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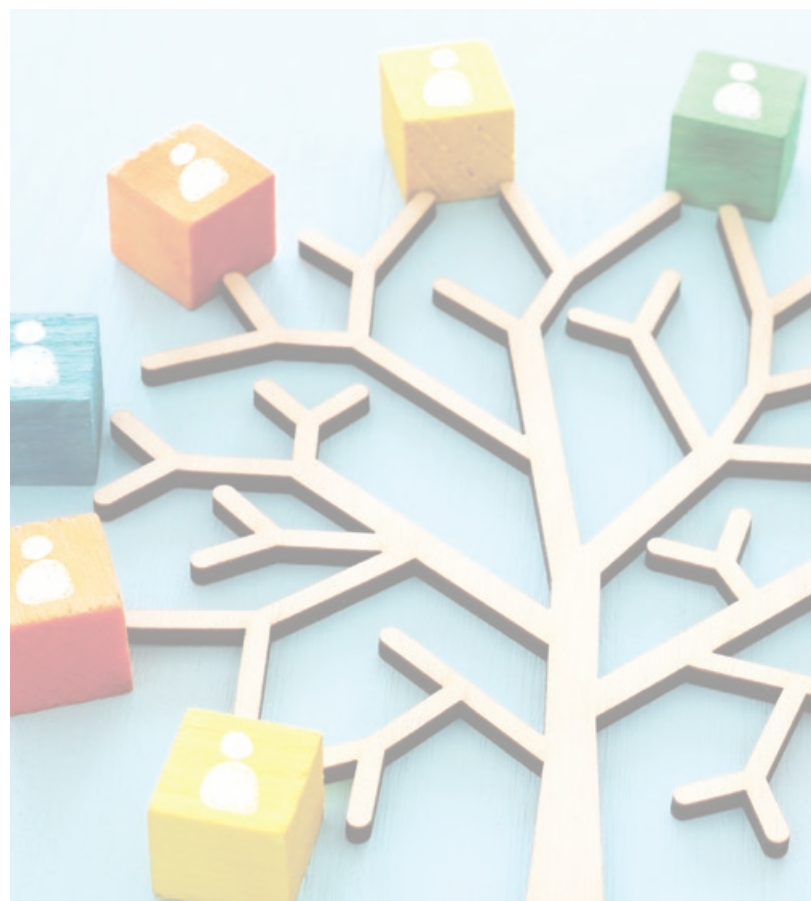
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# PENNSYLVANIA county news

## VOLUME 3 2024



There's no denying that the workforce is drastically changing. The way we view remote work, employee priorities, benefits, hiring processes and interviews are constantly evolving. In the middle of all that are the county human resources professionals. In this issue of County News, we'll explore the wide-ranging responsibilities of HR departments and how they stay up-to-date with all the emerging trends.

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**MICHAEL RIVERA**

President  
County Commissioners  
Association of Pennsylvania  
Commissioner  
Berks County, PA

## The Expanding Role of Human Resources in County Governments

When most people think of Human Resources (HR), they often picture the department that handles hiring, payroll, benefits, and employee discipline. However, in county government, HR's role extends far beyond these basic functions. It is a dynamic and strategic function that impacts every aspect of public service delivery. By recruiting and retaining talent, ensuring compliance, managing risks, and fostering a positive work environment, HR departments enable counties to operate effectively and efficiently. In turn, this directly benefits the community by ensuring that essential services are delivered by a motivated, capable, and supported workforce. As counties continue to face new challenges and adapt to evolving demands, the importance of robust HR management cannot be overstated.

### Recruitment and Retention: The Core Challenge

One of the most significant challenges facing county governments today is recruiting and retaining qualified personnel. Counties often compete with the private sector, other public entities, and even non-profits for top talent. Budget constraints, geographic limitations, and perceptions of lower compensation packages can make recruitment difficult. HR departments play a crucial role in

developing strategies that attract and retain skilled professionals.

Successful recruitment begins with creating clear, compelling job descriptions that emphasize not only the responsibilities but also the unique benefits of working in county government. Public sector positions often offer advantages like job stability, pension plans, healthcare, and the chance to make a meaningful impact in the community. HR departments are responsible for effectively communicating these benefits and branding county employment as a rewarding career path.

Retention is equally important. High turnover disrupts service delivery, leads to loss of institutional knowledge, and drives up costs. HR departments must create environments that encourage long-term commitment by offering opportunities for professional development, competitive compensation, and recognition programs. Counties that invest in their employees through continuous training, mentorship, and career advancement programs see higher satisfaction and better service delivery.

### Human Capital: The Engine of County Operations

Beyond traditional HR, it is crucial to consider human resources as human capital—the skills, knowledge, experience, and abilities

possessed by individuals that drive productivity and value within a county. This includes attributes such as education, training, creativity, problem-solving skills, health, and emotional well-being. Human capital is intangible but critical to the work of county governments.

Investing in human capital is essential for long-term success. Skilled and knowledgeable employees are more likely to generate innovative solutions, improve processes, and drive growth. Continuous learning and development help counties adapt to changes and stay ahead of evolving challenges. Focusing on human capital also improves employee satisfaction and retention. When employees feel valued and see opportunities for growth, they are more likely to stay and perform at their best.

### Health, Well-being, and Adaptability

A healthy workforce is vital for maintaining productivity. Access to quality healthcare, wellness programs, and supportive work environments contributes significantly to overall employee well-being and performance. HR departments must prioritize both physical and mental health initiatives to create a resilient and engaged workforce.

In a rapidly changing world, adaptability is key. Counties that invest in human capital are better equipped to handle disruptions, whether technological, economic downturns, or shifting community needs. A well-trained, healthy,

and adaptable workforce is essential for navigating uncertainty and maintaining continuity in service delivery.

### Leadership Development and Strategic Planning

Developing leadership skills and creating pathways for career advancement are critical to retaining top talent. HR departments must offer mentorship programs, leadership training, and opportunities for professional growth. Identifying future leaders and providing them with the tools they need for succession planning is essential for organizational sustainability.

HR is also integral to strategic planning in county governments. HR professionals collaborate with leadership to align workforce planning with long-term goals. This involves anticipating staffing needs, planning for transitions, and implementing initiatives that enhance efficiency. HR's involvement in strategic decision-making ensures that counties can meet the evolving needs of their communities.

