

Navigating Challenges, Empowering People:

NCDOT's Journey to Workforce Excellence



Navigating the Post-COVID Workforce Landscape

In early 2022, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) encountered a significant workforce challenge, with vacancy rates of over 23% in January 2022. Several factors contributed to this situation – a wave of retirements left many critical roles, particularly leadership positions, unfilled. The COVID-19 pandemic also resulted in a surge of promotions, which, while advantageous to those employees, led to numerous lower-level vacancies. Additionally, NCDOT struggled with increased competition for talent from the private sector, and the department's protracted hiring processes exacerbated the issue. Furthermore, the pandemic negatively impacted employees' mental well-being, creating a heightened need for support services and adding extra strain on the department's resources.

Turning the Tide: Our Strategies for Success

To address these multifaceted challenges, NCDOT implemented and continues to implement a range of key initiatives focusing on recruitment, retention, employee development, and mental health support. Key initiatives included:

- **Enhanced Recruitment:** NCDOT developed an "Enhanced Recruitment" platform to streamline and accelerate the hiring process. By automating job postings and expanding the department's reach in the labor market, this initiative aimed to attract a larger and more diverse pool of qualified candidates.
- **Competitive Compensation:** To attract and retain top talent, NCDOT improved its compensation packages to better compete with private sector employers. This included offering salaries and benefits that were more in line with market rates, making the department a more attractive employer for skilled professionals.
- **Apprenticeship Program:** In collaboration with community colleges, NCDOT established the Transportation Apprenticeships Program to provide hands-on training and career opportunities for aspiring technicians. This initiative aimed to develop a pipeline of skilled workers to fill critical roles within the department.
- **Mental Health Support:** To address the growing need for mental health support services, NCDOT implemented a Mental Health Awareness Program. This program provided training resources through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) on topics such as recognizing troubled employees, building better mental health, and adapting to change. The department also spotlighted suicide prevention resources on the internal employee website and shared monthly EAP communications with all staff to ensure that employees had access to the support they needed.

Transformative Results: Empowering Our Workforce, Driving Success

NCDOT's strategies have yielded impressive results in a relatively short period. By addressing the root causes of its workforce challenges and implementing targeted initiatives, the department has made significant strides in reducing vacancy rates, improving employee well-being, and cultivating a pipeline of skilled and engaged professionals as evidenced as follows:

- **Vacancy Rate Reduction:** NCDOT has reduced its vacancy rates from 23% in January 2022 to 18% in November 2024. This reduction is a testament to the effectiveness of the department's multi-faceted approach to addressing its workforce challenges.
- **Mental Health Awareness Program Participation:** NCDOT's Mental Health Awareness Program has supported 5,322 staff members since September 2024, with employees taking advantage of the training resources, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services, and support provided.
- **Reduced Suicide Rates:** Since the launch of the Mental Health Awareness Program, suicide rates have decreased by 75%, highlighting the critical importance of providing accessible and effective mental health support services in the workplace.
- **Increased Participation in Employee Development Programs:** NCDOT's investment in employee development initiatives, such as the Transportation Leadership Development Program and the Transportation Apprenticeships Program, has been met with enthusiasm from staff members. The increased participation in these programs underscores the department's commitment to cultivating a skilled and engaged workforce while also ensuring a strong pipeline of future leaders.

Envisioning NCDOT's Future

Building on the success of its recent workforce initiatives, NCDOT is committed to continuously improving its human resource management practices and fostering a culture of excellence. To further strengthen its workforce and drive long-term success, NCDOT has identified several key priorities for the future:

- **HR Management System Upgrade:** Implement a new HR Management System to support the talent lifecycle end-to-end and improve efficiency and operations.
- **Knowledge Management and Succession Planning:** Dedicate HR staff to enhance knowledge management and succession planning. Their aim is to develop knowledge databases, retain institutional knowledge, and support succession plan design.
- **Workforce Analytics and Productivity Dashboards:** Develop analytics and productivity dashboards with standardized KPIs to evaluate NCDOT's performance against human resource and strategic workforce goals, enabling data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement in department efficiency.
- **Workforce Development Program Expansion:** Continue to build on key initiatives such as the Transportation Apprenticeship Program (TAP+) and the Transportation Leadership Development Program (TLDP).