

Human Resources Strategic Plan 2024-2029

Introduction

In the spring of 2022, three months into the tenure of Vice President for Human Resources and CHRO Lorraine Goffe, the HR leadership team developed five strategic focus areas to reflect departmental priorities:

- Recruitment and Retention
- Total Compensation
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging
- Technology and Process Improvement
- Customer Support and Alignment

Specific drivers influenced the development of these strategic areas:

- University priorities for the staff community
- Workplace trends, including:
 - Generational and demographic shifts
 - The pivot to hybrid work caused by COVID-19
- The influence of external forces, such as:
 - Inflation
 - Job market
 - Upward pressure on compensation
 - Increased unionization in higher ed

Since then, although the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the workplace still reverberates as seen in some of these drivers, we continue to monitor and analyze the talent environment to ensure that our priorities align with the current market.

With that said, HR considers these five strategic focus areas to be “evergreen” -- that is, they are timeless priorities for a function focused on the people of an organization -- which is ultimately about managing talent. The following plan reflects this outlook. It also directly connects to the University priority related to the staff community, *Invest in our employees*, which states:

Faculty and staff are the people who earn great universities their status. Northwestern strives to maintain a diverse and equitable culture, and a total compensation structure that attracts and retains talented faculty, staff and administrators.

The HR strategic plan has been informed by feedback, some of which was not solely for this plan, but rather through ongoing feedback mechanisms. We heard both general and specific suggestions. Our colleagues and stakeholders articulated what they want from their HR department, while our employees communicated what they both need and expect from their workplace.

The strategic goals outlined in this plan address this feedback within our current budget and resources. We believe these goals will contribute to a meaningful employee experience at Northwestern.

Office of Human Resources Fundamentals

Our Mission

To promote an innovative and inclusive workplace where all individuals thrive and collaborate to advance our Northwestern Directions.

Our Vision

Partnering with colleagues across the University to create a one-of-a-kind employee experience.

Our Values

Collaboration, Integrity, Teamwork, Expertise, Service, Communication

HR Customer Guidelines

Providing excellent customer service is critical to our departmental success as well as the smooth functioning of the University. We define customers as both our colleagues within HR as well as our clients, stakeholders, and HR professionals across schools and units. The guidelines are as follows:

- Be responsive
- Be accountable
- Protect everyone's time and preferences
- Ensure confidentiality
- Follow communication best practices

Who We Are

[Human Resources](#) supports the Northwestern community from a "one-HR" framework. This framework means collaborating across the organization to provide integrated and strategically coordinated service while leveraging the expertise of each functional area.

HR Functional Areas

- **Benefits:** Offering our diverse community the total well-being benefits and support that they need.
- **Communications:** Providing communications that are transparent, user-centric, and relevant to our employee community.
- **Compensation:** Designing, implementing, and maintaining fair and competitive pay programs for staff through compliance, consultation and administrative services.
- **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging:** Embedding diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts throughout all HR services, programs and resources.
- **HR Business Partners:** Supporting the employee population while providing strategic HR guidance to leaders, managers, and teams to help them meet objectives and manage change effectively.
- **HR Operations, Payroll, & Support:** Providing seamless process and system support to our employees and teams.
- **Talent Acquisition:** Recruiting and hiring individuals who will thrive at Northwestern and contribute to the University mission.
- **Talent Development:** Fostering learning, identifying tools to manage our talent, and developing our employees to drive culture, performance, innovation, and results.

2024-2029 Goals

- Update and enhance University hiring processes to improve the candidate experience and facilitate a more diverse workforce.
- Address Northwestern's talent needs by building out Talent Development function to align HR's training, development, and recognition programming with the future of work and the employee experience.
- Build a career path framework that defines and organizes employee roles within the University based on job functions, scope of responsibilities, required skills, and competencies -- providing a roadmap to help employees understand how they can progress within the organization.
- Design a 5-year benefits strategy with a focus on market competitiveness, fiscal sustainability, and appropriate support for our employees' total well-being.
- Develop and implement a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging strategy to ensure HR services, programs and resources are inclusive and equitable.
- Enhance HR communications so faculty and staff are familiar with programs, services and resources for their professional and personal needs.
- Consolidate labor relations function through training, development of processes, policy updates in collaboration with stakeholders across the University.
- Through an HR Business Partner strategy, more fully leverage HR expertise across the organization.
- Implement a suite of process improvements, system enhancements, and training programs to continue to reduce risk to the University while enhancing customer service.

Highlights of Accomplishments 2022-2024

- Implemented and communicated Workplace Strategies for the University.
- Created rapid action teams to address post-pandemic recruitment and retention challenges.
- Decreased vacancy rate and time-to-fill with new hiring strategy and implementation of LinkedIn Recruiter, which included enhanced employer branding.
- Implemented a new Employee Assistance Program with enhanced well-being resources.
- Increased HR communications through new local and University-wide communication vehicles, mission statement, and customer service guidelines.
- Developed HR strategic alignment teams for school clients.
- Redesigned our service award ceremony for the staff community.
- Developed strategy for tighter I9 and worker classification compliance measures to reduce risk to the University.
- Created the communication vehicle "Fireside Chat" for Northwestern president and CHRO.
- Added additional retirement vehicle, the Roth IRA, for the University.
- Streamlined and enhanced DEI advertising outreach for University jobs.
- Replaced timekeeping system for the University for an improved user experience.
- Created new compensation communications via new website, information sessions and materials.
- Implemented pay transparency guidelines ahead of 2025 regulatory requirement.

- Provided additional askHR support in Chicago.
- Designed and implemented a new professional development framework through the Professional Skills Curriculum.
- Enhanced staff on-boarding process and re-designed New Employee Orientation program.
- Designed and implemented Total Compensation Statement.
- Designed and implemented local school/unit engagement surveys.
- Designed and implemented University-wide exit survey.

Conclusion

The role of Human Resources is to support the people of Northwestern so they thrive and do their best work advancing the University mission. Our strategic focus areas and accompanying goals demonstrate the work necessary to fulfill this role. And yet because organizations are dynamic, we will re-visit and refine these goals as we make progress. We believe this plan reflects a forward-thinking department committed to providing an employee experience equal to the individuals who make up Northwestern.

Appendix

Stakeholder Engagement

- CHRO listening tour
- Ongoing Provost meetings
- Ongoing Associate Deans meetings
- Ongoing unit/school strategic alignment meetings
- Ongoing Faculty Senate Benefits subcommittee feedback
- Ongoing NUSAC meetings
- Ongoing HR and business administrator meetings
- Cross-unit engagement surveys
- HR and business administrators focus group
- All-HR engagement survey
- HR leadership retreats
- HR managers focus group
- HR individual contributors focus group
- HR individual contributors survey

Additional Data Sources

- Monthly University data reports
- 2024 child and adult care review
- 2024 and 2023 Benefits Open Enrollment surveys
- 2023 Faculty Information Working Group Report
- 2023 and 2022 President's Fireside Chats employee feedback
- 2022 Rapid Action recruitment and retention teams
- 2022 Board of Trustees & Faculty Senate luncheon meeting on staff hiring and retention