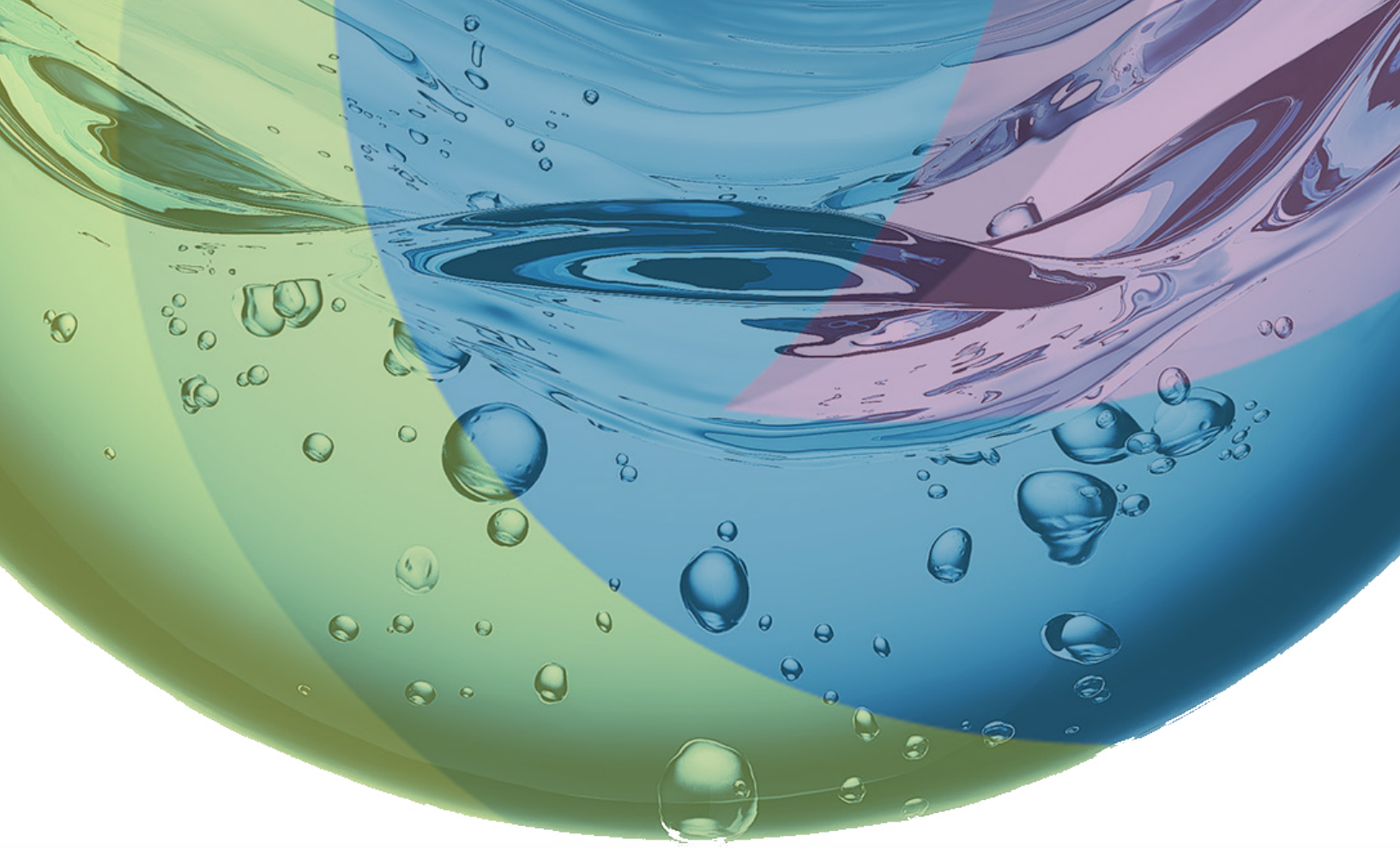




Managing the Nonprofit Workforce in Times of Flux

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Managing the Nonprofit Workforce in Times of Flux

Many nonprofit leaders are grappling with the fallout from the pandemic. One of the biggest challenges they face is figuring out how to manage workers' changing expectations about how and where they work. And job creation remains high, so competition for top talent remain intense, too. What do nonprofit executives need to know

to navigate this changing landscape? Which types of organizational culture help attract and retain top talent?

