NEOGOV

7 Best Practices for

BOOSTING RETENTION

Today

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THE ROOT CAUSES OF
TURNOVER

The US is in the midst of a labor shortage that's impacting almost every industry, including the public sector and education. As a result, organizations are struggling to find qualified candidates and retain the ones they have.

With an aging workforce and low rates of labor force participation, labor shortages will continue to rise in the coming years. Public agencies should start taking steps now to improve retention in order to remain competitive in a tight labor market.

The current public sector hiring crisis is unprecedented. In just one year, the number of public sector job openings soared by 45%. **HR professionals point to voluntary turnover as the number one driver for the spike in open positions.** Close behind are workers reaching retirement and an inability to fill previous positions – resulting in chronic short staffing.

The consequences of chronic short staffing are severe, both for the organization and the employees who take on extra work. Short staffing can quickly erode the work-life balance of high performing employees, leading to poor performance and burnout. The fiscal impact is just as severe with increased overtime, service cutbacks, and lack of raises.

Over time, short staffing can create a negative cycle of employee turnover. **By improving retention, organizations can go beyond addressing the symptoms of turnover** (i.e. burnout, poor performance, short staffing) **and instead address the root causes.**

Improving retention involves more than pay bumps and extra vacation days. Retaining employees requires building a strong culture, improving processes, and providing strong and thoughtful leadership. Read on to discover actionable strategies to improve retention in your organization.

1. BUILD A STRONG CULTURE

Building a strong culture is key to retaining your talent. When employees are satisfied with their jobs and feel a sense of purpose and belonging, they're less likely to eye other opportunities.

Positive workplace culture built on trust, openness, and support leads to job satisfaction, employee engagement, and better performance. On the other hand, negative workplace culture can erode morale, derail agency missions, and repel talent. **In one study, 48% of people working in low culture organizations were very likely to leave their jobs.**

Building a strong culture starts with identifying opportunities for improvement. As managers, it's hard to know exactly how your employees feel about their job. The easiest way to gain insight into your employees is through surveys and exit interviews.

Send Employee Surveys

Employee surveys offer insight into what your existing staff cares about the most. Collecting data about your employees helps you spot trends and pinpoint what the root causes of dissatisfaction could be. Surveys also provide employees an opportunity to give feedback, which fosters a culture of inclusion and openness.

Conduct Exit Interviews

Before employees see themselves out, sit down with them to understand why they're choosing to leave. Exit interviews are enlightening when conducted openly. Listening to the feedback of exiting employees can uncover issues with process and policy, but also reveal cultural nuances that may fester into larger issues if left unaddressed.

In a recent industry-wide survey, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) asked HR professionals what their current employees care about the most. Competitive salaries topped the list, but work-life balance came in close second. **27% of government HR professionals and 25% of education HR professionals said their employees care most about work-life balance.**

Given this data, it's clear that building an organizational culture supportive of employee wellbeing can improve retention. Start by preventing employees from being overworked by leveraging technology. **The right technology can help employees do more with less, saving them time and promoting a better work-life balance.**
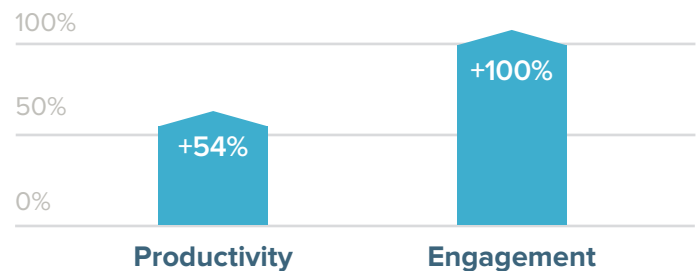
2. IMPROVE ONBOARDING

It's never too early to think about retention, even during the onboarding process. In fact, **onboarding is a short window of big impact for your new hires.** The onboarding process is the first impression a new employee has of your organization, and it can easily set the tone for their entire experience.

If your new hires have clear direction, scheduled check-ins, and upcoming deadlines to meet, they'll leave the office each day feeling accomplished. They'll also meet the expectations of hiring managers early on, which makes them feel more connected to the mission and drives employee satisfaction.

