

Staff from different departments come together at a competitive field day team at DonorChoose.org's three-day summer staff retreat.

2017 NPT Best Nonprofits To Work

Strong Focus On Organizational Culture Drives Staffing Choices At The Best Nonprofits

By MARK HRYWNA

A classic source of frustration in many workplaces goes something like this: An employee expresses an idea during a meeting. The boss hears that comment but lodges it in the back of the brain and weeks later it comes out as the boss's idea, forgetting that the colleague started it.

"It's classic that managers do this accidentally, deliver it as if it's their own idea. Obviously, that's frustrating for that employee," said Charles Best, founder and CEO of DonorsChoose.org, a 17-year-old nonprofit in New York City. "Whenever there's a workplace where employees feel like they will be acknowledged and get the justified glory for being the one to come up with an idea, they'll come up with kick-ass ideas," he said.

"Giving credit where credit is due is one reason why people would want to be here," Best said.

Recognition, trust and support -- both monetary and otherwise -- are

among the critical tenants that make up a great nonprofit to work for, according to *The NPT's 2017 Best Nonprofit To Work For*. *The NonProfit Times* partnered with Harrisburg, Pa.-based Best Companies Group for the seventh annual report, which ranked DonorsChoose.org as the No. 1 organization among medium-sized employers and No. 1 overall among the 50 nonprofits recognized. DonorsChoose.org last made the list in 2015, ranking No. 3 overall after a No. 8 ranking in 2014.

The Best Nonprofits To Work For report is data compiled from a thorough organizational assessment. Each participating nonprofit completes a questionnaire along with a confidential survey completed by employees. Business partners are also polled. The information then is combined to analyze and rank the workplaces. The organizations were further categorized as small, medium and large. Explanations of the categories accompany those stories.

**NPT's BEST
NONPROFITS
TO WORK FOR
★2017★**

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The NPT's 2017 Best Nonprofits To Work For identified the top 10 key drivers for employees across the 50 organizations:

- I feel I am valued in this organization;
- I have confidence in the leadership of this organization;
- I like the type of work that I do;
- Most days, I feel I have made progress at work;
- At this organization, employees have fun at work;
- I can trust what this organization tells me;
- Overall, I'm satisfied with this organization's benefits package;
- There is room for me to advance at this organization;
- I like the people I work with at this organization; and,
- I feel part of a team working toward a shared goal.

The *Employee Benchmark Report* represents the average percentage of positive responses to almost 80 statements or questions spread across eight focus areas. The percentage of respondents represents those who answered "Agree somewhat" and "Agree strongly."

For the most part, the same statements and questions scored highest and lowest in a category among nonprofits that made this year's list and those that did not. The difference was in just how big a disparity there was between nonprofits. Organizations that made the list tended to score near 90 percent across all categories while those that did not scored anywhere from 70 percent to as low as the middle 80s.

Among the eight categories of questions, the largest disparity overall between organizations that made the *Best Nonprofits* list and those that did not was found within "pay and benefits" (18-point differential) and "leadership and planning" (16-point differential):

- Leadership and planning, 90 percent compared with 74 percent;



You hear about places where employees can bring their true selves to work. It's important, especially for younger people.

--Charles Best

- Corporate culture and communications, 88 percent to 73 percent;
- Role satisfaction, 90 percent to 81 percent;
- Work environment, 89 percent to 83 percent;
- Relationship with supervisor, 92 percent to 85 percent;

