Washington State Health Care Authority

Recruitment and retention toolkit for behavioral health organizations

HCA 82-0644 (4/25)

Introduction

Purpose of the Toolkit

The **Washington State Health Care Authority** (HCA) worked with the **University of Washington Behavioral Health Institute** (BHI) to develop a toolkit focused on supporting behavioral health organizations with strategies to recruit and retain staff. This toolkit offers practical, easy-to-use resources to help organizations improve staff recruitment and retention.

Washington, like other states, has experienced a significant behavioral health workforce shortage following the COVID pandemic. The **2022 Behavioral Health Workforce Assessment** developed by the Washington Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board noted that this shortage existed prior to the pandemic's onset in 2020 and was worsened by a variety of pandemic-related factors, including increasing behavioral health needs for Washingtonians. Washington has made significant investments to strengthen behavioral health services after the pandemic, and the sector continues to innovate to make the workforce more robust and increase access to care for all members of our communities.

This toolkit was developed as one such innovation, with the goal of bringing tools to behavioral health providers across the state and serving as a catalyst for ongoing collaboration among providers to address workforce challenges. The toolkit-development team gathered input from both rural and urban providers who serve different communities across Washington during three project phases:

- **Phase 1:** Talking with 11 providers before creating the toolkit to understand their main challenges in recruiting and retaining staff
- **Phase 2:** Holding three feedback sessions about the toolkit's draft outline, with 12 behavioral health providers (most of whom were also engaged during Phase 1)
- **Phase 3:** Detailed review of the draft toolkit by seven providers

Of note, this toolkit is intended to support organizations in their efforts to enhance their recruitment and retention efforts; it is not intended to address the broader system-level considerations that are related to the statewide (and nationwide) behavioral health workforce shortage.

Approaches to Using the Toolkit

The toolkit is structured in four major sections and an appendix:

Section 1: Organizational Readiness and Capacity (Assessing current efforts and setting priorities)

Section 2: Recruitment (Getting the word out and increasing the size of the applicant pool)

Section 3: Selection (Assessing candidates and making an offer)

Section 4: Retention (Maintaining engagement and employee satisfaction)

Appendix: A list of resources and tools

Each section of the toolkit includes an overview and important points to consider, followed by best practices and tools. Sections are designed to cover every step in the recruitment and retention process, including designing and advertising a position, interviewing, making an offer, and strategies to onboard and retain employees. The toolkit-development team designed each section to work independently or together with the others, so organizations can identify the resources most helpful to them.

At the end of the toolkit is an appendix that contains links to the tools discussed in the toolkit, as well as links to other helpful resources for workforce initiatives.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) are concepts that represent the critical importance that all individuals find a sense of belonging at work and how this is affected by an organization's strategies to embed diversity, equity, and inclusion in every aspect of their approach to recruitment and retention.

- **Diversity:** The presence and participation of individuals with varying backgrounds and perspectives, including those who have been traditionally underrepresented[1]
- **Equity:** Equal access to opportunities and fair, just, and impartial treatment[2]
- **Inclusion:** A sense of belonging in an environment where all feel welcomed, accepted, and respected[3]
- **Belonging:** An individual's sense of comfort and safety in their environment, where they can show up as their authentic self and feel valued[4]

Meeting the behavioral health needs of all Washingtonians requires a workforce that reflects the diversity of our state with respect to race, ethnicity, cultural background, language, lived experience, age, sexual orientation, sex, gender expression, and other factors. DEIB concepts are woven into the strategies presented throughout this Toolkit. A detailed analysis of DEIB resources is beyond the scope of this toolkit.

[1] https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-dei
[2] https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-dei
[3] https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-dei
[4] https://thediversitymovement.com/what-is-workplace-belonging-why-is-it-important/

Section 1: Organizational Readiness and Capacity

Organizational assessment, both qualitative (story- or narrative-based) and quantitative (numbers-based), can be a powerful tool to identify and track recruitment and retention priorities. It's crucial to understand your organizational capacity and priorities when developing solutions.

This section shows you how to evaluate your current recruitment and staff retention practices and results. It also suggests ways to use this information to create goals you can track and adjust over time. When you assess your organization's current hiring and retention, you might decide to either:

1. Create goals that cover all aspects of recruitment and retention; **or**
2. Focus on one specific area that your team thinks needs the most attention.

