

# “What Next?”

**Staff Retention, Attraction, and Growth  
in the Caring and Non-Profit Workforce**



**Manager & HR Perspective**



Our Vision: We envision the continuous development of a leading-edge workforce.

Our Mission: Engage partners to find solutions to local workforce development needs.

We would like to express our sincere thank you to the Managers, Human Resources professionals, and others who came to our strategy sessions in November 2024. Your insights and ideas give us a starting point for a local discussion on how to retain, attract, and nurture staff in:

- Healthcare
- Education & Childcare
- Social Services
- Non-Profit organizations

Thank you also to the members of our ‘Supporting the Non-Profit and Caring Sectors’ project Advisory Team for their help and guidance in shaping this project.

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The logo for the Government of Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag to the right.

The logo for Employment Ontario, consisting of the words "EMPLOYMENT" and "ONTARIO" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font on a dark red rectangular background.

The logo for the Government of Ontario, featuring the word "Ontario" in a bold, sans-serif font next to a circular emblem containing a stylized trillium flower.

This project is funded by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.

The views expressed in this document do not reflect those of the Government of Canada or the Government of Ontario.

# Introduction

In November 2024, we facilitated brainstorming sessions with local Managers and Human Resources staff in Caring sectors including:

- Education
- Childcare
- Healthcare
- Social Services
- Non-Profit organizations.

We asked:

**“How do we retain, attract, and nurture our workforce?”**

This report, and the handwritten notes throughout, is a summary of their responses.



### **Please note!**

This is just a starting point to the conversation! Perspective from others involved (front-line workers, funders, other key decision makers, community) will be needed for effective and long-lasting improvement.



### **As you read this report, write down:**

- What is your organization doing well?
- Which areas are a priority for change?
- What resources or community partners can help?
- How will you implement change?

If we change nothing, nothing will change.

How will you make your workplace and sector stronger and more resilient?

Do you have comments, questions, or want to continue the conversation? Email us at [info@workforceplanningboard.com](mailto:info@workforceplanningboard.com) or call 519-622-7122.

Sonya Vanderheide  
Project Coordinator

# Compensation

Can staff cover their basic needs with the compensation they receive for their work? If not, you can plan on them leaving once they find a role that does.

Similarly, your pool of candidates may be limited if only those with the privilege and ability to accept a lower wage apply.

## Wage / Salary

- Fair and equitable wage
- Competitive salary
- More alignment on minimum standards of compensation
- Standardization of pay scale between similar roles / similar qualifications
- Living Wage Certification ([Ontario Living Wage Network](#))
  - \$21.30/hr Living Wage in Dufferin Guelph Wellington Waterloo (2024)

## Benefits

- Health benefits
- Retirement plans / RRSP / Pension
- Benefit options for precarious sector work: contracts, part-time workers

## Remove Financial Barriers

- For new hires and existing staff
- Cover work-related expenses & equipment:
  - Sector-required certifications (Vulnerable Sector Check, First Aid)
  - Annual membership fees in regulated fields
  - Laptop, software, cellphone
  - Mileage



Work-life Balance ♥

Retirement Plans

Equitable Funding

Competitive Salary Benefits

Encourage time away from work (disconnecting)

use days you're entitled to ..  
Vacation

Wellness Day

Living Wage Certification

## Customization

- Recognize the different needs of different ages, life stages, and individuals
- How do we offer flexibility for in-person employees (i.e. early childhood educators)?
- In-person workers may need extra paid time off work when they have repair people at their home
- Work-from-home workers may value more opportunities to connect as a team
- Develop a menu of compensation options. Employees choose options from categories.



## Work-Life Balance

- As leaders, encourage and model using the vacation days you're entitled to
- Seek opportunities to recharge staff: shut-down time off, Summer Fridays, Wellness Day
- Respect the right to disconnect
- Working more hours does not equal excellence
- Flexible hours or work schedule
- Shorter work weeks / 4-day work week
- Ability to work from home

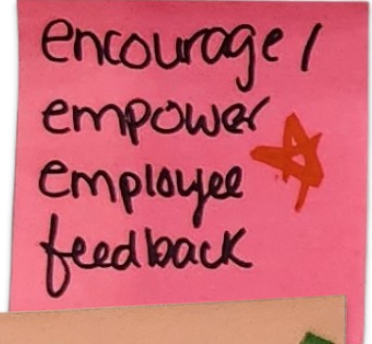


# Connection & Culture

People who work in these sectors tend to value and gravitate towards work that supports people. Organizations that do the same may find it easier to attract job applicants. How can you encourage empathetic leadership that supports and prioritizes people?

