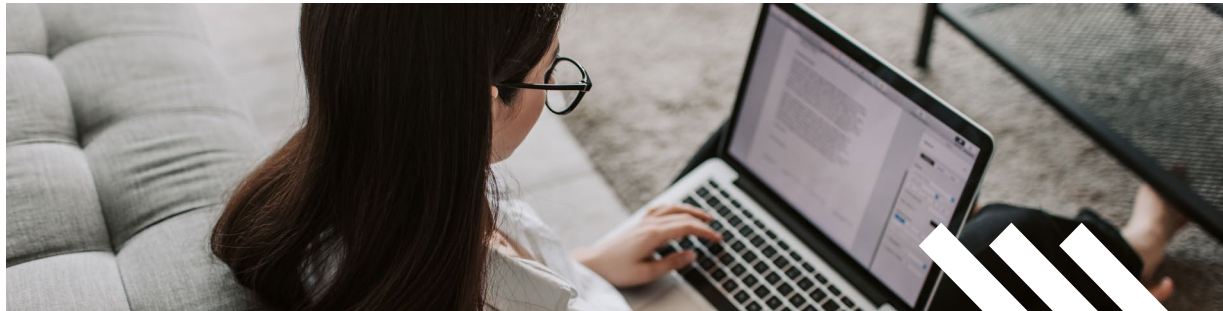


Vault



Managing HR for Nonprofits with a Hybrid Work Environment

*Crafting a More Intentional Leadership Approach to
Recruitment & Employee Engagement*

Managing HR for Nonprofits with a Hybrid Work Environment: Crafting a More Intentional Leadership Approach to Recruitment & Employee Engagement

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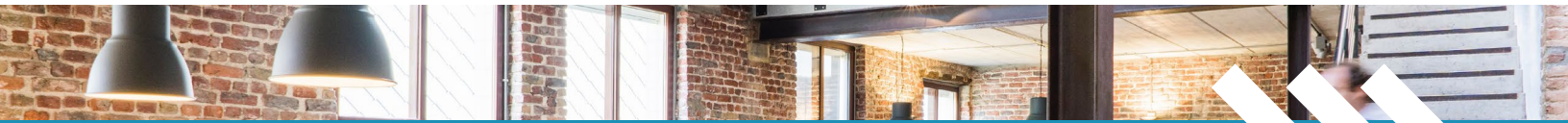


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Introduction

Organizations of all sizes are facing hiring challenges in today's tight labor market. A limited pool of qualified candidates, increased competition from other businesses, and demands for higher salaries and benefits are all pushing organizations to adapt how they recruit and retain star performers.

On top of these challenges, employers are being pushed to adapt to a new work environment. More workers are demanding some level of remote work, even as data is emerging that remote work can lead to a decrease in productivity. Further muddying the water is the fact that Gen Z workers – known for vastly different work styles and expectations – now make up a quarter of the world's workforce.

The good news for small and midsize nonprofits is that many of these challenges give them a unique edge in attracting talent. With the right leadership approach and powerful new tools at their disposal, nonprofits can effectively position themselves to succeed.

In this guide, we explain:

- » How nonprofits' mission focus can help them better attract applicants across the broader pool of remote workers ([Chapter 1](#)).
- » How becoming more intentional in managing employee expectations can help nonprofits engage their employees ([Chapter 2](#)).

- » How updating your professional development approach to support the modern workplace can better engage and retain employees ([Chapter 3](#)).
- » How to train managers to support employees and set the tone for organizational culture in this hybrid work environment ([Chapter 4](#)).
- » How to use advanced AI tools to ease the burden of routine HR tasks in order to focus on improving recruitment strategy ([Chapter 5](#)).

Chapter 1



Attract More Applicants with a Strong Connection Between Mission and Work

Compensation may still be the number one thing people are looking for in their work, but wages alone won't be enough to keep them there. It's essential to build employee engagement, which begins when employees find meaning in the work they do for an organization.

This desire for meaning was demonstrated in force as the COVID-19 pandemic pushed people to reevaluate their values. What was deemed the Great Resignation began as employees left their jobs en masse in search of better work that aligned with their values. Today, there's ample evidence that young people in particular prioritize meaningful work. The [LinkedIn Workforce Confidence Index](#)¹ found that 80% of job seekers within Gen Z (born 1995-2012) reported looking for roles that aligned with both their interests and values. This figure drops to 59% for Millennials (born 1980-1994), 49% for Gen X (born 1965-1979), and 47% for Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), according to the Index.

