



Training Playbook: Staff Recruitment and Retention

Introduction

Across the country, companies of all kinds are facing staffing shortages. The animal welfare industry is no exception and, historically, has always struggled with employee recruitment and retention. In search of solutions, agencies are taking a hard look at their hiring practices, internal culture and workplace values. Animal welfare organizations must also work to remove roadblocks, attract applicants who will be a good fit for their organization and their mission, and cultivate a workplace where people want to stay.

The topic of employee recruitment and retention may seem complicated, but it's really quite simple. It starts with identifying and cultivating the culture of your organization. In today's marketplace, much of the workforce prioritizes culture and values above all. It is imperative that your organization embodies its proclaimed culture and values in the work that's done each day. Remember, actions speak louder than words. Making culture a priority and ensuring that your values are put into practice will attract the right people to your organization and allow your staff to feel comfortable in and proud of the work that they do.

Recruitment

An integral part of supporting and growing your organization's culture is hiring people who reflect your core values and are invested in your mission. In the past, employers had the upper hand in hiring and didn't need to make their recruitment posts exciting or engaging. In today's marketplace, agencies are beginning to prioritize what type of person will best fill a role and are actively promoting their openings on various platforms.

It is also important for the organization to reflect the community in which it serves and to minimize bias in the hiring process. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) need to be considered in every step of the process, and it is highly recommended that all employees undergo DEI-based training. These actions will begin to establish a culture of acceptance regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual identity, age, and other protected classes — manifesting in more qualified applicants who genuinely care about the community served by the organization.

Job postings and descriptions

Job postings should be seen as advertisements to attract applicants who fit the needs of the vacant role but are also a good fit for your organization. The goal is to attract applicants who not only embrace the culture of your organization, but enrich it by bringing different perspectives and viewpoints to the table. Job postings are also advertising your mission because you want to find employees who will make that mission a reality.

Your job descriptions should include what the responsibilities of the role and what values you want to see reflected by the applicant. Historically, job descriptions have placed a priority on the requirements of a role, listing standards and qualifications. A long list of required skills or experiences inhibits many prospective applicants from submitting an application. Job descriptions should be comprehensive, but as concise as possible.

Consider recalibrating what a “qualified” applicant looks like. While meeting the qualifications of the job posting are important, you are likely to find that qualities such as grit, kindness, a sense of community, problem-solving ability, compassion and resilience are equally important. Because we cannot help animals without helping people, the goal is to find employees who are not only compassionate toward animals, but also toward other people.

Your job postings should grab readers’ attention and encourage a wider audience to submit applications. Try to make your job postings fun and engaging, so people want to work for your organization.

Job posting placement

There are two main types of recruitment: active and passive. Passive recruitment typically involves posting job openings on social media channels or other forums. Active recruitment involves exploring new and different spaces and communities to reach people who aren’t the typical audience. To engage in active recruitment, think beyond the usual job posting forums. Post in diverse spaces, as well as locally, to ensure that you are casting a wide and inclusive net. Plan to have the job posting up for one to two weeks to give more people an opportunity to apply.

Consider the following ways of advertising your open positions:

- Facebook groups
- Professional organizations (e.g., [Public Relations Society of America](#), [Association of Fundraising Professionals](#), the [HumanePro website](#))
- Nextdoor app
- Craigslist
- Newspapers, local mailings
- [LinkedIn](#) or [The Muse](#)
- Colleges
- Job fairs
- Community events, community centers
- Posting flyers in your local community (e.g., bus stops, local businesses, churches)

Professional networking

Hiring for some positions (often leadership level) may call for more focused recruitment strategies. Contacting those in your professional network can be immensely helpful in finding established professionals, with built-in references. Consider reaching out to people you have met at work-related events or conferences. It is important to make the distinction between your personal network and your professional network. While you may discover a good candidate from within your personal network, this is a common way that organizations neglect to hire staff who fully reflect the communities they serve.