## Communication

- Consistent internal and external communication
- Feedback flows both ways
- What steps can you take for staff to feel valued and heard?
- 1 on 1 meetings regularly
- Suggestion box and action on feedback
- Staff surveys:
  - Onboarding
  - Annual
  - Psychological well-being
  - Stay interviews



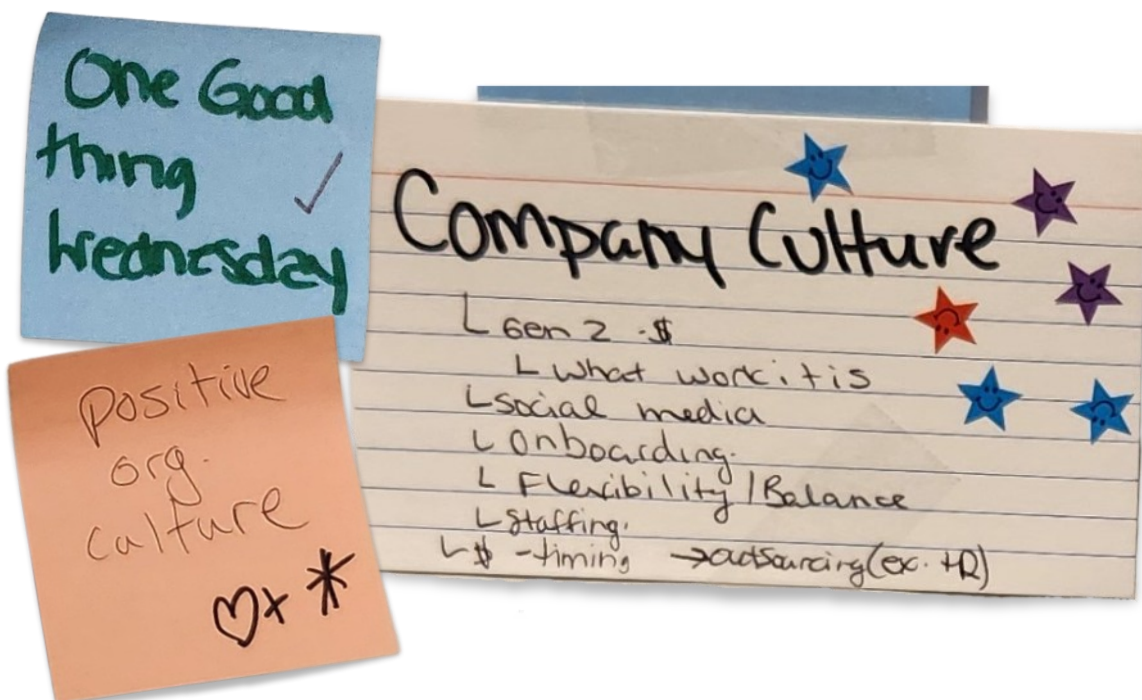
Encourage /  
empower  
Employee  
feedback