For nearly half of the job searchers within Gen X and Baby Boomers in search of greater purpose from their work, the nonprofit sector provides an excellent opportunity. Baby Boomers and Gen X may be seeking more meaningful work as they near retirement. The [American Working Conditions Survey](#)² conducted by Rand Corp. found that many older workers push back retirement in order to continue doing work they feel gives back to their communities. The nonprofit sector is one that people may want to come back to as a place for meaningful work that uses their wealth of talent.

1. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/gen-z-boldest-generation-its-job-hunt-priorities-off-charts-anders>

2. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9973-1.html

As a nonprofit organization, your mission is already your most powerful tool for giving employees the meaning that they crave. This alone is not enough to recruit talent that aligns with your mission. By connecting your job descriptions and daily operations to the mission, you infuse every role with purpose – attracting more candidates and building stronger engagement.

How to Engage Employees with Your Mission

To ensure that your employees feel the purpose expressed in your mission, it's essential that the mission is tied back to every aspect of your organization. There are a few key areas where clear messaging can strengthen engagement.

»» 1. YOUR BRAND:

For example, the mission should be communicated through the organizational brand. Millennials and members of Gen Z in particular have grown up with social media influencers who have cemented their understanding of the value behind a personal brand. This has driven them to search for work that fits their “personal brand.” Nonprofits should ensure their mission is clearly communicated in their brand, but this must be done authentically. Organizations should share stories that reflect the impact that they are making today and how they are positioned to do good in the future. This messaging can help future recruits see the impact they can make as part of your organization.

»» 2. JOB DESCRIPTIONS:

Job descriptions present another opportunity. The language here should connect your mission to the tasks that you expect people to perform each day. It's essential to be clear about how every role makes a difference to the organization and to the community and/or environment. When employees of World Central Kitchen are asked why they work for the nonprofit, the strong connection between mission and job description is clear. Employees explain that their work drives the mission to be first to the frontlines, providing meals in response to humanitarian, climate, and community crises. Every role is essential for achieving this mission.



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The same is true with employees of the nonprofit Concordance, whose mission is to reduce recidivism. Employees are committed to helping participants move forward and this is done by working directly within prisons and recently released inmates to provide substance abuse treatment, education, and job skills. Every role moves program participants to a healthier life after incarceration.

»» 3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT:

Performance management communication provides another opportunity for organizations to strengthen employees' connection to the mission. When nonprofits are transparent about how specific organizational goals help drive the mission forward, they build engagement. This also helps employees link organizational goals to their own professional development goals.

Bring Departments Together for Consistent Messaging

To ensure mission messaging is used consistently, small and mid-sized organizations in particular should consider building strong bridges and encourage Human Resources and Marketing and Communications departments to become an operational unit. This can ensure that language around missions is consistent from the website to the employee handbook and beyond.

When every member of the organization is driven by the same clear mission-first messaging, nonprofits gain a more engaged team as well as clear organizational direction that can expand impact.

Chapter 2



Manage Employees and Expectations Across a Hybrid Work Environment

The initial shift to remote or hybrid work was a necessity for organizations. Now that it is clear that remote work is possible for many roles, organizations must question whether it is best for their organization.

While this answer may vary across organizations, overall nonprofits may find that they can make a remote or hybrid environment work for them by structuring this approach to work. Nonprofits that are intentional in how they structure their flexible work environment can create a workplace that supports everyone.

Hybrid Work Wins

For job candidates, flexible and remote work opportunities provide invaluable work-life balance. With more remote opportunities available, flexibility is proving to be a deciding factor for candidates weighing options. For employers, remote positions provide access to a much wider pool of candidates. This is particularly important for employers facing labor shortages or in need of specialized skill sets.

However, this flexible work approach carries with it concerns about decreasing productivity and drops in innovation. Research has begun to emerge to provide some clarity here.

[The Evolution of Working from Home³](#), a study by Stanford's Institute for Economic Policy

3. <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/working-paper/evolution-working-home>

Research suggests that a hybrid environment, in which employees come into the office for two to three days each week, may provide the most productive blend of in-person and remote work. The researchers determined that workers generally saw productivity increases of about 7% with a hybrid work approach, while fully remote work tended to drive a drop in productivity of as much as 10%.

