



Ten Strategies to Enhance Employee Resilience and Engagement Within Survivor-Serving Organizations

Employees are the most valuable resource in any organization, and employees in domestic and sexual violence organizations provide essential services to survivors despite myriad challenges and limitations. Organizations that support and celebrate the heroic work of staff at every level of survivor serving organizations are better equipped to inspire and sustain employee commitment and engagement, which enhances the organization's ability to survive and thrive. Engaged employees are typically more satisfied with their work, are more productive, feel healthy, work well in teams, and demonstrate commitment to the organization's mission, vision and values.

Below are key practices that leaders of organizations can incorporate to build strength, resilience, and engagement for individual employees and the entire organizational body. These efforts will enhance organizational health and sustainability and thus, improve outcomes for survivors.

1. Build Employee Connection to your Mission and Values

An organization's mission, vision and values provide meaning to the organization and a sense of purpose for those who work there. Help employees set goals that are aligned with and contribute to the mission, vision and values of the organization. This shared vision helps create community, connection, and commitment.



Tips:

- Convey a clear sense of purpose in the workplace.
- Develop a mission statement reflective of the work your organization is committed to and involve all staff members in the creation of the statement.
- Set clear goals, strategies, and roles for staff in achieving the mission of organization.
- Ensure that new hires align with your mission/values, no matter the position.



Creative practices:

- Take time during an all-staff meeting to celebrate staff who have demonstrated the organizational mission and values in their day to day actions.
- Connect employee performance goals to the organizational values.
- Engage staff in reviewing or developing organizational core values.



Resources:

[How to Develop and Use Core Values: Sample Statement of Core Values](#)

[Aligning Mission, Vision, and Goals](#)

2. Find the Right Fit

Staff engagement starts with an organized and thoughtful hiring process based, in part, on the skills and talent needed, but also with an emphasis on locating an individual with a commitment to your vision and who possesses personal values that align with your mission. Further, your orientation process should continue to reinforce the vitality of your mission and values along with other new knowledge, processes, and responsibilities.



Tips:

- Share information about your organization and what makes it unique.
- Asks pertinent questions about an individual's values and commitment.
- Provide a structured [onboarding](#) that includes training and skill development.
- Clarify trauma exposure awareness and organizational staff wellness support.
- Match employees with an enthusiastic buddy/mentor to support their work and acclimation.
- Provide a welcome that celebrates the person as a valuable member of the team.



Creative practices:

- Upon hiring, provide the book "[Trauma Stewardship](#)."
- Select two staff members to provide orientation support for the first 3-6 months.
- Take a new employee to lunch, if possible, or provide some other acknowledgement on the first day.



Resources:

- [Onboarding Best Practices, A Guide for Onboarding New Staff](#)
- [Guide to Successful Nonprofit Executive Onboarding](#)
- [Nonprofit Recruiting Tips and Best Practices](#)
- [Employee Orientation Guide \(1st day\)](#)
- [Employee Orientation Checklist](#)
- [Hiring and Interview Tips](#)
- [Managing Nonprofit Employees](#)

3. Recognize Employee Efforts and Achievements

Performance evaluations are critical opportunities for a supervisor and supervisee to have formal conversations about strengths, weaknesses, and roles, and to create employee development goals that support the mission of the organization. Align these reviews with the organization's mission and core values, and include appreciation for achievements and strategies for improvement.



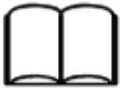
Tips:

- Encourage two-way communication, (open-door policy), and feedback on both sides.
- Structure review around dialog, not ratings, tailored to staff positions.
- Ensure clear job descriptions, roles, and expectations, aligned to project or position goals.
- Provide appreciation and recognition.
- Specify contributions to the organization or project.
- Provide compensation in the form of bonuses or gifts of appreciation following successful project completion.



Creative practices:

- Hold employee evaluation meeting outside of the organization, if safe and practicable.
- Provide notes, cards, or small gifts.
- Share a meal to recognize an accomplishment, bagel breakfasts, pizza lunches.
- Use strengths to address challenges and weaknesses.



Resources:

[Nonprofit Human Resources: Best Practices Toolkit](#)

[Human Resources \(HR\) Toolkit for Small and Medium Nonprofit Actors](#)

[Supervision: Helping People Succeed](#)

[The Key to a Successful Performance Review Process](#)

[Evaluate Your Staff to Identify Leaders](#) ([Leadership Development Toolkit](#)

[The Two Things Every Employee Wants](#) (success and be treated as a human being)

[11 Uplifting Ways to Celebrate Wins in your Organization](#)

4. Invest in Staff Development and Capacity Building

Employees who feel supported in their career development are more engaged with the mission of the organization. Invest in continuing education, capacity building, and opportunities for leadership for employees enhance the overall strength of your organization.



Tips:

- Partner with employees to develop meaningful, challenging and achievable personal development plans.

- Identify development opportunities that are parallel to the needs/objectives of the organization.
- Build skills and capacity through on the job education opportunities.