Stay  
Interviews

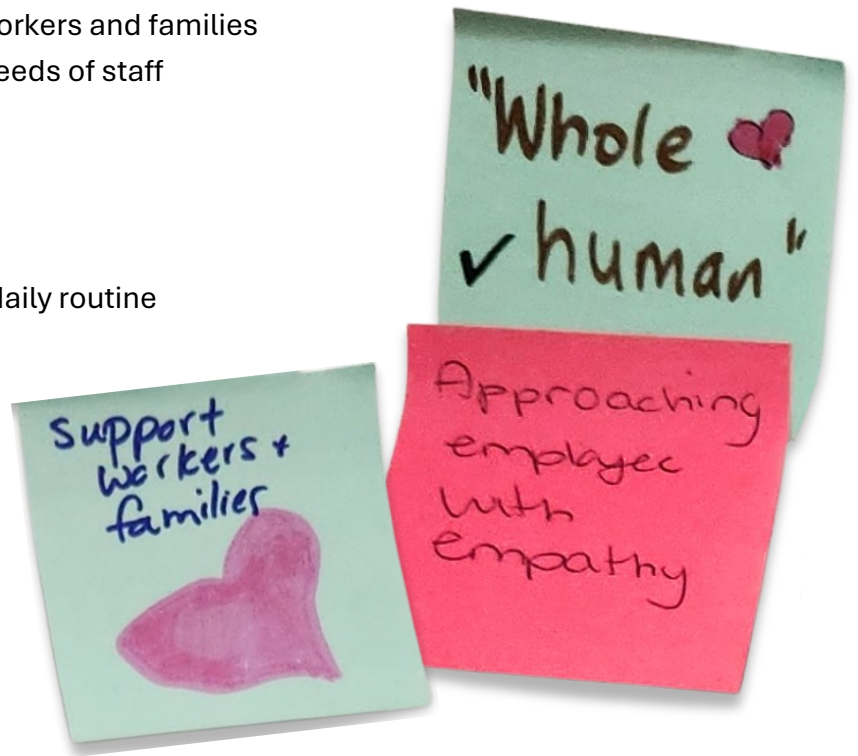
## Build a Strong Team

- Employee resource groups - offers support to staff for a variety of different things
- Networking events (internal & external)
- Social activities, meals
- “One good thing” Wednesday – every Wednesday each staff member shares “one good thing”



## Human Approach

- Wholistic responses that support workers and families
- Individual responses to individual needs of staff
- Empathy
- Psychological safety
- Wellness programs
- Have fun, get it done!
- Opportunities for things outside of daily routine



## Appreciation & Recognition

- Celebrating skills + employees at each level – going above and beyond is different for every job
- Formal and informal staff recognition
- Recognition event for employees
- Verbally recognizing hard work
- Social events
- Employee swag (logo clothing)
- Points reward system



# Skill Development

Non-profit and caring sector workers are facing shifting work environments. Developing a skills plan is important for retention and attraction.

## Workforce Planning

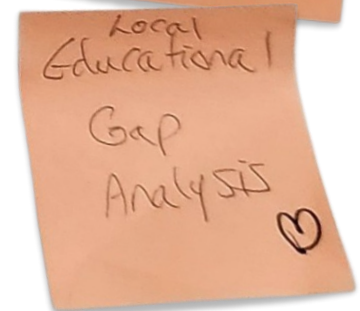
- Leverage our international talent
- Moving 'in' instead of up! Celebrating that not everyone wants to move up
- Redistribution of work when burnt out
- Shuffle work as needed (strengths based)

## Training & Skill Development

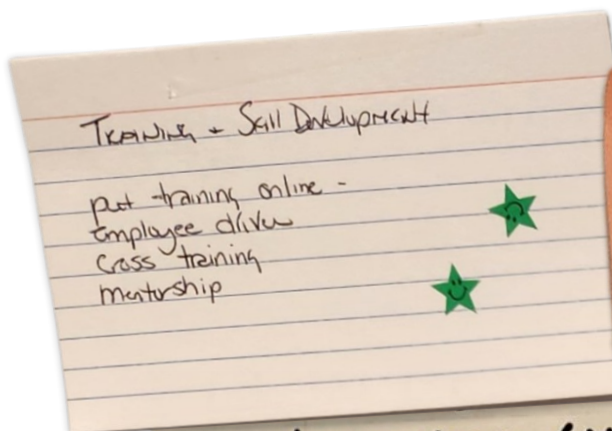
- Local educational gap analysis
- Be proactive in incentivizing education
- Prioritize professional development & career development
- Foster a learning culture
- Opportunities for career growth and development
- Personal Development (PD) plans
- Employee driven
- Put training online
- Exposure to different things
- Offer upskilling or re-skilling
- Cross train staff (so others can support staff paid-time-off)
- Staff skills assessments



