

Blog : Nonprofits Must Invest in Human Capital

People are nonprofits' most valuable asset and they must be smarter about finding, engaging, and keeping the staff they need.

A new report from the Nonprofit Listening Post Project at Johns Hopkins University, for example, says nonprofits can be more effective at recruiting and retaining staff—particularly from among “Millennials” born between 1982 and 2002, and Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964—by focusing on their mission.

“Offering staff a life of meaning can be a powerful tool for recruitment,” says Lester M. Salamon, who wrote the report and directs the Center for Civil Society Studies at the Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies.

Nonprofits also need to show they value their workforce by putting a high priority on personnel issues and adapting themselves to the diverse needs and interests of employees and prospective employees.

To attract Millennials, for example, nonprofits are shifting their recruiting to the Internet and looking for ways to offset student-loan obligations, the Hopkins report says.

Other strategies nonprofits can use to be more effective at recruiting and retaining employees include:

- Selling their organizations' “context,” including physical environment, work environment, and mission.
- Taking the initiative on recruiting by reaching out to young professionals who may not know much about nonprofits. An approach can include recruiting young people as board members and donors.
- Redefining work and the work environment by redesigning benefits to reflect new family structures, offering flexible hours, and using focus groups to keep in touch with worker concerns.
- Staffing and investing in human-resources departments.
- Offering relief to recent college graduates who face debt burdens.
- Reaching out to diverse communities in recruiting.

The workforce is changing and becoming more diverse, and nonprofits must move quickly to make sure they reflect and connect to the interests, needs, and values of the workers they will need so as to thrive and grow.