Creative practices:

- Establish opportunities for mentoring/peer support. See FUTURES webinar on [The Benefits of Mentorship](#).
- Consider internal promotions before seeking outside resources, whenever possible.
- Provide financial support for attendance at conferences, workshops, capacity building, and higher education, if possible.
- Provide opportunities for professional growth - i.e. different type of legal case, doing a media appearance, providing a presentation, lead a project/committee, shadow/cover a manager, etc.



Resources:

[Professional Development Planning](#)

[Development Opportunities for Nonprofit Staff](#)

[The Benefits of Mentorship: Empower, Lead, Succeed in Organizations Serving Survivors of Violence \(Webinar & Resources\), FUTURES](#)

[Mentoring Toolkit for Staff, Faculty, and Leaders Interested in Being Mentored](#)

5. Address Vicarious Trauma

Survivor serving organizations should incorporate trauma-informed practices into their daily activities. [Research](#) shows that vicarious trauma can lead to fatigue, increased rates of depression, and burnout among staff in sexual and domestic violence organizations. A trauma-informed organization prioritizes physical and emotional safety, relationship and connection, hope and resilience (to face challenges), and utilizes a survivor defined approach in all levels of the organization's policies, practices, staffing, supervision, and environment.



Tips:

- Provide education and training to all staff members on the signs of stress, burnout, and vicarious trauma and its impact on health and well-being.
- Design a written policy on vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, self-care, and staff wellness.
- Use tools to create and transform organizational practices and supportive environments, including employee self-assessments, goal setting, and organizational approaches that align with mission and values.

- Recognize and address how experiences of staff with trauma may impact their work and leadership performance.



Creative practices:

- Organize a vicarious trauma committee to address how the organization addresses trauma.
- Create a “Lending Library” for staff members to share books.
- Offer wellness services (meditation, massage, yoga, art therapy) at organization for free, if possible.
- Use mindfulness or breathing practices to start meetings, end with positive things.
- Help staff develop goals for wellness practices and recognize and provide incentives.

Resources:



[Mindfulness practices](#)

[Self-Care and Relationship Checklist](#)

[Tools for Managers: The Organizational Self-Care Checklist](#)

[Tools for Transformation: Becoming Accessible and Trauma-Informed Organizations](#)

[Compassion Fatigue & Self-Care for Individuals and Organizations \(webinar\)](#)

[Building Cultures of Care: A Guide for Sexual Assault Service Programs](#)

[What About You? A Workbook for Those that Work with Others](#)

[A Self-Care Checklist for Leaders](#)

6. Find Creative Ways to Compensate Employees

Compensation can be a difficult subject to talk about, especially when organizations have varying budgets and staff sizes. Compensation includes more than salary. Employers should consider all the various needs of their employees and think outside the box on how to add to their employee satisfaction and wellness. Staff compensation can include health and wellness benefits, adjustments for living wage, and organizational policies to maintain staff wellness.



Tips:

- Provide competitive compensation approaches. View your local [living wage calculator](#) for information.
- Structure salaries through a variety of sources (governmental, private foundations, community grants, fundraising, etc.) in order to secure financial sustainability.
- Offer generous benefits that are valuable to employees such as sick-leave, vacation, and parental-leave.
- Establish wellness benefits and opportunities for staff members (exercise, co-pays for medical services, massage/body work, yoga, etc.)



Creative practices:

- Sabbatical policy for all staff after 5 years as staff, paid sabbatical leave for three months.
- Compensating staff through time off for events that are held on weekends and evenings.
- A small monthly or yearly stipend as a self-care benefit.
- Continuing education reimbursement or loan forgiveness.



Resources:

[Living Wage Calculator](#)

[Ways to Reward Your Nonprofit Staff When You Can't Afford Raises](#)

[Salary Policy Review Discussion Guide](#)

[Compensation for Nonprofit Employees](#)

7. Support Staff Leadership

Organizational leadership contributes significantly to a healthy work environment that fosters employee engagement and well-being. Organizational leaders must create and sustain the organizational vision, inspire staff, model behavior, prioritize needs, provide direction, encourage collaboration and innovate, all in an effort to achieve the organizational mission.



Tips:

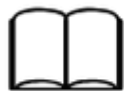
- Help build the capacity of supervisory (manager) employees to help increase confidence, effectiveness, and better employee relationships. Capacity building topics could include: communication, delegation, motivation of employees, planning, conducting effective performance discussions, and providing feedback, etc.
- Create a space that provides opportunities for everyone to take and demonstrate leadership.
- Practice [situational leadership](#) (adapt based on individual or task), by delegating, supporting, coaching and/or directing.
- Use reflective supervision (regular collaborative reflection between service provider and supervisor).



Creative practices:

- Explore practices that build on the strengths of staff for well-being, growth and sustainability.
- Cultivate leadership and skills through training, mentoring, multiple job experiences, talent development, and nurture.
- Use the annual and periodic reviews to make a connection with the mission, desired results, and leadership qualities and skills that would be helpful to develop.