Perhaps you have noted already that you have a steady flow of applicants for licensed therapist positions, but candidates are not accepting job offers. Alternatively, you might have identified that you are doing well with hiring, but new staff members tend to leave within their first six months. These different situations would lead to different solutions. This section helps you to identify your organization's priority areas, use that information to set recruitment and retention goals, and measure your organization's progress toward those goals.

Benefits of Organizational Assessment

Looking at your organization's current situation before trying new hiring and retention strategies helps you focus your improvement efforts. An organizational assessment can help you:

- Identify the recruitment and retention challenges that are most pressing for your organization (including which jobs are harder to fill and keep filled)[5]
- Focus on strategies that address your organization's specific challenges[6]
- Provide a baseline against which you can track the effectiveness of new strategies, so you can learn from results and adjust your approach as needed[7]

Considerations for Initial Assessment

It is helpful to consider a combination of qualitative (story- or narrative-based) and quantitative (numbers-based) data when assessing your organization's current state. While there is a lot of data you could collect, it's better to focus on just a few key measures (perhaps 3-4) rather than tracking more than your agency's resources can support. You can always change what you measure as your needs and strategies change.

Quantitative Data

There are a variety of measures that can help you to understand your organization's current state. Numbers-based measures can be compared to state or national data (for example, how does your retention rate compare to the national average for behavioral health organizations?) or they can be examined in the context of trends over time (for example, is the number of applicants for a given position generally increasing or decreasing?).

SAMHSA (the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) worked with **Advocates for Human Potential** to develop a behavioral health **Recruitment and Retention Toolkit**, which provides detailed guidance for organizations seeking to gather quantitative organizational baseline information such as retention, turnover, and vacancy rates. These tools include the **Quick Tool to Gather Organizational Baseline Information**, which provides a resource on **how to gather your organization's vacancy rate, retention rate, and other measures**.

[5] http://toolkit.ahpnet.com/Building-a-Recruitment-and-Retention-Plan/Introduction.aspx
[6] http://toolkit.ahpnet.com/Building-a-Recruitment-and-Retention-Plan/Introduction.aspx
[7] http://toolkit.ahpnet.com/Building-a-Recruitment-and-Retention-Plan/Introduction.aspx

Qualitative Data

Beyond numbers, qualitative information, such as stories and feedback through self-assessments and team evaluations, can provide valuable insights for your hiring and retention plan. Gathering qualitative information provides the opportunity for individuals with different roles in the organization to contribute, and it allows you to assess the current state from many perspectives. For example, individuals in varied roles within an organization can complete a self-assessment related to a particular area of recruitment and retention, then work together to understand the results and create goals.

The **TennCare Workforce Initiative Toolkit** (a collaboration between TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration) includes a **Workforce Initiative Organizational Self-Assessment Workbook** that guides self-assessment in six domains[8]:

- Assessment and Using Workforce Data
- Organizational Capacity and Processes
- Recruitment Practices
- Selection Practices
- Retention Practices
- Evaluation Practices

The Workforce Initiative Organizational Self-Assessment Workbook is linked above and in the toolkit appendix.

Prioritizing and Building a Plan

After completing your assessment, you can use what you learned to match the challenges identified with new strategies for your agency. To keep the process manageable, match the number of goals or focus areas to current team capacity/bandwidth (e.g., starting with only a few new recruitment and retention goals). The Challenge/Intervention Strategy Matrix in Figure 1 (which can be found on page 22 of the **Workforce Initiative Organizational Self-Assessment Workbook**) is a useful tool in accomplishing this matching. This guide is also included in the toolkit appendix.

Figure 1: Tennessee QuILTSS Workforce Initiative Organizational Self-Assessment Workbook Challenge/Intervention Strategy Mix

Challenge/Intervention Strategy Matrix

Challenge	Strategy	Area of need to explore
Few qualified applicants **Trouble finding new workers**	• Expand recruitment sources • Inside sources for recruitment • Implement recruitment bonuses • Advertise and implement hiring bonuses • Long-term recruitment strategies • Regional recruitment consortia • Market the organization • Implement internship programs for students	
Turnover rates are too high **New hires quit in first 3-6 months**	• Inside recruitment sources/recruitment bonuses • Realistic job previews • Improve selection practices • Structured interviewing	

