



2015 NPT Best Places To Work

Mission trumps pay, although compensation does matter

By MARK HRYWNA

Ask most any employee at a nonprofit why they work there and the answer will almost always come down to mission and believing they are making a difference. But what sets apart the organizations in the *2015 NPT Best Nonprofits To Work*?

In David Letterman style, Best Companies Group (BCG) derived the top 10 key drivers in the *NPT Best Nonprofits To Work* study:

- I like the type of work that I do;
- I have confidence in the leadership of this organization;
- Most days, I feel like I have made progress at work;
- I feel part of a team working toward a shared goal;
- My pay is fair for the work I perform;
- At this organization, employees have fun at work;
- My supervisor handles my work-related issues satisfactorily;
- The organization provides the technology, equipment and resources I need to do my job well; and,
- I feel I am valued in this organization.

The overall survey average for positive responses in all categories of the Employee Benchmark Report in the *NPT Best Nonprofits To Work* was 89 percent for those that made the list compared with 77 percent for those that did not. The largest disparity within a category was in leading and planning (90 percent versus 73 percent), followed by pay and benefits (88 percent versus 73 percent), and corporate culture and communications (88 percent versus 74 percent).

The National Older Worker Career Center (NOWCC) was number one overall for the second straight year among the 50 organizations ranked in *The NPT Best Nonprofit To Work*. Created from the AARP in 1997, NOWCC is dedicated to promoting experienced workers 55 and older “as a valuable and critical component of the nation’s workforce,” according to its website

With only about 24 employees, it wouldn’t take very many staff leaving to punch up the turnover rate but even still, NOWCC only had an 8 percent turnover last year and no turnover the previous year.

NOWCC boasted the highest average annual salary for exempt employees, one of the few that reached six figures (\$105,828). “We try to be competitive in our market,” said Greg Merrill, president and CEO of the Arlington, Va.-headquartered organization, with most employees in Arlington, as well

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as several others in Denver and Dallas. "You have to be competitive when looking for staff," he said.

"We invest in our staff, which is also a contributing factor to low turnover. Folks are fairly compensated, and part of a very dynamic team that they believe in the mission, and make it happen," said Merrill. "Compensation is one part of the reward for that. Other parts include working with people they like in a place that is comfortable, respects them, and gives them opportunity to engage and grow."

NOWCC modified its internal performance review management process this past year, which was designed with the help of a team of about five employees. "They helped design it, explained it to colleagues, so folks would hopefully understand that it is focused on helping every member of the staff improve their professional development and their performance," he said. Of course, management also was involved, with supervisors talking to staff and their peers. "The objective was to get to any areas that needed to be improved."

Employees talked to their colleagues about what worked and what didn't with the previous process, and what was confusing or not helpful. They compiled that feedback to help create a more responsive and effective resource to aid the organization by helping members of the staff, he said.

With only two dozen employees, Merrill aims to have a conversation with each member of the staff every year. "One of those questions was always historically about the performance review process," he said, and he provided feedback he received, without attribution, to the team that helped revamped the review process.

"There's a lot of qualitative input that goes into it," he said of employee reviews and evaluation. "We discovered that over time, trying to put numbers on performance is very difficult, particularly if you try to compare a number or grade given by one supervisor, with a grade by another to another," he said. However, if the focus is on improving the employee's performance, Merrill said he thinks this resource is going to be very helpful.

The new process was implemented this past fall and the team that put it together already had identified a couple of tweaks by January, as the organization was approaching mid-year reviews. "It's an evolving process, based on what works, what doesn't, and potential sources of confusion," Merrill said.

"We've got input from the supervisor level but also from the staff. We're small enough that we can do that in a way that is not disruptive," Merrill said. He thinks that a small staff makes a huge difference and contributes to the culture and community they try to create at NOWCC.

"We don't need to do exit interviews very often," Merrill quipped, although they are conducted when an exit occurs to gather valuable feedback.

While impressive health and retirement benefits go a long way toward making an organization a *Best Nonprofit To Work*, some of the most well-received benefits don't necessarily cost much, if anything.