Places you may find potential candidates for recruitment:

- NACA or other professional animal welfare organizations
- Nonprofit board members
- LinkedIn
- Facebook groups
- Conferences
- Former mentors
- Volunteer pool

The challenge with recruitment is persistence. Stay consistent, keep promoting, and know that with foundational cultural changes within your agency, you will begin to see a wider range of applicants so you can find the right fit.

Retention

You may have heard people say, “Employees don’t quit a job, they quit a manager.” While this may be true in some cases, there are actually many factors that play into someone’s decision to leave an organization.

Staff retention starts right at the beginning, during the onboarding process. This is when staff first experience the organization’s culture, and it is important to make sure they have a positive experience. For more information on the onboarding process, see our [playbook on staff development and training](#).

Knowing what drives a person (e.g., money, schedule flexibility, impact, opportunity for growth) will often allow you to be proactive in the retention process. However,, it is inevitable that some staff will leave, so you should consider holding exit interviews. Exit interviews can provide valuable insight into why people leave and can help pinpoint specific issues, which can then be addressed.

Below are some common reasons that employees leave their jobs:

Inadequate salary and benefits

You may be thinking: “But we can’t afford to pay more.” Imagine, however, the all-encompassing benefits of a consistent and well-trained staff, with managers who have time to focus on their employees. Consider the amount of time and resources lost to the constant hiring and training of new staff members. Examine your budget, work with local leadership and your fundraising team, and prioritize compensation as a means to increase retention.

In addition, keep in mind that compensation is more than just pay, so supplement with benefits whenever possible. There is also the reward of working toward a cause alongside like-minded team members.

Feeling overworked and inadequate work-life balance

It is important to provide some flexibility in your staff’s schedules, including remote or work-from-home opportunities, and to ensure that staff have adequate paid time off. Working in animal welfare can be tough on our mental health, so consider providing your staff with access to mental health professionals through your benefits program. A robust volunteer program will also help to support your staff.

Feeling unsupported and unrecognized

Consider hosting staff appreciation days or off-site gatherings, but there is room for staff appreciation every day. Make sure you thank your staff for their hard work and acknowledge their successes.

Limited opportunities for growth

Provide opportunities for growth by having tiered positions (e.g., animal care tech I, II, III). It is also important to provide regular training (including cross-training between departments) to encourage professional growth and development and a higher rate of job satisfaction.

Dissatisfaction with leadership or supervisors

All staff in leadership-level positions should go through management training regularly. Managers should be accessible and available to hear staff’s concerns, but it is also important to ensure that staff know how to contact human resources and feel comfortable doing so.

Concerns about the organization's direction, culture or finances

Prioritizing transparency is an effective way to allow staff to feel like they can be part of the solution. Discuss budgets, shelter data and organizational direction honestly and openly with all staff (and volunteers). If staff members have any issues with your organization’s culture, give them a safe space to voice their concerns and be proactive

in addressing the problem. In addition, conduct regular performance reviews and provide support to give staff avenues for feedback and ideas.

If you have questions regarding the topics of recruitment and retention, please reach out to your [regional strategist](#), [regional director](#), or the Best Friends national shelter support team at team2025@bestfriends.org.

Resources

- [Why Employees Quit: 11 Evidence-Based Reasons](#)
- [How to Hire Employees for a Cultural Fit](#)
- Culture Initiatives [Operational Playbook](#)
- Staff Development and Training [Operational Playbook](#)
- [Shelter Leadership Culture & Community Engagement](#) webinar
- [Municipal Shelter Leadership Culture & Community Engagement](#) webinar
- [Workable](#) recruiting software
- Society for Human Resource Management [toolkits](#)
- Best Friends blog post "[It's time we have a conversation about pay](#)"

[CARE](#) (Companions and Animals for Reform and Equity) is an excellent source for DEI training. CARE's Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Certification provides coursework that helps students look critically at our current and historical failures as it pertains to race equity. CARE seeks to put committed organizations and individuals on a path to greater truth and understanding, and eventually to action. For more information on this training, click this [link](#).