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ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT

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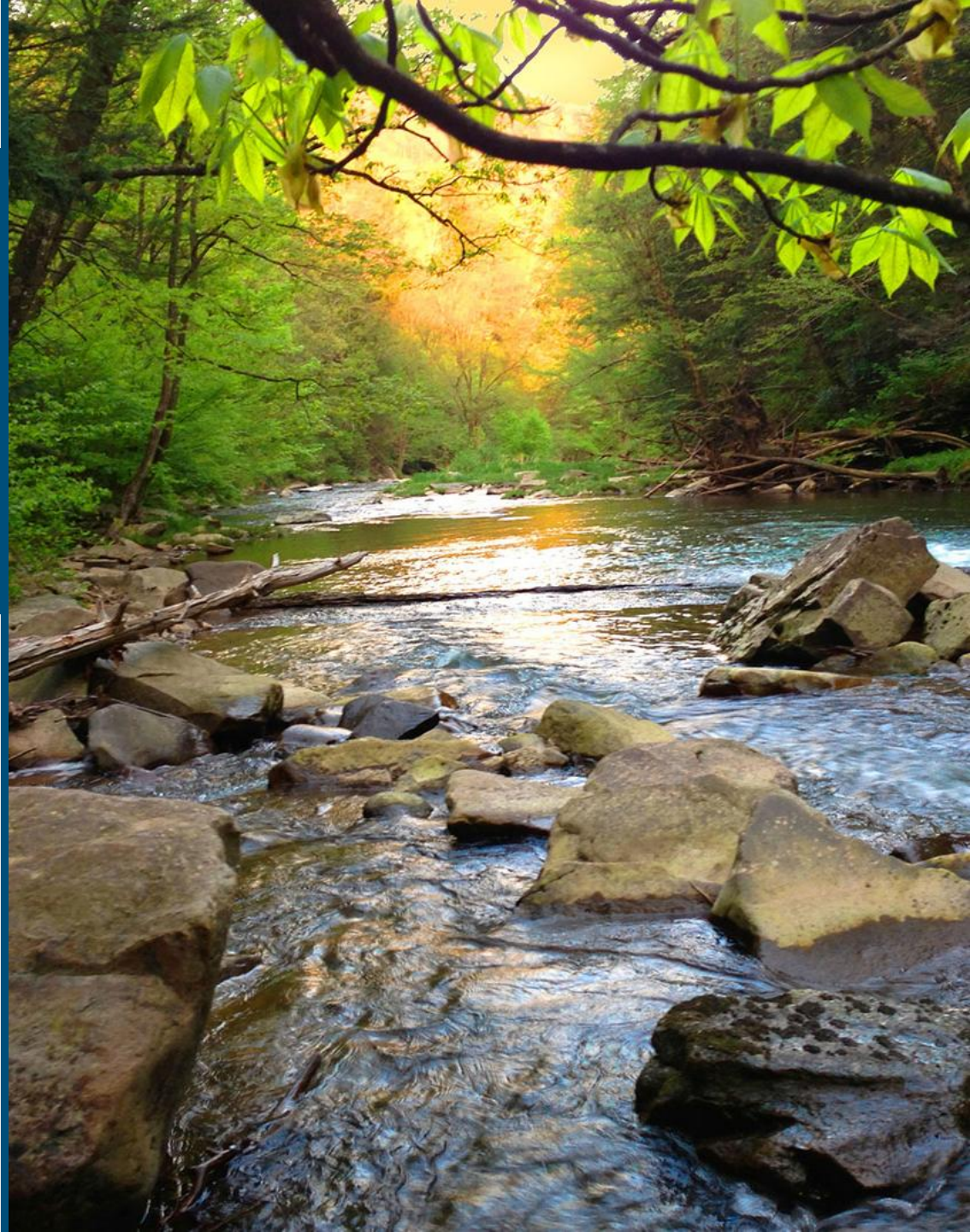
SEK CPAs & ADVISORS | Guidance You Can Count On.