[8] **https://ici-s.umn.edu/files/YDpYpnPhQh/tn-workforce-initiative-organizational-self-assessment-workbook-10-12-2021?preferredLocale=en-US**

Challenge	Strategy	Area of need to explore
	• Effective orientation • Improve socialization practices • Mentoring programs	
New staff unsure of job roles and functions	• Effective orientation • Mentoring • Improve co-worker support for new hires	
Supervisors have difficulty finding time to coach and mentor new employees	• Develop peer mentoring programs • Cooperate or collaborate with other organizations to share training resources so that the supervisor can focus on coaching and mentoring • Implement a strategy to reduce turnover so there are fewer new employees to coach and mentor	
Lack of training opportunities	• Web based training or Distance learning • Develop a training calendar • Cooperate or collaborate with other organizations to share training resources • Create a staff development culture instead of offering only regulatory driven training opportunities	
Poor performance; training doesn't produce desired results	• Competency based training • Performance evaluations • Progressive discipline	
Supervisors report being overwhelmed; don't know how to do their jobs	• Support and train supervisors • Mentoring for supervisors • Realistic job previews for supervisors	
Morale problems	• Participatory management • Recognition • Rewarding long-term employees	
Conflict between staff and supervisors or managers	• Teams/team building • Networking • Support and train supervisors • Implement high performance supervision practices	
Coworkers don't get along	• Teams/team building • Improved selection practices • Supervisor training • Training on conflict resolution	

After matching your identified challenges with potential strategies, your final step in the assessment is to use this information to set goals and timelines for accomplishing them, and to identify how you will evaluate progress toward these goals over time. To keep the process manageable, it can be helpful to start with only a few new recruitment and retention goals. For each goal, the team should ask and answer the following questions:

- What are the steps to accomplishing this goal?
- When do we expect each step to be completed?
- Who is responsible for each step?
- How will we measure progress along the way? Specifically, what change will we be looking for, and how often will we measure it?
- When and how will we modify our goals or adapt strategies according to what is and isn't working?

An example "Action Planning Worksheet" can be found on page 24 of the **Workforce Initiative Organizational Self-Assessment Workbook**. This worksheet can be used to track answers to the questions above and can serve as the basis for building a recruitment and retention improvement plan.

Section 2: Recruitment

This section is focused on recruitment strategies designed to increase the number of qualified applicants who meet your organization's needs. The first crucial steps in recruitment are:

1. Describing the position
2. Describing why your organization is a great place to work
3. Developing strategies to get the word out about open positions in a way that invites engagement and gets your job announcement into the hands of a large and diverse pool of qualified potential applicants

Each organization faces different hiring challenges based on where and how it operates. To create effective hiring strategies, it's important to understand what makes your organization and region unique - both the good and challenging aspects that might affect job seekers. No matter your situation, you'll want to focus on identifying and showcasing the professional and personal benefits that your organization and location can offer candidates. Behavioral health organizations can be different in several ways, including:

- Geography (e.g., rural or urban)
- Business type (e.g., for-profit or non-profit; private or governmental entity)
- Services offered (e.g., substance use disorder services, mental health services, or both; outpatient services or residential services)
- Cultural or linguistic background of the community served

Each context presents challenges and opportunities. Clearly and accurately describing the personal and professional benefits relevant to your organizational and regional context can give you an advantage in generating interest from applicants who are well matched with your organization and region. **Relias** offers a **simple tool** to identify and highlight your organization's strengths in their work on how to become an "employer of choice." This tool is linked in the footnote below and in the toolkit appendix.[9]

Getting Started

If you already completed an organizational assessment of your recruitment and retention practices, the data gathered during that assessment can guide your analysis of the key recruitment challenges your organization is facing. For example, if you gathered data on retention, turnover, and vacancy rate by position, it could help you identify whether the challenge is organization-wide or position-specific, and you can adapt your strategies accordingly.

If you haven't yet completed an assessment, quick data gathering and reflection on current challenges will help you target your approach. Below are some questions for consideration:

- What positions present the greatest challenge in recruiting enough qualified applicants?
- What is professionally or personally rewarding about working in your organization and your region?
- Are the key strengths and benefits of working for your organization spelled out in your job announcements? If so, what might be missing? How might you adapt this language to appeal to applicants with a broad range of experiences and needs?
- What are the benefits of the specific role you're filling? What resources (financial or otherwise) do you have available to expand your efforts to get the word out about open positions? If additional resources aren't available, what partnerships, staff and organizational superpowers, and informal connections might you draw upon?

