

PH WINS Learning Collaborative Change Package

Retention and Succession Planning

Introduction

The Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey

([PH WINS](#)) is the first nationally representative survey of individual state health agency workers. More than 10,000 public health workers from 37 states and 14 cities participated in the 2014 survey. This document is part of a series of change packages, a collection of great ideas and practices aimed at promoting lasting change, that discusses findings from the 2016-2017 PH WINS Learning Collaborative (LC), supported by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials ([ASTHO](#)) and the [de Beaumont Foundation](#). Health department staff who participated in the LC completed PH WINS in 2014 and used the survey findings to develop and address a workforce development opportunity within their agencies through the LC. Participating health departments included the Boston Public Health Commission, Houston Health Department, Maryland Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Health, Nebraska Division of Public Health, and South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control.

These change packages aim to help public health agencies hire and retain a well-prepared workforce that finds a career in public health fulfilling and impactful. This specific change package provides a menu of potential actions that public health agencies can use for retention and succession planning efforts. This document is organized into several sections:

- A **table** listing a goal that an agency might wish to accomplish related to retention and succession planning. This is followed by several key changes that could support that goal, a potential list (“menu”) of different ideas that agency staff can try to affect the change, and associated resources that may assist with implementing the idea.
- General **resources** that could be helpful overall and address more than one idea.
- **Stories** (successes, lessons learned, and resources) from public health colleagues in the LC who have experience related to enhancing cultural awareness in the workforce.

Please note that this document is not intended to be all-inclusive: it is meant to help agencies start thinking about change and present bold and creative ideas for impacting change. If you have ideas or suggestions for additions to this resource, please contact the PH WINS team at phwins@debeaumont.org.

Preparing for Change

The following best practices may be useful for agencies that are preparing for, or in the early stages of, change that affects the workforce:

- **Conduct an organizational assessment** to determine what your agency is already doing related to retention and succession planning. (This assessment may include some of the actions listed in this section.) The assessment may help agency leadership select priority actions, determine readiness for action, and identify initial steps. See “General Resources for Retention and Succession Planning” later in this document for links to existing organizational assessment guides. Agencies may also find it helpful to review the PH WINS change package focused on change management.
- **Explore your organization’s resources.** Specifically, consider which existing policies, practices, workforce development plans, organized labor benefits, and structures could help support efforts related to retention and succession planning or connect you to key formal or informal agency leaders. Additionally, consider your agency’s history and current climate relative to the change you seek. Some agencies will benefit from selecting basic actions to start, while other agencies with already-established initiatives may benefit from tackling more advanced ideas.
- **Engage agency staff and stakeholders** in planning and implementing interventions. Engaging diverse perspectives and knowledge will encourage buy-in and build a cohort of individuals who can champion retention and succession planning. Internal agency representatives may include human resources, information technology systems, communications/public relations, management, and front-line staff. External resources may include academic institutions, professional associations, training providers, subject matter experts, or consultants. You may also choose to hold roundtable discussions or focus groups, form an advisory committee, conduct key informant interviews, or engage the broader workforce in a variety of other ways around retention and succession planning.
- **Clearly define what you are trying to accomplish.** The clearer you are, the more directly you will be able to develop strategies to address the issue. Consider applying quality improvement methods to tackle the problem: Plan, Do, Study, Act cycles could provide structure to solving bigger organizational workforce issues.
- Changes and ideas presented in this document require different levels of organizational and individual commitment. Therefore, consider **aligning your actions with your strategic plan** and other guiding documents and **explore any potential financial implications** before taking any action.

PH WINS Measures

This change package focuses on the following PH WINS measures:

- **Reduction in staff intentions to leave in the next year among non-retirement aged workers or new employees.**

The table below identifies goals that an agency may want to achieve related to retention and succession planning. It is meant to serve as a guide for achieving or addressing the PH WINS measure listed above. Although some of the ideas in the table are specific to retention or succession planning, the same solutions often may help address both issues. Please note that the “Other Ideas to Try” incorporate evidence-based recommendations or actions without a link to a specific resource or tool. These ideas may also be specific to an agency’s location.

This change package is one in a suite of five that ASTHO and the de Beaumont Foundation developed to assist agencies with their workforce development initiatives. The other change packages discuss **enhancing cultural awareness in the workforce, change management, creating a culture of learning, and improving organizational communication**. They include resources that may also be helpful for addressing retention and succession planning.



PH WINS Learning Collaborative Change Package

Retention and Succession Planning*

Change package: a curated collection of ideas and practices to create lasting change in your organization.

*Note: Inclusion in this list does not imply endorsement of any particular process or product. Organizations using this change package should always vet resources independently and make the determination for applicability to their unique agencies and workforces.

Goal

What you are trying to accomplish?

High performing employees are engaged and enjoy personal and professional career growth. Operations are smoothly and successfully sustained during planned and unplanned staff transitions.

Key Change

Institutional practice or condition, or individual change or behavior you will see.