### Compliance and Risk Management

Navigating the complex web of federal, state, and local regulations is another critical HR function. Ensuring compliance with labor laws, safety regulations, and collective bargaining agreements helps avoid legal disputes and financial penalties. HR departments develop and enforce policies that protect both the county and its employees, including managing workplace safety programs and addressing grievances.

"...the importance of robust HR management cannot be overstated."

### Fostering a Positive Work Environment

The effectiveness of county services is closely tied to employee morale. HR departments are responsible for creating a positive work environment where employees feel valued, respected, and engaged. Recognition programs that celebrate achievements, whether through formal awards or simple appreciation gestures, play a significant role in maintaining motivation and commitment.

### The Time for Strategic HR is Now

The days of "take the job or leave it" are over. Counties need to be competitive, engaging, and forward-thinking to attract and retain the best talent. A strong HR department that prioritizes human capital is essential to the success of county governments. By investing in HR and focusing on people, counties can ensure that they remain resilient, efficient, and ready to meet the challenges of the future. ▀



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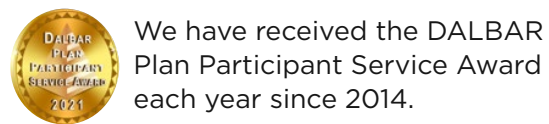
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# Mental Health AND THE WORKPLACE

By **Tiffany Bloyer, MS, MBA, PHR, SHRM-CP**  
Franklin County Human Resources Director

**M**ental health in the workplace is a critical concern that impacts both employees and employers. A healthy work environment fosters productivity, engagement, and overall well-being, while a negative environment can lead to

increased stress, decreased job satisfaction, and mental health problems. Over the last several years, many things have changed in society, which have had a significant impact for employees, resulting in employees having to balance many things. There's work stress, workplace cul-

ture, interpersonal relationships, personal factors-health conditions, lack of coping skills and more. As a result it can impact the workplace-productivity, increased absenteeism and presenteeism, higher turnover, and just an overall negative organizational impact.

This past year we have worked diligently to determine the best way to support our workforce during stressful times. So many jobs in the county environment deal with high stress situations that can leave a lasting impact on the employee days, weeks, months and years after the event. Our 911 telecommunicators take calls that can be incredibly stressful with a chance for no closure to the outcome, CYS workers see some horrible situations that can have a lasting impact, and so many other county-related jobs that can be stressful and need some level of intervention to assist with the challenges they may face in their jobs.