Career Growth Opportunity \*



Local Educational Gap Analysis ♡



Training = Skill Development

- put training online -
- employee driven
- cross training
- mentorship

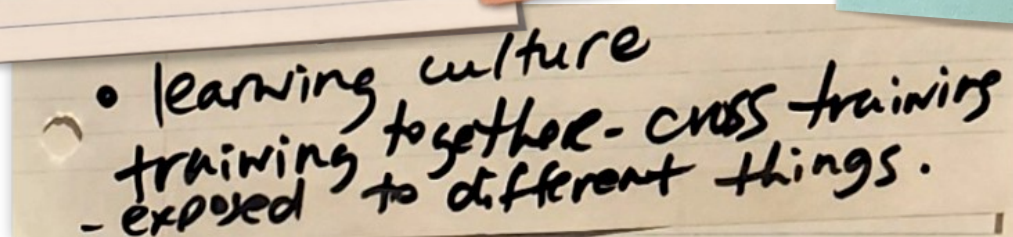


Career Development \*

- PD
- mentoring



Prioritize Professional Development. \*

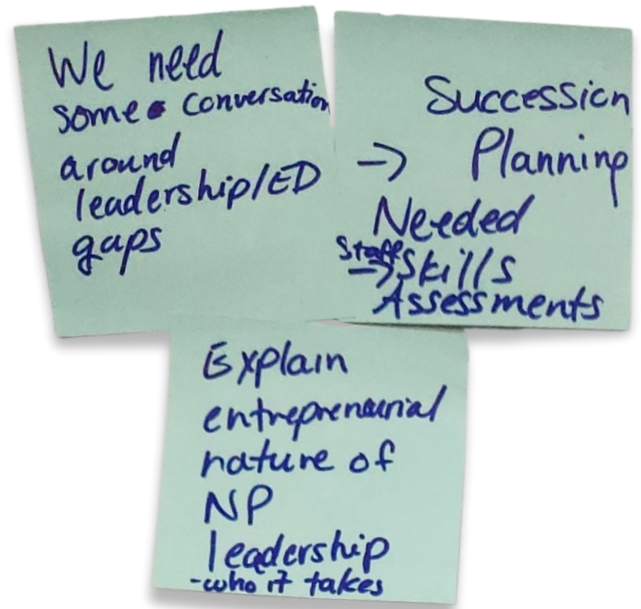


- learning culture
- training together - cross training
- exposed to different things.



## Leadership

- Strength-based leadership approach
- Address leadership gaps:
  - Succession planning
  - Training for non-profit leadership
  - Staff skills assessments
  - Explain the entrepreneurial nature of non-profit leadership and what it takes

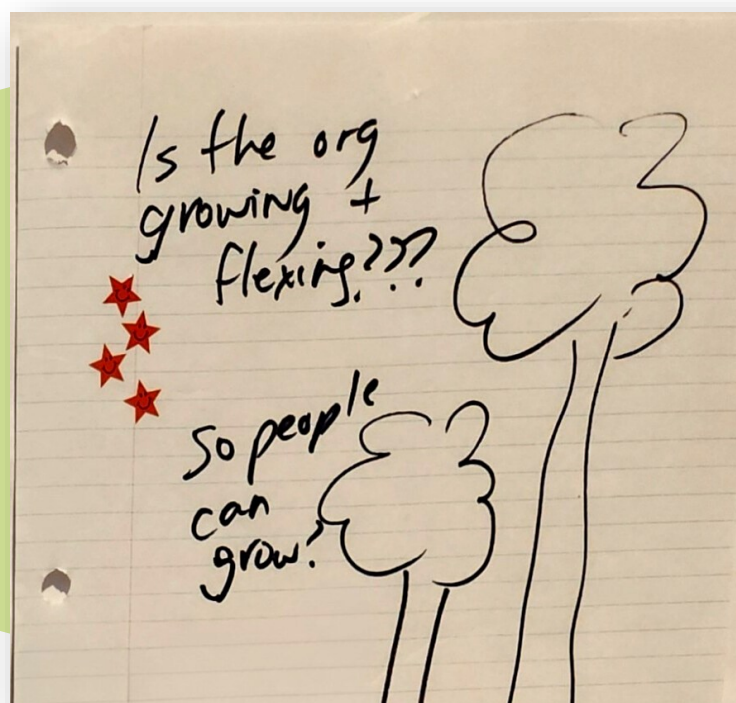


## Mentorship

- Peer mentoring (groups & onboarding)
- Coaching and mentorship
- Newer employee working with a more senior employee getting advice

## Growth

- Allow growth and change within the org
- Instead of staff leaving the organization to grow their skills, can the organization flex or grow to accommodate their skill development internally?
- "Up & over." Help employees have opportunities to move up to another department or role
- Develop a path of growth; goals for the next 5 years



# Staff Attraction

When struggling to attract applicants, the methods used are just as important as the number of people that view them. What do you do well, and where can you do better or even revolutionize attraction practices?