TOP 50 NPT's BEST NONPROFITS TO WORK FOR 2017

Rank	Organization	State	City
1	DonorsChoose.org	New York	NY
2	Communities In Schools National Office	Arlington	VA
3	Team Rubicon	Los Angeles	CA
4	Kessler Foundation	West Orange	NJ
5	Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands	Omaha	NE
6	Education Commission of the States	Denver	CO
7	Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia	Washington	DC
8	DoSomething.org	New York	NY
9	The Lord's Place	West Palm Beach	FL
10	ZERO - The End of Prostate Cancer	Alexandria	VA
11	Crossroads	Duxbury	MA
12	InterfaithFamily	Newton	MA
13	Young Community Developers	San Francisco	CA
14	BoardSource	Washington	DC
15	Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona	Tucson	AZ
16	Space Foundation	Colorado Springs	CO
17	Our Family Services	Tucson	AZ
18	PRS, Incorporated	McLean	VA
19	Alzheimer's Association	Chicago	IL
20	Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society	Arlington	VA
21	The SAFE Alliance	Austin	TX
22	CAP Tulsa	Tulsa	OK
23	American Heart Association	Dallas	TX
24	The Children's Home of Cincinnati	Cincinnati	OH
25	AHC	Arlington	VA
26	Gulf Coast Community Foundation	Venice	FL
27	Council of Chief State School Officers	Washington	DC
28	Kinexus	Benton Harbor	MI
29	NeedyMeds	Gloucester	MA
30	Brighton Center	San Antonio	TX
31	The Center for Trauma & Resilience	Denver	CO
32	PENCIL Foundation	Nashville	TN
33	Partnership for Public Service	Washington	DC
34	iMentor	New York	NY
35	Directions for Youth & Families	Columbus	OH
36	Cinnaire	Detroit	MI
37	The Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults	Baltimore	MD
38	Palm Beach Habilitation Center	Lake Worth	FL
39	NJ Society of Certified Public Accountants	Roseland	NJ
40	Career Path Services	Spokane	WA
41	STAR Center	Jackson	TN
42	4Cs Of Alameda County	Hayward	CA
43	Year Up	Baltimore	MD
44	BBB	Austin	TX
45	National Institute of Aerospace	Hampton	VA
46	College Foundation of the University of Virginia	Charlottesville	VA
47	National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy	Gaithersburg	MD
48	Service Access and Management	Clarion	PA
49	The Mission Continues	New York	NY
50	Pathway Homes	Fairfax	VA

- Training, development and resources, 84 percent to 69 percent;
- Pay and benefits, 88 percent to 70 percent;
- Overall employee engagement, 92 percent to 82 percent; and,
- Survey average, 89 percent to 77 percent.

Within "leadership and planning," the disparities among seven questions were in the double-digits, with the highest (18 points) on the statement, "There is adequate follow-through of departmental objectives," and "The leaders of this organization care about their employees' well being."

Although statements and questions within the pay and benefits category most consistently had the largest disparities between organizations that did or did not make the list, the largest found in the survey overall was on the statement, "Staffing levels are adequate to provide quality products/services," within the category of corporate culture and communications. Three-quarters of organizations on the list responded positively to that statement compared with barely half of those that did not.

Recognition is important to employees and not just at DonorsChoose.org but consistently across all 50 of the *Best Nonprofits*. One of the statements where *Best Nonprofits* diverged from

others was: "This organization gives enough recognition for work that is well done." About 84 percent responded positively to that statement compared with just 66 percent among organizations that didn't make the list.

"You hear about places where employees can bring their true selves to work. It's important, especially for younger people," Best said. "We want to express a personal passion or intellectual purposes, or about current events. It creates a colleague who feels more connected to the organization, more committed to the organization, because they're able to express all of who they are," he said.

Best credits the implementation of a new instant messaging tool with helping to do that. DonorsChoose moved from Skype to Slack for intra-office instant messaging during the summer of 2015. He described Slack as a sort of "next-generation bulletin board" in which users can subscribe to particular topics.

"At first we transitioned because we simply thought it would enable group chat a little more seamlessly. Of course, it turned out to do a lot more than that," Best said.

The 550 Slack forums at DonorsChoose help nurture camaraderie as well as organize around

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Team Rubicon ranked No. 1 on last year's Best Nonprofits To Work and returns this year at No. 3. Photo by Kirk Jackson.

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projects. It allows for direct, one-on-one private conversations, dialogue within teams, and connections with staff across different personal interests.

Some teams use Slack exclusively for project management but the organization lets teams decide how to use it. Affinity groups have formed, ranging from cat lovers to fitness buffs to neighborhoods. "It's a great way to get out organization-wide messages, instead of email or it might not merit emails," Best said, adding that Slack has become the way that employee anniversaries are acknowledged.

"It's created a greater sense of kinship, enabled colleagues to bring their true self to work," he said, and know more about what they're colleagues are up to yet without feeling overburdened or over-sharing.

"Slack actually conveys a lot more information to people than email ever did. Yet people are spending less time, or at least much more productive time, with their colleagues," Best said.

The founder is confident that DonorsChoose has enough of a performance-minded culture -- "everyone thinking like an owner culture" -- that he doesn't believe there's an issue of employees spending more time on cat lover Slack channels than work.

Last year's No. 1 organization, Team Rubicon, returns to the list this year ranked No. 3 overall after growing some 40 percent.

The Los Angeles, Calif.-based charity hired an additional head on the human resources team and initiated programs around growing and sup-

porting remote staff, supervisory development and automated/real-time performance management that will roll out this year.