Team Rubicon in El Segundo, Calif., sponsors local Toastmaster membership for employees to encourage and improve their public speaking. To develop professional speaking and writing skills,



National Older Worker Career Center

2015 NPT's Best Nonprofits To Work Top 50

Rank	Organization Listing	U.S. Employees
1	National Older Worker Career Center	24
2	Team Rubicon	28
3	DonorsChoose.org	75
4	The Denver Center for Crime Victims	15
5	The Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults	21
6	Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia	46
7	Young Community Developers, Inc	25
8	AHC	68
9	Caring Voice Coalition	41
10	Soles4Souls, Inc.	26
11	DoSomething.org	52
12	Kessler Foundation	106
13	Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands	26
14	NeedyMeds	21
15	Communities In Schools	50
16	National Board for Certification In Occupational Therapy	34
17	Step Up	16
18	Animal Legal Defense Fund	33
19	Pearl S. Buck International	17
20	The Mission Continues	39
21	Crossroads for Kids	22
22	Pathway Homes	94
23	Alzheimer's Association	522
24	Metropolitan Family Service	84
25	Center for Community Change	72
26	PRS	84
27	Wounded Warrior Project	503
28	North Carolina Outward Bound School	49
29	The Achievement Network	159
30	Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society	206
31	Partnership for Public Service	66
32	Emmaus Community of Pittsburgh	66
33	PENCIL Foundation	20
34	American Heart Association	3054
35	Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona	131
36	Emerge! Center Against Domestic Abuse	67
37	Directions for Youth & Families	115
38	ZERO - The End of Prostate Cancer	18
39	Birthingright Israel Foundation	44
40	Summer Search	135
41	Christian Community Action	148
42	Brighton Center	100
43	CAP Tulsa	541
44	Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida	87
45	New York Cares	93
46	The Vision Council	28
47	4C's of Alameda County	72
48	Year Up	411
49	Catholic Charities of Dallas	141
50	Career Path Services	93

2015 Top 10 Key Drivers

Rank	Key Driver
1	I like the type of work that I do.
2	I have confidence in the leadership of this organization.
3	Most days, I feel I have made progress at work.
4	I can trust what this organization tells me.
5	I feel part of a team working toward a shared goal.
6	My pay is fair for the work I perform.
7	At this organization, employees have fun at work.
8	My supervisor handles my work-related issues satisfactorily.
9	This organization provides the technology, equipment and resources I need to do my job well.
10	I feel I am valued in this organization.

employees also are required to write blog posts, as well as story-sharing and presentations.

Some 75 percent of the employees at St. Louis, Mo.-based Mission Continues take advan-

tage of the organization's pro bono partnership with Engaged Health Solutions, according to President Spencer Kympton. Every staff member has the option of having a personal coach, focus-

ing on health and nutrition or professional life. There's the one-on-one relationship but the company also periodically provides full team training.

"We've prioritized having very strong health, retirement and supplemental insurance benefits. It's been a core to our benefit policy," Kympton said. "It's almost counterintuitive, saying to vets, 'we still need you. We need you to serve at home, in doing so, help you transition home.' But that's without a handout or charity, more of a challenge or an opportunity to continue serving."

Step Up has three offices nationwide, with four employees in each: Chicago, New York City and Los Angeles, which also includes four within the national office located there.

The annual retreat in Los Angeles is a great opportunity for staff in Chicago and New York City to escape harsh winters. It always includes team-building activities, some of which get pretty creative, such as trapeze class, to improve and do anything that might get staff out of their shells. "The big thing is, what's the shared activity going to be," said Alissa Zito, vice president of communications.

In addition to a focus on providing flex time for employees, Step Up created what it calls its Staff Acknowledgement Strategy, to help with internal and intraoffice communications. An employee's first day at Step Up, regardless of which office, would include an email from the managing director introducing them to employees, their desk set up with Step Up swag, on top of lunch with the entire team. Hiring anniversaries also call for an email from Chief Executive Officer Jenni Luke, a card from the vice president and acknowledgement on the monthly staff call.

Even on a birthday, they can expect a card from the CEO and an email from the managing director acknowledging the day, as well as a card from the regional team and either a team lunch or gift and snacks paid for by Step Up. Got a promotion? Expect an email from the managing director to all staff to acknowledge the move.