National Workforce Snapshot

Metric	Sept 2025	Sept 2026	What This Means
Unemployment Rate	4.4%	4.2%	Hiring remains competitive. Most people who want a job already have one.
Labor Force Participation	62.5%	61.8%	The available talent pool remains limited.
Employee Quit Rate	2%	1.9% (August)	Voluntary turnover is lower. Workers appear somewhat less willing to leave existing jobs.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Workforce Realities

Pennsylvania:

- 3.6% unemployment rate
- 62.6% labor force participation rate

Public Sector:

- 0.8% (Aug) national state and local government quit rate
- 44% say their largest wave of retirements is still ahead
- 51% rank succession planning as a very important issue
- 53% do not have a formal succession planning process
- 53% offer flexible schedules
- 50% offer hybrid work

Challenges:

Replacing experienced employees and attracting candidates from a limited labor pool (including rural challenges).



Sources: Mission Square Research Institute, State and Local Government Workforce Survey Report 2026; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry



Recruitment

Tips & Strategies

Start With Strategic Workforce Planning

Move from “reactive hiring” to workforce planning.

Be proactive and intentional with recruiting.

- Where are we vulnerable if someone leaves?
- What roles are mission-critical over the next 12 to 24 months?
- Where do we have skill gaps, and could cross-training help address them?
- What does our employee turnover tell us?
- Is succession planning in place for key roles?
- When and how will we recruit for our needs?



Use Branding to Increase Interest

Your Brand = How people perceive your organization as a place to work

- Be able to articulate why employees love working for your organization. Highlight the impact of their work, not just job duties.
- Have a story to tell about your organization and its people.
- Clearly communicate your mission, values, and workplace culture.
- Maintain a consistent brand across channels (social media and your website/careers page).

Mission-driven/community messaging: Using taglines centered on community and public service (e.g., Showcasing day-in-the-life stories, employee testimonials, and local impact through social media platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn).



Create Effective Job Postings

Make it REAL – and easier to say yes to!

- Clear organization snapshot (set context to attract right candidates)
- Why this role exists (connect outcomes to mission)
- Focused responsibilities (not a long task list)
- Skills & experience for success (include “transferable skills and non-traditional career paths welcome”)
- Work model (on-site/hybrid/remote) and schedule expectations
- Transparent pay range and benefits (builds trust and speeds decisions)
- What this opportunity offers you (highlights the positives)
- Why work with us (sells impact, growth, and visibility)
- “Day in the Life” paragraph



Using AI to Develop Job Postings



Clarity is a recruiting advantage!

Suggested AI Prompt:

Act as an experienced public sector/nonprofit recruiter. Using the attached job description, create an engaging job posting for a Resource Conservation Specialist at a small conservation district. Use a friendly and professional tone and write to attract candidates, not simply describe the job. Highlight the mission, why our work matters, key responsibilities, and desired qualifications. Include "What This Opportunity Offers You" featuring *[insert benefits, compensation, flexibility, perks, etc.].* Use the organization's website for additional context: *[insert website].* Do not invent information that is not provided.

Sample "A Day in the Life" paragraph – Resource Conservation Specialist:

As a Resource Conservation Specialist, your time is split between field activity and essential office operations. You will spend mornings answering public inquiries and reviewing compliance permits. In the afternoon, you will head out to map field projects using GIS tools, check on local water quality, or assist with seasonal community initiatives.

Design Entry-Level “Plus” Roles

- Create roles that combine the core work with a clearly defined growth area, rather than endlessly searching for the perfect expert. Hire for 80% of the role.
- Clearly define what the person will learn or take on over time, and provide coaching, mentoring, and exposure to leadership.
- Helps attract early-career professionals, career switchers, people from adjacent sectors, and candidates with strong transferable skills. This expands the talent pool and builds loyalty by investing in development.
- Hire for potential, not perfection.

“This role will primarily be hands-on, with the opportunity to grow into program management over time.”



Use a Variety of Sources

You do not need expensive advertising. Focus on repeatable networks and channels.