[9] **https://www.relias.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Ebook_HHS_HowToBeAnEmployerOfChoice.pdf**

Best Practices and Tools

Job Design and Description

What is a job description?

A job description is a list of the general tasks, functions, and responsibilities of a position. Typically, it also includes to whom the position reports and specifications such as the qualifications needed by the person in the job, salary range for the position, and more. A job description is usually developed by conducting a job analysis, which includes examining tasks and sequences of tasks necessary to perform the job. The analysis looks at the areas of knowledge and skills needed for the job.

There is more information about developing a job description in the **Building a Recruitment and Retention Plan** (look specifically at Step 4).

Even if you have an existing job description you are adapting or updating, it can still be helpful to approach the position description as if you are starting from scratch. Read through the job description and consider the question: **If this job description were new, what key components would you look for? Are those reflected in the current job description?**

There are a variety of tools available to guide you in assessing the accuracy and effectiveness of your job description. Advocates for Human Potential provides **tools for job analysis** and a **step-by-step guide for drafting a job description**.

Job Announcement and Getting the Word Out

What are the legal requirements for job postings?

Washington State Department of Labor & Industries created a **fact sheet** outlining current requirements for job postings.

After your job description is refined and ready to go, it is time to spread the word about your open position. Developing a job announcement provides an opportunity to share the personal and professional benefits of working at your organization and distribute it through a wide range of channels. In addition to the established recruitment platforms your organization may utilize (e.g., LinkedIn and Indeed), it can be valuable to develop a list of other distribution methods that may reach different audiences, including:

- Job boards or job fairs for local or regional training programs (including those in other parts of the state, where new graduates may be looking to relocate after graduation)
- Distribution lists for professional associations and coalitions, including those that support particular communities of providers (e.g., BIPOC therapists)
- Sharing the posting with staff members, board members, community partners, and funders

Your current employees are a great resource for recruiting new team members. Happy employees can help spread the word about job openings. Let them know about open positions and provide them with simple, shareable resources, like sample posts for social media or email templates. This is a low-cost way to share your job posting. Additionally, it may be helpful to incentivize employees with a referral bonus when they make a connection to an applicant who is hired and accepts a position. Employees who enjoy their work are key to recruiting new talent. For this reason, the strategies discussed in the Retention section later in this toolkit are also an important part of effective recruitment.

In addition, the Washington Health Care Authority has a **Customizable Toolkit**[10] that can help behavioral health organizations distribute information about job openings. It contains customizable messaging and visuals you can use to spread the word on social media, newsletters, and other mediums. The toolkit streamlines and increases the effectiveness of your recruiting efforts by providing graphics and photos you can use without worrying about copyright infringement and suggested text to which you can add your organization's details. The **Customizable Toolkit**'s suggested messaging highlights these key reasons someone would choose to work in the behavioral health field:

- High impact and support for the community
- Working as part of a passionate, supportive team
- The opportunity to make a positive difference
- Opportunities for career growth

[10] **chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https:/startyourpath.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/HCA_2024_Customizable_Toolkit_R1T1.pdf**

Section 3: Selection

This section addresses the strategies your organization uses to evaluate an applicant's fit with the qualifications and experience needed for the role, as well as strategies to support the applicant in evaluating whether your organization and the job are a good fit for their skills and preferences. As such, it includes tools both to **assess an applicant's capabilities** (e.g., interview processes) and strategies to **provide applicants with additional information about the job and organization** they are considering (e.g., job preview). **Successful recruitment ultimately rests on goodness of fit:** identifying and recruiting candidates who both meet the organization's needs and who feel that that the organization and job are a good fit for their personal and professional priorities.