Angie Franchino started out as a volunteer at Step Up before holding a number of positions, and now is vice president, operations and fundraising strategy. The staff acknowledgements were always done informally but there was nothing documented that ensured the organization was doing it equitably. "It came to my attention that there wasn't any structure around it; someone might get a call, someone might not," she said. One value at the organization is celebrating success.

Anecdotally, there has been a shift in staff morale, Franchino said, citing a combination of factors dating back to last year. "We focused last year to make sure staff understand their part in the bigger picture, intentionally communicating in a way how their efforts are tied to the strategic plan," she said. "I would like to think that's helping them feel valued and that their role is really important," Franchino. Feedback was received last year that there was a lack of clarity so efforts in the past year have focused on creating clarity, in roles and responsibilities.

"Play Your Position" was the theme of Step Up's retreat two years ago, with the idea that everyone might have options, but trust your team member is doing their role, and do your role, Franchino said. "When we don't, things start to break down, and we tried to draw attention to it: This is what happens when you don't trust in teamwork, don't play your position." *NPT*

Best Large Organizations

Performance Management Standards Rule At Biggest Nonprofits

By MARTIN C. DAKS

When CAP Tulsa wanted to deepen its connection with employees, the anti-poverty agency took serious steps to ensure that employees understood their roles in the organization and were aware of the way the managers value their contribution, according to Executive Director Steven Dow.

"We start with an initial hiring process that screens for job-related technical knowledge, and also consider whether a candidate shares our belief in our mission," Dow explained. "That is reinforced by our on-boarding process, which grounds new employees in our organizational mission, strategy and the expectations that the organization and employees have of each other."

The state's largest organization of its kind, CAP Tulsa provides support and guidance to low-income families, offering early childhood education services and comprehensive enrichment programs for the entire family.

CAP Tulsa, which ranked 43rd on the list and fourth among large organizations with 250 or more employees, provides ongoing feedback to workers with an online performance manage-

ment system that clearly defines their job and that tracks their achievements and goals.

Performance management was a primary theme among the large organizations making the *Best Places* list for 2015. Some 83 percent of employees at large organizations on the list said that leaders were open to input from employees

2015 Large Nonprofits (250 or more employees)

Rank	Organization Listing	U.S. Employees
1	Alzheimer's Association	522
2	Wounded Warrior Project	503
3	American Heart Association	3054
4	CAP Tulsa	541
5	Year Up	411

compared to 68 percent of workers at groups not making the list. Benchmarking and communicating standards was key, with 81 percent of respondents saying leaders give enough recognition for work that is well done versus just 61 percent at groups not making the list.

Other benchmarking in large organizations that made the list versus those that did not include:

- There is adequate follow-through of departmental objectives 84 to 69;

- This organization treats me like a person, not a number 90 to 73;

- My supervisor handles my work-related issues satisfactorily 89 to 84;

- My supervisor handles my personal issues

satisfactorily 93 to 86; and,

- I believe my job is secure 84 to 69.

"Midyear, supervisors and employees also sit together for a review," explained Dow. "In addition to going over strong points and areas that need to develop, we use the review as a way to further sketch out how an individual's role integrates with the overall organization. Ongoing coaching and a mentality of continuous improve-

ment are also part of the mix here."

Because CAP Tulsa is dedicated to early childhood education and family support, Dow said the organization has "a particularly vital commitment to maintaining an environment and learning tools that help employees to do their job even better."

Implementing that means offering plenty of employee support, and fielding state-of-the-art facilities with classrooms that give children a "stimulating, clean, safe, secure, and bright environment that makes it easier to learn."

Compensation is also part of the equation. "We compete with the public school system for teachers, so our pay scale has to be market-based," Dow said. CAP Tulsa pays up to 89 percent of employees' health-insurance premiums, and matches employee contributions to their 403(b) retirement plan by 50 percent up to 6 percent of an employee's salary.

The nonprofit established a wellness program roughly four years ago with incentives that include up to \$600 a year savings for healthcare insurance, and up to one day off with pay.