- **Employee Referral Program**
- **Board of Directors:** Structured approach is effective. Provide summary of role, a specific ask (please share with people in your network), a deadline, and next step.
- **Universities/Colleges/High Schools:** Make personal connections with Career Center staff and professors. Offer internships. Do guest speaking (which doubles as recruiting). Use Alumni resources. Consider multiple majors and provide training.
- **Volunteer-to-Staff Pathway:** Be transparent that strong volunteers often become staff when roles open. Benefits = already a culture fit, shorter onboarding, and stronger long-term retention.
- **Boomerang outreach:** Make a list of past finalists, former staff, and prior volunteers. Re-engage people who already said “yes” once. Go back 10+ years.
- **Consider those transitioning careers:** Retirees, late career professionals seeking purpose, corporate professionals interested in mission-driven work, professionals returning to work after caregiving responsibilities.
- **Use social media and job boards:** Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn; Industry-specific niche job boards.



Understand Candidate Experience = Your Reputation

- Make it easy to apply. No lengthy application up front.
- Immediately confirm receipt of each resume.
- Create a Careers webpage that has an About Us section, to get to know you and your mission, and a way to easily submit resumes.
- Interview process must be focused, timely, and organized. Communicate any delays.
- Take the time to relate and truly listen to candidates during the interview.
- Maintain personalized and consistent communication throughout the process. Do not ghost people after an interview!

***Candidates remember how you treated them even if not hired.**



Use Transparency as a Recruiting Filter

- During interviews, intentionally name both the rewards and the realities of working at your conservation district.

- **Explain:** What you love about working there
  What is genuinely challenging
  How your team handles pressure

- **Results:** Builds trust with candidates
  Better self-selection
  Attracts people who want honesty over hype
  Reduces turnover from “this isn’t what I expected”



Track Recruitment Efforts



Create an Excel spreadsheet that records every contact made during your recruiting efforts.

Candidate Owner	Candidate Name	Current Employer	Telephone/Email	How Do We Know Them	Date Last Contacted	Response	Next Follow-Up Action
Joe Smith	Sandy Jones	ABC Company	sandy@yahoo.com	Joe worked with Sandy at former employer. Understands she is not happy.Asked District Manager to reach out to her.	10/1/2026	She is considering opportunities but currently working on completing a big project. Timing will be better in a few months.	District Manager will email Sandy in three months to check in.