Team Rubicon saw improvement in communication across offices by implementing best practices that are now habitual behaviors," according to Director of Human Resources Candice Schmitt. During virtual meetings with a meeting lead, a moderator monitors the chat bar, acting

feel included and "grow a strong sense of workplace culture regardless of where they sat, but it turns out they felt it was cheesy and a waste of time," Schmitt said. This year, Rubicon will focus on reinforcing benefits of each location and recognizing and celebrating their differences versus trying to create a virtual office culture, she said.

The last time that the Center for Trauma & Resilience made the *Best Nonprofits* list, it went

some initial hesitation and even unhappiness from peers in their community.

The center has a contract with the sheriff's department to do trauma sensitive yoga groups with jail inmates. Fanning said that incarcerated people typically also have been victims at some point in their lives and cope with that stress and anxiety. Staff often want the assignment and have no hesitation because inmates are such an appreciative group, she said. "Folks in jail are really appreciative of someone coming in and taking the practice to heart," she said, using the practice to calm themselves.

There is a sort of counter-intuitiveness to it -- that a victim services group is doing service for perpetrators -- but "we try to have a bigger lens than that. They had victimization in their life as well and that's who we should be serving," Fanning said.

"We look at trauma as a health issue not just a victimization issue. Look at both victims of crime and other service providers, and what impact trauma has on someone's health," Fanning said. "Trauma is more than just momentary psychological impact but affects someone's entire health," she said.

The center's name change has helped to shift attitudes around that as well as empowered staff to be able to address trauma in a bigger circle, helping people increase social support, reduce the risk of health problems. "It's brought to the forefront as a staff, health disparities and those kinds of more community and long-term impact of trauma, she said. *NPT*

TOP 10 KEY DRIVERS - 2017

Rank

- 1 I feel I am valued in this organization.
- 2 I have confidence in the leadership of this organization.
- 3 I like the type of work that I do.
- 4 Most days, I feel I have made progress at work.
- 5 At this organization, employees have fun at work.
- 6 I can trust what this organization tells me.
- 7 Overall, I'm satisfied with this organization's benefits package.
- 8 There is room for me to advance at this organization.
- 9 I like the people I work with at this organization.
- 10 I feel part of a team working toward a shared goal.

as a voice in the room for those dialed in or asking for a chance to speak. Even something as simple as rearranging all-staff meeting space to identify where speakers should stand and look to engage the remote audience has received good feedback, she said.

With about half of its staff in satellite offices or working from home, Team Rubicon put a lot of effort into making perks and fun employee engagements suitable for participation across all locations. The hope was that employees would

by a different name: The Denver Center for Crime Victims.

"We wanted something that was more positive and more directly reflected what we did," said Kathi Fanning, director of training. "We deal with trauma all the time. We're hoping to move people toward resilience," she said. The former name left people identifying as a crime victim but not reflective of the progress that they make.

The name change helped to expand the circle of people the center works with, despite



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Large Organizations

Career Growth, Life Balance Keep Staffing Stable

By MARK HRYWNA

At The SAFE Alliance, employees are allowed to bring their babies to work for six months after they return from family leave. More than a dozen employees took the organization up on the perk last year.

"There were just babies everywhere," said Daniel Cox Malyszka, chief human resource officer, at the Austin, Texas-based nonprofit. "As long as it doesn't interfere with their jobs, people are like, 'A baby!,' passing them back and forth," he said. That's on top of the on-site daycare, where employees get priority and a discounted rate.

It's not just daycare that made The SAFE Alliance among the *Best Nonprofits To Work For* last year. It ranked No. 2 among large organizations and No. 21 overall. With some exceptions, supervisors don't oversee more than five people, according to Malyszka. The effort to keep a low employee-to-supervisor ratio aims to combat high turnover at an organization that deals with foster care, domestic violence and other sensitive topics. Supervisors also are required to have meetings at least once every other week for an hour and help staff through difficult situations. "We want that time to connect," he said.

If employees see an avenue for career growth, they won't want to leave the organization but at the same time, SAFE has supervisors who are very green. So Malyszka has written and delivered trainings on effective interviewing, performance management, sexual harassment and other types of harassment, anti-retaliation and conflict resolution.

"We are growing this curriculum at one to two trainings per year, and doing them in a rotation, one topic per month," he said. "Attendance has been excellent and trainings are collaborative with group work that gets participants involved and encourages them to apply real-life scenarios to the material they are learning," Malyszka said. "The idea is to get the supervisor team to a great place that can lead better," he said, opining that people don't quit their jobs but rather their bosses.