"We also offer tuition reimbursement for employees from day one," he said. "That's supple-

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mented by a comprehensive employee training and development program that addresses technical skills and 'soft' skills. The children benefit from all this, and the initiatives also reinforce our relationship with employees."

At the American Heart Association (AHA) in Dallas, "We really pride ourselves on establishing and maintaining a cohesive, well-understood corporate culture, using a comprehensive communications program to connect employees, leadership, affiliates, local divisions, and volunteers across the nation," said AHA CEO Nancy Brown. "Part of the effort is a focus on infusing them with our brand, "Life is Why," which involves promoting longer, healthy lives. We also use communications tools -- including blogs, staff and 'town hall' meetings, training and other sessions -- to ensure that our organizational actions and decisions are in line with that brand focus."

Large organizations that made this year's list communicate well with staff. Some 92 percent of respondents at large groups said that their organization's corporate communications are frequent enough versus just 70 percent of those who did not make the list. And, 88 percent of workers at organizations on the list trust what they are told versus 66 percent at organizations that did not make the list.

AHA came in at number 34 overall and third among large organizations.

"Model performance standards, and continual interaction with supervisors helps to tie it all together," she explained. "Customized employee training and development is another priority. Employees have the computers and other tools they need to do their job, and they're encouraged to expand their learning through our American Heart University which blends digital and face to face learning opportunities with custom learning plans for employees."

Employees are encouraged to exercise initiative. Among other benefits, AHA offers an employee wellness program, on-site walking paths and exercise facilities. Steps like these "enable the AHA to attract and retain talented employees while improving the organization's ability to increase fundraising and to reach out and help more people to live a heart-healthy life," Brown said.

The Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) in Jacksonville, Fla., has created a "cohesive, well-understood corporate culture," according to Human Resources Executive Vice President Addie Poudrier. "We reinforce it with comprehensive communications between the employees and leadership at all levels."

WWP nestled in at number 27 on the list and second among large organizations. Every week the international organization holds an "all-staff communications phone call" where every employee, regardless of location, can plug in to be updated about programs, and local and national events. WWP also hosts an annual conference, which every employee is required to attend, where the executive team discusses the organization's current programs and future strategies.

"We go to great lengths to ensure that employees see how their activities further WWP's mission and vision," Poudrier added. "And the decision-making process of our executive team is done in a transparent manner, with discussions and other information freely shared among

employees.

Supervisors are supportive and honest with their feedback -- in addition to annual reviews, managers periodically provide coaching and other feedback that's reinforced by robust training and development programs. WWP's work environment is geared to maximize safety while helping employees to focus on mission-critical tasks.

"The work spaces at our regional offices are

process that includes a general human resources and new-hire orientation, suicide-prevention training -- a big issue among veterans -- and a day of hands-on training with WWP military veterans who discuss post-traumatic stress disorder and other conditions that often affect returning service members.

WWP offers market-based compensation and periodically benchmarks the organization's

verse workforce," said Julia Santiago, the organization's senior director of strategic human resources. Year-up ranked 48th on the overall list and fifth among large organizations.

"We start by familiarizing each new employee with our 'identity statement,'" Santiago said. "Then we utilize a Predictive Index Assessment [a methodology that measures work-related behavior] to gain a better understanding of their unique needs and how our infrastructure can best integrate them."

To keep the organization transparent and ensure that employees are in the loop, Year Up hosts periodic webinars, where executives report on initiatives and other issues. Santiago said a variety of approaches are utilized to encourage employees to develop their skills.

"Every two years we have a company-wide retreat to build alignment around our strategy," she explained. "Then, each year between, we have separate, departmental retreats that help individuals to become better at their jobs. We also encourage them to prepare for a position they'd like to grow into by offering every employee an annual stipend of \$2,000 which can be used for education, certification or other skill and knowledge building activity."

A separate leadership development program pairs employees with cohorts in different departments in "learning buddy" sessions for a three-day period each quarter.

"Each quarterly session is broken up into three modules," explained Santiago. "In module one they explore leadership concepts, then in module two the cohorts explore ways to manage change; finally module three focuses on the ins and outs of running a business. Employees who believe they understand their role in the organization, and feel valued are more likely to perform better and to be committed to the organization. Developing our staff helps to bring this about and to maintain it."

