



PUBLIC FINANCE WORKFORCE | CASE STUDY

KITSAP PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

Embracing Hiring Innovation Amid a Public Health Crisis

➔ How the Kitsap Public Health District shifted strategy to meet surging demand

When the pandemic hit, Kitsap Public Health District faced surging demand for public health services coupled with high turnover. To resolve its understaffing and deliver vital public health support, the district embraced innovation and flexibility in hiring, expanding its recruitment outreach channels and streamlined staffing for early-stage interviews.

KITSAP PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT, KITSAP, WA

COUNTY POPULATION: 275,000



Kitsap County is located just an hour outside Seattle, Washington with approximately 275,000 residents. The Public Health District team is a dedicated and diverse group of approximately 130 individuals responsible for all public health services for Kitsap.

Melissa Laird has been the finance manager of Kitsap Public Health District since 2017. She started her professional career in the private sector working as a staff accountant, controller, and vice president of finance and operations. Karen Holt is the human resources manager for the Public Health District and has been in her position since mid-2014.

THE SITUATION

High turnover amid surging demand for staff in a public health crisis

Like other public health entities, Kitsap faced unprecedented employment and workplace challenges in 2020 when COVID-19 hit the county. Demand for public health services surged: employees from the Community Health and Environmental Health divisions were tasked with contact tracing, working with patients, and other virus-specific work.

At the same time, turnover rates soared as the district's staff opted to retire or step back from their work because of health concerns. Suddenly, the district was understaffed with simultaneously taking on more responsibilities, which would only increase with additional tasks like vaccine administration. The district faced an urgent need to fill vacant as well as new positions.



KITSAP PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT



THE SOLUTION

Enhance hiring outreach, streamline applicant review, and speed hiring pace

In the face of a sudden need for more employees, the district prioritized improving its hiring process. To do so, staff embraced what Melissa described as a “nimble work culture.” Since the onset of the pandemic, the Public Health District has seen an agency-wide willingness to embrace innovation and flexibility during the hiring process.

Karen led efforts to enhance candidate outreach by adding new channels, including GovernmentJobs.com, LinkedIn, Handshake, Craigslist, social media postings, and even community events. These channels allow HR to target the most qualified candidates. In addition, all position descriptions used

during recruitment are updated by management during a routine annual review. For positions Kitsap is having difficulty filling, HR will modify the job qualifications “to a classification that lends itself more to life experiences, rather than only education,” Karen noted. This practice is used to expand the candidate pool and therefore receive more applications. Additionally, instead of recruiting, the district may choose to underfill the position and transform it into a promotional opportunity, serving the purpose of supporting current employees and improving the pace of hiring by bringing the search in-house.

Prior to COVID, each interview panel required an HR representative. Now, seasoned hiring managers conduct the initial applicant review while HR

PROBLEMS TO SOLVE

- ? Reduce vacancy rates
- ? Expand applicant pools
- ? Cut time to hire
- ? Keep pace with growth

RESULTS

- ✓ 200% year-over-year recruitment growth, 2019-2021

approves the selections. A smaller panel for the interview expedites the timeline. Karen also urges her hiring managers to be proactive by setting aside dates for interviews and drafting questions prior to the position closing. This, too, helps to speed hiring pace.

THE RESULTS

Kitsap has seen real improvement in the physical growth of hired staff. In 2019, the district recruited 23 staff, but that number soared to 46 in both 2020 and 2021. Concurrent with improvement in its recruiting process, state and local public health have increased significantly since 2019. The new hiring initiatives have showcased how Kitsap Public Health District’s flexible and innovative work culture has created success.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Workforce 2023: Solving Hiring Challenges

GFOA has heard consistently from members about the difficulties of hiring in local government. In search of solutions, we identified eight municipalities across the country that have grown their applicant pools and reduced hiring times through process change. Their solutions are lessons to inspire other local governments to solve their hiring challenges.

Learn more: gfoa.org/workforce2023