Adequate staffing levels appear to be the biggest issue among large organizations in the seventh annual report. In response to the statement, "Staffing levels are adequate to provide quality products/services," an average of 72 percent of employees at nonprofits that made the list answered positively, compared with 47 percent that did not.

SAFE operates two large campuses and one satellite office downtown, which in total comprise more than 20 acres and 17 buildings. The alliance is the result of a merger of Austin Children's Shelter and SafePlace. The consolidation took effect Jan. 1 but discussions started as far back as 2011. SAFE Alliance in 2013 began providing coordinated planning, human resources, finance and other administration functions to both organizations. Late last year, the two boards voted to complete a full merger.

Part of what made the merger easier was the CEO at the time at children's shelter, used to be CEO at SafePlace.

"Having people at both ends made it easier to

make it happen but the culture of each organization was very different," Malyszka said, being very regulatory at the shelter given the rigorous, government-indoctrinated feeling while SAFE Place was more of a grassroots, feminist organization.

"We had a lot of conversations about what values from each organization were going to be forwarded to this new organizations," he said. Both were comparable in size, budget and staff, so it "was more about giving each legacy organization a place at the table to talk about what was important to them."

When the alliance first was formed, it wasn't initially meant to be a merger nor was it in the plans. "We pooled the employee group and offered everyone the same benefits but we operated with different employee handbooks," Malyszka said. There even were three different boards of directors: one each for SAFE, Austin Children's Shelter, and SafePlace.

As the chief human resources officer, Malyszka was leading two different sets of policies, depending on which office he was in that day. "As an employee I needed to follow different policies, too. We finally realized that merging

Families, caregivers and staff gather for an Alzheimer's Association walk fundraiser.



An employee engages a child during one of CAP Tulsa's reading programs.

was necessary to fulfill our mission – and then all those other things that were troublesome fell into place," he said.

Among large organizations, the gaps between nonprofits that made the list and those that didn't were most pronounced in the area of pay and benefits. An average 88 percent agreed strongly or somewhat that they were satisfied with assorted benefits and vacation and sick leave policies, compared with just 65 percent among employees of organizations that did not make the list. The amount of healthcare paid for was the biggest disparity, with 90 percent of employees at *Best Nonprofits* agreeing compared with 59 percent at other organizations.

Pay and tuition reimbursement benefits were areas of the lowest satisfaction among all organ-

izations surveyed but a wide gap still remained between employees at the *Best Nonprofits*, that averaged more than 71 percent in agreement, while those at organizations not on the list were closer to 50 percent.

Alzheimer's Association went through a merger of sorts of its own, and yet still made the *Best Nonprofits To Work For* list for the eighth year in a row. The Chicago-based charity was the top-ranked large organization (250-plus employees) and No. 19 among the 50 recognized.

This year's recognition comes after a reorganization, consolidating 81 chapters and 48 stand-alone affiliates into one national entity. The reorganization took effect July 1, after affiliates decided by Jan. 15 whether to remain the organization. About six affiliates broke from the process to remain stand-alone local nonprofits.

The organization included several specific email communications for news related to the changes occurring in the association and unifying the organization ("ALZ United Minute" and "ALZ Insider") as well as a human resources/payroll relocation class, with news intended for newly merged chapters to assist in transition activities.

President & CEO Harry Johns said communication and commitment to mission were paramount throughout the multi-year reorganization process. "Certainly before, during and after the changes, we worked hard to communicate across the organization," Johns said, including several town halls with staff across the country. "We were a participative organization in terms of the way we work before the changes, certainly we had lots of chances at discussion," he said.

"The thing that's most critical is engaging people in a real way and paying attention to the input. You can't follow every piece of input because it doesn't always agree. But paying attention to it, staying true to the mission at the same time -- that's what driving us, to be true to the mission and people, that's the core of it," Johns said.

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Employees of the SAFE Alliance pose in a photo booth during a Superhero Party to celebrate their win in the Austin Chronicle's "Best In Austin" - Best Real Life Superheroes Award.

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While everyone didn't agree with making changes, Johns said, they all agreed on mission. "Those types of things are important in getting through changes of this sort," he said.

Due to hard work of people in the field, across chapters at headquarters, the organization has transitioned pretty smoothly compared with what it could have been. "A lot of it is working together on this; it's not me, it's not us at the Chicago office making decisions without including people. Not everyone agrees with decisions, but when we do them we try to do them openly, communicating about them. That's critical even if we weren't making those changes," Johns said.

