



# ▶ WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT REPORT

## for Community Development Associations

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*Based on data collected during our 2023 Family Snapshot Survey and the Workplace Environment Survey conducted by Lisa Much*

### Introduction

The Community Opportunity Alliance conducts an annual survey of state and regional community development associations within our membership known as the “Family Snapshot.” The 2023 Family Snapshot survey results revealed persistent challenges with hiring and retention despite increases in staff numbers and compensation. As a result, we partnered with researcher Lisa Much to conduct a Workplace Environment Survey examining factors that affect staff retention and recruitment. This report documents the findings of that survey, which gathered responses from 58 non-executive staff members of associations that are members of the Community Opportunity Alliance.

**In 2023, these state and regional associations saw significant employment growth.** They not only increased their full-time staff but also raised salaries well above the inflation rate. Despite these positive changes, recruiting and retaining staff remained a challenge.

## Factors Driving Job Satisfaction and Recruitment

The Workplace Environment Survey provided deeper insights into staff retention and recruitment, highlighting four key factors impacting employee satisfaction:

- 1 Compensation and Benefits
- 2 Accurate Job Descriptions
- 3 Employee Burnout
- 4 Effective Management and Recognition



## FACTOR 1: Compensation and Benefits

A study from Nonprofit HR revealed that **45 percent** of responding nonprofit employees plan to seek different employment in the next year.<sup>1</sup> Our Workplace Environment Survey found that **23 percent** of respondents have seriously considered leaving, and another **32 percent** have casually looked for other opportunities. Our survey revealed that **non-competitive compensation is a primary factor** affecting these numbers in our network.

In addition to retention, non-competitive compensation significantly impacts recruitment. Nearly three-fourths of respondents to a National Council of Nonprofits survey investigating the nonprofit workforce cited salary as a barrier to new staff recruitment.<sup>2</sup> Our survey found that Alliance members can at least partly overcome this barrier by providing and marketing desirable benefits.



<sup>1</sup> "23% of Pulse Survey Respondents Won't Work for Nonprofits." Nonprofit HR, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Nonprofit Workforce Survey Results. National Council of Nonprofits, 2023

Our Workplace Environment Survey asked respondents about their satisfaction with their current compensation and benefits package. Numerous respondents expressed greater satisfaction with their work-life balance and benefits packages than with their compensation. Benefits important to the respondents include **ample paid time off policies, organizational days off, parental leave, healthcare, and retirement benefits**. Additionally, respondents who reported a positive work environment attributed their satisfaction to **flexible hours and work location**.

Providing these sought-after benefits may supplement non-competitive compensation and improve recruitment and retention outcomes. Nearly 30 percent of respondents to the 2023 Family Snapshot Survey who wrote in comments noted that the **opportunity for hybrid and remote work** contributed to a good work environment. Remote job listings garner three times more job applications compared to other top locations according to a user survey by job search website, *The Muse*.<sup>3</sup> All Alliance member associations provide remote work options, so they should capitalize on this desirable benefit by highlighting it in the recruitment process.

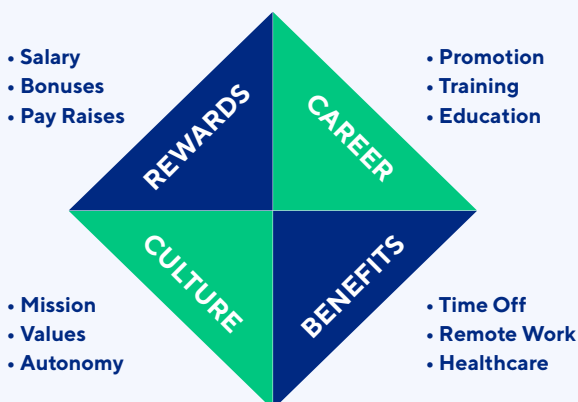


*The most compelling factors motivating individuals to work for nonprofits and community development are the independence and flexibility of our work environments.”*

– Workplace Environment Survey respondent

## HOW TO WRITE AN EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION

- ▶ **Define what sets your organization apart** from others, whether it’s your company culture, career development pathways, or unique benefits.
- ▶ **Emphasize the tangible benefits offered** such as compensation packages, flexible work arrangements, or wellness programs.
- ▶ **Align organizational values with individual aspirations**, emphasizing the meaningful impact employees can make within the company.
- ▶ **Authenticity is key** – ensure that your proposition accurately reflects the reality of working within your organization.