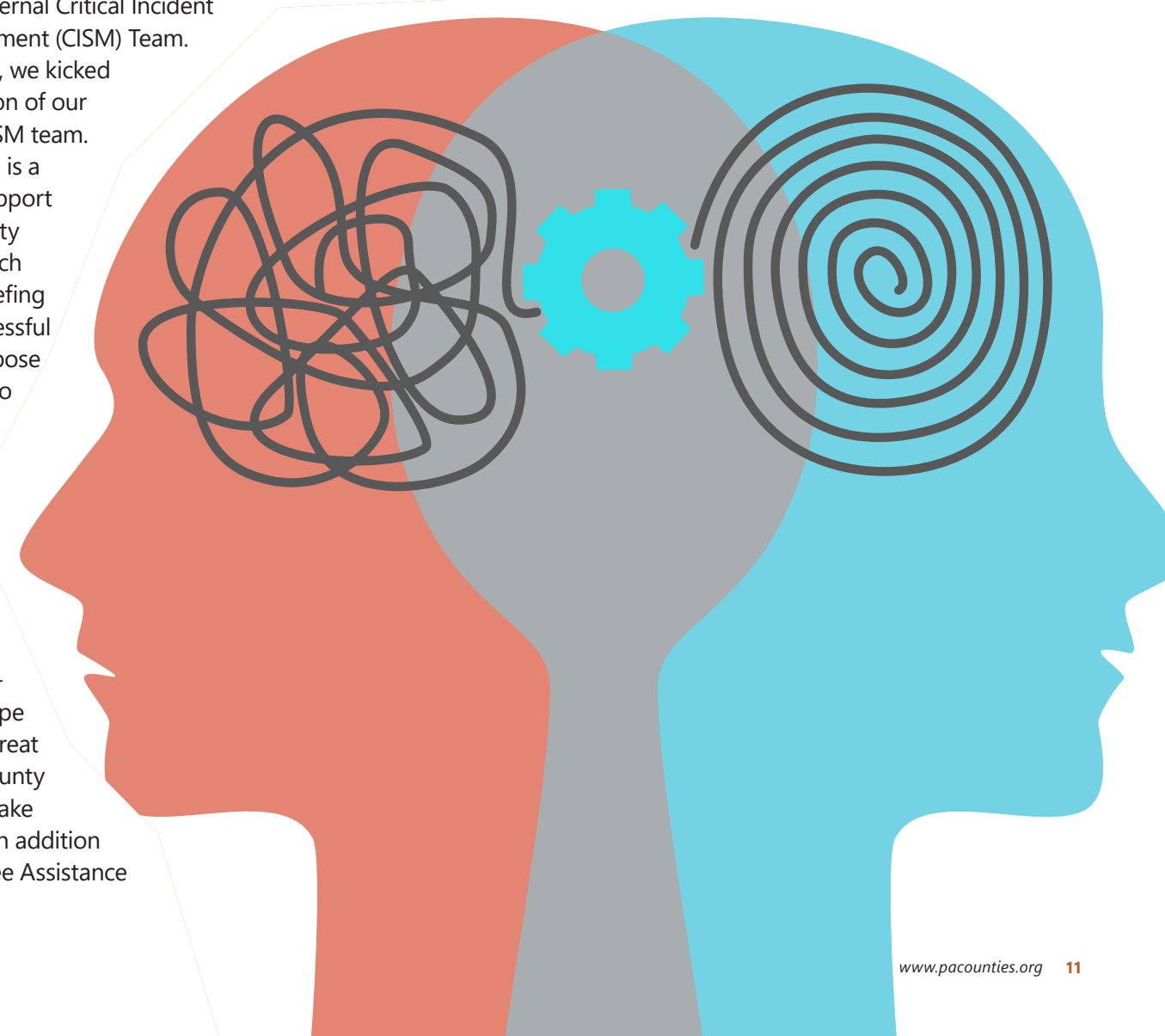
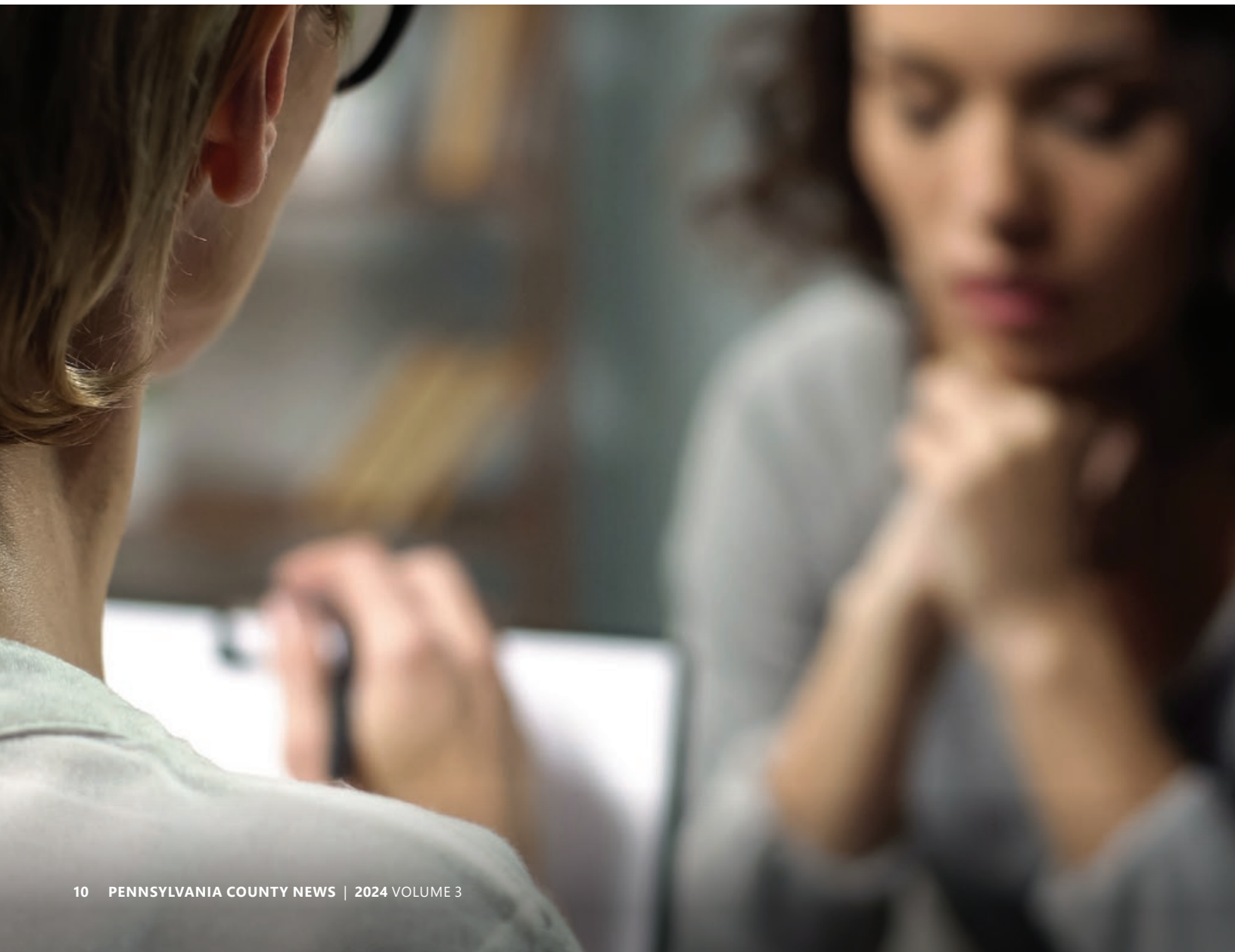
Over the last several years I have had the opportunity to work closely with our Mental Health Department to create an internal Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team. On July 1, 2024, we kicked off the utilization of our countywide CISM team. The CISM team is a confidential support group for county employees which provides debriefing services for stressful times. The purpose of the team is to emphasize the importance of health and wellbeing in the workplace during a stressful time, personally and professionally. We hope this team is a great resource for county employees to take advantage of, in addition to our Employee Assistance

Program (EAP) and other mental health initiatives.

Last fall, county employees applied to be a part of this team and they have gone through training in debriefing services following an incident. Examples of situations the team would be utilized for include supporting a caseworker who encountered a fatal situation or near fatal situation in a home they were called to and could use someone to talk to for support, a 911 telecommunicator just got off a call where the person on the other line unfortunately passed away and could use some support to find closure, a county employee witnessed a car accident on the way to work and could use someone to debrief with

regarding what they saw. These are just a few examples of when the CISM team could be contacted.

We are more than excited to utilize this initiative here in Franklin County. Our team consists of seventeen people from a variety of departments. We meet to have refresher training and debrief and to provide any updates needed. We hope that our workforce will recognize our appreciation for their mental health. Our sole purpose in county government is to take care of others, and it's imperative that our employees take care of themselves so they can take care of others, and to provide a resource for them if they need it, is something of which we are more than proud. ▾





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# HEALTHCARE TRENDS IN COUNTY COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

By **David E. Mitchell, Esquire**  
Campbell Durrant, P.C.

**A** county's largest employee benefit cost is typically the cost of providing healthcare coverage. Although the battle to contain healthcare costs is never ending, a number of strategies are increasingly being considered by counties to help make healthcare costs more sustainable.