"It's cliché but if committed to that every day, acted on that every day, engaging people in that process, it makes a difference."

Service Access and Management, Inc. (SAM) ranked seventh among large organizations and No. 48 overall. With more than a dozen offices in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, the Reading, Pa.-based corporate office has a budget to encourage satellite offices to do team-building events.

One office hosted a murder-mystery dinner and another visited a local ropes course. Office Olympics take on a seasonal theme, with indoor activities in the winter, like stacking mini-marshmallows, and outdoor events like relay races in warmer weather.

"We encourage each office to do any team building events they want to do," Human Resources Officer Kristin Clark said. "They make it

a fun thing," she said, composing teams and sometimes pitting staff against supervisors in light-hearted competition.

"We have a lot of outgoing, young staff that really get into it," Clark said, estimating about

engagement with our employees," she said.

CEO Nan Haver has made it her mission to increase employee engagement, Clark said, because there's lots of data that indicate that's how you get the best out of staff. SAM will com-

2017 LARGE NONPROFITS (250 or more employees)

Rank	Organization	City/State	U.S. Employees
1	Alzheimer's Association	Chicago, IL	1,988
2	The SAFE Alliance	Austin, TX	267
3	CAP Tulsa	Tulsa, OK	540
4	American Heart Association	Dallas, TX	3,445
5	The Children's Home of Cincinnati	Cincinnati, OH	319
6	Year Up	Baltimore, MD	729
7	Service Access and Management	Clarion, PA	768



The thing that's most critical is engaging people in a real way and paying attention to the input. --Harry Johns

half of the staff are Millennials. It's a different generation in that they're a lot more mobile and less likely to stay at jobs as long as previous generations. "The challenge is to engage with them so they choose to stay with us," Clark said. Motivation is not always related to pay for Millennials. "They like the team-building kind of things. As a whole, we're really trying to focus a lot more with

memorate its 20th anniversary and is planning events throughout the next year. Haver has made it clear she wants the celebration to be about the employees.

Like many nonprofits, SAM recognizes employees when they reach certain milestones with the organization. For their fifth anniversary, employees receive a pen but after that, they get to

choose their own award from a catalog at each five-year increment. It can be anything from a purse to a toolset or clothing, embroidered with SAM's logo or not. "People really like it, being able to pick what they want, they appreciate getting something they would like or use," Clark said.

Satisfaction surveys of employees show that the No. 1 draw is the flexibility of schedules, Clark said. Staff can meet with consumers when it's convenient for them so they're not just sitting in the office but out in the field on case management. "We get a lot of productivity out of people that way," she said. SAM serves different populations, ranging from mental health to the developmentally disabled and in some counties early childhood intervention.

Employees have been taking advantage of SAM's various wellness programs throughout the year, including stress management, smoking cessation and exercise, among others. Initially, the program started with a trainer visiting offices, meeting with several staff in person, according to Clark. It has since transitioned online with tools like GoToMeeting.com, so any site can participate. "People who've done the courses need something more," she said, so it might be time to re-tool the program again.

Step challenges and weight loss competitions a la "The Biggest Loser" have worked better for wellness than seminars and classes. "That's been a work in progress," Clark said, as they try to find ways to get staff more motivated and participating. **NPT**

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Medium-Sized Organizations

Team Building And Feedback Keeps Office Positive

By ANDY SEGEDIN

DoSomething.org's Manhattan office might look like any number of swanky, employee-friendly work places scattered throughout New York City. Despite the open layout and amenities, it would all be for naught without the people in the seats, according to Sam Arpino, talent and culture manager.

"The people make this a fun place to be," said Arpino. "I think a lot of places try to build this culture and too much time is spent on props. 'How can we get scooters and foosball tables and catered lunch?' We have a lot of those things, but, at the end of the day, if you don't have people who are invested in your mission, the foosball tables will just be sitting there or you'll have people who are unproductive and won't be there for a while."

If striking that balance seems tricky, it's because it is, according to Arpino, which is why her job is dedicated to finding it. The key, she said, is being intentional and strategic in the hiring process, searching in particular for a cultural fit. Cultural fit does not mean seeking out a homogeneous work environment, but rather a blend of people from various backgrounds who learn and communicate differently, but are all capable of actively contributing early on.

Arpino described hiring as "monumental" and the most important thing an organization can do aside from becoming self-sustaining. With just 56 full-time employees, the staff is too small for a poor fit to fly under the radar and the open-office setting adds to the sense that each employee makes a cultural difference. As such, Arpino said that DoSomething.org doesn't settle when it comes to making a hire and holds out for candidates who fit the office culture. "If you have people who follow your core values, you're going to have people contributing positively to the culture," she said.