Year Up also innovates in its approach to employee review. Instead of limiting evaluations to a formal, annual report, managers meet individually with their direct-report employees weekly, with team meetings held on a periodic basis.

"We also incentivize employees with reasonable salaries and good benefits, including a 100 percent match up to 5 percent of employees' contributions to a 401(k) plan," according to Santiago. "And every two years we engage a compensation consultant to benchmark our salary and benefit scales with our peers; and we refresh our compensation as needed."

Nonprofits often seek a significant commitment from their workers, but Santiago says Year Up tries to balance that with a welcoming environment.

Year Up launched a wellness program during 2013 that focuses on issues such as managing stress and integrating work and life activities," she said. "A wellness agent at each of our locations coordinates these and other activities, and many of our locations also have a 'wellness room,' an area where people can relax in a Zen-like, stress-free environment. It's all part of a comprehensive effort to demonstrate our commitment to employees as well as to the communities we service," said Santiago. *NPT*



Participants at the Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's

A Model Worth Copying

Employees at the Alzheimer's Association (AA) headquarters in Chicago "believe deeply in our mission and our strategies to address it," according to CEO Harry Johns. He said that's one reason that AA keeps making the best nonprofit to work list.

"Alzheimer's Association employees understand what they need to do to move both the organization and the Alzheimer's cause forward," he added. "They are passionate about achieving progress and, thanks to them, we're making significant progress."

The association, which ranked first among large organizations and 23rd overall, offers plenty of opportunities for workers even as it promotes work/life balance. The efforts are anchored by an approach that encourages employees to share ideas and concepts, while training leaders to be listeners, said Johns. "We celebrate successes and embrace the significant work we have remaining before us."

Organizational leaders build trust by being transparent, and keeping staff "up-to-date on all of our work, from the global scientific advances we drive, to public policy successes and local Walk to End Alzheimer's gains," he added. "Because no matter what their individ-



Harry Johns

ual roles, our colleagues make our advances possible for the people we serve -- now and in the future."

Managers also seek to reel in employees with diverse talents, and then keeps them with a "total rewards program" that includes paid time off, competitive base pay, a retirement savings plan supported through strong employer contributions, health care choices and leave of absence programs.

"Passion and compassion are prevalent at the Alzheimer's Association as we work to serve our constituents," Johns said. "It's driven by our mission and it's delivered by our great people." *NPT*

configured in an 'open environment' format that makes it easy to collaborate," Poudrier explained. "Our locations in Jacksonville and in San Antonio also have on-site or nearby workout facilities, so employees can exercise their bodies as well as their minds. The offices are also decorated with colors and designs that reflect our brand, and managers promote our corporate culture principles of fun, integrity, loyalty, innovation and service."

Employees undergo a three-day on-boarding

salary and benefits. "We also offer tuition reimbursement, and WWP pays 100 percent of the healthcare insurance premiums for employees and their eligible dependents," said Poudrier. "These are all effective ways to attract and retain high-quality employees, and these initiatives help them to focus on their job instead of worrying about benefits and other issues."

Year Up, a Boston-based nonprofit with sites in 14 cities, reaches out to a diverse group of individuals, "and likewise, we try to attract a di-

Martin Daks is a freelance business writer in Bethlehem Twp., Pa., and a regular contributor to The NonProfit Times.

Best Medium-Sized Organizations

Involving Staff In Decision-Making Fuels Job Satisfaction, Growth

BY PATRICK SULLIVAN

If you work for Communities in Schools, the organization wants to give you \$1,000. In fact, it insists. “Our professional development opportunities are outstanding, \$1,000 per employee per year. We ask employees to max that out,” said Stefani Raggio, the organization’s vice president of human resources.

Medium-sized organizations might sometimes lack the resources of larger organizations or the agility of their smaller counterparts. Focusing on developing employees is one way to gain a competitive advantage while making sure employees are engaged with the organization and its mission.