For employees represented by a labor union, nearly all healthcare changes are subject to the collective bargaining process. A Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board decision even held that switching from traditional health insurance coverage to a self-insured plan is a mandatory subject of bargaining, even if employees would receive the exact same benefits under both plans. Decisions about changing healthcare coverage in ways that will reduce costs often need to be made under a tight timetable. Sometimes a county faced with a steep healthcare rate increase will seek to make changes to its healthcare plan during the term of a collective bargaining agreement. Whether or not a collective

bargaining agreement contains healthcare reopener language, some unions have resisted entering into mid-term negotiations regarding healthcare changes, seeking to postpone such discussions until it is time to enter negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement, which can delay any changes for several years. This tends to happen more often where employees pay a healthcare contribution that is based on a percentage of their pay or that is a fixed dollar amount. Under either of those types of contributions, the amount that employees pay is unaffected even if plan costs double or triple. In contrast, if employees pay a contribution that is based on a percentage of the premium (or even a percentage of the cumulative premium increase in comparison to a designated base year), then it is much more likely that employees and the unions that represent them will be willing to discuss changes that would reduce the cost of healthcare when your county is faced with a steep rate increase. When both the employer

and the employees are affected by healthcare rate increases, there is a strong incentive for unions to work with the employer to do more to contain healthcare costs.

According to the Kaiser Foundation Employer Health Benefits Survey, on average employees nationwide pay 29% of the premium cost for family coverage and 17% of the cost of individual coverage in 2023. Although unions are often resistant to efforts to implement or increase employee healthcare contributions, most recognize the reality that there is a strong trend toward increased employee healthcare contributions in both bargaining and interest arbitration. The fact that many county employees pay a fraction of what the taxpayers in their county contribute toward their healthcare coverage is certainly a compelling reason to seek increases in employee premium contributions. From a bargaining perspective, gradually phasing in an employee contribution increase over several years can often be a more successful strategy than insisting on implementing a steep

increase all at once. Counties often must start implementing increases with non-union represented employees in order to get unions and interest arbitrators to take their proposals for an increased contribution seriously.

Counties have many options to consider in their ongoing effort to make the cost of healthcare more sustainable.

Collective bargaining agreement language that gives a county the right to change to a comparable healthcare plan can also be a powerful tool to help contain healthcare costs. Unions often seek language limiting an employer's right to change to a plan that is "equal to" or "better than" the current healthcare plan, which usually results in options that are more expensive than the current healthcare plan. In contrast, contract language that allows a county to switch to a "comparable" plan incorporates a more flexible standard that typically provides the ability to switch to less costly options that are highly similar to, but not necessarily identical to or better than, the current coverage. Given the tight deadlines

that frequently apply to decisions regarding healthcare coverage, such provisions often incorporate an option for expedited arbitration to resolve disputes over whether a plan is truly comparable. There is a strong trend in bargaining and interest arbitration toward incorporating both comparable plan language and expedited arbitration provisions.

Another trend that has been increasing in recent years is the implementation of spousal surcharges for non-employee spouses who have the option to get healthcare coverage through their own employer but who instead elect to receive county coverage based on their spouse's county employment. Requiring employees to pay more to cover spouses who have the option to obtain coverage through their own employer can encourage those spouses to take their employer's coverage rather than staying on the county's coverage. Some counties even exclude non-employee spouses from coverage if they have the ability to get coverage through their own employers. Many private companies have already implemented spousal surcharges or spousal exclusions, and the trend is now growing among counties and other local government employers.

For many years counties looking to reduce healthcare costs have often looked at adjustments like increasing deductibles, increasing copayments, or making cost-saving changes to their plan's drug formulary. Although these options are still well worth considering, some governmental employers have been considering more dramatic changes.

Many counties and other local government employers have found self-insured trusts to be a more affordable option than traditional healthcare coverage. A self-insured trust can involve a pooled

risk arrangement with other governmental employers, which can provide many of the advantages of a single employer self-insured plan with less of the risk. Mechanisms like stop loss coverage can further protect the employer and the trust from the cost of catastrophic claims. Coverage provided by self-insured trusts typically involves a benefit grid that closely resembles or even matches the benefit grid provided by traditional health insurance plans, but often at a significantly lower cost and with a greater emphasis on wellness programs. Annual increases can be more predictable and lower than the typical fully insured plan increase. In years when claims costs are lower than projected, employers may even receive money back. Self-insurance options continue to be considered by many employers looking for an alternative to traditional fully insured healthcare coverage.

Another option that has gained attention in recent years is the Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangement ("ICHRA"), which is permitted under federal regulations that took effect on January 1, 2020. An ICHRA provides coverage in a way that is dramatically different from the traditional approach, but the end result for the employees and their dependents can be very similar to coverage provided by a traditional insurance plan at a potentially lower cost. If an employer adopts an ICHRA, it stops providing traditional healthcare coverage for some or all of its employees and sends them and their dependents to the Affordable Care Act Marketplace/Exchange to obtain coverage at the employer's expense. Some employers have provided a fixed amount of funding for employees to use to obtain a plan of their own choosing in the Affordable Care Act Marketplace. Because there are a wide variety of ACA

Marketplace plan options, this has resulted in confusion and discontent among employees in some cases. Other employers have used a different approach, under which the employer, perhaps in conjunction with a consultant or broker, selects an ACA Marketplace plan that closely resembles its current healthcare plan. Those employers might also reimburse employees for some or all plan copayments or deductibles. Although ICHRA arrangements have not yet been widely adopted, an increasing number of employers are exploring this option. One very significant complication with ICHRA coverage,

however, is that individuals who are eligible for Medicare coverage cannot be covered by an ACA Marketplace plan. Normally employers cannot treat Medicare eligible employees or dependents differently than other plan participants, but in this case the law requires them to do so. Some employers have addressed that issue by providing reimbursement to Medicare-eligible employees or dependents for the cost of their Medicare coverage as well as the cost of either a Medicare supplement or a Medicare Advantage Plan, and even some or all of their copayments and deductibles. It remains to be seen

whether adoption of the ICHRA model will become a widespread trend, but interest in exploring the option will likely increase in the years ahead.