DoSomething.org is among several medium-

sized organizations, defined as having between 50 and 249 employees, that has identified the importance of employees in creating positive work environments. Having fun at work (92 percent vs. 77 percent), feeling as though leaders represent organizational core values (91 percent vs. 76 percent) and being in a position to do their best work (90 percent vs. 73 percent) were among the largest difference makers between employees of organizations that made this year's *Best Nonprofits To Work For* list and those that didn't. As such, the hiring process has been used by some nonprofits as a means of gaining an edge.

Checking in at No. 6 among medium-sized organizations and No. 8 overall, DoSomething.org offers a bevy of additional perks including a four-week volunteer sabbatical for every two years worked and student-loan forgiveness of up to \$20,000 after five years on the job provided that previous monthly payments have been made.

The loan forgiveness program was identified as a way to increase diversity in the workplace as those from low-income backgrounds might be less inclined to enter the nonprofit sector with hefty stu-



From Top: DonorsChoose.org ranked No. 1 overall in this year's report, and the national office of Communities In Schools ranked No. 2. Last year's No. 1 organization, Team Rubicon, ranked No. 3 this year.

cultivation of an internship program. The organization is very intentional through its vetting of interns and makes sure to avoid the typical go-for tasks of administrative work or fetching coffee. About 20 to 25 percent of staff are made up of former interns, Arpino said, describing the internship program as DoSomething.org's "secret sauce" and a pipeline to future sponsors, donors and colleagues even if the interns eventually move on elsewhere.

The National Institute of Aerospace (NIA), which checks in at No. 25 among medium-sized organizations and No. 45 overall, too, has developed an employee pipeline. A research institution, NIA draws heavily from its consortium of university partners including the University of Virginia, University of Maryland and Georgia Institute of Technology, as well as NASA's Langley Research Center, which is near NIA's Hampton, Va. headquarters.

Headquarters is often full of students, researchers and employees from a wide variety of backgrounds, many of them from outside the country, according to Douglas O. Stanley, Sc.D., president and executive director. NIA seeks to celebrate that diversity during many of its annual events, which include a winter gala. The organization hosts, for instance, an international luncheon in which everybody brings in an international dish to reflect their heritage.

The same mindset led to sushi becoming a popular item during Thanksgiving festivities. Stanley, a New Orleans native, said that he steps in during Mardi Gras by making favorites such as shrimp creole while another Louisiana native in the office might make traditional red beans and rice.

The nature of NIA's work, with researchers often collaborating with peers in other organizations on long-term projects, led to an emphasis on autonomy. NIA's policy is that employees need to work 80 hours every two weeks, but it is up to them how that time is divvied up. Likewise, employees are free to conduct research at home

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when needed, Stanley saying that with three children he has taken advantage of off-site teleconferences.

NIA uses annual performance plans so an abuse of flex-hours and off-site working could be monitored but it hasn't been an issue, he said. Employees tend to be self-motivated enough in their research to avoid the need for micromanagement. "It's like herding cats. You just want them to be happy," Stanley said of employees, comparing the dynamic to the sports analogy where the players -- in this case the researchers -- are the stars and everybody else, Stanley included, falls under the generic "staff" label.

Partnership for Public Service (PPS) places similar faith in employees, according to Tim McManus, chief operating officer. In an effort to promote work-life balance, PPS does not require employees to take leave when they need to go to the doctor or wait around for the cable guy. Similarly, employees are free to work from home when their children are sick or they don't feel comfortable driving during inclement weather. The key, McManus said, is the expectation that employees use their best judgment and make smart choices, which the organization tries to give them the freedom to do.

That trust in good judgment extends to the workplace. PPS, based in Washington, D.C., and ranking No. 17 among medium-sized organization and No. 33 overall, has instituted Friday Snack, an opportunity to serve snacks and let