- Redefine responsibilities, provide gradual increase of authority for program and budget decisions.
- Support internal promotions that promote and develop new leadership.
- Cross-train staff to support skill development and also minimize the impact of transitions.



Resources:

[Supervisor Roles and Responsibilities: Helping People Succeed](#)

[Remote Supervision in Rural Dual/Multi-Service Advocacy Agencies](#)

[How to Lead in Uncertain Times](#)

[Dare to Lead Leadership Assessment](#)

[Clarifying Responsibilities with MOCHA](#)

8. Assess your Physical Environment

Organizational culture consists of the dominant values, beliefs, and norms, which develop over time and become relatively enduring features of organizational life. Organizational systems, procedures, and behaviors of leaders create and also reflect an organization's practices. Keeping organizational culture vibrant, meaningful, and alive are the foundation of an organization's success and sustainability.



Tips:

- Create and maintain a physically safe and accessible work space that is also trauma informed.
- Encourage employee feedback and input for programs and changes in the organization.
- Share stories, events, history, and transfer of knowledge.
- Strive to be transparent; this builds engagement and trust.



Creative practices:

- Form committees that lead: Performance and Quality Improvement, Wellness and Resiliency, Book Club, Employee Engagement, Green Team.
- Use team building exercises and activities to foster a positive relationship among co-workers.
- Create an environment where all people feel listened to, valued, and appreciated.
- Put policies in place that reflect and support organizational values.
- Develop or update [workplace policies](#) on domestic violence and sexual assault.



Resources:

[Key Considerations for Serving Deaf Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence](#)

[Workplaces Respond to Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, NRC](#)

[Hosting a Meeting Using Principles of Trauma Informed Care](#)

9. Communicate to Connect

Healthy staff communication is integral to organizational sustainability and staff engagement. Intentional internal communications can play a critical role in helping employees feel more knowledgeable, connected and appreciated. Identify organizational communication practices that enhance clarity and reduce conflict.



Tips:

- Provide regular updates on key organizational developments and new information that impacts your work and community, and aim for transparency. Ask staff to share information.
- Build awareness about the different communication styles across people in the organization.
- Provide guidance and set clear expectations and preferences on modes of communication.
- Clarify process or policy for resolving grievances/miscommunications.
- Build communication skills among staff, including basic skills in listening, speaking, questioning and sharing feedback.
- Create ways for staff to provide feedback and suggestions.



Creative practices:

- Use skits to practice good communication practices.
- Use tools to assess and build communication styles strategies among team members, such as: [Communication in Colors](#), [DISC Assessment](#), and exchange of communication preferences, or conversations around a book or article related to communication strategies.
- Share board reports from managers with all staff.



Resources:

[Resolving Differences Using the Circle of Conflict](#)

[The Circle Way Process: strategy/tool to lead conversations, process, and resolve](#)

[4 Ways to Navigate Different Communication Styles in Your Workplace](#)

[DISC Assessment](#)

[Personality Test Based on Myers & Briggs](#)

[How Leaders can Build Psychological Safety at Work](#)

[How to Make it Safe for People to Speak Up at Work](#)

[Healthy Communication & Conflict Resolution](#), Tennessee DV Shelter Best Practices

[The Four Elements of Strong Relationships: The Manager's Guide to Relationship Building](#)

10. Make the Most of Staff Meetings

Staff meetings can build teamwork, motivation and reinforce connection. Plan meetings that are organized engaging, productive, and action and goal oriented.



Tips:

- Hold regular full staff meetings – share major accomplishments, concerns, announcements, etc.
- Get input from all staff about the agenda for each staff meeting.
- Unnecessary meetings can lead to burn out. Assess if there needs to be a meeting at all. Sometimes, check-in over e-mail or virtually is sufficient.



Creative practices:

- Hold regular “office hours” where people can check-in.
- Hold weekly leadership meetings that contain a training component.
- Provide training during bi-weekly meetings.
- Staff and teams take turns in organizing staff meeting, including topics for discussion, agenda, and presentations by teams or projects, and team building activities.
- A staff member takes turn in taking notes of staff and team meetings and shares them with everyone, capture discussions, decisions, resources shared, and next steps.



Resources:

[How to Get People to Actually Participate in Virtual Meetings](#)

[The Right Way to Run Meetings](#)

[Check-in Meeting Agenda Templates](#)

[Increasing Nonprofit Executive Team Effectiveness](#)

[Staff Meetings: An Organizational Must!](#)

[Nonprofit Retreats the Right Way](#)

Action Plan

Actions for Enhancing Staff Engagement and Resilience

A. What are three things that we could do to enhance staff engagement and resilience?

1.

2.

3.

B. What are our vulnerabilities/gaps?

C. Who needs to be engaged and what are their roles?

D. What resources are needed?

For information, resources, and TA support on organizational sustainability and capacity building through the [SOS Institute](#), please contact Futures Without Violence. [Learn more and access resources](#). Contact: Mónica Arenas, marenas@futureswithoutviolence.org.

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