

## **Dare to Grow: Expanding Resources for the Staff Lifecycle USAC Staff Life Committee 2023-2024**

### **Vision**

The Staff Life Committee of the University Staff Advisory Council (USAC) endeavors to produce a comprehensive summary of issues for review by administration specifically designed to better staff at various points in the staff lifecycle. Within each issue, the Staff Life Committee has highlighted ideas and requests related to each problem that we would ask leadership in People, Culture, and Belonging (PCB) to review and implement in the means determined most effective by their context experts.

The concept of the staff lifecycle emerged as a means of describing efforts that would impact a staff member from their first days of employment through their time and development at the university, while meeting their needs at the different phases of the professional and personal journey staff move through while employed at the university potentially to retirement. Each component of this summary affects the full lifecycle for staff.

Where the Staff Life Committee has historically picked one subject area for inquiry and then proposal, this year's Staff Life Committee boldly seeks to provide a robust summary of issues that packages together multiple sub-topics that impact the staff lifecycle at various points. By deploying multiple working groups of cross-institutional staff representation, this proposal reflects the efforts achieved through radical collaboration to improve the staff experience.

### **Organization of the Proposal**

The design of this proposal intentionally features three distinct chapters devoted to core issues within the staff lifecycle. Specifically, the proposal seeks to improve staff onboarding, non-health related (fringe) benefits/perks, and retention efforts that each impact staff at crucial points in the staff lifecycle. Each chapter is organized around key themes, followed by problem statements, and then bullets of ideation from the Staff Life Committee.

### **Sources of Information**

This document and the content areas of its chapters were put forth following a Retreat facilitated by the Wondr'y staff to arrange multiple and varying challenges staff experience that USAC receives through our Comment Form and from the experiences of the committee's membership of approximately 30 representative staff from a diverse set of offices around the university.

Some of what the Staff Life Committee is pursuing in this document is novel. Pursuit of these recommendations positions Vanderbilt to trailblaze and offer staff something uncharted and revolutionary. Vanderbilt's willingness to step outside of the existing framework for staff support and move into a lifecycle model where enrichment and commitment to staff are prioritized truly will reflect a commitment to the One Vanderbilt mantra where staff, students, and faculty comprise the university community and better it daily.

## Onboarding and Acclimation

1. The Importance of the First Week
  - a. Problem: Staff members may flounder for a full week while waiting for university systems to begin recognizing them or technology to be set up, or in the absence of a structured plan from their supervisor, experience frustration.
    - i. We ask that new employees receive a successful first week of planned onboarding with an adherence to working systems, clear start-up actions, and base-line knowledge necessary for the first few weeks until Orientation.
      1. Convene relevant units and re-design cross-campus efforts for all pre-arrival steps such that systems and technology work on the first day
      2. Establish a standardized “first week” checklist with actions applicable to most staff (computer, Commodore Card, access, email, Oracle)
      3. Relay “must-know” knowledge to bridge until deferred orientation
      4. Emphasize relevant campus and campus adjacent resources early
    - ii. We ask that supervisors acknowledge the importance of this week and prioritize staff welcome and onboarding as a top responsibility.
      1. Ensure supervisors are present and engaged with new staff
      2. Coordinate the “first week” checklist
      3. Communicate who staff should work with for common problems
      4. Review job responsibilities, set expectations, and orient to role specifics
2. The Importance of Ongoing Onboarding
  - a. Problem: Staff may experience a decline in support and involvement in onboarding beyond the first week and may still be experiencing initial challenges. Staff also begin operating within their roles and transitioning into the university environment, which inevitably can lead to new challenges that need support.
    - i. We endorse PCB’s “Vanderbilt Voyage” plans for a revamped, multimodal Orientation offering and look forward to hearing feedback and seeing assessments reflecting an improved orientation experience.
    - ii. We ask for accountability and structure for supervisors to continue the onboarding process and success orientation of their staff.
      1. Train supervisors on supervision and onboarding
      2. Provide tools including a guide for the first six weeks with checkpoints and accountability for these checkpoints
      3. Create an employee-facing timeline, workflow, or checklist such that new staff can monitor their own progress and advocate for themselves if information/steps in their onboarding are missing guide and supervise up to receive missing information or steps
      4. Network the staff member with logical partners for work responsibilities while also helping facilitate social acclimation and establish community
      5. Support staff as they move into job responsibilities and provide outlets for remediation, ongoing education, and troubleshooting
3. The Importance of Public Facing Information and Resources
  - a. Problem: Most troubleshooting information that new staff need is scattered based on the unit of responsibility, impeding the efficient resolution to common challenges.
    - i. We endorse PCB’s plans for a landing page. We ask that a “one stop shop” style website for new staff members be designed.

1. Build the website such that multiple avenues exist to solve a problem (links and instructions; problem solving by topic area; FAQs)
  2. House resource content referenced in the above requests on this landing page including the first week checklist, must-know Vanderbilt knowledge guide, VUIT setup information, supervisor guides, etc.
  3. Include links to information about Nashville for those new to the area; employee perks; and campus information related to staff needs
  4. Film a high-quality (in both information and production) virtual campus tour devoted to staff experience on campus and feature it prominently
  5. Consult with USAC and Staff Life Committee on content ideation
  6. Charge a staff unit within PCB to routinely update and manage
4. The Importance of Designated Troubleshooters and Concierge Onboarding
    - a. Problem: Acknowledging that the above will help the onboarding process for staff, inevitably there are nuanced situations, a supervisor is not present, logical action steps are not working, etc. Staff need a central point of contact for those instances.
      - i. We ask that PCB appoint devoted personnel/unit to making sure onboarding functions go well and serving as the primary point of contact when issues arise.
        1. Deploy an appropriate number of FTE(s) to manage the onboarding function and provide concierge level service to proactively and reactively solve challenges in onboarding
        2. Convene a working group of relevant units to support this unit
        3. Centralize to one help desk/phone/email to triage to the appropriate contacts within the troubleshooter working group
        4. Audit back-end operations such that every starting staff member appears correctly in systems and is appropriately set-up
        5. Provide training and support for managers as well
5. The Importance of Assessment and Tracking Progress
    - a. Problem: We know some staff are falling through the cracks in their onboarding process and having less than ideal experiences, but we do not have a means of systematically identifying trends or collecting data in an early alert system
      - i. Deploy assessments at key intervals in a new employee's lifecycle (following the first week, six months, and one full year)
      - ii. Identify new employees not being supported and provide solution options
      - iii. Assess trends in what staff feel was important at a given checkpoint and what knowledge gaps existed in each phase to better structure the new staff cycle
      - iv. Utilize trend data to understand contributing factors to retention or departure