Read on for insights into what young nonprofit workers are looking for, how to keep your fundraisers from jumping ship, and to get insights from nonprofit leaders on how to run a nonprofit in hybrid or virtual environments.

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Nonprofits Learn the Benefits — and Trials — of Ditching the Office

By JIM RENDON



ISTOCKPHOTO

Nonprofits have had to think a lot about how they operate over the past two years. Some have taken a step that might have been considered radical a few years ago: They've given up their offices and gone virtual.

For Fair Chance, the decision was easy. A Washington, D.C., organization that works with community-based groups, mostly led by people of color, to help them grow, it was reconfiguring its office space when the pandemic hit. Staff members had already relocated to a smaller set of offices while work was being done. The organization's lease was up, so it asked the landlord if it could just rent the smaller space instead. He said no. So they refused to sign the lease and gave up both spaces. Fair Chance sublets a few office spaces and has access to a conference room, but, otherwise, all of the 16 employees work from home.

CEO Gretchen Van der Veer has had to think creatively about how to maintain the organization's culture. It has staff meetings on Zoom every other week. There are online contests like one in which staff members made faces out of fruit and vegetables in their homes and sent in photographs. Prizes were given for the assemblages that used the most produce and were the most creative. They also gather for in-person quarterly celebrations. At one, they played mini golf.

Only about 40 percent of all Americans have jobs that can be done remotely, but those who can work from home like it, according to a series of worker [surveys](#)

across the economy conducted by the Pew Research Center. Three-quarters of those working remotely who were surveyed in January said the reason they work from home was that they preferred it, up from 60 percent in 2020. As workers have gotten more exposure to working remotely, more of them want to continue doing it.

One reason: They are finding more work-life balance. And 78 percent of those currently working from home at least part-time say they want to continue after the pandemic.

"Employers have to be responsive to these new desires on the part of their employees if they're going to retain them," says Kim Parker, the report's author and director of social-trends research at the Pew Research Center.

For some people of color, working from home has been a respite from hostile work environments, says

Carmen Marshall, chief equity officer at Maryland Nonprofits.

"If you are Black, brown, other, if you're outside of the power structure, there's always been a consequence for you to work in an environment where you don't have any control over your comings and goings, your ability to speak out, the demand for you to keep quiet," she says. "Remote work allows you to experience less [discrimination] because you are not in the presence of it."

Some organizations are finding unexpected benefits from remote work. The Utah Nonprofits Association gave up its lease in December. The association realized that by providing services online rather than in

For some employees of color, remote work is a respite from hostile work environments.

person, it was doing a better job serving its rural members. The group saw no reason to go back to the way it had worked before.

The Family League of Baltimore, which provides services to other nonprofits, has yet to go back to its office space. It is considering staying remote and subletting the space and perhaps letting some of the groups it works with use it for meetings.

BIGGER POOL OF APPLICANTS – AND EMPLOYERS

Some nonprofits are hiring people who live far away and may never come into the office. Such permanent remote work is increasing. According to the Pew survey, the share of people who said they worked from home because they relocated nearly doubled to 17 percent from 2020 to 2022.

Chorus America, which provides services to 6,000 choruses, recently hired two people who live too far away to come into the

office regularly. Allowing the positions to be remote expanded the applicant pool. “Nobody wants to come back to the office fulltime,” says Catherine Dehoney, the group’s CEO.

But in the same way that nonprofits can now access a larger pool of applicants, job seekers can also now access many more employers.

Fair Chance lost a development staff person to a national nonprofit in Oakland, Calif. He’ll be working remotely from the D.C. area.

So far, Van der Veer’s efforts to replace him have not worked out. The group did not receive what it considered a diverse enough group of applicants to move forward with interviewing people.

“I think our salaries weren’t competitive,” she says. “Our benefits are very competitive: You can work from home. I do think that that is going to be an advantage for us.”

What Young Nonprofit Workers Want

By **JIM RENDON**



CHRONICLE PHOTO BY MICHAEL THEIS

Sydney Aulffo left one nonprofit job for another at the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership that offered more opportunities to learn and be promoted.

In December, Sydney Aulffo left her job at a nonprofit after working there three years. She was passionate about the group's mission. But the 25-year-old is also interested in her own career. She felt working remotely during the pandemic had impeded opportunities for mentoring and that the group's flat organizational structure meant there were few opportunities for advancement.