## FACTOR 2: Accuracy of Job Descriptions

The majority of Alliance member organizations found it at least somewhat challenging to recruit new staff. They perceived a shortage of skilled candidates, an issue evident across the nonprofit sector. “Lack of expertise in-house in developing strong job descriptions to attract the right pool of candidates” was also cited as an important factor that significantly impacted recruitment.

In addition, mismatches between job descriptions and actual roles can lead to dissatisfaction and contribute to burnout. Several respondents wrote that they felt overwhelmed by unclear responsibilities and expectations. An **Employee Value Proposition** is a tool that organizations can use to address these issues affecting recruitment and job satisfaction.

<sup>3</sup> 2023 User Survey *The Muse*, 2023.

## FACTOR 3: Burnout



### WHAT IS BURNOUT?

According to the World Health Organization, “*burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed*” and is characterized by feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy.<sup>4</sup> – Definition provided in our Member Work Environment Survey

Referencing the definition above, the survey asked “How well do you feel this definition currently describes you?” **Thirty-one percent** replied “fits me very well” and **9 percent** replied “fits me extremely well.”

Some **41 percent** of survey respondents reported that they experienced burnout, as compared to the national average of **48 percent** among all nonprofit workers.<sup>5</sup> A representative from the Community Builders Network of Metro St. Louis highlighted this issue, stating, “**There is too much strain on existing staff. We’re having to do too many duties and wear too many hats.**” Other comments echoed concerns about heavy workloads and burnout. Respondents attributed burnout to multiple factors, including **unclear responsibilities, miscommunication, workloads, and not feeling valued.**



To minimize burnout, it is crucial to establish sustainable work practices that reduce stress and prioritize well-being. While some strategies may seem obvious, such as **setting clear expectations and regularly reviewing workloads**, Alliance member organizations cited creative ways to minimize burnout. For example, the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC) offers a \$500-per-year stipend that employees can use for anything that adds to their wellness. Employees have used their stipends on therapy sessions, art supplies, and even a hot air balloon ride!



*To me, it speaks to the trust PACDC has for our staff to know what it is that we need to flourish.”*

– Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations staff member

Their Wellness Policy also includes “half-day Fridays” in the summer, occasional “Sun” days where the Executive Director gives a random day off, and “Fun” days where PACDC organizes a fun activity for staff.

<sup>4</sup> Burn-out an “occupational phenomenon.” World Health Organization, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Nonprofit Employee Benefits Benchmark Report, PPI Benefit Solutions, 2021