“We think of ourselves as a learning organization,” said Eleanor Vincent, COO of Pathway Homes in Fairfax, Va., which ranked 22nd overall and sixth among medium organizations. “We put a lot of emphasis on staff going back to school for advanced degrees, licenses and certificates,” Vincent said. Pathway Homes recently added a tuition reimbursement lottery. Once a quarter, eligible staff can win funds to pay for the equivalent of a three-credit graduate course.

Organizations with between 50 and 249 employees were the most heavily represented group on this year’s Best Places to Work list, with 24 winners out of 50. Medium organizations on the list outscored medium organizations not on the list by an average of 11 percentage points in the satisfaction survey that determines rankings, overall 89 percent to 78 percent.

The most pronounced difference, 15 percentage points, was found in the category of Leadership and Planning, with winners reporting a 90 percent satisfaction rate. There was an 11-point discrepancy between those on the list and those not on the list in the Training, Development and Resources category.

When it comes to professional development, the Arlington, Va.-based Communities in Schools is “very open-minded as to what that looks like,” said Raggio. “We take a holistic approach, things that may help improve your development in or out of the workplace.” Whether it is job skills or parenting skills, managers at Communities in Schools are just happy their employees are learning.

There are many ways to learn and Nancy Lublin, executive director of DoSomething.org in New York City believes one of the best ways is to, well, do something. That’s why DoSomething offers a sabbatical to volunteer for a month to any employee who has been with the organization for more than two years.

“We’ve had lots more people take sabbatical,” Lublin said. “We’re helping these other organizations, and (our employees) learn new things and come back stronger.”

DoSomething was number 11 overall and third among medium organizations. The organization moved up from the 18th spot last year, and added enough employees to be bumped from the small category in 2014 to the medium category. Lublin said the organization tries to

have new hires start at the same time as “classes” to create a shared experience. DoSomething makes sure to engage its new employees from the start.

“The first day of the job is the only day anyone remembers. That is the most important day,” said Lublin. “There’s a whole day of activities,

business development, and a digital developer. “Everybody gets to know each other and it fosters terrific mutual respect,” she said. “It gets you up out of your chair, if you have to go talk to a team member across the floor. That’s great, too. Nobody gets stuck and nobody’s desk gets too junked up.”



2015 Medium Nonprofits (50 - 249 employees)

Rank	Organization Listing	U.S. Employees
1	DonorsChoose.org	75
2	AHC	68
3	DoSomething.org	52
4	Kessler Foundation	106
5	Communities in Schools	50
6	Pathway Homes	94
7	Metropolitan Family Service	84
8	Center for Community Change	72
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20	Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida	87
21	New York Cares	93
22	4C's of Alameda County	72
23	Catholic Charities of Dallas	141
24	Career Path Services	93

co-workers taking you out to lunch, orientation to the communications guide and system. We make sure your desk and computer and email are all set up. We want you to feel like we’ve been waiting for you.”

Although new hires’ desks at DoSomething are all set up, they shouldn’t get too comfortable. Every six months everyone takes part in what Lublin calls “The Reaping.” Every employee’s name goes into a hat. They then have 15 seconds to choose a new desk when their names are called.

Lublin sits with the rest of the DoSomething staff, near an account manager, someone in

DonorsChoose.org in New York City, number one among medium organizations and number three overall, also has an unconventional seating arrangement. “Managers sit with the staff,” said Melanie Duppins, senior director of policy and human capital. “Try to find our corner offices. There are none. It has rendered a culture where people are available to you.”

Seating is open at DoSomething and DonorsChoose, and doors are open at Pathway Homes. “We have a formalized open door policy,” said Vincent. “It’s something the leadership team has put a stamp on. We want our agency to be one where anyone can walk into any office,

right up to the CEO’s.”

DoSomething has innovation meetings every Wednesday morning. Lublin said a number of campaign ideas such as using animated GIFs instead of photos on the organization’s website came from the innovation meetings. “There are so many different ideas. That’s the whole point,” she said. “Anyone can present and anyone can attend.”