"It felt like I'm going to be in this same pay range until I reach that next level. That might be five or more years down the road," she says. "You want to feel that your work is reflecting the skills that you have."

Aulffo just received her master's degree in public administration from George Washington University and started a new job at Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, where she is excited about the professional opportunities. She says her new workplace also reflects her values, which is important to her.

"Whatever you tie yourself to is a reflection of who you are," she says. "I would want to work in a place that supports my morals."

Aulffo is one of millions of younger nonprofit employees who think differently about work than many of their older colleagues. Nonprofit leaders would be smart to pay attention to them, says Mandi Stewart, an associate professor of public administration at the North Carolina State University. Millennials — who are now ages 26 to 41 — have been the largest generation in the work force since 2017.

Younger people today approach work differently, says Jasmine Johnson, an associate professor of public policy and administration at George Washington University who teaches aspiring nonprofit professionals and studies younger workers.

They are less likely to stay at an organization for very long. They are more interested in work-life balance, and they value diversity much more than earlier generations, she says. They want to see their values reflected in the workplace as much

as in the rest of their lives. And because of the large amount of student debt young workers carry, pay is also important — as is the ability to grow and learn within an organization.

"My students are always thinking, can I get more experience? Can I move up in the organization?" Johnson says.

They can also be quick to leave when things don't go their way, particularly if the pay is not what they think it should be, Johnson says. "If they're not getting paid [appropriately], if they're having a bad experience with their supervisors, they leave."

'WHO'S GOING TO DO THAT?'

Some employers find the demands from younger workers unrealistic. Angela Habr, executive director of the Hyde Park Neighborhood Club, a group that offers programs for young people in Chicago, says she has hired younger leaders who won't do any work or check email after hours. Work-life balance is great, she says, but there needs to be flexibility to respond to something like a building closure or some other crisis.

"Who's going to do that if you're not?" she asks. "I'm having to carry that slack for younger workers because their sense of work-life balance is so strong that they're not willing to do even the crisis management."

It can be easy to get frustrated with younger employees' approach, says Libbie Landles-Cobb, a partner at the consulting firm Bridgespan. Nonprofit executives who worked hard and made sacrifices to rise through a culture that rewards self-sacrifice can be tempted to sneer at the demands of younger workers. But, she says, before demanding those sacrifices from others, leaders need to ask themselves what the value is in perpetuating systems of inequity or overwork.

Of course, nonprofits can't meet every demand. Being transparent about what is and isn't possible and how changes to

the workplace might affect the mission of the organization are more important than granting every request, Landles-Cobb says. But leaders also need to be willing to rethink some of their own biases about work culture. “We just need to be more creative and more open-minded and really think about the possibility that exists right now to make some of these changes,” she says.

FLEXIBILITY IS PRIZED

Tenneille Choi, 31, is a development officer at Free Arts, in Arizona. The two things she has come to appreciate most about the organization since she started in the fall of 2020 are its mission — helping abused children through the arts — and flexibility.

She got to decide how much she wanted to work in the office and how much at home. She tried a few arrangements and finally settled on working from home on Wednesdays. Choi realized that when she was at home, she would keep working and working, sometimes until 9 p.m., when her boyfriend would remind her to stop.

“Compartmentalizing just helps me maintain that work-life balance,” she says. “I still have my workaholic tendencies, but I like having that one workday to maybe have a slower pace in the middle of the week.” And she can change the days anytime she wants. “I feel spoiled.”

Choi says if she ever left the organization, she couldn’t imagine working somewhere that required her to be in the office every day. “We tasted what teleworking can be like, what hybrid working can be like,” she says. “I think an employer would be really foolish to not offer that flexibility in the future.”

The kind of autonomy that Choi has can make a difference for younger workers who are more likely to question an organization’s policies, says North Carolina State’s Stewart. For example, if young

workers are forced to come back to the office, they want to know why.

She says if employers ask staff to start working from the office again but they are just commuting in to do Zoom calls all day, they will question whether that decision makes sense.

“What’s the motivation for being together?” she asks.