With a hybrid work approach, employers are able to give back to employees who need work-life balance. Employers gain additional hours of productivity during time workers might have once spent commuting, among other benefits. However, these benefits are only possible when employers take the time to structure an approach to hybrid employee engagement.

Structure Hybrid Engagement

Becoming more intentional around your hybrid work approach can strengthen employee engagement and productivity. Below are a few areas where nonprofits should begin evaluating their hybrid work policies.

»» 1. PLAN IN-PERSON TIME:

Some research indicates that having individuals pick their own days for working remotely is better for the individual, but it's not as intentional for the organization. Yet having employers require a specific number of days on-site lowers morale, according to a Gallup survey of 8,090 remote-capable U.S. employees. The [Gallup survey](https://www.gallup.com/workplace/401738/coordinating-hybrid-work-schedules-5-important-findings.aspx)⁴ ultimately found that 46% of hybrid employees reported being more engaged at work when their team collaboratively determined their hybrid work policy. In fact, Gallup found this to be the single most engaging hybrid work policy, despite having only 13% of employees saying their team had done this.

By having individual teams recommend a core day to meet in the office once or twice a week, it becomes easier to host the communal lunches and after-work happy hour that build connections. To build on this engagement, nonprofits may consider hosting quarterly or even annual in-person meetings to strengthen connections across their far-flung workforces.



4. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/401738/coordinating-hybrid-work-schedules-5-important-findings.aspx>

»» 2. PROVIDE THE RIGHT TOOLS AND RESOURCES:

Tools like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Workspace, Slack, Asana, and others have been adopted broadly over the last few years. This can support collaboration between remote employees. However, it's important to ensure everyone — including new hires — feels confident in navigating the platforms of choice and how to make the most of these tools. There are many options available, and onboarding around new tools or communicating new features will keep everyone at the top of their game.

»» 3. ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION:

Nonprofit HR managers should make sure everyone is clear on the most appropriate channels for reaching out to colleagues. This includes clarifying which channels and modes of communication are preferred and when certain channels may be most appropriate.

It is also essential to note that preferred channels may vary based on remote or in-person status. For example, people may prefer email on remote work days to allow time to focus on scheduled activities. By providing a clear policy around when different modes of communication are most appropriate, managers can help prevent communication breakdowns. For example, falling back on email or apps for performance reviews leaves room for misinterpretation and misunderstanding that can prove damaging.

»» 4. BUILD TRUST AND FLEXIBILITY:

When “in the zone” in the quiet of remote work, it's tempting to push meetings or phone conversations back. However, showing up builds trust. It sends the message that time is valuable. Showing up on camera during remote meetings builds human connection and strengthens trust-based relationships. It encourages greater understanding during meetings. These meetings can be essential for building the trust that makes more teams effective. That said, it's important to ensure meetings are productive and purposeful. Being intentional about meetings — through timing and by sending out agendas in advance that enable people to come to meetings prepared for rapid action — demonstrates value for employees' time.



»» 5. ESTABLISH REGULAR CHECK-INS:

When in the office, colleagues bump into one another and connect. With hybrid work, it's important to be intentional about when to meet. By intentionally setting up regular touchpoints, employers can strengthen connections.

»» 6. STAY DISCIPLINED ABOUT MAINTAINING ONE-ON-ONE DISCUSSIONS WITH EMPLOYEES:

These touchpoints send the message that "I'm putting aside time for you because I value you and am committed to your development and growth." Setting policy to this effect is particularly valuable for ensuring less experienced managers understand the importance of these meetings in building trust.

With structured feedback and touchpoints, there is no reason nonprofits can't benefit from the vast talent pool now available to them through remote work.

Chapter 3



New Strategies for Employee Growth in the Hybrid Work Environment

Opportunities for professional growth and career progression are of utmost importance to employees, particularly less experienced candidates. These opportunities may include structured professional development courses and skill building, as well as regular feedback that helps employees know they're on the right track professionally. Delivering clarity around job performance can lead to higher levels of employee satisfaction.

Yet fully remote employees and even some hybrid workers feel as though they work in a feedback vacuum. Fully remote workers in particular report feeling that they have no idea whether they're a star performer or about to be fired. Even the highest performers may feel more insecure about their performance without consistent feedback.