Best Practices and Tools

Interviews

Your organization may be able to improve the interview process by focusing on interview structure. Consider the **five components** below to ensure organized and equitable interviews:

1. Generating a standard set of questions for all applicants in a job category
2. Providing the interviewers with a structured rating scale
3. Having the right number of questions for the time allotted (e.g., no more than 10 questions for an hour interview)
4. Conducting panel interviews, where a candidate is interviewed by several staff members, which provides an opportunity for integrating a range of perspectives in hiring decisions
5. Developing clear criteria for selecting who participates on the interview panel, to broaden the perspectives included in the interview process

For panel interviews, it is helpful to include people who will work closely with the new hire, along with the direct supervisor. These additional perspectives can give a more holistic view of the applicant. For example, when hiring for supervisory positions, you could invite someone who would report to the supervisor and a peer of the supervisor to join the panel. This gives different viewpoints regarding whether the applicant is a good fit. The presence of both a peer and a direct report in the interview process also provides an excellent opportunity for the candidate to learn about the job and the organization through direct conversation with potential future colleagues. Additionally, considering the diversity of your panel with respect to life experience (e.g., gender, age, race/ethnicity) broadens the perspectives included.

Structured Behavioral Interviews

Using a structured behavioral interview approach can improve the quality of information gathered during the interview process. Structured behavioral interviews include a standard set of questions and a rating scale, and they focus on questions that encourage applicants to use examples from their experience to describe how they would handle situations relevant to the job for which they are being considered.

Structured behavioral interviews provide applicants an opportunity to share past examples of their work-related behavior that align with the skills and responsibilities of this role. Past behavior is an effective predictor of future behavior, so anchoring an interview to behavioral examples from a candidate's past provides a good picture of their capabilities. This strategy also provides opportunities for individuals applying for an entry-level position (who may not have behavioral health experience) to draw from past non-behavioral health employment experience to demonstrate that they have skills, knowledge, and talents that can be generalized to a behavioral health setting. To encourage this, it can be helpful to phrase questions in a way that encourages candidates to generalize from previous employment and/or life experience that may have occurred outside of a behavioral health professional setting.

The **TennCare Workforce Initiative Toolkit** offers a **Behavioral Interview User's Guide** that provides guidance related to the type and structure of questions that could be included in a structured behavioral interview[11]. For those who are interested in learning more about this process, the TennCare Toolkit also offers a free recorded **webinar on structured behavioral interviews** that serves as an introduction to this concept and strategy. The TennCare Behavioral Interview User's Guide and webinar also provide guidance related to structured rating tools to gather input from interview panelists that the hiring manager can use in making their decision.

Additionally, employers must be knowledgeable about lawful and unlawful interview and application questions to ensure that the organization's employment application form and interview questions request information from applicants in a lawful manner. The guiding principle behind any question to an applicant – whether the question is asked by the interviewer or appears on the employment application – should be, "Can the employer demonstrate a job-related necessity for asking the question?" The **Washington Administrative Code** provides guidelines for pre-employment inquiries that can assist with this assessment.

Job Preview

Providing an in-depth preview of the experience a candidate can expect in the job they are applying for helps them evaluate whether the organization and job are a good fit for their goals and preferences. The TennCare Workforce Initiative Toolkit outlines a tool to accomplish this goal, the **Realistic Job Preview**. As the name suggests, it is intended to provide the candidate with a clear sense of what they can expect from your organization and what their day-to-day work would look like in the role. The intention is to portray both the benefits and the challenges, as well as give the candidate a better sense of the work than they would typically glean from a position description.

[11] **https://tenncare.ici.umn.edu/dsp-workforce-toolkit/selection/using-structural-behavioral-interviews**

Section 4: Retention

Staff retention is key to a healthy organization. Behavioral health work is relationship-based, and high turnover can impact both employee and organizational well-being and the quality of care for clients. Investing in staff retention is a workforce strategy that decreases the amount of effort an organization must spend on staff recruitment. There are many factors that contribute to the length of time an employee stays in their job, including their access to opportunities for training and professional growth, as well as their perceptions of organizational and employee well-being[12]. This section focuses on several best practices in retention, including:

- Strategies for onboarding and training
- A commitment to gathering input from staff, coupled with transparent efforts to address employee concerns and suggestions
- Tools to promote organizational and employee well-being, including supporting a sense of purpose in the work and providing opportunities for growth within the organization

Best Practices and Tools

Training and Career Development

Onboarding New Employees

When thinking about onboarding, organizations often focus primarily on the orientation during an employee's first few days in their new position. This early orientation generally provides key information an employee needs to operate within their role and the organization. In contrast, **a strong onboarding program extends beyond orientation and includes structured support for new employees during their first 3-6 months of employment**. Effective onboarding has been shown to improve new-hire retention, with one study showing that employees who received structured onboarding were 58% more likely to remain in their position three years after hire than those who did not[13].