Ideas to Try

Curated list of potential actions that may impact the change you wish to see; could be evidence-based or “testable” ideas.

1. Best practices for employee retention are used throughout the agency.

A. Implement a reward/recognition system.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- Virginia Department of Human Resource Management handbook: [Employee Recognition Program Handbook](#)
- Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas toolkit: [The Community Tool Box: Rewarding Accomplishments](#)

B. Conduct regular “stay” interviews as part of performance review and planning processes.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- Careers in Government: [Employee Retention Strategies: Keep the Good Ones](#)
- [Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services: Stay Interview Guide](#)

Key Change

Ideas to Try

1. Best practices for employee retention are used throughout the agency.

C. Conduct exit interviews.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- HR Council toolkit: [Keeping the Right People: Exit Interviews](#)
- Society for Human Resource Management webpage: [Using Exit Interviews to Prevent Disaster](#)

D. Implement flexible work hours.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- Federal resource on telework: [Training and Resources](#)
- HR Council toolkit: [Workplaces that Work: Flexible Work Arrangements](#)
- Webpage: [Telework Toolkit](#)

E. Build a strengths-based initiative to facilitate engagement.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- [CliftonStrengths](#) (note: not a free resource)

Key Change

Ideas to Try

1. Best practices for employee retention are used throughout the agency.

F. Implement wellness policies and programs.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- [Health Affairs blog series on employee wellness](#)
- CDC webpage: [Workplace Health Promotion](#)
- ASTHO webpage: [Worksite Wellness in State Public Health Agencies](#)

Other Ideas to Try

- Implement remote work practices.
- Provide managers with training to facilitate engagement of direct reports.

Key Change

Ideas to Try

2. Best practices for employee succession planning are used throughout the agency.

A. Implement professional and leadership development programming.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas toolkit: [The Community Toolbox: Building Leadership](#)

B. Recruit and engage interns or practicum students as a pipeline for entry-level positions.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy sample program: [Internships that Strengthen the Sector](#)

Key Change

Ideas to Try

2. Best practices for employee succession planning are used throughout the agency.

C. Implement a more formal and consistent onboarding process.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- County of Los Angeles Department of Human Resources guide: [Supervisor's Guide to Onboarding: A Strategic Workforce Planning Program Resource](#)

D. Provide leadership coaching.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- ManagementHelp.org: [All About Personal and Professional Coaching](#)

E. Implement a mentoring system.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- Ohio State University toolkit: [Mentor Toolkit](#)
- Ohio State University toolkit: [Protégé Toolkit](#)

Key Change

Ideas to Try

2. Best practices for employee succession planning are used throughout the agency.

F. Integrate selective talent recruitment (generational, values-focused) practices into hiring processes.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- HR Council toolkit: [Getting the Right People Overview](#)

Other Ideas to Try

- Build a public service values communication strategy/campaign aimed at recruitment

Key Change

Ideas to Try

3. Best practices for employee succession planning are used throughout the agency.

A. Develop succession plan that is specific to organization's needs

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City toolkit: [Nonprofit Executive Succession-Planning Toolkit](#)
- Annie E. Casey Foundation report: [Building Leaderful Organizations: Succession Planning for Nonprofits](#)

B. Develop position transition plans when employees terminate employment.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

- National Institutes of Health: [Transition Interview Guide and Transition Plan Templates](#)

Other Ideas to Try

- Assure continuity of operations plan is up-to-date and considered in succession efforts

Resources

General Resources for Retention and Succession

Careers in Government Public sector job website with background information, strategies, and job tools, including those that address retention. (Focused on employers and prospective employees.)

Center for State & Local Government Excellence and **Local Government Research Collaborative**

- **“Workforce of Tomorrow”** Report
Report on recruiting and retaining talent, particularly those new to the workforce or soon to be part of the workforce.
- **“Recruitment and Retention Challenges and Successes in the Local Health Department Workforce”** Webinar
Guide addressing definition of need, process, considerations, and challenges to succession planning within local health departments.

Central Washington University Guide “Succession Planning – Prepare the Right People for the Right Jobs at the Right Time”
University example of succession planning approach with guidance.

Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice Recruitment and Retention Report “What’s Influencing the Decisions of Public Health Workers?”

Report on understanding the workforce motivators for entering and remaining in the public health field.

Gallup Report “State of the American Workplace”

Private sector workforce report that is translatable to the public sector related to engagement of workforce for satisfaction, retention, and performance.

Glassdoor Report “Why Do Workers Quit? The Factors that Predict Employee Turnover”

Report of study discussing employee retention.

Harvard Business Review: Employee Retention

Series of articles addressing employee retention.

Human Resources Council for the Nonprofit Sector

Nonprofit organization supporting workforce efforts. Free resources including a toolkit with information, templates, and checklists to assist with hiring, retention, and policies. Features major topical sections addressing employee training, workforce development programs, and example policies. (Note: while some resources may be specific to Canada, many are generalizable.)

