

## A COMPREHENSIVE CASE STUDY

# Data-Driven Culture Improvement With Immediate and Ongoing Results

## Client Demographics

**Nonprofit HR Practice Area:** HR Outsourcing

**Location:** Washington, D.C.

**Sector:** Nonprofit

**Mission Type:** Advocacy/Legal/Policy

**Staff Size:** 50 Employees

**Annual Budget:** \$10 million

**Type of Engagement:** Culture Audit

## Engagement Scenario

A national membership organization partnered with Nonprofit HR to assess its culture and identify and mitigate issues that permeated the senior leadership team (SLT) and staff. Some issues creeping throughout the organization were invisible and became permanent. The cultural causes for concern showed the potential to wreak havoc, making it difficult for the organization to be impactful in its mission. Nonprofit HR's Outsourcing practice area conducted a culture climate survey, produced a report with strategic recommendations and presented the findings to HR, operations, the SLT, managers and all staff.

**Engagement Duration:** 10 months

## Engagement Details

Nonprofit HR's Outsourcing team served as thought partners and collaborated closely with stakeholders on the project. They organized the survey into several focus areas. The project required several sub-deliverables, including:

- Climate survey development
- Climate survey execution
- Data analysis
- Climate survey report with recommendations
- SLT presentation
- All-staff presentation

The HR Outsourcing team collected valuable survey data and promptly got to work on tallying and analyzing the results. While employee benefits proved to be a strength that most staff members were happy with, the organization had several opportunities for improvement. The two areas needing the most refinement were accountability and career development, followed by DEI and work environment/culture.

- **Accountability:** Staff felt the “culture of nice” resulted in zero accountability for those who were not doing their jobs, creating interpersonal issues or otherwise having a negative impact on the work environment. Additionally, staff felt that the organization held the SLT to the lowest level of accountability.
- **Career development:** Staff felt the organization needed to provide a clearer understanding of how to advance their careers. Staff sought more organization-wide professional development and career mapping guidance. Additionally, they desired more onboarding, continuous education and career development support.
- **DEI:** There was a major DEI focus in the engagement. Survey results revealed that people of color and female staff held disparate views of working at the organization compared to white and male staff. The people of color and females rated the nonprofit lower in almost every category while the white and male staff rated nearly every category higher.

#### Other important considerations for improvement that surfaced around the work environment/culture include:

- **Promotions/bonuses:** The process for promotions and bonuses was a serious concern for the staff who felt they needed more fair treatment.
- **Compensation:** Only white staff members believed they received fair compensation. Staff felt frustrated by the lack of pay increases in light of inflation.
- **Connection with the SLT:** Staff felt disconnected from the SLT, desired more feedback opportunities and wanted to be more involved in decision making.
- **Heavy workload:** Staff wanted the workload adjusted to a more sustainable level. They also said that generous benefits would not make up for an unsustainable workload.
- **Post-pandemic reevaluation of benefits:** Staff wanted a reevaluation of benefits in a post-pandemic world. Factors included staying remote and receiving work-from-home (WFH) stipends. Other requests included more generous, flexible time off, mental health days, enhanced wellness benefits, four-day work weeks and no-meeting Fridays. Staff also sought tuition reimbursement and increased professional development stipends.

## Considerations

- 1 Lack of staff trust:** A few years ago, before Nonprofit HR's engagement, the client paid another consulting firm to conduct a culture audit. However, they did not use the data to make meaningful advancements and never updated the staff on any data-based insights. Because of this experience, staff felt they didn't have a voice and that this new survey engagement would produce the same outcome. As a result, resistance occurred — why would they waste their time?
- 2 Leadership buy-in and participation:** The Outsourcing team had to convince senior leadership of the importance of their involvement to get the most out of the project.
- 3 Internal data analysis needed:** While the Outsourcing Consultant analyzed the data, they needed stakeholders to concurrently analyze how different staff segments were experiencing the organization and answer the question: Were there any significant differences across survey respondents?

## Solutions

After the HR Outsourcing team identified cultural strengths, weaknesses and pain points, they brainstormed meaningful, actionable and proactive recommendations — all backed by the inestimable data provided by staff.

The client leadership let staff know they valued their feedback. They summarized the data and openly shared a high-level results overview with “take-charge” actions. Due to their transparency, the organization built trust showing that they would take a proactive approach to mitigate identified issues.

Following the survey, the HR Outsourcing team successfully drove the implementation of changes over the course of the year in partnership with client stakeholders. Improvements included the addition of new benefits such as 12 weeks of paid medical leave and unlimited paid time off. The HR Outsourcing team developed and conducted DEI, staff communication and performance management training, in addition to transparently sharing promotion, bonus and onboarding processes with all staff.

Considering the complexity of the engagement, Nonprofit HR expeditiously completed the long project — on time and within the contracted-hour budget. Nonprofit HR continues its partnership with the organization and will roll out a second climate survey in 2023 to measure progress against 2022. Looking to the future, Nonprofit HR made several recommendations for 2023 and 2024.



- **Accountability:** The organization should continue to provide staff communication training and follow-up to ensure difficult conversations and continuous feedback occur. Be sure to hold all staff accountable, regardless of level. Incorporate employee feedback from 2022 into supervisor reviews. In 2023, integrate SLT reviews with new performance management software. Build out a more detailed 2023 performance management process with training on giving clear feedback. Develop a performance improvement process in 2023.
- **Career development:** Create a career mapping guide either in 2023 or 2024. Launch a learning management system (LMS) for structured staff development opportunities.
- **DEI:** Continue to invest in DEI efforts, providing training to every staff level. Hold team members accountable for the DEI shared values via continuous coaching. Follow the conflict resolution and grievance policy. Collect demographic information and grant them feedback opportunities so all staff segments have a voice.
- **Promotion/bonuses:** In 2023, ensure supervisors introduce development with next-step conversations to the annual performance process. In 2023, create a process around interim work engagements.
- **Compensation:** Keep staff updated on the compensation leg of the project. Be transparent about the project methodology and outcomes.
- **Connection with the SLT:** Consider implementing pulse surveys via TinyPulse or an anonymous Google Form. Add feedback opportunities such as all-staff meetings and one-on-ones to build relationships and foster trust.
- **Heavy workload:** Consider if more hires are required to support the current workload. Communicate current wellness benefits and resources. Encourage staff to invest in their wellness and take time off.
- **Post-pandemic reevaluation of benefits:** Invite staff feedback and consideration when making decisions around returning to the office. Educate staff on current WFH benefits and policies. Review time off policies through a post-pandemic lens. Consider a wellness stipend for all staff. Consider raising the professional development stipend and opening the policy to include appropriate tuition reimbursement.