Counties have many options to consider in their ongoing effort to make the cost of healthcare more sustainable. Even if the expiration of your collective bargaining agreements is several years away, starting to gather information and evaluate healthcare options now can be a key factor in successfully achieving your county's healthcare objectives in your next round of bargaining and interest arbitration. ▀



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THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE  
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By **Tammy Gillette**  
Pike County HR Director

**L**ions and tigers and bears, oh my! The primary mission of human resources is to create a positive work environment that ensures the well-being and success of both the employer and employees. However, working in HR can sometimes feel like Dorothy's journey along the Yellow Brick Road—filled with unexpected and daunting challenges. While some tasks are routine and comfortable, each day brings new demands and scenarios that may be unfamiliar. These challenges can arise from employees with unique needs, unusual disciplinary investigations, or complex policy changes requested by the employer. The stakes are high, as it is critical that HR professionals ensure legal compliance to avoid costly lawsuits and fines.

Employment laws form the landscape of our HR realm. These regulations are intricate and strict, but are also ever-changing and sometimes vaguely defined. Mere simple mistakes in areas like discrimination, harassment, wage and hour regulations, FMLA, workers' compensation, COBRA rights, ADA accommodations, and labor posters can lead to severe financial repercussions. Even if an HR professional has a firm grasp of these elements and appears to have a golden road ahead, there are always flying monkeys of constant legal changes and new court precedents lurking ahead to ambush. Aside from new challenges, the routine processing of those familiar tasks may suddenly no longer be compliant, and your comfortable apple tree might throw a painful zinger. In this industry, what you don't know will indeed hurt you, and it is a scary brick road to navigate on your own.

Fortunately, there's SCHRPP. The Wizard of Oz film teaches the value of teamwork and community, and SCHRPP—the Society of County Human Resource Professionals of Pennsylvania—offers a supportive community for HR professionals. This organization includes seasoned and new county HR professionals,

legal experts, and vendors from across Pennsylvania. SCHRPP provides invaluable resources through its listserv message forum, regular webinars, regional discussion forums, and annual conferences for networking and education. Members also receive a free SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management) membership and access to the SCHRPP website, which features a County Policies Library and County Job Descriptions Library. Additionally, members have access to a Quick Call Legal Hotline.

So have no fear when faced with a delicate employee theft investigation since SCHRPP's recent webinars have thoroughly covered the topics of Weingarten, Garrity, and Loudermill rights. There's no need to worry about an unexpected lawsuit related to a pregnant employee who requested workplace accommodations- the last annual conference included a detailed session on the newly enacted Pregnant Workers Fairness Act of 2023. The SCHRPP listserv helped members nimbly dodge disaster with changing Fair Labor Standards Act salary thresholds as a thorough discussion of the impacts took place well in advance of the new requirements. For those tricky FMLA or ADA scenarios that have you anxious, post a quick question and the listserv is a treasure trove of generous advice from experienced HR professionals.

Being a PA County HR Director no longer needs to feel like navigating a thorny, dangerous Land of Oz. Just click the heels of your sensible flats and say, "There's no place like SCHRPP!" 🍷



# A Human Resource Related Benefit for PCoRP (Pennsylvania Counties Risk Pool) Members

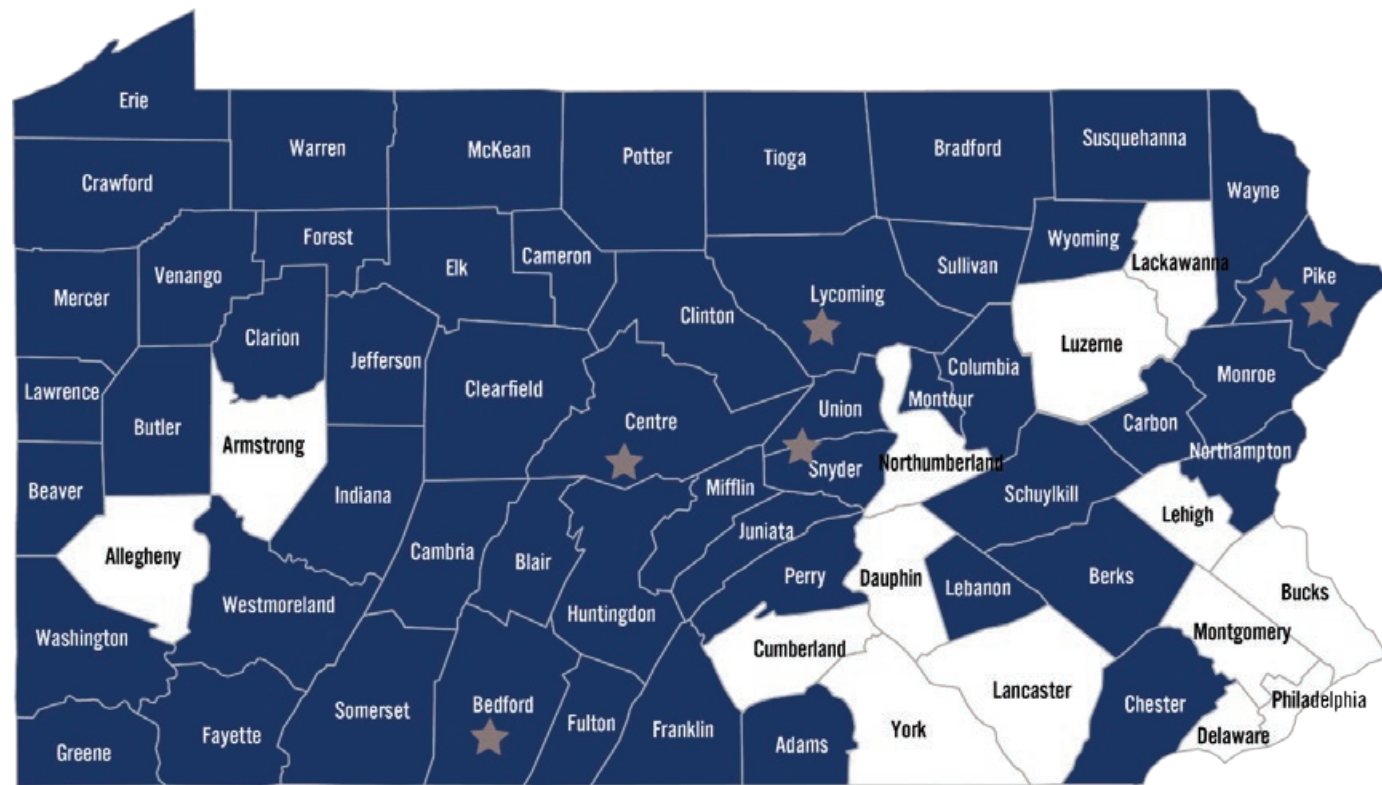
By **Keith Wentz**  
Risk Management Director, CCAP

**PCoRP Members, this HR related benefit is designed for you! The PCoRP HR Risk Management Review service is designed to help reduce exposures to liability for PCoRP members.**

Employment-related lawsuits are a major liability and can be very time consuming and costly to the members and PCoRP. With risk mitigation in mind, the PCoRP Board of Directors allocates funding to provide up to seven members per year a free HR Risk Management Review. This benefit affords members with an analysis of their personnel policies and procedures and is an entirely voluntary benefit available to all PCoRP members.