At the Center for Community Change (CCC) in Washington, D.C., “People have the opportunity on their team to tap into people in the leadership,” said Managing Director Mary Lassen. “There are things we do that ensure the leadership is spending time with our staff across the board.” Lassen said that could range from a leader going on another team’s retreat, to brown bag lunches with employees. “I do a lot of one-on-one meetings with individual staff, people who do not report to me, to see how they’re doing and check in on their plans,” said Lassen.

The engagement strategy of the Kessler Foundation in West Orange, N.J., number 12 overall and number four among medium organizations, starts with people: The right people.

“If you begin with the right people, you can adapt to the fast changing needs of the market you’re in,” said President and CEO Rodger DeRose. “Secondly, if you have the right people you don’t really need to motivate them. They’re self-motivating people. Nothing beats being part of a team expected to do great things. If you recognize you have the wrong people, it doesn’t matter what you do. Having a good vision with mediocre people will still produce mediocre results.”

Kessler’s commitment to its people is solid in good times and in bad. Many nonprofits had to lay off staff when the Great Recession hit. Not so with Kessler. “We are fortunate enough to have a large endowment but it was impacted by 30 percent,” said DeRose. “We did not lay off one person. If a person did not have any performance issue, they were assured they had a job.”

For DonorsChoose, communication extends far beyond the executive suite. The organization subscribes to a diffused decision-making model. “We believe people on the front lines should be influencing the direction of the organization,” said Duppins.

The organization’s managers recently pondered the question of allowing the platform to fund professional development projects for teachers. “(Founder and CEO) Charles (Best) could have said, ‘We’re doing it.’ Instead, he reached out to me and said to determine a process to include the staff,” said Duppins. DonorsChoose did staff surveys and focus groups, and reached out to teachers and donors, then bundled those results in a presentation to the board. The board ultimately decided to allow those projects to be funded.

“Employees love it,” said Duppins. “What we see happening is greater ownership from the employees because they get to be involved from day one. They’re acting as owners and giving more than 9 to 5. They’re always thinking outside their departments and job descriptions on how to make the organization better.” *NPT*

Best Small Organizations

Small Often Doesn't Mean Nearby For Dispersed Staffing

BY MARK HRYWNA

Small nonprofits probably have it easy, you're thinking. They probably have staff and operations that are more manageable than the giant, national charities. Instead of having to go through a protocol of emails and approvals from multiple higher-ups to get something done, most employees at a small nonprofit can probably stroll down the hall to talk to their boss or CEO.

In some cases that might be true, but not for some of the small organizations recognized in the *2015 Best Nonprofits To Work* by *The Non-Profit Times* and Best Companies Group (BCG).

Several nonprofits ranked in this year's report have multiple offices scattered about the country, with anywhere from two to six employees in each outpost, in addition to the national office, despite having fewer than 50 employees (the cut-off to be considered in the small organization category).

While telecommuting or flexible hours have become more popular during the past couple of decades, the *Best Nonprofits'* employer engagement report reinforces just how much that means to staff members. Among small organizations, some of the largest disparities between those that made the ranking and those that did not, were on questions about telecommuting, flexible hours or compressed workweeks.

Among organizations ranked this year, 76 percent of employees said their employer offered telecommuting as a standard practice versus just 40 percent at nonprofits that didn't make the cut. As for flexible hours or a compressed work week, 57 percent of staff at small organizations said their employer offered it as a standard practice compared to just 40 percent at nonprofits not on the list.

Most of the employees of the National Older Worker Career Center (NOWCC) are located in the Arlington, Va., headquarters but the organization also has about four staff in a Denver, Colo., office and two at an outpost in Dallas, Texas.

NOWCC has one employee who works some 400 miles from headquarters. The staff member is a permanent telecommuter in Rochester, N.Y. That was the result of a pilot project to try working permanently off-site after her husband was relocated. "We looked at what she did, how she did it. It's been going on for four years. It's worked out very well," said Greg Merrill, president and CEO of NOWCC, which for the second year in a row ranked No. 1 in the Best Nonprofits.

"We look at it with an open mind when it comes to flexible work arrangements. When the staff understands, is able to participate, and increases their investment in NOWCC too; it's part

of why they believe this is a good place to work," he said.

