

TIP SHEET

Personal Responsibility
Education Program

Boosting Staff Recruitment and Retention in Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs

October 2023



As an Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (APP) program administrator, recruiting and retaining a committed and capable team is one of the most important things you can do to ensure the long-term success of your program. However, stress, burnout, and social isolation among staff, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, have brought about challenges for many administrators who rely on educators and other staff to conduct community outreach, engage youth, and accomplish myriad program goals. Despite the barriers, there are strategies you can use to attract, recruit, and retain professionals who are passionate about and remain committed to your APP program's mission. Use these tips and resources to identify and implement the strategies that are best suited to your program.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE STAFF RECRUITMENT



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TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE STAFF RECRUITMENT

1. Articulate your program's mission, vision and values to prospective staff clearly.

It is important for staff to be comfortable with and passionate about your program's mission. When advertising a new position, ensure that your marketing materials clearly and accurately state your program's overall mission, vision, and values.

2. Create a compelling job description.

The job description should be detailed enough so candidates have a good sense of what their day-to-day work will entail. Describe the expectations and qualifications required for the role and consider identifying the opportunities available for employees to develop transferable skills. Carefully consider the skills candidates need to be successful in the job. A potential candidate may be more likely to take an entry-level job in your organization if they are able to relate the skills they will obtain to their longer-term professional goals (e.g., going to graduate school in education or social work). Use visuals (e.g., photos of program events) to create appealing marketing materials.

3. Use a variety of recruitment strategies.

Consider multiple ways to get the word out about your job opportunity, including social media posts, job boards, networking, "word of mouth" advertising by current staff, and dissemination via partnerships with other local organizations. Colleges and universities are great avenues for recruiting people who may be looking for work. Get to know instructors and professors in departments that are related to your programming (e.g., health education, sociology, psychology, communication) and ask them to distribute flyers or email announcements. Ask if they know candidates who would be a good fit. Consider creating internship opportunities so you can get to know students who might be interested in longer-term employment upon graduation. By casting a wide net, you are more likely to obtain a diverse candidate pool.

4. Offer competitive compensation.

Before advertising your position, become familiar with the range of salaries for similar positions in your region to ensure you can set a competitive salary that will attract and retain staff. [Glassdoor](#)  allows you to search for salaries by job title, organization, and location. Some APP grantees find that they can combine funds from various funding sources to offer competitive salaries. You could also consider offering additional monetary incentives for meeting performance-based goals.

5. Use behavior-based interview questions and problem-solving scenarios to choose the right candidates.

Interview questions that elicit information about relevant past behavior and experiences can help you assess a candidate's suitability for your program. Likewise, by giving a candidate an opportunity to describe how they would solve a real-life problem commonly encountered in your program, you will be able to predict how they might respond on the job. Use prompts such as, "Describe a time when you had to..." or "Please give me an example of a situation when you..." to obtain evidence of past behaviors and experiences. Use questions like "If a youth did XYZ during a lesson, what steps would you take and why?" to assess relevant problem-solving skills.



Foster equity in your organization through equitable hiring practices.

When recruiting new staff, consider recruiting those who bring in new skills and perspectives based on their education, training, prior work experience, or life experience. Below are some tips for attracting and hiring staff who have a background working with historically underserved populations.

- Diversify the places where your organization posts job opportunities (e.g., community colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, minority-serving institutions in the community).
- Emphasize experience over degrees.
- Share job postings in both English and non-English languages.
- Make the interview and hiring process more equitable by standardizing the interview process. All candidates should be asked the same interview questions and be interviewed by the same people.
- Invest in implicit bias training for staff involved in recruiting and interviewing candidates. [Project Implicit](#) developed the free Implicit Associations Test (IAT) to detect implicit bias by measuring reaction time to images and words. There are various assessments staff can take to help them understand their own implicit biases relative to certain groups of people, so they can work to minimize their impact.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE STAFF RECRUITMENT

1. Develop and implement comprehensive onboarding procedures.

When onboarding staff, ensure they understand your program's mission and project logic model. Provide new staff with documentation of policies, procedures, and information regarding how to obtain and use any tools or resources they will need for their job. Let them know who can answer specific types of questions and make sure they receive sufficient training for any tools they will use or curricula they will teach. Consider giving facilitators an opportunity to shadow experienced staff and co-teach lessons with them before asking them to teach lessons on their own.



2. Know the signs of burnout.

The first step in addressing burnout is to know what to look for. Common signs that staff are experiencing stress or burnout include the following:

- Moodiness
- A change in energy level or signs of withdrawal
- A change in job performance

To identify burnout proactively, consider having regular check-in-meetings with staff where you can ask about stress they might be experiencing. You can also ask them to self-assess their mental well-being on a regular basis and share their thoughts with managers.

What causes staff burnout?

Researchers have identified some organizational risk factors linked to burnout.¹ Have you observed any of these risk factors in your workplace?

- **Work overload** contributes to burnout by depleting the capacity of people to meet the demands of the job. A sustainable and manageable workload, in contrast, provides opportunities to use and refine existing skills and become effective in new areas of activity.
- **Lack of control** is also linked to burnout. However, when employees are able to influence decisions that affect their work, exercise professional autonomy, and obtain resources necessary to do an effective job, they are more likely to stay engaged.
- **Insufficient recognition and reward** (whether financial, institutional, or social) increases people's vulnerability to burnout. On the contrary, monetary and non-monetary rewards can mitigate burnout.
- **Lack of team support and trust and unresolved conflict** can create a greater risk of burnout. However, when there is strong social support and employees have effective means of working out disagreements, they are more likely to stay engaged.
- **Lack of appropriate fairness and respect** can lead to cynicism, anger, and hostility. Showing fairness and respect can create trust and increase motivation.
- **Conflicting values on the job** (a gap between individual and organizational values) can make employees feel like they must make a trade-off between work they want to do and work they must do, and this can lead to greater burnout. When the ideals that originally attract an employee to the job are aligned with their day-to-day experience, they are more likely to remain connected.

1. Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2016). Understanding the burnout experience: recent research and its implications for psychiatry. *World psychiatry: Official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)*, 15(2), 103–111. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20311>

3. Introduce a culture of self-care.

Encouraging a workplace culture that prioritizes self-care is important for long-term employee well-being. Here are some steps to promote it:

- Take responsibility for your own self-care.
- Establish policies that support staff self-care such as sufficient Paid Time Off (PTO) policies.
- Establish a wellness committee to organize low-cost wellness activities.
- Implement a wellness (e.g., movement, nutrition) challenge and offer recognition and prizes for participation.
- Provide resources or lunch-and-learn sessions on mindfulness, exercise, nutrition, and stress reduction.
- Encourage outdoor walking meetings (if feasible and accessible to all employees) or incorporate movement or stretching into indoor meetings.
- Advertise local wellness initiatives in your community.
- Create a wellness newsletter or add wellness content to an existing employee newsletter.
- Encourage employees to schedule short breaks hourly (e.g., using the Pomodoro time management technique).



- Encourage mindfulness and meditation by having 10- to 15-minute meditation sessions.
- Allow employees to expense mindfulness apps (if feasible).
- Negotiate employee discounts at local fitness clubs or partner with local fitness instructors for discounts.
- Start a health and wellness book club.
- Create a list of referral resources in your community that support staff wellness and share the list with staff.



4. Help staff maintain a healthy work-life balance.

There are many things managers can do to make sure staff are able to disconnect from work during non-work hours:

- Model work-life balance.
- Set communication time boundaries (i.e., it should be accepted that people shouldn't be expected to answer emails after hours).
- Respect planned PTO and provide coverage during an employees' absence; remind employees of the importance of taking time off.
- Provide strategies for transitioning from "work" to "home" when working virtually.
- Offer flexible working hours if feasible.
- Discourage eating lunch at the computer.

5. Address compassion fatigue or secondary traumatic stress.

Compassion fatigue can occur when staff have excessive demands on their empathy. [Secondary traumatic stress](#) can occur among service providers who work with people who have been traumatized and can result in cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physical symptoms among the providers themselves, including feelings of isolation, anxiety, dissociation, physical ailments, and sleep disturbances. Secondary traumatic stress can lead to organizational effects such as increased absenteeism, impaired judgment, low productivity, poorer quality of work, higher staff turnover, and greater staff friction. Strategies you can use to address these conditions include the following:

- Adopt policies that encourage self-care.
- Identify an expert within the organization who can provide support to staff regarding trauma-informed care and secondary traumatic stress.
- Refer employees to counseling or support groups (or an employee assistance program if your organization has one).
- Recognize employees' successes in making a difference in young people's lives.
- Create a culture that de-stigmatizes the effects on employees of working with trauma survivors and encourages open discussion of secondary traumatic stress among staff.
- Provide education on secondary traumatic stress to employees.

6. Mitigate social isolation.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting social distancing and subsequent pivoting to virtual work and learning increased social isolation among both youth and program staff. Whether your staff primarily works out of a shared office or works remotely, there are things you can do to mitigate the effects of social isolation and bring people together in creative ways. Consider the following ideas:

- Conduct in-person or virtual social gatherings with fun themes.
- Have in-person or virtual coffee breaks or lunches.
- Conduct team-building activities (e.g., games, contests).
- Promote a volunteer day at a local charitable organization.
- Celebrate staff members' work anniversaries.

7. Foster good communication among your team members.

Fostering good communication within the team is an important part of being an organizational leader. Below are some ways you can encourage your staff to communicate clearly and manage conflicts respectfully:

- Encourage casual conversation, informal meetings, and cross-department chats.
- Provide training in offering feedback and active listening.
- Regularly seek out feedback from staff.
- Have an open-door policy so staff feel comfortable coming to you with ideas or concerns.

8. Recognize and reward staff for their accomplishments.

In addition to providing monetary rewards like raises, bonuses, and promotions, you can use a variety of non-monetary approaches to acknowledge employees' achievements and encourage them to recognize each other:

- Use meeting time to acknowledge team members' work and express gratitude. A simple "thank you" can go a long way.
- Implement a peer-to-peer recognition program.
- Recognize employees via a monthly newsletter, e-card, or digital recognition board.
- Organize celebrations for special achievements.

9. Provide professional development opportunities.

Employees who are given growth opportunities may be more likely to stay engaged. Consider these tips for creating an environment that challenges your staff to grow and develop new skills:

- Schedule regular performance reviews and encourage goal setting.
- Identify the strengths of each employee and help them make a professional development plan that includes a clear career path.
- Consider implementing a mentoring or buddy program to give experienced staff a chance to develop leadership skills and simultaneously support other staff.
- Collaborate with other organizations that can share knowledge and resources with your staff.
- Invest in training opportunities related to APP, Adulthood Preparation Subjects, educational methodology, and other related topics. Remember to encourage staff to take advantage of the many training opportunities (e.g., recorded trainings, webinars and other presentations) and resources (e.g., tip sheets, infographics, videos, podcasts) on [The Exchange](#).



Recruiting and retaining staff is an ongoing process. Stay abreast of the needs of your program and your team, regularly assess your staff's job satisfaction, and use their feedback to make any necessary modifications to your policies or procedures to enhance staff retention.

RESOURCES

The Exchange

- [Creating Safe Spaces: Facilitator's Guide to Trauma-Informed Programming](#) (facilitator guide; includes information on secondary trauma)
- [Navigating Staff Turnover](#) (podcast episode)

Other Resources

Office of Population Affairs

- [Employing and Retaining the Best Facilitation Staff for Adolescent Sexual Health Programs](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Workplace Health Promotion

- [Stress](#)
- [Engaging Employees in Their Health and Wellness](#)
- [Mental Health in the Workplace](#) (issue brief)

American Psychiatric Association Foundation

- [Center for Workplace Mental Health](#)
- [Beating Burnout at Work](#) (infographic)
- [Employee Mental Health & Well-being During and Beyond COVID-19](#)
- [The Working Well Toolkit](#)

World Health Organization

- [Burn-Out an "Occupational Phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases](#)

Administration for Children & Families

- [Secondary Traumatic Stress](#)

Psychology Today

- [Work Day Stress Relief: 5 Senses in 5 Mindful Minutes](#)

Reach Out

- [Developing a Self-Care Plan](#)

University of Colorado Department of Psychiatry

- [Self-Care Toolkit for Coping with Social Distancing](#) (with tips on staying virtually connected and creating an inviting virtual office)

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

- [Meditation and Mindfulness: What You Need to Know](#)
- [Your Healthiest Self: Wellness Toolkits](#)

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