The goal of the PCoRP HR Risk Management Review is to provide HR directors and commissioners with input and advice about ways to limit the possibility of being sued, and to best position the county in the event of a lawsuit.

PCoRP's Board of Directors has selected two of its defense counsel firms to conduct the reviews. The firms are generally assigned based on the participating member's geographical location. The review is designed to provide impartial, independent advice to members.



★ Locations of County Related Entity Members

In a typical PCoRP HR Risk Management Review, the following items are evaluated:

- Employment Application
- Employment Postings
- Job Descriptions
- Recruitment and Hiring Policies and Procedures
  - Background Investigations and Reference Check
  - Probationary Period
  - Drug Testing
- Orientation and Staff Training
- Personnel Manual
- Payroll
  - Overtime and Compensatory Time
  - On-Call Compensation
- Grievance Procedures
- Performance Evaluations
- ADA Compliance
- ACA Compliance
- Personnel Record Retention
- Employee Discipline and Discharge
- Collective Bargaining Agreements
- Work-Related Injury and Disability
- Heart and Lung Act Compliance
- Worker's Compensation Insurance
- Unemployment Compensation
- Policies:
  - Personnel Policies & Distribution
  - Medical Examinations/ Physical Policy
- Sexual Harassment Policy
- Non-Discrimination Policy
- Anti-Harassment Policy
- Leave of Absence Policies - Vacation/Sick/FMLA/Extended Leave Policies
- Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)
- Disciplinary Policies
- Termination Policies
- Separation Policy
- Affirmative Action Policy
- Personnel Record Retention Policy
- Medical Marijuana Policy
- Required Employment Law Postings

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Following the review of all the above policies, procedures and practices, the attorney will prepare a draft written report and send it to the HR director for review and comment. After a set time for comments and a review of any comments received, the final report is issued to the commissioners, county solicitor and PCoRP. The reports are considered confidential and subject to attorney-client privilege. PCoRP will not use the information from this benefit to change the member's cost of coverage or to deny coverage. Instead, members of PCoRP's Risk Control Team will work collaboratively with members to improve risk management efforts based on the recommendations provided in the review.

## HOW TO REQUEST YOUR HR RISK MANAGEMENT REVIEW

PCoRP Members who are interested in having the PCoRP HR Risk Management Review conducted should contact Keith Wentz, Risk Management Director, at [kwentz@pacounties.org](mailto:kwentz@pacounties.org).

*Please note, PCoRP members who have not previously received this service will be given priority in scheduling the reviews.*





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# Affiliate Spotlight

## CPDAP

By **Amy McKinney**  
Lawrence County Planning Director

The County Planning Directors Association of Pennsylvania (CPDAP) is a statewide association made up of the county planning directors from across the state. They have been meeting since the 1990s and have relied largely on support from the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). In 2012, CPDAP became legally incorporated and in 2013 they submitted an application to the IRS for approval as a non-profit organization. They are also a CCAP affiliated association.

Officers for 2024 are Amy McKinney, president and Lawrence County planning director; James Lettiere, vice president and Mifflin County planning director; Zach Norwood, treasurer and Crawford County planning director and Shannon Rossman, secretary and Lycoming County planning director.

Four at-large Board members include Felicia Dell, York County planning director; Greg Molter, Montour County planning director; Rick Fry, McKean County planning director and Josh Krug, Indiana County planning director.

CPDAP has members throughout the commonwealth who are actively involved in county planning and raising awareness on land use issues, including two agencies that serve two counties each – the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission serves Lehigh and Northampton counties, while the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission serves as planning staff for Dauphin and Perry counties.

### MISSION

The mission of the association is to improve planning practices in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania by providing for the collection, distribution, and exchange of information relating to planning at the county level among its members; improving public relations; informing members about legislation intended

to modify planning functions; providing information and guidance to CCAP and the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association (PA-APA), and other kindred organizations on legislative, regulatory, and policy matters; and cooperating with other interested agencies in the promotion of the objectives of the CPDAP.

### VALUES AND PRIORITIES

It is the vision of the CPDAP to effectively represent community planning as a means of improving the quality of life for all citizens of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Association provides opportunities for statewide county-to-county networking and for enhancing the visibility and effectiveness of county planning during their quarterly membership meetings held in State College.

The association’s strategic plan includes five core values that reflect the membership’s view of the organization and how it carries out its mission and vision on a day-to-day basis. Those five core values are integrity to the public interest, professionalism, moral courage, excellence, and comprehensiveness in approach/interrelationships as a primary strength and asset from which to cultivate and build.

CPDAP has five organizational priorities including developing and communicating policy positions; increasing communications with other organizations; using technology for more county participation; promoting training opportunities; and establishing standing committees.

Areas of focus within these priorities include municipal capacity, rural planning, floodplain management, water planning, coordinating planning and economic development, consistency in administration of county development regulations, natural gas and Act 13, and all modes of transportation.

### MEETINGS AND CHECKLISTS

CPDAP hosts quarterly membership meetings to network with other professionals across the state. The Association provides a forum for county planning directors to disseminate information on the characteristics of the county planning function and to provide input on CCAP policies and priorities that address county planning issues. During quarterly meetings, members discuss and share information of interest and concern to other county planners. Meeting topics over the last year have included topics such as community engagement, housing efforts, creating future planners, revitalization efforts across PA and rural broadband.