Structured onboarding programs can <u>increase new hire productivity</u> by as much as 54% and double the level of employee engagement. Standardizing the onboarding process gives employees the opportunity to find success early, which is critical when starting a new job. Professionalized onboarding also helps hiring managers know sooner than later if they made the right hire.

Figure 1
Effects of Structured Onboarding Programs

Another strategy to improve onboarding is to keep your onboarding portal updated. This may seem simple, but it's important for new hires to access the most relevant training and resources. **NEOGOV data shows employers with up-to-date portals (i.e. updated within 6 months of an employee's start date) have 16% higher retention rates.**

Updated onboarding portals make new hires feel welcome and valued. Providing all the resources for a new hire to be successful is a great way to make a positive – and lasting – first impression.

3. EVALUATE EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Evaluating the performance of your employees can have a big impact on your retention efforts. Employees who receive regular feedback and have clear performance goals are more likely to feel valued and engaged in their work.

NEOGOV data shows **employees with at least one goal on their performance evaluation are 25% more likely to stay at their agency.** Employees, especially ones in the public sector, want to know how their work contributes to the mission. Tying performance goals with mission outcomes is a great way to do this.

Whether it's delivered at an in-person meeting or through email, providing feedback on a regular basis keeps employees motivated to continue performing at their best. Employees want to know how they're doing and where they can improve

But giving feedback isn't always enough – it's also the frequency of feedback that matters. **NEOGOV data from over 200 public agencies shows quarterly journal entries increase retention by 19%.** Quarterly performance reports can also help managers avoid recency bias during annual reviews.

Evaluating an employee's performance does more than check a box. By identifying areas for improvement, agencies can provide targeted training and supportive resources to help employees develop their skills and feel confident in their position – leading to better retention.

Figure 2

Ways to Increase Employee Retention

Performance Evaluation Tactic
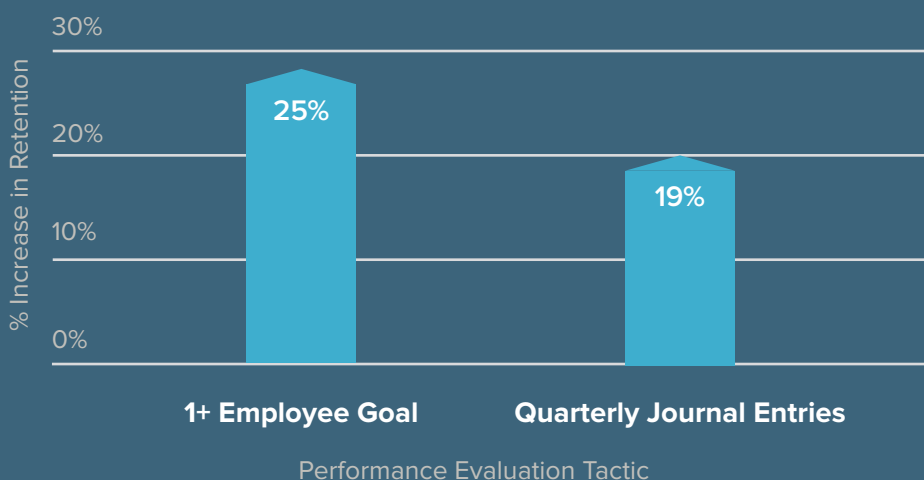
4. PROVIDE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

In our fast-moving, tech-driven world, learning new skills is an investment in the future – for both the employee and organization. By providing learning opportunities, agencies demonstrate they're committed to employee growth and organizational progress.

When organizations don't offer employees the opportunity to gain new skills, retention rates suffer. **NEOGOV data points to limited development opportunities as one of the <u>top three reasons for employee turnover</u> in 2021 and 2022.**

Continuing education and job skills training is clearly a top priority among public sector employees, so it's important for agencies to invest in learning opportunities. **The benefits of offering opportunities to gain new skills are plenty:**

- Increased job satisfaction

- Improved productivity

- Reduced errors

- Enhanced service delivery

- Increased organizational resiliency

From conferences and webinars to mentoring and special projects, learning can take many forms. With a growing number of remote employees, e-learning is a convenient way for hybrid workers to gain new skills on their own time. **NEOGOV data shows employees who self-enroll in over 3 learning courses have 10% higher retention rates, on average.**

Even though you run the risk of training an employee who later chooses to leave, offering the opportunity to learn new skills bodes well for your organization's reputation. Continuing education is a worthwhile investment in your workforce and part of a long-term retention strategy.