## Be Attractive

- How do people know who you are? (Visibility)
- What is your organization's first impression?
- Established core competencies—the skills, knowledge and experience that give your organization a competitive advantage
- Demonstrate to others what you do day-to-day
- Is your company culture visible on social media?
- Give back to the community

## Invite Others In

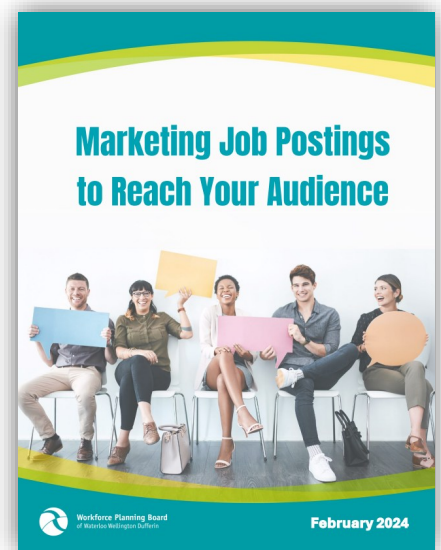
- Student/Co-op placements
- Apprenticeships
- Employee referrals
- Volunteers (if appropriate)

## Improve the Application Process

- Describe how the job allows you to have impact
- Well-written job ads  
(See "[Marketing Job Postings to Reach Your Audience](#)" report by the Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin)
- Simplify the process; do you NEED a cover letter?
- Skills-based application
- Ensure volunteerism counts
- Inclusive hiring practices

## Onboarding

- Build an onboarding process and use it consistently
- Coaching and mentorship
- Newer employee working with a more senior employee getting advice



# Inclusivity

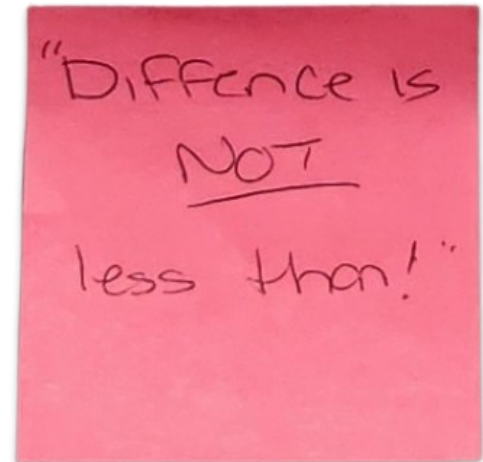
“Having to hide or mute one’s identity due to discrimination at work can cause significant stress and take a toll on the mental health of marginalized employees.”

- The Centre for Addictions and Mental Health

- Tap into all skill sets and different sectors of people
- Equip leaders with knowledge and skills for diverse staff needs
  - Neurodiversity
  - Disabilities
  - Stage-of-life considerations
  - Newcomers
  - New to the sector

## Implementing Inclusion

- Programs
- Policies
- Action Team for intentionality and accountability



# Speaking Up

Ask any number of employees how they got into this work and the response is usually something like, “I fell into it.” How do we better define ourselves?

## Public Awareness Campaign

- Advocate for appropriate financial compensation
  - “Why? Don’t you do it for love?”
  - “But your issue is growing – you’re not fixing it.”
- Ask why non-profit employees often make less than for-profits?
- Non-profit does not always mean a lower wage.  
i.e. In childcare and senior care, workers may earn more in non-profit.
- Educate the public on the importance of careers in these sectors: ECE, PSW, DSW, nonprofit EA, and more
- How do we quantify the monetary value of our work to community?  
What would happen if we disappeared?

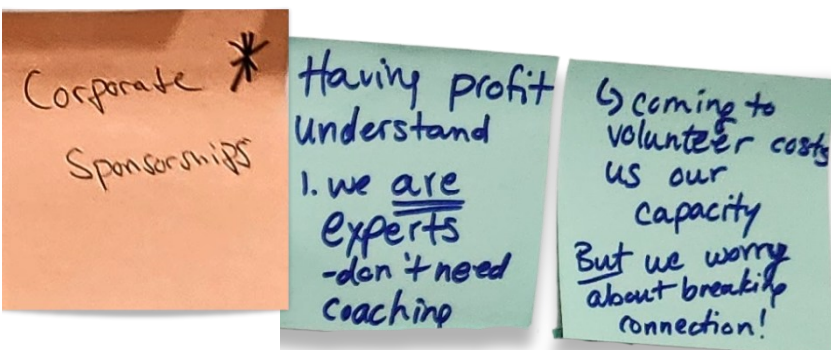


## Advocacy

- Compliance requirements (hiring, education, expectations, partnerships) need flexibility
- Build consistent messaging across sectors for amplification
- Advocate for free certification for non-profit or caring sectors
- Find advocates to government:
  - Organizations (i.e. Ontario Non-Profit Network) already advocating to government
  - Partner with outside industries (i.e. construction, manufacturing)
  - Community leaders advocating for sectors (have data) have ideas
- Government designating funding in some way to help non-profit budgeting