Retention

Tips & Strategies

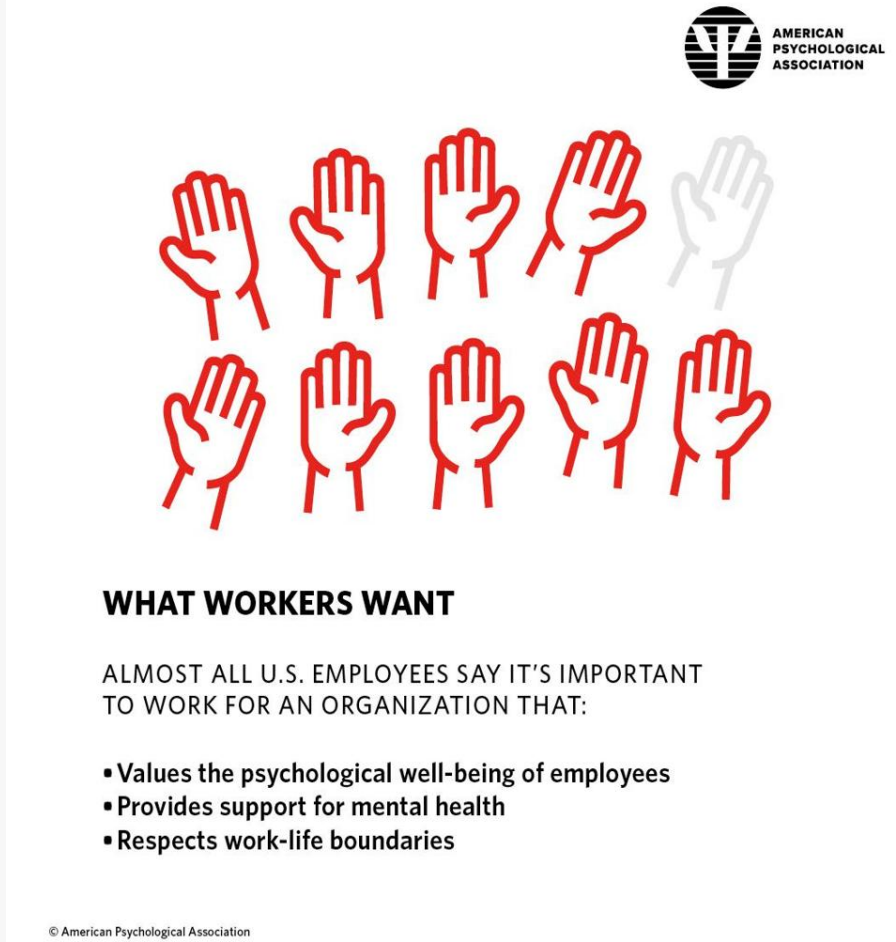
Build Psychological Safety

People feel safe to ask questions, admit mistakes, and raise concerns without fear of blame, embarrassment, or retaliation.

- Questions are welcomed, not judged
- Mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, not personal failure
- Workload concerns can be raised before burnout
- Leaders model humility and transparency

Psychological safety is one of the top three factors employees value most (84%), falling just behind regular pay raises (86%) and before flexible work (83%).

Source: Oyster Employer Disillusionment Report



Effectively Onboard New Hires

Nearly 90% of employees decide whether to stay or go within the first 6 months.

First impressions matter!

- Starts before official hire date – send communication to explain logistics of first day, dress code, lunch, and employee handbook. Order and prepare all equipment/materials.
- Provide a formal and planned orientation
    - Meet and greet coworkers – tour office/facility
    - Complete new hire paperwork, review benefits and policies, get logged into software
    - Schedule a one-on-one with manager and clearly communicate job expectations
    - Assign a buddy
- Provide effective training. Have some work assignments lined up.
- Conduct new hire follow-ups at 30 days, 90 days, and 180 days.
- Manager should have ongoing check-ins with the new hire (at least weekly).



Source: SHRM.org

Provide “Relief Benefits”

Create predictable “relief benefits” for high-intensity periods

- Proactively plan for known stress points so employees know relief is coming before burnout.
- Identify your 2–3 most intense periods each year. Pair each one with a pre-planned recovery action, such as:
  - Offer flexible schedules the week after an event or project completion
  - Approve mental health days
  - Reduce the number of meetings
  - Provide lunches
  - Temporary re-prioritization – “nothing new this week”

Talk about the recovery plan in advance, not after exhaustion hits.



Build Micro Recognition into Normal Work

Employees often work hard without immediate visible results

- Move recognition from annual evaluations and occasional praise into everyday operations.
- Start meetings with a brief mission moment tied to someone's work
- Normalize peer recognition – emails, huddles, thank yous
- Spot "bonuses"
- Use impact-based recognition statements –

  "Thank you for working through the state conservation grant this week. Your attention to detail and budget was spot on and we stand a much better chance of getting funded because of your hard work."



Provide Comprehensive Benefits

- Health, Dental, Vision, HSA/HRA/FSA/Dependent Care
- Retirement Plan
- Life, Disability
- PTO – vacation, sick, personal
- Paid Holidays
- Educational Assistance
- Employee Assistance Program – Mental Health Benefits:

69% of adults say they could've used more emotional support in the last year.

Source: The Harris Poll on behalf of APA

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Take Simple No-Cost Actions

- Conduct stay interviews (2 questions, twice per year):
  - What makes your work here meaningful enough that you want to stay right now?
  - What's one change that, if left unaddressed, might make it harder for you to stay?
- Have good manager habits (weekly 1:1s and clear priorities)
- Provide growth opportunities by 'stretch' assignments, not just promotions (projects, rotations, mentoring).
- Provide flexibility



Action Plan for Next 90 Days

- Commit to developing a staffing plan and create a shared spreadsheet to track recruiting efforts.
- Make one improvement to your onboarding process.
- Have at least two stay conversations. Take action based on feedback.
- Determine what “relief benefits” you will provide employees to prevent burnout.
- In meetings or emails, recognize at least 2 employees and explain the positive impact of their work

None of these actions require funding – just leadership attention.



Q&A





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