WEEDING OUT EMPLOYERS

Young nonprofit professionals care deeply about equity, diversity, and inclusion — and Johnson says a nonprofit’s approach to DEI is an important factor for many young workers when they consider job opportunities. Young people are more upfront about the many ways they identify and are more used to interacting with

people with diverse identities than older workers are, she says. “They’re just more able to sniff out if you’re walking the talk.”

Johnson says some of her trans students and students of color are making their identities clear on their résumés. She says when she was

their age, that was frowned on but that students today see things differently. They put their identities on their résumés to weed out prospective employers. If an employer has an issue with their identity, she says, the student wouldn’t want to work for the organization anyway.

Choi says Free Arts is a good fit for her because the values it espouses — communication, transparency, and respecting boundaries — are important to her in both her personal and professional lives. She says she sees them play out in the workplace regularly.

“I think it’s why our team has worked really well together,” Choi says. “I personally love all of those values for myself.”

Millennial nonprofit employees aren’t afraid to question an organization’s policies.

How to Hang On to Fundraisers in a Hot Job Market

EMILY HAYNES

Employees across the country left their jobs en masse this spring. [Nearly 4 million](#) people quit work in June, according to the Department of Labor's most recent jobs data. Many of these employees were [restaurant or hospitality workers](#) looking for safer, better paying workplaces, but [executives quit](#), too. The Great Resignation, as some commentators are calling it, is poised to reshape the workforce, and nonprofit employees are no exception.

"Demand for fundraisers is as high as it ever was," says Dennis Barden, senior partner at executive search firm WittKieffer.

That high demand is a warning sign for charitable organizations, says Lori Kipnis, managing director for strategy and advisory at Nonprofit HR, a talent management firm that works with nonprofits. "There's high risk that top talent will be poached or will voluntarily exit," she says.

Managers of development professionals can stave off attrition by initiating frank conversations with their fundraisers, often called "stay conversations." The questions asked should be similar to those posed during an exit interview, Kipnis says, such as "How are you utilizing your time? What would you want us to know about how we can support [you]?"

The goal is to resolve pain points before they cause a fundraiser to quit.

Fundraisers were prone to burnout and quick job turnover even before the pandemic. In August 2019, [51 percent](#) of

fundraisers surveyed by the Chronicle said they planned to quit their current jobs by 2021. Past surveys of fundraisers by the Association of Fundraising Professionals found the share of fundraisers who were considering quitting their jobs in a given year to be about 75 percent. The pandemic encouraged some to be more conservative, with just [50 percent](#) of fundraisers saying they had thoughts of quitting last year, according to a recent AFP survey.

Still, the reasons fundraisers leave their roles have held steady over the years. The stress of punishing fundraising metrics, poor pay, and toxic workplaces were the primary reasons fundraisers say they would quit. After living through more than a year of a pandemic and societal upheaval, fundraisers are even less likely to tolerate those challenges today.

"People, after coronavirus, have realized that your time is limited and you could lose anybody at any time," says Allison Quintanilla Plattsmier, executive director of Edgehill Neighborhood Partnership, a community-development nonprofit in Nashville, Tenn. "The time that you're spending at work needs to be productive and fulfilling and helping to advance your personal life as well."

With another season of remote work approaching, the Chronicle talked with fundraisers and consultants about why fundraisers quit and how employers can keep them aboard.



GETTY IMAGES

EMPLOYEES FEEL 'A NEW LEVEL OF EMPOWERMENT'

Fundraising has always been a grueling career path. In 2019, 84 percent of fundraisers surveyed told the Chronicle that they felt “tremendous pressure to succeed” at work, and 55 percent said they “often feel unappreciated” for the work they do.

As the pandemic stretches toward the end of its second year, some fundraisers are losing patience with these challenges — especially millennial and Gen Z fundraisers.

“There’s a new level of empowerment here,” says Barden, the executive recruiter. “This pandemic has shifted people’s values pretty substantially.”

Young professionals typically endure long hours to climb the career ladder and eventually land a leadership role with more flexibility, he says. “Younger people are no

longer willing to wait for that, at least in the moment.”

This unwillingness isn’t due to laziness, Quintanilla Plattsmier says. Rather, it’s an acknowledgment that the status quo isn’t sustainable because too many fundraisers feel as if they’re running a race whose finish line only gets further away the more they run toward it.

“Fundraisers often find themselves doing the work of two or even three people as they get more skilled at their job, but their pay remains stagnant or barely keeps up with the cost-of-living adjustments,” Quintanilla Plattsmier wrote in an email. “This is why fundraisers [get burnt out](#) so easily.”