Just as employers must become more intentional in how they structure their work environment, as discussed in Chapter 2, so too must they become more intentional in how they deliver performance feedback, recognition, and the many other ways managers support employees' growth. In fact, this may be particularly critical for small and mid-sized nonprofits, which tend not to have large paths for career growth. In these cases, smaller professional steps and more frequent feedback are even more important for employee engagement.

Invest in Growth

It is essential to continue structuring opportunities for growth and development, but in the hybrid work environment, it's also important to regularly bring these opportunities to employees' attention. Make clear how your organization can support a candidate's career trajectory, beginning in your recruiting messaging. Include a bullet in the compensation and benefits section of your job posting that addresses professional development benefits. This messaging should also extend into early orientation and during the first year of employment. This might include details in the employee handbook that describe the process for utilizing professional development funds.

Setting the tone early will let employees know that you'll be investing in their success. Being intentional about revisiting these discussions around growth will prevent employees from feeling stagnant in their careers. During the first year, this might include discussions about certifications or external resources for professional development during manager one-on-ones. Ensuring employees are skilled for their next step will make them feel prepared for whatever might come next – and helps employees feel invested, which in turn helps retain them.



Make clear how your organization can support a candidate's career trajectory, beginning in your recruiting messaging.

Recognize Employees and Build Connections

Intentionality is particularly important when it comes to delivering feedback for hybrid workers. There's a tendency to put off recognition or performance management until employees are face-to-face, but putting off these discussions can make feedback feel less relevant. When a performance management issue arises out of office, discuss it immediately while it is still fresh in everyone's mind.

Similarly, when employees excel, it's important to be intentional in recognizing and rewarding employees in a manner that works for the remote environment. While in-the-moment feedback is important here, intentional recognition can also include plans to deliver recognition over virtual meetings. Forwarding praise received from others can also instill pride in a job well done. Employers might also consider remote swag. A number of companies have popped up to help employers create branded gifts that are then made available in online stores. Employees are given credits and can then order gifts that are meaningful to them and show up directly at their door.

More simply, recognition should also come in response to email deliverables. There's a tendency to send off a deliverable and then not get feedback on whether it met the market. Become intentional about delivering feedback and closing the loop on how deliverables are used or received.

Build Strong Relationships

Delivering feedback is an important way to build relationships in the hybrid or remote work environment. These relationships are important to help employees feel strongly connected to an organization. However, relationship-building in this new way of working can feel difficult. Having employees come in on a team-selected core day, as described in Chapter 2, can help. Managers can also create opportunities for employees to interact with their peers remotely. Virtual "water cooler" chats or trivia games that teams can play online together can build comradery.

These relationship-building activities can build strong teams, but managers should also think bigger about building cross-departmental relationships. Cross-departmental collaboration can be more challenging in a hybrid work environment, as there may be fewer reasons to get together and connect. There's less opportunity to simply bump into colleagues in the hallway.

Yet these relationships drive cross-departmental collaboration that can allow for stronger progress toward shared goals. Making sure that other departments know what's happening in your world can build opportunities for collaboration and trust. To spur this collaboration, be intentional in sharing information related to the company as a whole. This can be as simple as creating the time to share both personal announcements and items discussed in meetings that colleagues may not have had access to.

Opening meetings with time to share also reflects a growing need for employees to bring themselves to work in ways that haven't been seen before. There's an increased expectation to be able to bring one's authentic self to work. Allowing space for some discussion of one's personal life or interests, through a supportive work environment, can be instrumental in building strong relationships that will engage hybrid and remote employees.

Chapter 4



Learning to Manage in a New World of Work

Managers have always been key culture-setters. They're the frontline workers that dictate how employees experience an organization. As a result, it's essential that managers fully embrace and be trained to lead in a hybrid or remote work approach that will set your organizational culture.

As with every aspect of management, it's essential to be intentional about training both new and current managers to operate in this new work environment. Where in the past it may have been as simple as having a manager trainee shadow a more experienced leader, these training opportunities must evolve into planned discussions around some of the key changes impacting the remote work experience.

Learning to Support More Styles of Work

One of the key factors to consider in training managers today is that remote work provides both a much wider pool of applicants and, with that, some notable cross-cultural differences. Employees have long recognized that there are different workstyles on the East Coast versus the West Coast, or in northern versus southern states. Work style and cadence changes with geographic environments from more laid back to high-energy, high-pressure work environments. Now, managers may find that accounting for different approaches to work can better nurture and retain top performers.