5. OFFER WELLNESS RESOURCES

Over the past few years, mental wellness has become a hot workplace topic as more employees struggle with stress, burnout, and depression. Of all industries, the public sector experienced some of the highest burnout rates in 2021 and 2022.

A recent Gallup poll shows K-12 educators as having the highest rates of burnout in the United States. Supporting this, NEOGOV data shows **59% of education HR professionals pointing to burnout as the top reason for employee turnover in 2021 and 2022**.

Along with educators, law enforcement officers battle mental wellness issues in high numbers. In a survey of 8,000 officers, **79% reported feeling stressed at some point during their law enforcement duties.** 69% of the same respondents said that stressful experiences while on duty had caused unresolved and lingering mental wellness issues.

Mental wellness issues such as these can lead to performance issues, absenteeism, stagnant career growth, and higher turnover. Because employee wellness is directly tied to overall organizational health, you should offer supportive resources to help struggling employees.

You can offer a number of wellness resources to support employees:

• Health benefits that include mental health services

• Wellness app

• Mental health training for managers

• On-site wellness consultations with a mental health professional

• Screening tools

• Public education materials

• Workshops or seminars

• Wellness events

• Dedicated quiet space

• Flexible scheduling

By offering wellness resources, agencies are actively removing stigma around seeking support. Encouraging employees to use wellness resources also normalizes mental wellness in the workplace, which can create a more open and trusting culture.

59%
of education hr pros report **burnout as the top reason for turnover**

79%
of officers reported **feeling stressed during their duties**

69%
of officers said stressful experiences on duty **caused mental wellness issues**

6. BOOST STAFF MORALE

Morale is a feeling that's hard to measure and even harder to describe, but has the power to drag an organization down or move it forward. Nicoletti-Flater Associates, specialists in policy and public safety psychology, note that "when morale is high within a department, there is a built-in buy-in to the goals and overall mission".

A recent NEOGOV survey of Colorado law enforcement agencies show **80% of police chiefs consider morale as "very important".** Public safety leaders understand the consequences of low-morale can permeate all aspects of an organization if left unaddressed.

Boosting morale is an organization-wide effort, but is usually led from the top. **Here are a few strategies you can implement right away to boost staff morale:**

- **Openly show appreciation for a job well-done.** Giving positive reinforcement inspires employees to continue working hard. Acknowledging their work makes employees feel seen and valued.

- **Offer constructive feedback in the form of 360 reviews.** 360 reviews gather feedback from an employee's team members, subordinates, managers, and themselves. Comprehensive feedback gives employees more detail and perspective about their performance.

- **Share positive feedback from the community.** Working with the public, it's likely you've received positive feedback about a member of your team. Share these kudos openly with the office so staff feel recognized and appreciated.

Low morale has the power to negatively impact virtually all aspects of an organization – from customer service to productivity levels to recruitment and retention. Boosting staff morale when it's low is a worthwhile investment to protect the organizational health and efficiency.

7. LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY

If you and your team are overwhelmed with high turnover and short staffing, **technology can help you do more with less.** The right technology solution can streamline many of the best practices listed above, like onboarding, evaluations, and learning, and spare teams from becoming overworked.

Short staffing may be an uncomfortable new normal for many organizations, but the right technology helps maintain a lean, agile staff. Creating efficiencies with technology can make the work day more enjoyable, leading to improved job satisfaction, productivity, culture – and ultimately retention.

NEXT STEPS

Thanks for reading the Report: **7 Best Practices for Boosting Retention Today** by NEOGOV. We hope these insights and resources have been helpful.

NEOGOV serves public sector and education HR with a comprehensive suite of solutions for recruitment, onboarding, performance management, employee development, and more. **To learn more about this topic and how NEOGOV's software suite can help, register to attend the Ignite conference today**.

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