What’s more, remote work has made donors harder to reach than ever. It’s a challenge for fundraisers to even meet the same fundraising goals they met before the pandemic because they have less access to traditional donor touch points,

like coffees and cocktail parties. Last year, some nonprofits began considering virtual meetings and phone calls with donors as [meaningful forms of outreach](#). Previously, only in-person meetings would have earned this designation.

“You have to be realistic about what fundraisers are able to accomplish,” Quintanilla Plattsmier says. “In the remote environment, your ability to get your job done relies on other people responding to the meetings that you’re trying to set up or being willing to hop on the phone.”

LEADERS SHOULD EMBRACE REMOTE WORK AND GIVE FREQUENT FEEDBACK

While remote work has its challenges, some fundraisers have welcomed the decrease in business travel and increased flexibility to manage their personal and professional responsibilities.

As nonprofits [contemplate how they’ll return](#) to in-office work, leaders would do well to understand that some of their employees are all-in on remote work. “There are still people out there who think that unless they can eyeball their employees, they must not be working,” Barden says. “Those people are not going to be able to hire anybody.” What’s more, fundraisers who don’t want to return to the office or move for a job now can apply for the rising number of full-time remote positions.

In such a competitive job market, nonprofit leaders should consider how they take the friction out of remote work to retain their top fundraisers. Limiting virtual meetings and scheduling time for strategic work is a good place to start, says Kipnis. Monthly feedback sessions between managers and their fundraisers, she adds, will help leaders identify new pain points that they can’t see working remotely.

Since the start of the pandemic, Kipnis says many leaders have delayed performance conversations. “Everybody has so much on them personally and professionally that managers are hesitant to share critical feedback,” she says. But

putting off tough conversations only allows problems to fester.

There’s no need for these conversations to be highly critical, however. Kipnis recommends that managers frame them around their employees’ professional goals. By asking fundraisers what skills they hope to build and what resources they need to achieve them, managers can make sure their employees stay goal oriented during a chaotic time.

“With the pandemic, you have no idea what people are going through,” Quintanilla Plattsmier says. Frequent feedback sessions help managers and their fundraisers get the support they need.

EMPLOYEES WANT TO SEE GENUINE EFFORTS TO ADVANCE EQUITY

Over the last year, many workplaces have acknowledged that they need to improve so that all their employees feel welcome and included, regardless of their racial, gender, or other identity. Some have taken more meaningful action than others. Rosann Santos, director of alumni engagement at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, says she’s heard from colleagues of color who left their positions rather than wait for their employers to live up to their words.

“Everyone all of a sudden has a diversity, equity, and inclusion statement on their website or from HR, but it’s very shallow,” she says. “We’re still not seeing it.”

Fundraisers who are early in their careers — such as millennials or Gen Z — typically have the most bandwidth to call it quits when their colleagues or donors cross a line, she adds. What’s more, the often-wide generational divide between young fundraisers and older donors can cause discomfort and harm. Enduring insensitive comments from donors, Santos says, can be emotionally taxing for some fundraisers. “They see it as a microaggression or they see it as insulting or they see it as being dismissed,” she says.

Insensitive and offensive remarks can accumulate and compound over time, and



nonprofits that ignore bad behavior by their employees or donors can forfeit fundraising talent.

Employees are not willing to tolerate nonprofits that do not put equity at the forefront of their mission, Quintanilla Plattsmier wrote in an email. “Professionals are holding their organizations to higher standards regarding what they expect internally and externally and pushing back at organizations that only engage in performative allyship or pull equity out of their back pocket for optics.”

LEADERS MUST CONVEY CLARITY ABOUT MISSION

Experts say one of the best ways for nonprofits to keep their employees happy is to stay true to their mission and values.

The new challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic have caused some organizations to adjust their missions to better meet the moment, Santos says, but leaders need to clearly articulate to their fundraisers why

and how their missions have changed. If they don’t, fundraisers could leave if they feel the mission they signed up for has significantly changed.

Kipnis, the human resources consultant, agrees. She suggests that managers ask their employees, “How is the role looking and feeling based on how you came to know the responsibilities of the position?” Managers should follow up the question by asking employees what kind of resources and support they need to succeed.