CPDAP has also created a checklist for municipal planning agencies to help better integrate water resources considerations and implications into all comprehensive and local land use planning, land use decisions and development plan reviews and approvals through



those efforts to assist local communities to achieve optimal decision-making and more cost-effective utilization, protection, restoration and management of water resources. The resources included in the checklist provide benefits, and risks, to the landowners and communities within their vicinities; however, the water resources are also vulnerable to the impacts of all activities on the landscape that drains to or infiltrates into them. With the evolution of GIS and digital technologies, the ability now exists to more comprehensively integrate water resources considerations into land use planning and decision making. The checklist provides suggestions of what components should be considered within the planning process, as well as both a basic and an advanced data set.

For more information about CPDAP, visit [www.cpdap.org](http://www.cpdap.org)



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 PennDOT Transportation  
 Planning Manager



Huntingdon County Commissioner Jeff Thomas



Tioga County  
 Commissioner  
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Marie Conley, America250PA



Berks County Commissioner Christian Leinbach (left),  
 CCAP Executive Director Lisa Schaefer (middle) and Berks  
 County Commissioner Michael Rivera (right)



Columbia County Commissioner Dave Kovach



Desiree J. Nguyen, CCAP Managing Director,  
 Insurance Programs (middle)



Former Franklin  
 County Commissioner  
 Sam Worley



Clinton County  
 Commissioner  
 Jeff Snyder



Indiana County Commissioner Robin Gorman (left)  
 and CCAP Executive Director Lisa Schaefer (right)



Michael Sage, CCAP Chief Operations and Information  
 Officer (left) and Terry Cochran, CCAP Senior Meeting  
 Planner/AAP Executive Director (right)



Indiana County Commissioner  
 Sherene Hess



Berks County Commissioner and 2024  
 CCAP President Michael Rivera



Indiana County Chief Clerk Robin Maryai  
 (second from left) receives the Chief Clerk of the  
 Year Award at the CCAP Annual Confer-  
 ence Awards Ceremony.



The 2025 elected CCAP Officers. Clearfield County Commissioner Dave  
 Glass, 2nd VP (left), Snyder County Commissioner Joe Kantz, VP (second  
 from left), York County Commissioner Julie Wheeler, Treasurer (middle),  
 Indiana County Commissioner Sherene Hess, President (second from  
 right), Berks County Commissioner Michael Rivera, Chair (right)



Armstrong County Commissioner John Strait (left), Melanie Gordon,  
 CCAP Human Services and Criminal Justice Policy Director (second from  
 left), Armstrong County Commissioner Pat Fabian (second from right)  
 and John Buffone, CCAP Director of Media and Public Relations (right)



Sophie Eyer, CCAP  
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# HIRING DURING THE *Great Resignation*

By Michael McAuliffe Miller, Esq. & Morgan B. Sandler  
Eckert Seamans

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, employers struggled to navigate workplace policies, vaccine requirements, and remote work expectations. When it was time to return to work, the effect that COVID-19 had on the workplace continued to ripple throughout the job market. This ripple ultimately resulted in the highest record of resignations that this country has ever seen. 47.8 million people resigned from their jobs in 2021, which is 33% higher than the recorded resignations in 2020.

Almost four years out from the pandemic, employers are still feeling the impact of the Great Resignation, both in recruiting new employees and retaining current ones. To solve this problem and not only attract new employees but also retain the qualified and dedicated ones you already have, it is essential to ask: what do employees value in a workplace?

The answers might surprise you - hint, it's not just money.

Taking a step back, the great resignation happened for a reason, and not all of it can be blamed on the pandemic. Yes, masking requirements, fears of contracting COVID-19, vaccines, and other COVID-19 related concerns were enough to push some people into early retirement, or resignation, but not 47.8 million people. In fact, it has much more to do with a cultural shift that came about post-pandemic.

After spending months in isolation, possibly losing loved ones, working remotely, spending more time with family, and having flexible work schedules, employees began to

re-evaluate their priorities. What it boiled down to was happiness, and for many that happiness was not found in their current work environment.

## CHANGE THE WORKPLACE

So back to the core question here: what do employees value in a workplace enough to stay or to come work for you? The answer that employers are quick to assume is money. However, workplace happiness often boils down to five things: money, training, management, culture, and promotion.

Now that applicant pools are smaller than ever, problems in these areas, which were once easily ignored or tolerated when there were 100 applicants, are now glaring issues that potential and current employees cannot overlook. These problems impact municipal jobs more than others, as they have limited advancement potential.

Limited advancement potential means that workplace happiness is not driven by potential salary increases or climbing a corporate ladder. Employees enter these positions with the understanding that growth opportunities are confined to those within the municipality, and pay rates are generally not dynamic. As a result, employees are more dependent on the workplace environment to encourage them to stay in a position.

Money is important, salary is important, and people expect to be paid according to their worth. Along with base salary, benefits,

paid leave, bonuses, and pensions all factor into what might not only attract an employee but also keep them. The job market is competitive, and there might always be a higher paying job out there, but there are things that can be done to make a salary more attractive even when it is not feasible to increase the base salary outright. Retention bonuses do not have to be rolled into the base salary but can be added as an incentive that makes employees not only feel appreciated but also increase their dedication to the job.

However, money is not everything, and municipalities and boroughs, or any entity with a definite budget for employees, should be hesitant to throw money at the problem and keep increasing salaries. This simply is not sustainable, and once the great resignation is over, the expectation for constant salary hikes will remain. Instead, salary increases where feasible in combination with fostering a positive work environment can be just as impactful in maintaining a satisfied and motivated workforce.

Key to any healthy workplace environment is effective and well-trained management that knows both the job and the people. A good leader can often be the reason employees choose to stay at a job they might otherwise dislike. Creating good management starts with selecting the right managers and promoting the right values. The best manager might not always be who is the best at their job, it needs to be someone capable of empathy, someone who is invested in the employees, and someone who is capable of setting clear expectations. Investing in leadership

development is investing in the workplace and can directly improve employee satisfaction.

In addition to effective management and pay increases, training and promotion opportunities are key to workplace satisfaction. This can be challenging in jobs with limited advancement potential, but there are steps that can be taken to make employees feel the satisfaction of career growth even without climbing a corporate ladder. Progressive training, and increased responsibilities that reflect an employee's interests can create the satisfaction of growth and investment within the job without having actual promotions to provide. Additionally, as an employee progresses in their role, providing more flexible work arrangements, can achieve improved satisfaction as well. For example, adding remote option days to an employee's schedule as they increase in experience and responsibility levels, can provide an employee something to work toward, that also creates a better work life balance.