National Center for Healthcare Leadership Case Studies “Best Practices in Health Leadership Talent Management and Succession Planning”

Succession planning guidance, considerations, and “how tos” from an organizational perspective. Examples from healthcare can be translated to the public health settings.

Resources

cont.

Office of Personnel Management Report “[A Guide to the Strategic Leadership Succession Management Model](#)”

Federal source outlining a model for building leadership capacity and succession planning.

Ohio Department of Administrative Services Report “[Succession Planning: Ohio’s Talent for Tomorrow and Beyond](#)”

Succession planning guide for state government agencies with state-specific examples that are generalizable.

[The Management Center](#)

Company offering fee-based coaching and training, with a website containing tools addressing a range of topics including guides for employee check-in meetings and goal setting.

University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development’s The Community Toolbox Resource “[Chapter 10: Hiring and Training Key Staff of Community Organizations](#)”

Information and tools for planning, job descriptions, policies, orientation and training.



Stories from the Field

Houston Health Department

<http://www.houstontx.gov/health/>

The Houston Health Department LC team held roundtables to collect feedback from employees about what actions the department could take to retain employees.

Staff provided very honest and helpful feedback. The agency is currently implementing some of the ideas that employees suggested, and will schedule follow-up meetings to let employees know which suggestions are being implemented and to share the recommendations being made to department leadership. The Houston LC team suggests scheduling such roundtables on at least an annual basis so that employees can communicate their ideas and concerns. Ultimately, the Houston Health Department LC team is proposing that a portion of staff training hours be devoted to particular categories or topics, such as general public health, communication skills, technical skills, and diversity.



CLICK HERE
to view all the PH WINS Learning
Collaborative Change Packages

Stories from the Field

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Public Health

<http://dhhs.ne.gov>



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Nebraska's LC team recognized that stay interviews are an extremely effective no-cost strategy to empower organizations with opportunities to engage employees, identify risk of attrition, and respond with initiatives to ensure continuity of operations.

The Nebraska team decided that it was a best practice it wanted to try. Because Nebraska's state health agency is under a large umbrella organization, its HR-driven activities, such as performance evaluation processes, are out of its direct control, and there was no mechanism to track the type of data needed to better inform retention and succession efforts. The journey required some changes to strategies to engage HR as a partner. The agency conducted two rounds of Plan Do Study Act cycles to test, retest, and finalize a tool. Engaging a variety of managers and employees to test and provide feedback was important to ensure staff buy-in to use the tool and ensure that the tool was used as intended and collected actionable data.

Before rolling the tool out division-wide, the Nebraska LC team developed a communication strategy to help leadership understand and commit to full implementation. The roll out included supervisor training and opportunities for subsequent technical assistance and support. The LC team received a suggestion to host a "community of practice" group for supervisors, and it is exploring this idea. Lastly, the LC team now has a tool to collect the stay interview data that will be used to inform succession planning, as well as other tools to support managers in contributing to effective retention. Overall, the process went well and is showing positive outcomes.

While the Nebraska LC team was researching resources, materials, and research related to succession planning, it came across the 2009 U.S. Office of Personnel Management report "[A Guide to the Strategic Leadership Succession Management Model](#)." Although agency leadership was already sold on the need to conduct succession planning, providing them with recommended approaches required additional context about existing best practices. Leadership found this report to be particularly useful because it is a comprehensive resource with a lot of valuable content and it was developed by and for the public sector.

Reflections & Acknowledgements

Reflections from the PH WINS Team

Each of the teams experienced staff turnover during the project period, both within their organizations at large and on their specific teams. Teams successfully addressed turnover and navigated losing institutional knowledge by turning these experiences into new opportunities to implement practices around succession planning for their project work and engage new staff in their projects.



PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE
INTERESTS AND NEEDS SURVEY

ASTHO

The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) is the national nonprofit organization representing public health agencies in the United States, the U.S. Territories, and the District of Columbia, and over 100,000 public health professionals these agencies employ. ASTHO members, the chief health officials of these jurisdictions, formulate and influence sound public health policy and ensure excellence in state-based public health practice. ASTHO's primary function is to track, evaluate, and advise members on the impact and formation of public or private health policy which may affect them and to provide them with guidance and technical assistance on improving the nation's health. ASTHO's vision is "state and territorial health agencies advancing health equity and optimal health for all," and its mission is "to support, equip, and advocate for state and territorial health officials in their work of advancing the public's health and well-being."



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de Beaumont Foundation

The de Beaumont Foundation's mission is to strengthen and transform public health in the United States by improving the effectiveness and capacity of local and state health departments. We believe that a strong public health system is essential and work to improve the practice of public health through thought leadership and strategic and engaged grantmaking. Programs funded by the Foundation build the capacity and stature of the public health workforce, improve public health infrastructure, and advance the distribution of information and data in the field.



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State and Local Health Agencies

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- Boston Public Health Commission
- Houston Health Department
- Maryland Department of Health
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Public Health
- South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control

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