## How For-Profit Companies Can Help

- Look at the training or expertise we offer as non-profits and consider partnering with the for-profit sector to create a revenue stream within our sector
- Understand:
  - Coming to volunteer costs us our capacity but we worry about breaking connection!
  - We are experts at what we do – don’t need coaching



## Funding:

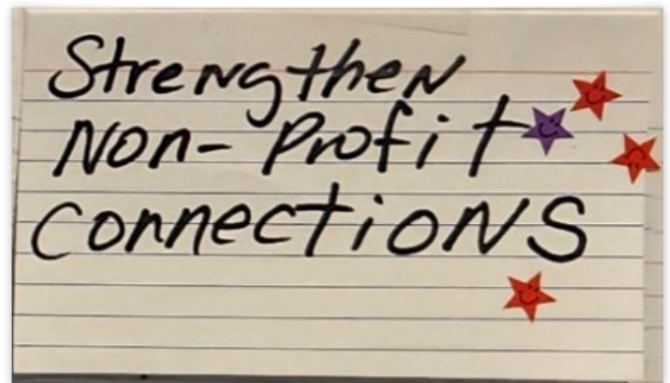
- Corporate sponsorships
- Personal Development costs
- A conference
- Appreciation event for staff

# Collaboration

Developing a new approach or larger initiatives all comes down to collaboration. That is one of the sector's powerful traits, but we can do better.

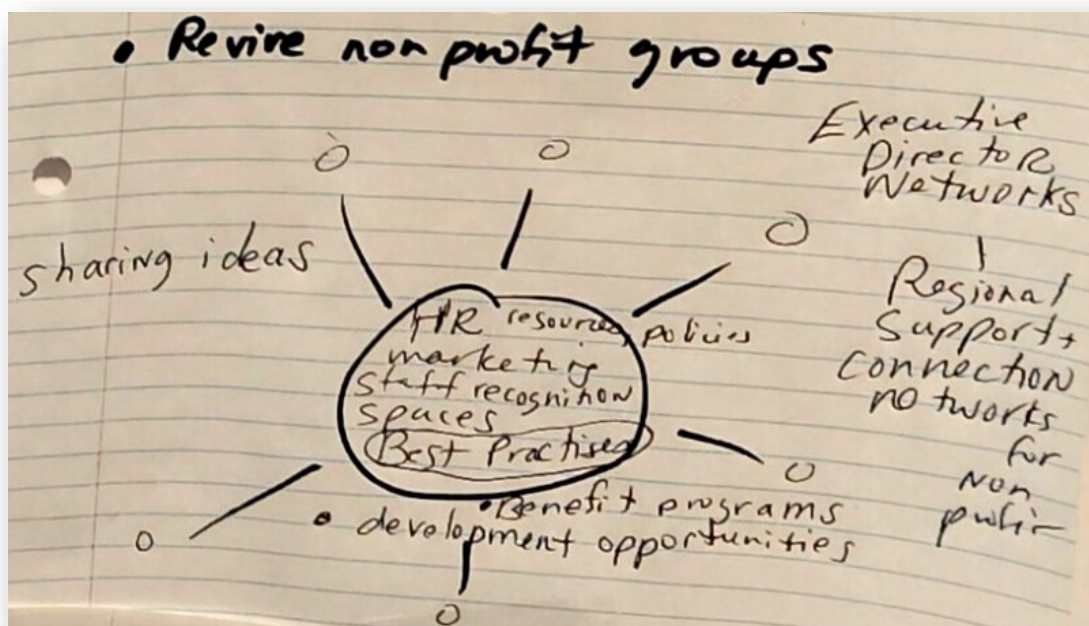
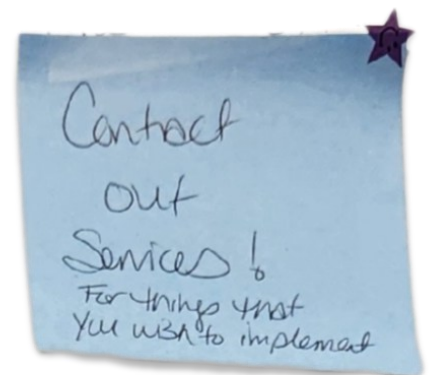
## Share Resources

