervisors know of each worker’s whereabouts (including day, time, and location of each home visit).
- Have supervisors accompany workers on the first home visit, or attend home visits as teams.
- Conduct visits outside of the home when a worker does not feel safe entering the home.
- Provide safety trainings for all new hires.

Direct practice is rewarding, however it can be emotionally and physically challenging. Support and appreciation, a reasonable workload, as well as access to resources and training are critical for recruiting and retaining a high-quality staff. One of the biggest sources of information on how to improve recruitment and retention is to offer exit interviews with staff who leave the organization. Overall, in order to provide high-quality programming, it is essential to find, develop and retain skilled program staff.

RESOURCES

- The National Collaboration of Youth Capturing Promising Practices in the Recruitment and Retention of Frontline Youth Workers

- National Child Welfare Workforce Institute Resource List

- Freda D. Bernotavicz
  Screening and Selection of Child Welfare Staff
  https://www.childwelfare.gov/management/workforce/recruit_hire/staff_selection.cfm

- Jordan Institute for Families, UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work
  The R&R Project: Child Welfare Staff Recruitment & Retention
  https://www.childwelfare.gov/management/workforce/recruit_hire/staff_selection.cfm