Another area where small nonprofits separated themselves in the Best Nonprofits was providing facilities to promote exercise and fitness (57 percent versus 40 percent) and wellness programs or practices (67 percent versus 20 percent) in the workplace.



National Older Worker Career Center

The El Segundo, Calif., headquarters includes a gym, balance balls and a pool table. But it's not all physical challenges to build camaraderie: Thursdays are movie nights. There's also Taco Tuesdays, the occasional happy hour as well as beach bonfires.

The organization started as an international disaster relief organization, primarily doing med-

Veterans service organizations (VSOs) draw from military culture and a lot of staff are veterans and holdovers from military service and so people are very task and team oriented, Lee said. "Mission Continues is an organization we share a lot of affinity toward the way they treat veterans to change the discourse around the veterans space. They're not a burden. They don't need charity. They need a challenge. They are assets for civil society," he said.

Physical training is part of what staff at Mission Continues does, not so much to prepare for volunteering efforts in the field as to bring the team together, particularly during retreats. "Through pain comes growth," quipped President Spencer Kympton, whether that's trampoline dodge ball, trampoline aerobics, or Cross Fit courses under the St. Louis Arch. "I think everyone enjoys the settings and getting together with team members in a different way," he said.

Fewer than 20 of the approximately 40 employees of Mission Continues are based in the St. Louis, Mo., headquarters, with other staff scattered in New York City, Houston, Washington, D.C., and southern California, along with an employee in Boston and Indianapolis.

"In the face of spreading out and regionalizing, moving to regional offices, one of the things we risked was having some of that connection lost and begin to erode," Kympton said. The organization is moving toward all employees having the option of working remotely at least one day a week, and with that a focus on strengthening internal communications in the coming year.

The organization has expanded from two to five offices during the past two years, aiming to move toward a national program that operates regionally rather than through a central office. "With that spread it becomes harder to communicate consistently across the entire organization," Kympton said.

Mission Continues made a commitment to two full-team retreats each year, flying all employees to one location (usually St. Louis) where they spent three days together, doing team-building activities, reconnecting to core values, and to each other. "It's a time and travel commitment but one that's highly valuable and highly valued on the staff," Kympton said.

In daily operations, too, Mission Continues aims to bring co-workers together in simple ways, providing breakfast every day and setting aside schedule tea time. "The intent behind some of those is just that there are opportunities to pick their heads up, and take a moment to connect with their co-workers, in a way that's not 100 percent driven by work that they do," Kympton said. *NPT*

2015 Small Nonprofits (15 - 49 employees)

Rank	Organization Listing	U.S. Employees
1	National Older Worker Career Center	24
2	Team Rubicon	28
3	The Denver Center for Crime Victims	15
4	The Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults	21
5	Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia	46
6	Young Community Developers	25
7	Caring Voice Coalition	41
8	Soles4Souls	26
9	Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands	26
10	NeedyMeds	21
11	National Board for Certification In Occupational Therapy	34
12	Step Up	16
13	Animal Legal Defense Fund	33
14	Pearl S. Buck International.	17
15	The Mission Continues	39
16	Crossroads for Kids	22
17	North Carolina Outward Bound School	49
18	PENCIL Foundation	20
19	ZERO - The End of Prostate Cancer	18
20	Birthright Israel Foundation	44
21	The Vision Council	28

Employees at nonprofits such as Mission Continues and Team Rubicon must be in pretty good shape just to keep up with their workday, which could include a pickup basketball game or pull-up or push-up competitions. "We've always been a pretty physically active organization," said Mike Lee, communications and fundraising coordinator at Team Rubicon. "The work that our volunteers do in the field is pretty intensive," he said.

ical work overseas, first visiting Haiti to help after the 2010 earthquake. It has shifted toward more domestic work because "we realized this type of continued service is beneficial for military veterans," he said. Veterans returning from military service often lack a community or purpose. Team Rubicon provides a framework to guide the reintegration into civilian life and ensure it's very therapeutic, he said.

In Their Own Words

Hear directly from the leadership at several of the *NPT's Best Places To Work -- 2015*. Go to www.thenonproffitimes.com and turn up your speakers to listen in on how these executives are helping their staffs make a difference.