The culmination of all these factors contributes significantly to the overall workplace culture. In fact, some studies have found that culture is the number one driving factor behind resignations. Improving workplace culture involves all the strategies

mentioned previously, but additional efforts can also make a substantial difference in how your workplace culture is perceived.

Flexibility, organizational support, responsiveness, and work-life balance are key elements. If an employee needs to start their shift 30 minutes later for school drop-off, listen to them, work with them, and make the necessary adjustments. If employees can perform their tasks from home, consider adding remote workdays to their schedules. Providing organizational support when employees highlight flaws in the workflow, request additional training, or report failing equipment can go a long way in making them feel heard and supported in their careers. Addressing these issues not only improves morale but also fosters a positive and productive work environment.

## CHANGE THE WAY YOU HIRE

Once an employer has put in the work to create a workplace that excites employees, it is crucial to showcase this during the hiring process. One effective way to do this is through social media. By moving away from traditional hiring practices and expanding your search to social media platforms, you can attract a new generation of talent

and utilize free tools to highlight your workplace. The reality is that people turn to Facebook, TikTok, and X not only to find jobs but also to find community. A community member who sees your monthly happy birthday posts or the photo album from the county picnic might very well be your next employee. Social media is a free tool that can get your job positions in front of a wide audience.

The world moves fast, and so should hiring. To secure the best candidates for the job, a swift recruitment process is essential. Ideally, the time from interview to start date should be less than 20 days whenever possible. This not only allows the employer to lock in top talent but also demonstrates to the candidate that you are eager and confident in their fit for the role.

In conclusion, navigating hiring during the Great Resignation can be challenging, but it is an opportunity for employers to reevaluate their workplace and recruitment strategies. Hiring and retaining qualified employees is a task that money cannot always fix, but addressing compensation, work environment, training, management, and the hiring process, potentially can. 🍷

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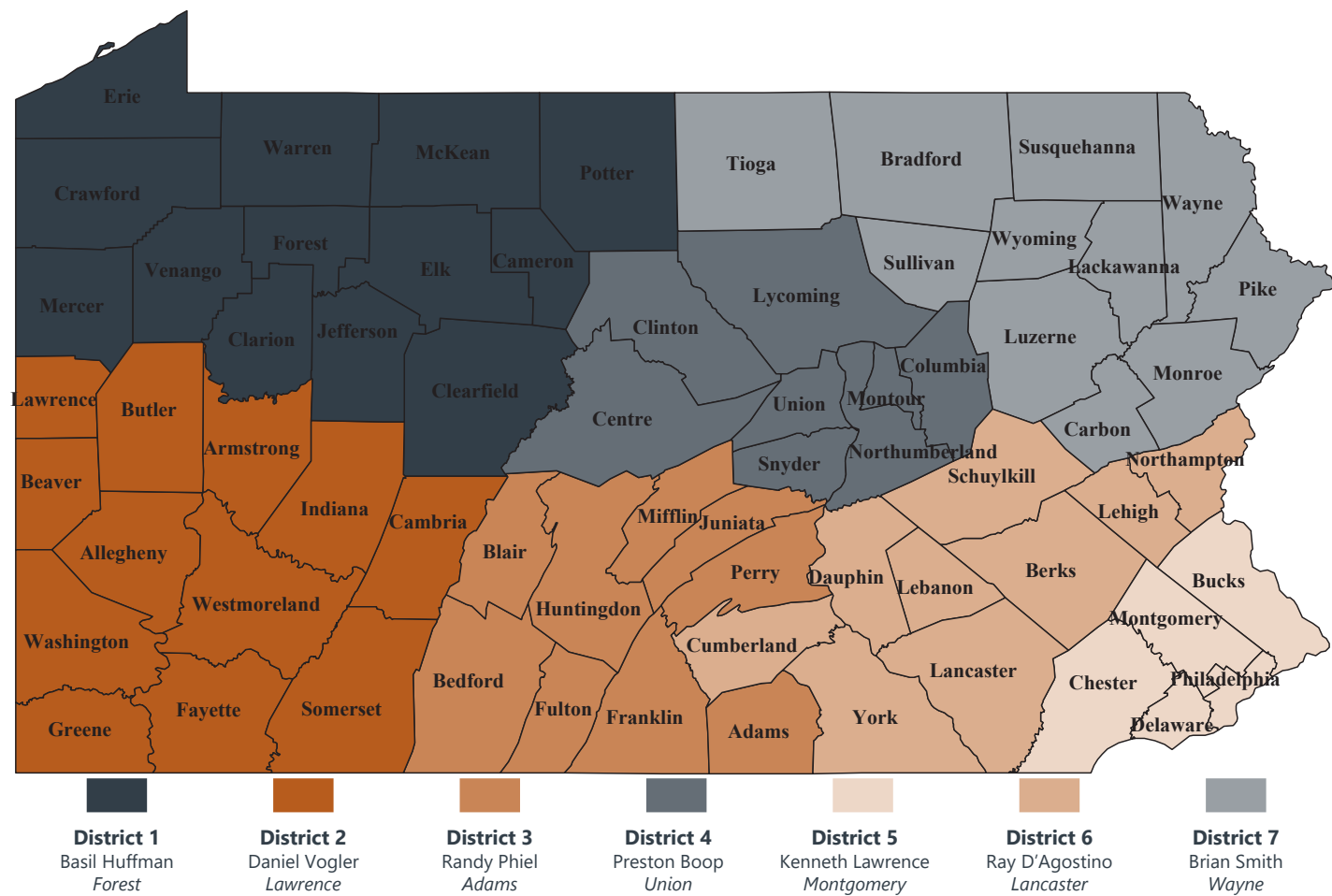
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# Getting to know the CCAP DISTRICTS



**Q Where are the CCAP Districts located?**

**A** Counties are divided into seven geographic districts. The general location of each district is as follows:

- District 1 – Northwest
- District 2 – Southwest
- District 3 – