

Providing Mental Wellness Support and Services to Staff at Small Nonprofits

Resource Type: Articles

Topic: HR Risk and Employment Practices

The pandemic made clear that nonprofit employers must recognize and respond to employees' mental health and wellness needs. It also brought to light workplace patterns that take a mental toll on teams. Learn how to provide assistance your employees value and avoid common pitfalls.

Listen. Staff surveys, exit interviews, and all-staff meetings can give you insights into where your staff is hurting or stressed and needs assistance. Gather and analyze information from all of these channels, make a plan to act on the feedback, and communicate your actions to staff.

Evaluate. Turn a critical eye to your organization's mental health benefits. Analyze how you can improve them in response to the needs employees shared. Can you give staff members and families access to more sessions with a therapist each year? Provide more telemedicine options for therapy? Provide an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

Talk. Make talking about mental health with your team a priority. Don't make the conversation all about your own experiences—but as a leader, if you don't share something, you can't expect anyone else to. Share the message frequently that your workplace prioritizes mental health, and share how it does so. Emphasize that your door and calendar are truly open. Talk about stories in the news or that you've heard from other nonprofits of how their teams deal with mental health challenges and stress. And if an employee seems to be struggling, ask privately if they're OK. Let them know you don't want to overstep any boundaries, but you're concerned about their well-being.

Train managers to promote wellness and mental health. Most managers don't receive any training on how to supervise other people, let alone how to talk with them about the importance of mental health. Let staff see you take breaks and prioritize time for yourself, your interests, and loved ones. Provide positive reinforcement to staff members who do the same, and encourage all team members to do so.

Hold managers accountable. Consider adding new metrics to your management performance reviews, like how well a manager works with employees to help navigate work-life balance, keeps team members informed of changes at work that affect them, and provides timely and useful feedback.

Address workload. Workplace stresses can contribute to mental health concerns. Consider a four-day workweek or other modified schedule. Build as many options for flexibility into your organization's schedule as possible. Look for ways to say yes to flexible scheduling requests, instead of no. Having control over when and how you work can be a powerful tool.

Move forward on equity. Evaluate leaders on how well they demonstrate equity in hiring, supervision, and business decisions, and how well they consistently learn on their equity journey. Listen to the needs of staff on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Frequently communicate the steps the organization is taking to create a culture of belonging.

Make sure staff know what mental health resources the organization provides and how to access them. Share this information frequently, in multiple formats, and on multiple platforms.

Consider “restoration breaks,” where the entire office closes to give staff time to rest and reset.

Communicate expectations clearly. As your organization’s priorities shift during a changing time, make sure employees know what projects take top priority and what can be put on the back burner. Clearly communicating expectations and helping employees problem-solve on workload can help alleviate confusion and burnout, lowering workplace stress.

Additional Resources

- [Mental Health Has Become a Business Imperative – MIT Sloan Management Review](#)
- [How And Why Nonprofits Are Supporting the Mental Health Of Their Employees – Council of Nonprofits](#)
- [3 Steps Every Nonprofit Can Take To Support Their Employees’ Mental Health – LinkedIn](#)
- [Nonprofit Leaders, Prioritize Mental Health For Employees of Color – SGEEngage](#)