2017 MEDIUM NONPROFITS (50-249 U.S. employees)

Rank	Organization	City/State	U.S. Employees
1	DonorsChoose.org	New York, NY	92
2	Communities In Schools National Office	Arlington, VA	57
3	Team Rubicon	Los Angeles, CA	65
4	Kessler Foundation	West Orange, NJ	118
5	Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia	Washington, DC	51
6	DoSomething.org	New York, NY	56
7	The Lord's Place	West Palm Beach, FL	86
8	Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona	Tucson, AZ	118
9	Space Foundation	Colorado Springs, CO	53
10	Our Family Services	Tucson, AZ	69
11	PRS, Incorporated	McLean, VA	84
12	Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society	Arlington, VA	217
13	AHC	Arlington, VA	72
14	Council of Chief State School Officers	Washington, DC	82
15	Kinexus	Benton Harbor, MI	62
16	Brighton Center	San Antonio, TX	112
17	Partnership for Public Service	Washington, DC	104
18	iMentor	New York, NY	136
19	Directions for Youth & Families	Columbus, OH	127
20	Cinnaire	Detroit, MI	81
21	Palm Beach Habilitation Center	Lake Worth, FL	94
22	Career Path Services	Spokane, WA	101
23	4Cs Of Alameda County	Hayward, CA	60
24	BBB	Austin, TX	81
25	National Institute of Aerospace	Hampton, VA	99
26	The Mission Continues	New York, NY	61
27	Pathway Homes	Fairfax, VA	106

colleagues interact whether it be by watching a World Cup match or March Madness game or by playing a board game. The theme is providing staff a regular opportunity to unwind, McMahon

said. The idea is that if such opportunities are offered during the week, employees will be able to focus when at their desks. Larger such events include Partnership Olympics, which features



The people make this a fun place to be.

--Sam Arpino

teams competing in events such as relay races, golf putting and Nintendo Wii games. Staff have made the event their own, according to McManus, with teams developing their own cheers.

"One thing that makes us successful, it's not one person's job to engage people here, it's really everybody," McManus said. "A lot of the ideas that we've come up with, it's not the senior team or human resources or the CEO; it really comes from staff. I think that speaks volumes about the kind of organization we are." *NPT*

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Small Organizations

Recognition, Community Support Staff Efforts

By ANDY SEGEDIN

Figuring out how long a staff member has been working at Crossroads in Duxbury, Mass., is sometimes as easy as looking at the design and color of their T-shirt. Staff receive “office swag” -- shirts, fleeces, sweatshirts, tote bags -- every year to the point where employees can identify how long others have been around simply by noting what kind of swag they are proudly using.

“Swag at Crossroads is bold,” said Billi Solis-O’Brien, communications manager. “It creates a sense of community. A recent organizational re-brand rendered older items “vintage” and this past year’s Team Crossroads event featured different logos for full-time and seasonal-staff for each to represent and take pride in their role.

Employee pride, recognition and communication have consistently served as difference makers among small organizations, those with between 15 and 49 employees, that make *The NonProfit Times’ Best Nonprofits To Work For* and those that don’t. This year is no different with employee recognition (93 percent to 74 percent), employers open to input (93 percent to 77 percent) and employees feeling like a person and not a number (98 percent to 84 percent) serving as some of the larger gaps between the cultures of workplaces that made the list and ones that didn’t.

Crossroads, which ranks No. 4 among small organizations this year and No. 11 overall, attempts to promote useful communication and ownership among employees in a number of ways. For one, programming takes place out-of-office in camps in Boston, so Crossroads conducts quarterly all-staff meetings in which employees from all departments can learn about goings-on across the organization. A Google Doc that can be accessed by all is also being worked on with the idea that the running document will be able to highlight topics discussed in various meetings across departments.

Service days are another way in which Crossroads managers look to promote organizational ownership among staff, according to Solis-O’Brien. Crossroads owns three Boston-area camps. Local companies are invited to conduct service days with their employees. Outside employees are often joined by staff at Crossroads who get their hands dirty cleaning and painting. “It’s all hands in,” said Solis-O’Brien. “It creates a sense of ownership. It’s not just something the organization owns. You put your own sweat in.”

Organizational transparency can sometimes be a two-edged sword, according to Ellen McSherry, chief operating officer for the New Jersey Society of Certified Public Accountants (NJSCPA) which ranked No. 13 among small organizations and No. 39 overall. NJSCPA seeks to strike a balance between the two edges by holding regular meetings and being open as to how decisions within the organization will impact them, but staying away from a 38-person decision process. NJSCPA’s volunteer board helps chart much of the organization’s course, McSherry said.

Of additional importance in creating a positive workplace is the promotion of a family environment, McSherry said. Employees are able to



Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands was recognized as one of the *Best Nonprofits To Work For* for the sixth year in a row.