## FACTOR 4: Effective Management & Recognition

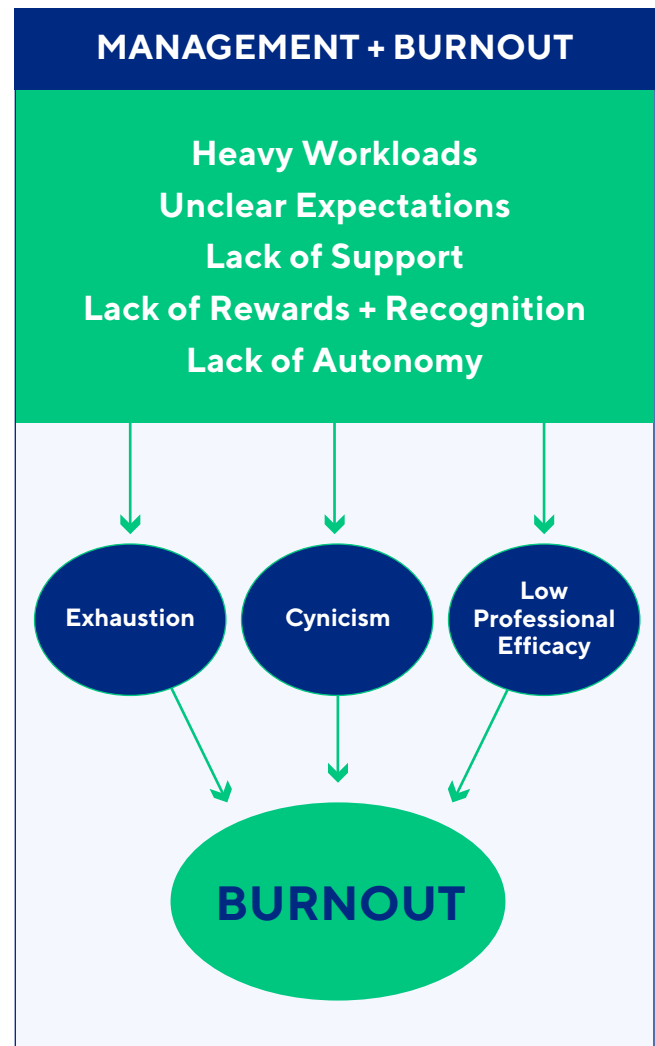
The Workplace Environment Survey revealed that unclear responsibilities, expectations, and heavy workloads are substantial factors leading to employee frustration and a sense of ineffectiveness – all of which are major contributors to burnout. Best practices indicate that managers can mitigate these issues by conducting weekly one-on-one meetings with staff. These sessions help ensure that employees feel valued, understand their responsibilities, maintain manageable workloads, and receive the necessary support.



*Our executive director and chief operating officer have implemented **senior staff meetings** to give directors an opportunity to get feedback from upper management and share what's happening with their direct reports. This has been a wonderful way to keep the information flowing to everyone on staff. Also, our **weekly staff meetings** are designed to discuss top priorities first and then do a round robin where every staff member is given a chance to either share what they're working on, ask questions, share observations, etc. Our COO really felt it was important that everyone is offered a chance to speak so although time is limited, we make sure that we get around to everyone. If a staff member has an issue that requires more time, the COO makes sure to meet offline right afterwards with those individuals.*

*Another way they've been making sure staff is being heard is by offering **skip-level meetings**. Our ED is encouraging those who don't report directly to her to schedule time with her. Many on our staff have taken advantage and it's been appreciated."*

– Housing & Community Development Network of New Jersey staff member



Survey respondents commented that **regular recognition and appreciation** for employees' efforts are a significant characteristic of a positive workplace environment.

Strong management practices extend benefits beyond internal operations and influence recruitment. By **prioritizing employee well-being and fostering a supportive work environment**, managers help cultivate an organizational reputation that attracts new talent. Employees who feel valued and supported are more likely to become advocates for the organization, attracting high-quality candidates through positive word-of-mouth. This approach not only fills job openings with capable individuals but also builds a committed workforce.

## Recommendations Summary

- 1 **Benefits are critically important to both current and prospective employees.** If you cannot offer virtual or hybrid work, know that you may be a less competitive employer than other nonprofits. Consider what other benefits you may be able to offer to minimize burnout.
- 2 **Maintain clear and up-to-date job descriptions.** Regularly update job descriptions to reflect true responsibilities and avoid role ambiguity, which can lead to job dissatisfaction and turnover. Annual updates and discussions about role changes can be a proactive way to manage expectations and reduce workplace stress.
- 3 **Consider using Employee Value Propositions.** You can use them as an addition to or substitute for regular job description updates.
- 4 **Ensure that employees feel valued and heard:** Establish a culture of appreciation where employees feel genuinely valued. This can include recognition programs, regular feedback sessions, and open channels of communication with supervisors. Ensuring that employees feel heard can significantly improve morale and decrease turnover rates.

## Members Can Access Salary Data

The 2023 Family Snapshot Survey collected budget information from housing and community development associations that are Alliance members. The survey also collected salary data for their employees.

**All Community Opportunity Alliance members can access budget and anonymized salary data:**

Go to <https://bit.ly/2023budget-salary-data>.

Use your work email address to log into this members-only webpage.

## THANK YOU

*We greatly appreciate all of the Community Opportunity Alliance members who participated in the 2023 Family Snapshot Survey and Lisa Much's Member Workplace Environment Survey. Your responses were invaluable to this report.*

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