- Share ideas
- Physical space (i.e. for training)
- Training opportunities
- HR resources, policies, best practices
- Marketing
- Staff recognition
- Benefit programs
- Revive non-profit groups:
  - Executive Director networks
  - Regional support & connection networks for non-profit
- Opportunities to network
  - Internal & external
  - Across sectors



## Contract out services

- Value your time, know your skills, and recognize when paying a skilled contractor may be the best decision for what you want to implement.



# Where to Start?

## Accountability

- Regular HR audits of:
  - Social Wellbeing Policy
  - DEI Policy
  - Compensation package
  - Best practices
- Action groups

• When did you last audit policies ?? ★

## Technology:

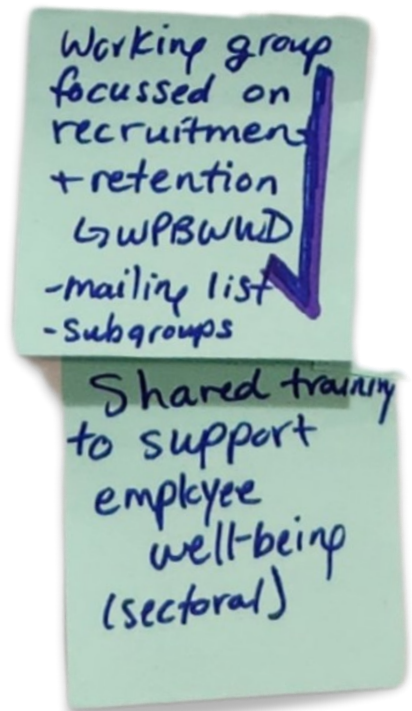
- Use technology to our advantage
- HRIS (Human Resources Information System) + Payroll. Reduce duplications.
- Use AI features to collect and synthesize employee feedback
  - i.e. “Culture Amp” – an employee experience platform



## Working Group

Form a “Working Group” across organizations, focused on recruitment and retention

- Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin can initiate this idea
- Communicate via mailing list and/or subgroups
- Shared training to support employee well-being (sectoral)
- Workforce well-being to roll out of the working group



# A Note on Wellness at Work

Employees that work in caring sectors are naturally at high-risk for symptoms of stress and burnout. As Managers and HR professionals, it is critical to be aware of symptoms and risk factors so you can retain healthy, effective team members. Below are some resources to get you started!

## **Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety**

Pocket Guide: [Comprehensive Workplace Health Program](#)

- “This 200-page pocket guide will help you establish a workplace health program (or enhance your existing program) by providing information, tips, charts, checklists and illustrations.”

## **Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA):**

Subscription-based program: [Not Myself Today](#)

- “Build greater awareness about mental health, reduce stigma, and create psychologically healthy and safe work cultures – in just a few clicks. Not Myself Today can help your team tackle issues like burnout and stress and learn how to support employees experiencing mental health challenges.”

## **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH):**

Report: [Workplace Mental Health: A Review and Recommendations](#)

## **Charity Village:**

Webinar: “[Burnout in the nonprofit sector: What you need to know](#)” (2024)

- Includes risk factors at work, and prevention at an Organizational, Management and Team level.

## **Mind Garden**

Assessment: [Maslach Burnout Inventory™ \(MBI\)](#)

- The MBI measures burnout as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) and in the ICD-11.

## **Ontario Non-Profit Network (ONN):**

Online resource: [Decent Work and Wellness](#)

- Eight key elements that support employee wellbeing, Workplace Wellness Assessment, and more.

## **World Health Organization (WHO):**

[Fact Sheet: Mental Health at Work](#)

- Risks to mental health at work, plus actions and recommendations.

## **YMCA WorkWell:**

[Workplace Well-Being Services](#)

- “We help organizations across Canada develop the knowledge, competencies, and skills they need to care for the well-being of their employees by transforming and optimizing organizational culture.”



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Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin  
73 Water St. S., Suite #407  
Cambridge, ON N1R 7L6  
519-622-7122

[www.workforceplanningboard.com](http://www.workforceplanningboard.com)