“In the development space, where the job market is so hot right now, there are ample positions for folks to move to in mission-focused organizations,” she says.

These are not conversations that can be delayed, Kipnis adds. Fundraisers often put out feelers for new roles in the fall, with an eye toward making a job transition in the new year. By opening channels of communications now and keeping them active, nonprofits can make sure their organization is a place where top talent wants to stay.



GETTY IMAGES

How to Run a Virtual Office, From Leaders Who Have Done It for Years

BY LISA SCHOHL

The deepening Covid-19 crisis has much of the population hunkering down at home, leaving many companies and nonprofits figuring out how to adjust to remote work for an uncertain period.

Running a virtual office brings unique challenges no matter the context, experts say, but especially during these difficult times, when many groups are battling falling revenue while trying to meet an increased need for services due to the virus and the economic downturn.

Some organizations have operated remotely for years with positive results, and their experiences offer lessons for managers and employees working from home for the first time.

GrantStation, a company that runs an online database of grant opportunities and provides grant-seeking resources to nonprofits, transitioned to a virtual office in 2012, more than a decade after its founding in Fairbanks, Alaska. The company wanted to shrink its carbon footprint from car-commuting and broaden the geographic scope of its staff, says Cynthia Adams, CEO.

The move was successful despite a couple of departures early on: GrantStation's 17-person staff is "overwhelmingly happy" with working from home, Adams says, and its productivity spiked by 75 percent.

TRIAL AND ERROR

Figuring out how to manage a remote team was a process of trial and error, however. In the beginning, Adams grappled with how to keep in touch with staff members throughout the day and evaluate their work when she could not see them — and had never even met some of them in person. The organization was using Google Chat for quick communications, but it wasn't always easy to locate employees. "You didn't know where people went — they'd just disappear," Adams says, "sometimes for hours."

Things improved in the second year when GrantStation started using Slack,

an online messaging service, and set guidelines for staying in contact during the day. The staff has flexibility to take breaks and run personal errands as long as they complete their work, Adams says, but they are required to update their status on Slack to indicate when they'll be back and how others can reach them in the meantime.

Adams also hired a "process auditor" during the early stages of the transition to help the company adapt its operations to remote work. That person handled all questions about procedures — such as who should answer the phone, where the mail should go, what insurance coverage to keep. This step was crucial to ensuring a smooth transition, she says.

Any nonprofit can do this, Adams adds, even if it can't afford to hire outside help. Some businesses, including GrantStation, would be willing to provide mentors or volunteers to help nonprofits figure this out during the coronavirus crisis, she says, or you could work with a board member whose company works remotely.

'WATERCOOLER MOMENTS'

The Pollination Project, a nonprofit that makes micro-grants to community leaders in 116 countries, has operated remotely since its creation in 2013. Executive director Ajay Dahiya oversees a virtual team of 10 full-time employees, most of whom live in the United States, and more than 100 volunteers around the world who are actively involved in the group's grant-making process.

A huge challenge of running a virtual office is building and nurturing a strong organizational culture without in-person interactions, Dahiya says. "Unless you're careful and conscious, it can just become about business all the time, and you interact with one another simply because there's a task that needs to be done."

Working to replicate "[watercooler moments](#)" that are typical in a traditional office is essential to creating team members who trust one another and are committed

to the organization's success, Dahiya says. One way the Pollination Project does this is by dedicating the first five to 10 minutes of its weekly meetings with its core employees to checking on each other. Because of the Covid-19 crisis, the group now holds a "team huddle" videoconference every morning that includes time to see how everyone is feeling and what support they need.

Both Dahiya and Adams say Slack channels — in which groups of people discuss a specific topic — also have been useful for fostering a sense of community among employees. Around half of the Pollination Project's channels are focused on subjects that are not related to work, such as food ("since we don't go out to lunch with one another," Dahiya says) and "pets and plants" so that no one feels left out. The group also has a channel dedicated to sharing messages of appreciation to colleagues. "That is something really important because it can be lonely to work remotely," Dahiya says.

GrantStation has similar channels on Slack and has added new topics of conversation during the coronavirus outbreak: tips for preventing infection and ideas for keeping kids busy and providing educational opportunities while they are not in school or day care.

It's best to let these outlets for personal connections emerge organically from the team, Dahiya says because people probably won't "bring their heart" to them if they feel forced.