## Employee Perks

1. Communication of Employee Perks
  - a. Problem: There is a lack of clear communication on what perks are available to staff.
    - i. We encourage the communication of employee perks to receive more attention and clarity better reach all staff.
      1. Create *Did You Know* highlights in MyVU with university tips including perks
      2. Include a featured perk in USAC's monthly newsletter
      3. Post flyers in staff-facing areas across campus
      4. Train unit-level administrators, HCMs, and HR leads in units to advertise offerings to schools, departments, and units
      5. Host an employee perks table at spring and fall staff assemblies
      6. Bring in vendors/partners for an employee perks/benefits fair.
    - ii. We ask for more visibility of Employee Perks/Employee Perks information.
      1. Feature employee perks in highlighted areas.
        - a. We note that on the Benefits Overview page on the PCB website, Employee Perks is not one of the highlighted resources listed. Instead, it is buried as the last link as one expands the Benefits tab.
      2. Host a dedicated employee perks landing page instead of a direct link to Abenity.
      3. Pull out "Perks 101" from Abenity and feature on dedicated landing page.
2. Comprehensive Platform for Employee Perks
  - a. Problem: Employee perks and benefits are discussed in various locations and staff sometimes do not even know they exist.
    - i. We request a clear location, app, website, etc. listing all employee perks.
3. Scope of Discount and Benefit Offers
  - a. Problem: Staffers in other states do not have access to most of the same benefits that local staff are afforded.
    - i. We suggest a clearer effort to distinguish Employee Perks as more than just the Abenity platform.
    - ii. We ask for a review of discounts to ensure that the perks offered serve a diverse population of staff both locally and out-of-area/state
  - b. Problem: Other employers have perk packages to garner and keep employees
    - i. We propose PCB research industry-based perks that match and/or exceed those of other local competitors – Amazon, Nissan, HCA, Oracle, etc.
4. Creation of a Commodore Connector role
  - a. Problem: Staff do not have a person to go directly to for all questions pertaining to their journey at Vanderbilt, onboarding to retirement, including support for benefits/perks
    - i. We ask for a staff position(s) dedicated to communicating and troubleshooting questions regarding benefits available to the Vanderbilt University community. This position would not be responsible for negotiating employee perks offerings but would be a highly visible single point of contact representative for all things related to employee perks.
    - ii. We request a clear means to engage with this position easily via the dedicated perks website described above, a dedicated phone line, or chat.

## Staff Retention

1. Research and publicize internal research about staff retention
  - a. Problem: The university lacks a consistent, ongoing public investigation into staff retention.
    - i. We ask for PCB to research what factors increase or decrease the likelihood of staying at the university, including internal promotion opportunities, transitioning across divisions/units, and the skills/experiences required to make those moves.
      1. Engage staff of all lengths of university service on an ongoing basis
      2. Launch surveys and host in-person listening sessions across all divisions.
      3. Create meaningful, in-person engagement opportunities about staff retention issues. This will increase connection to PCB staff and these initiatives, while promoting transparency and clarity
2. Improved communication of existing milestone recognition efforts
  - a. Problem: Existing milestone/service programs are relatively unknown, underpublicized and online sites are not updated.
    - i. We ask PCB design a visibility campaign for staff at key milestones, highlighting the key and new programmatic efforts for staff retention.
      1. New staff are largely unaware of the milestone programs (receiving credits for gifts at 5 year intervals, including a Vanderbilt chair at 25 years of service)
  - b. Problem: Vanderbilt promotes a narrative about radical collaboration and achieving excellence, but rarely profiles or highlights staff as central to the university's function.
    - i. We seek greater publicity about the years of service programming (chair receiving), including video campaigns and quality photos.
      1. This effort highlights Vanderbilt's commitment to staff, that Vanderbilt is a steadfast and trustworthy employer. It can additionally be tied to how staff are essential to supporting the university's academic mission.
3. Expand staff participation in Tuition Remission programs to certificates or licensure programs.
  - a. Problem: Staff are less inclined to participate in tuition remission because of its minimal financial impact to the sizable cost of tuition in the country and the length of commitment required to complete an undergraduate or graduate degree.
    - i. We request expanded definitions for tuition remission to cover costs of certificate programs, certifications, and/or licensure programs.
      1. PCB can create an application or grant program for staff to pursue approved certification programs (PMP, Strengths Coaching, DISC assessment, SHRM etc.) for funding.
      2. Alternatively, PCB can host Vanderbilt's own training workshops on these subjects/certifications and create an application program for staff to participate in onsite training.
      3. Following successful completion in programs, PCB can then create a marketing campaign that highlights the program, outcomes and benefits, and Vanderbilt's commitment to staff success and career development.
      4. Oracle can also feature a badging system to reflect earned credentials