Onboarding programs can be scaled and tailored to fit your organization's size, capacity, and culture. The key is that the onboarding program supports the employee's integration into their role and the organization during their first months. A strong onboarding program leads to better retention by providing new employees with opportunities for support as they learn about the organizational culture. Common elements of an effective onboarding program include:

- **Maintaining regular contact** with the incoming employee during the time between offer acceptance and their first day of employment.
- **Sending key informational materials** prior to the first day, to maintain engagement following the recruitment and selection process and set the stage for what the new employee can expect in their first days at the organization. For example, information such as available refrigeration for lunches, whether there is a dress code, and any parking or transportation information a new employee may need can build connection and lessen initial anxiety and uncertainty.
- **Connecting new employees to the organizational mission** on their first day. Reminding employees what the organization is about and how they can be a part of advancing the mission builds engagement from the very first day.
- **Creating a checklist that outlines onboarding activities** during the first 3-6 months, which both the new employee and their supervisor use to track progress.
- **Scheduling structured check-ins** with each new employee (e.g., at the end of the first week and at 30, 60, and 90 days), to ensure they have access to the support they need.

---

[12] https://www.relias.com/blog/staff-retention-in-behavioral-health-qa
[13] https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/the-true-cost-of-a-bad-hire/

- When possible, **using technology to streamline and track the onboarding process**. For example, make new-hire paperwork available electronically (and, if possible, include e-signatures functionality) and create automated deadline reminders to simplify the process for new employees.
- **Implementing a buddy/peer mentor program** that connects new employees to a veteran team member who can provide support and information. In addition to practical help, this strategy builds belonging and can facilitate a new employee's integration into the organization.
- **Scheduling meet and greets** between new employees and people with whom they will interact. This can help orient a new employee to who does what, while also building connections that can be a potential resource for the employee as they dive deeper into their new role.
- Providing an **opportunity for partners and families to connect with the organization and community** as part of the onboarding process, to build cohesion and promote belonging. This is especially critical for supporting employees and their families who are new to living and working in a rural area.
- **Asking for feedback** at the end of an employee's onboarding, considering indicators of onboarding success such as: role clarity, social acceptance, confidence in their ability to succeed in their new job, and knowledge of their role and the organization.
- Considering any **additional strategies and effort** needed to effectively onboard remote employees, including navigating complex IT issues and the extra effort required to nurture belonging in a remote or hybrid team.

The TennCare Workforce Initiative Toolkit offers a variety of free recorded webinars that dive deeper into these topics, including their **Onboarding and Orientation webinar** and their **Peer Mentoring webinar**.

Supervision and Training

In addition to initial onboarding, access to regular supervision and training can have a significant impact on staff retention. While effective supervision and management are key ingredients of employee satisfaction in all types of workplaces, it is arguably even more critical in behavioral health organizations because of the stressful and demanding nature of the work. The TennCare Workforce Initiative Toolkit offers free recorded webinars on strategies for **frontline supervision** and **competency-based training**.

Providing support to the behavioral health workforce involves both administrative supervision and clinical supervision. In some organizations, clinical and administrative supervision are provided by the same supervisor, and in others, different people fill those supervision roles. Either option can be effective. The critical ingredient is regular (ideally, at least weekly) professional development and clinical support for all direct service team members.

The **Washington State Health Care Authority** provides access to a **free online webinar** focused on best practices in clinical supervision. A link to this webinar is also provided in the appendix with resources and tools at the end of this toolkit.

Career Pathways within Organizations

In addition to effective onboarding and ongoing training and supervision, building internal career pathways within your organization is an effective tool to increase employee engagement and retention. The opportunity for employees to grow professionally within the same organization (e.g., from entry-level behavioral health staff to licensed therapist or from therapist to supervisor) demonstrates to employees that you are invested in their professional development. Additionally, it allows you to build your own workforce and train the next generation of your organization's leaders. The TennCare Workforce Initiative Toolkit offers a free recorded webinar on **strategies for building career pathways**.