UNEXPECTED BENEFITS

Despite the challenges, operating remotely also brings some valuable benefits, Adams and Dahiya say. For example, it led to a notable decrease in personnel problems at GrantStation, such as complaints about coworkers' behavior or conflicts because of office cliques. "A virtual office strips away all

those silly shenanigans," Adams says.

As an international organization, the Pollination Project has found a different type of value in having a virtual office. Because the group works with grantees and volunteers in many countries, it can't bring them all together in a physical space. But it can open up its virtual staff meetings to its broader network. For instance, it used to invite a grantee to join a staff meeting once a month to discuss his or her work and its impact.

This helps build relationships among everyone involved in the Pollination Project's work, Dahiya says, and connects them to the mission in a tangible way.

"Of course, you could always do that through videoconferences even if you were an in-person office," he says, but that often gets overlooked.

Here are more tips from Dahiya and Adams to help your organization strengthen a remote team or transition to a virtual work environment for the first time.

Build organizational culture. Create opportunities for staff members to interact with

each other to prevent people from working in "silos" and to foster accountability. "Don't lose your culture because you've lost your workplace," Dahiya says.

Hold weekly staff meetings to help people feel closer to each other and the organization. Adams also tries to have a conversation with each employee every morning to see how that person is doing whether by a phone call or a quick message.

Build time into the beginning of meeting agendas for personal connection. "Otherwise, it'll spill over anyway, and it may take your meeting off track," Dahiya says.

Consider holding a daily "team huddle" during Covid-19. Use this time to check on people's feelings and their needs for support.

Streamline the tools you use to collaborate. "Everything runs more

Don't lose your culture because you've lost your workplace.

efficiently if people don't have to check 12 different places for communications and for updates," Adams says. If you work with a consultant or volunteer to develop procedures for remote work, that person should be able to help with this, she says.

Consider the best channel for each communication. Define simple guidelines and stick to them, Adams says, such as when to use email versus online messaging. If you're not sure which method to use, make a phone call, Dahiya says. He likes to use video calls around 75 percent of the time. "A lot can get lost without seeing the body language, the tone, the context of what's being discussed," he says. But don't over-rely on video, Adams says. Some employees

don't like feeling that they need to tidy their work area and their appearance when telecommuting.

Also consider each individual employee's communication preferences, Adams suggests. For example, she speaks to certain people by phone because they need to talk through their thoughts, while other staff members prefer to resolve questions quickly using online messaging or email.

Dedicate an online channel to showing appreciation. This can help employees feel valued and deepen connections.

Look for unexpected advantages of working remotely. Flexibility to adjust schedules and greater productivity are a few, the experts note.

The nonprofit sector is experiencing an unprecedented staffing crisis.

Fundraisers are moving into new roles or leaving the profession altogether. At Graham-Pelton, conversations with nonprofit leaders who are struggling to attract and retain fundraising talent is increasing exponentially.

Prolonged staffing challenges are impacting both morale and metrics, which jeopardizes the ability of nonprofits to fulfill their missions. This does not have to be the case. Transitional staffing makes it possible to maintain fundraising momentum and employee engagement, even in times of high turnover.

This guide will help you understand the most important trends impacting the nonprofit workforce. It also highlights the critical factors to consider to be successful with transitional staffing. Let's get started.

THE GREAT RESIGNATION'S IMPACT ON NONPROFITS

The term "the Great Resignation" was coined only a year ago in May 2021 by Anthony Klotz, a professor of management at Texas A&M University. Since then, we've seen tremendous movement in the nonprofit sector for several reasons. Some common themes have emerged.

THREE REASONS WHY NONPROFIT LEADERS ARE LEAVING

Executive salary increases: This industry-wide game of musical chairs in leadership is fueled in part by a 30% salary increase for nonprofit executives over the past two years, as reported by The Chronicle of Philanthropy.

Retiring baby boomers: Many baby boomers were nearing retirement when COVID-19 emerged and chose to lead their organizations through the pandemic. With operations stabilizing, retirements are increasing.

An equitable take on leadership: Many nonprofits are placing a new or renewed focus on their DEIB missions and initiatives, which may require new leadership with specialized expertise.