For example, when a star applicant based in a remote area of the country was hired by an organization based in the metro D.C. area, the employee became overwhelmed within just a few short weeks. Upon taking a step back, it became clear that the work environment felt frenetic to an employee who was used to a more relaxed pace of work. This acknowledgment of a work culture difference helped bridge the gap in expectations.

Delivering New Levels of Wellbeing Support

Another area where managers are finding they must make changes is when it comes to addressing employees' mental health. There's far more openness about mental health challenges and the need for support today than there has been in the past. The combination of growing awareness of and engagement around social issues and the impact left by the pandemic has made it far more normal for employees to be open about their mental health challenges. This is particularly true of Gen Z. One [American Psychological Association report⁵](#) found that Gen Z is more likely to report mental health concerns than any other demographic group.

As workplaces encourage people to bring their authentic selves, people are becoming more open about their mental health challenges. Managers may find they need some understanding of how to support people actively managing mental health concerns, including connecting them with more appropriate resources. Manager training must adapt, and should include insight into how and when to have these conversations, what areas should be referred to human resources, and how to best support employees with health struggles. While this is relevant for all organizations, nonprofits operating in high-stress environments or with at-risk populations should be especially attuned to this need. Organizations can provide training resources specific to their employee's needs.

Investing in employee wellbeing also means that organizations must offer support here that goes beyond health insurance. Many organizations have offered employee assistance programs (EAPs), which may come with a set number of free sessions. However, four days of support is no longer enough. Consider adding different resources outside of EAP, such as counseling. The KonTerra Group is one example of an organization available to provide counseling and support for employees who work in high stress environments or relief organizations. In addition, more organizations are offering wellness days specifically geared toward supporting mental health with time off beyond sick and vacation days. Some organizations are evaluating ombudsman services, which support conflict resolution around workforce issues.

5. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/01/gen-z>

Help Managers Make the Shift

Not all managers have made the mental shift to the new world of work. There can be frustration that comes with being forced to change a familiar method of mentoring and connecting with individuals.

To help managers make the mental shift to managing a hybrid workforce, it's essential to provide tools and training for managers on how you set up effective one-on-one sessions. The most successful managers will be those that are flexible in how they communicate and that understand that remote workers do need to be managed differently than people reporting in person.

It will also be important to remind managers that their perception that their team is ineffective may not be correct. Rather they are using different skill sets. Remote management is still about managing people – which has always been difficult – but simply requires more intentionality around checking in and connecting.



The most successful managers will be those that are flexible in how they communicate.

Chapter 5



Leveraging Emerging Technology in the Hybrid Workforce

Nonprofits have a number of tools available to support the growing shift to remote or hybrid work. Artificial intelligence (AI) driven technology is increasingly among these tools. They offer big opportunities to change the way organizations recruit and support their teams. However, leveraging these tools to their full potential will require HR leaders and team managers to recognize and navigate the potential challenges as well.

Weighing the Pros and Cons of AI in HR

HR is discovering, as other industries have before, that AI technology offers a tremendous range of advantages. In HR, these advantages might include:

- » **Automation of routine tasks.** AI solutions are leading employees through onboarding by presenting information only after certain requirements have been cleared.
- » **Valuable insight for HR leaders.** AI tools can provide insight on candidate quality metrics, such as new-hire turnover and retention rates, to guide adjustments to recruitment and onboarding strategies.

- » **A more personalized employee experience.** Through the use of advanced analytics, AI solutions can help identify which skill gaps employees might have and recommend appropriate training opportunities or modules.

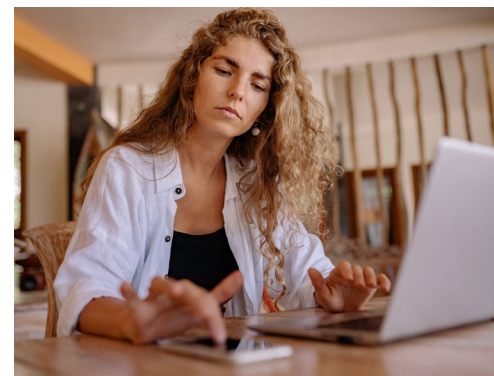
That said, the risks around this new technology are already becoming clear. Perhaps chief among them are ethical considerations around how AI is used to streamline the hiring process. AI technologies apply algorithms that help HR managers screen resumes for key criteria. When there are hundreds of potential applicants to evaluate, this can be a significant timesaver. However, it can also introduce a risk of discriminatory hiring practices. Because resumés are based on criteria entered by the HR manager, AI solutions draw upon any biases input by the hiring manager to rate an individual's compatibility for a position. Allegations of bias in AI screening are working their way through the legal system.