Gathering Staff Input

Gathering and responding to staff input demonstrates to staff that you value their voice and are committed to continuous quality improvement. There are a variety of methods through which staff input can be collected, including regular staff satisfactions surveys, stay interviews, and exit interviews. While most organizations are familiar with exit interviews, the stay interview may be a new concept to many. The **Society for Human Resource Management** (SHRM) defines a stay interview as:

> A structured discussion a leader conducts with an individual employee to learn specific actions the leader can take to strengthen the employee's engagement and retention with the organization. [14]

SHRM's **Stay Interview How-To** provides an overview of this process and its potential benefits to organizational culture and employee retention.

Staff input works best when there are different ways for employees to share their thoughts (e.g., quick online surveys, regular opportunities for Q&A sessions with organizational leadership, and opportunities for more in-depth interviews). Opportunities for input should be offered at regular intervals. **What's most important is not how you collect feedback, but how you use it.** While it is not usually possible to act on all staff input, closing the communication loop with staff about what you heard and what you are planning to do with the information is critical for building trust. For example, after a Q&A session, send a follow-up message summarizing key feedback and explaining the actions being taken or how the topic will be addressed later. Even when organizational leadership determines they are unable to take the requested action or make the requested change, it is valuable to let the staff know they considered the request/change, that they are unable to implement it at this time, and why. That builds trust and transparency, and it is an opportunity to foster collaboration between leadership and staff. Included in the appendix are several resources for collecting and responding to input from staff, including implementing **staff satisfaction surveys** and **stay interviews**.

Employee Well-being

A sense of belonging at work is a cornerstone of employee satisfaction. When we feel seen and understood within our workplace, we can do our best work. Conversely, when we do not feel psychologically safe or lack a feeling of inclusion or belonging, it can have a detrimental impact on employee performance, retention, and overall organizational culture.

There are a variety of frameworks that address employee well-being. An organization's well-being program should be driven by staff input and evaluated regularly, to determine what is and isn't working and adjust accordingly. Mental Health America's **resources on workplace wellness** provide a good starting point for this discussion. Frameworks for trauma-informed care can also be useful for behavioral health organizations, as they situate employee and organizational well-being within the context of the exposure to suffering that accompanies work in this field. SAMHSA provides a **comprehensive set of resources** to think about the intersection of trauma-informed care and employee well-being. Similarly, **Trauma Transformed** provides a variety of articles and downloadable tools to integrate a trauma-informed framework into an organization's well-being plan. These resources may be helpful in addressing the burnout and secondary trauma that can sometimes accompany behavioral health work.

Regardless of the framework you use, recognizing the critical nature of the well-being of your workforce and promoting well-being through intentional strategies can improve employee retention and positively influence your organizational culture.

[14] **https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/employee-relations/stay-interview-how-to-core-features-advantages**

Appendix of Tools and Resources

General

2022 Behavioral Health Workforce Assessment (Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board)

Recruitment and Retention Toolkit (SAMHSA and Advocates for Human Potential)

TennCare Workforce Initiative Toolkit (TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration)

Relias

Organizational Assessment

Quick Tool to Gather Organizational Baseline Information (SAMHSA and Advocates for Human Potential)

How to Gather Vacancy Rate, Retention, and Other Metrics (SAMHSA and Advocates for Human Potential)

Workforce Initiative Organizational Self-Assessment Workbook (TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration)

Recruitment

How to be an Employer of Choice (Relias)

Analyzing a Job Position (SAMHSA and Advocates for Human Potential)

Writing a Job Description (SAMHSA and Advocates for Human Potential)

Selection

Behavioral Interview User's Guide (TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration)

Structured Behavioral Interview Webinar (TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration)

Realistic Job Preview Webinar (TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration)

Retention

Onboarding and Orientation Webinar (TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration)

Peer Mentoring Webinar (TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration)

Midwest Retention Toolkit (National Rural Health Resource Center)

Frontline Supervision Webinar (TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration)

Competency-Based Training Webinar (TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration)

Best Practices in Clinical Supervision- 1 (Washington State Health Care Authority)

Career Pathways Webinar (TennCare and the University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration)

Stay Interview How-To (Society for Human Resource Management)

Implementing Staff Satisfaction Surveys (Solutions, Training, and Assistance for Recruitment and Retention (STAR^2) Center)

Implementing Stay Interviews (The Grossman Group)

Workplace Wellness (Mental Health America)

Practical Guide for Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach (SAMHSA)

Trauma Transformed