TRANSITIONAL STAFFING: WHY IT EXISTS AND HOW IT'S DIFFERENT

Throughout the pandemic, we've supported nonprofit leaders with transitional staffing and leadership. As the Great Resignation gives way to the Great Reshuffle, the need for immediate fundraising leadership is becoming even more apparent. There is an urgency to reconnect with lapsed donors and to re-launch fundraising initiatives that have sat dormant since March 2020.

Why are we using the term "Transitional" instead of

"Interim"? It's an intentional response to the collective transitions taking place in teams and individuals throughout our profession. To paraphrase William Bridges' classic book *Transitions*:

"We know that change is external: staff departures, new

hires, and new practices. However, transition is internal: a reorientation that your team goes through before the change can work."

Every member of a development team experiences a disruption when a colleague leaves; this is the nature

of our interconnected work. Transitional leadership, managed by an experienced fundraising professional, minimizes that disruption by providing stability, trusted leadership, and positive momentum. Transitional leaders support the hiring and onboarding of new staff, address immediate priorities, and provide direction and management to the existing team.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRANSITIONAL LEADER FOR YOUR NONPROFIT

Board chairs and executive leaders should consider if hiring an interim leader is the right approach for long-term organizational success, and if so, what type of interim leader is needed at this moment. Hastily made appointments can lead to serious and long-lasting consequences.

Dr. Jennifer Boulay studies women in interim leadership roles in higher education and cautioned board members and executive leaders to, "Be thoughtful about the interim process. You can't just stick a warm body into a role and expect everything to work out."

She goes on to share how uncertainty around interim appointments creates stress in the workplace:

"Uncertainty in the workplace can have an impact on more than just our comfort level. When there's ambiguity at work, it can lead to increased stress. Organizations must think about the interim timing thoughtfully and provide the greatest amount of care so that staff feel valued and supported throughout the process."

Additional research shows that ambiguity can have

a profound negative impact on morale, leading to decreased organizational citizenship and lower job performance.

Leadership changes naturally create ambiguity, so think carefully about the role you want your transitional leadership to play. Then be prepared to communicate to the rest of your team clearly and directly.

THREE TYPES OF TRANSITIONAL LEADERS

In their 2022 review of scholarly research on interim leadership, Dr. Viktoria Rubin and Dr. Jon Ohlsson describe three types of transitional leaders and their impacts on organizations:

The External Expert focuses on knowledge creation. They contribute to the organization's understanding through in-depth analysis, the implementation of best practices, and a review of data analytics.

The Change Agent facilitates cultural change and takes advantage of the initial momentum to establish new norms that they believe are best long-term.

The Formal Manager keeps the 'ship afloat' and supports new staff.

Determining the type of transitional leader your organization needs involves a thorough and honest assessment of your current fundraising operations. External services, such as Graham-Pelton's Transitional and Interim Staffing service, can help you clarify the right balance of leadership needed to propel your organization forward with momentum, focus, and stability.

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH INTERNAL APPOINTMENTS

Nonprofit leaders are often tempted to appoint an existing staff member to the interim role. Maybe they believe it will provide continuity or preserve the budget. Research indicates that appointing an internal candidate as interim may result in possible negative consequences for both the organization and the appointee.

Internal interim leaders may be more risk-averse and reluctant to take the significant steps needed to make positive change. They may fear jeopardizing existing relationships, preventing them from holding team members accountable for performance. Additionally, there is always the chance that internal appointees will not remain at the organization if they are passed over for the permanent role, causing additional turnover and turmoil. If they do remain, they are heading back into a team that they previously managed, which can create imbalance and possible ill will.

Other potential risks of internal appointments include:

- What was the departing leader's style? Were they the first to bring donuts on Friday or did they cultivate a sense of humor on the team?
- How can this team maintain the best parts of their character?
- Are there opportunities for other team members to assume additional responsibilities or grow professionally during the transition?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND NEXT STEPS

Hiring nonprofit leadership and fundraising staff is always challenging, and the current market is only making it more difficult to find the right candidates. While we don't know when the Great Resignation will end, we do know this: your mission can't wait. Engaging with a transitional leader can support organizational stability, retain and motivate staff, and set up permanent leadership for success.

Thanks to Dr. Tom Sechrest, Dr. Jennifer Boulay, Dr. Viktoria Rubin, and Dr. Jon Ohlsson for their scholarship and contributions to this article.

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ABOUT GRAHAM-PELTON

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