2017 SMALL NONPROFITS (15-49 U.S. employees)

Rank	Organization	City/State	U.S. Employees
1	Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands	Omaha, NE	35
2	Education Commission of the States	Denver, CO	45
3	ZERO - The End of Prostate Cancer	Alexandria, VA	24
4	Crossroads	Duxbury, MA	27
5	InterfaithFamily	Newton, MA	26
6	Young Community Developers	San Francisco, CA	35
7	BoardSource	Washington, DC	29
8	Gulf Coast Community Foundation	Venice, FL	18
9	NeedyMeds	Gloucester, MA	27
10	The Center for Trauma & Resilience	Denver, CO	15
11	PENCIL Foundation	Nashville, TN	20
12	The Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults	Baltimore, MD	18
13	NJ Society of Certified Public Accountants	Roseland, NJ	37
14	STAR Center	Jackson, TN	40
15	College Foundation of the University of Virginia	Charlottesville, VA	28
16	National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy	Gaithersburg, MD	36



Employees of the Education Commission of the States enjoy a staff retreat to a Denver Broncos game.

work remotely when needed and a condensed work week, which allows staff to arrive late on a Monday or leave early on Friday so long as they make up the time in between has been used by some staff, particularly parents with active children. The fact that staff at the Roseland, N.J.-based organization are willing to chip in on duties outside their job description helps promote the family atmosphere, according to McSherry. It is a quality that leaders try to identify early on in potential hires. “You’d hope that when you get to the interview stage, the person has the skills for the position so you’re really looking for a fit in culture,” she said.

The concept of promoting positive workplace culture early on is shared by Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands (BBBS), which ranked as this year’s top small nonprofit and No. 5 overall. Managers at the Omaha, Neb. - headquartered organization takes a deliberate approach to the hiring process and prioritizes onboarding. A bagel break-

fast with co-workers is typical for a first day on the job, according to Michelle Drake, director of operations, followed by a 90-day on-boarding process that includes spending time with leaders from every department and making sure that newcomers understand each aspect of the agency.

From there, employees’ work anniversaries are recognized every month during staff meetings and gifts are given at the three, five and 10-year marks during the annual holiday party. Staff members who have been on board for 10 years are treated to a special party and a slideshow is made in their honor. Drake said that a current employee is closing in on 15 years at BBBS and so a new tradition will be created to mark that anniversary.

Nichole Turgeon, CEO, makes it a point to go out to lunch each month with those celebrating a work anniversary -- a tradition that has also served as a means of knocking down department silos and promoting interoffice communication. “A lot of what drives employee satisfaction is

feeling that somebody at work cares about them,” Turgeon said.

BBBS figures out ways to recognize employee achievement on a more regular basis by asking the employees what they appreciate. Some employees have no preference, according to Turgeon. Some want to be recognized by their supervisor, some might want to be commended discretely.

Monthly metrics and the organization’s Start With Me award are two means that BBBS has identified in acknowledging quality work among staff. Monthly metrics allows for those who performed particularly well in a key area, such as time taken to enroll a volunteer or support calls completed, to be recognized by co-workers, Turgeon said. Start With Me is a peer-nominated monthly award given to those who go above and beyond and is marked by a certificate and the employee’s name on a plaque. Drake has heard during employee interviews that the recognition makes staff members strive to do better.

“When people see their peers recognized, they feel like it makes them want to do better, not so that they can be recognized, but because they appreciate working with other people who are engaged,” Drake said.

The National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) in Gaithersburg, Md., builds workplace camaraderie from a host of office events such as a monthly bowling lunch and White Elephant holiday celebration featuring a luncheon that takes place the week before Christmas as the organization closes its doors during Christmas week.

Back at the office, significant effort is made in ensuring that staff have the resources they need to work efficiently, according to Allan Freedman, chief operating officer. The typical work station has ergonomic chairs and dual screens with computers rotated out every three years. Though a nonprofit office space might not be the first place one thinks to find up-to-date technology, Freedman described holding on to old equipment as a “misplaced savings” when it takes staff 20 minutes to print out a document because their computers are too slow.

“We spend a lot of time on the internal technology process,” Freedman said. “It’s hard to do sometimes, but it works.”

An eye toward efficiency also creates situations in which NBCOT employees might be moved around as part of organizational strategy. One thing that leaders have been sure to do during such periods is communicate with staff about changes and provide updated charts illustrating the organizational hierarchy that aligns with processes for employee review and improvement. The structuring, staff events and other office initiatives all boil down to a focus on communication -- the most important element of a quality workplace, Freedman said of the organization that ranked No. 16 among small employers and No. 47 overall.

“People talk about transparency, but what they’re really talking about is communication, Freedman said. “People talk about it, but unless you do it right -- and by right I mean doing it -- it fails.” *NPT*