In addition, AI tools open organizations up to risks around data privacy. AI can collect and process vast amounts of data. For example, AI tools used to conduct background checks are able to process a much broader range of data — such as social media profiles — than traditional tools. HR managers must be diligent about putting processes in place to prevent unreasonable invasions of privacy. They must also remain abreast of regulatory requirements as they emerge to govern this new technology.

In addition, managers must recognize that AI can't consider values or evaluate how well a candidate will fit in with company culture. Leaving candidate evaluation to AI alone risks gathering a pool of technically proficient candidates that may not necessarily fit in culturally. Some decisions simply require human involvement.

Creating an AI Policy

As AI increasingly permeates the workplace, HR managers will find that these tools may not be avoidable — nor should they be avoided. Instead, as with every aspect of the changing workplace environment, it's important to be clear about what you want to achieve with your AI tools. AI is meant to support teams, not replace them, but a lack of clarity can still create a sense of unease among employees.



A clear AI policy can help put minds at rest. And by aiming for quick wins with your AI investments, HR leaders can further build buy-in among employees. This might include solutions that provide easy productivity gains, demonstrating value and allowing for more strategic applications later on.

In navigating this changing landscape, it will also be important to tread lightly. AI solutions are expanding, and uses of artificial intelligence haven't been fully vetted through our legal system. It will be important to watch for updates on AI best practices from trusted associations and partners as new use cases emerge.



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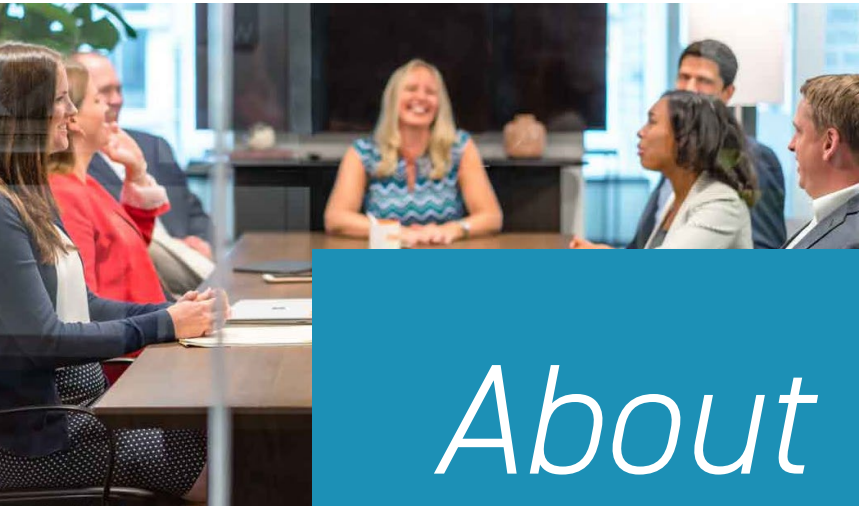
Conclusion

Nonprofits are not immune from today's hiring and retention challenges, but they do have unique solutions available to help them adapt. As it has always been, nonprofits' mission is their greatest strength.

Now, by weaving this mission into every aspect of operations, nonprofits can attract strong applicants from across the much broader pool now available due to remote work capabilities. This may be particularly impactful as Gen Z becomes an increasingly larger part of the workforce.

The shift toward more remote and hybrid work also opens up a greater pool of talent for nonprofits. Organizations can maximize the success of this new world of work by becoming more intentional in how they recognize, manage, and communicate with employees. They may find they will need to update their professional development approach to support the modern workplace. And managers will need training that allows them to better support remote and hybrid employees and set a new tone for organizational culture.

New tools are available to support this changing landscape. Advanced AI tools are now available to ease the burden of routine HR tasks, allowing leaders to focus on improving their recruitment and retention strategy. While it will be important to carefully navigate requirements and best practices for use of these tools, today's technology solutions overall open organizations up to more powerful opportunities to hire top talent and engage all employees.



About Vault

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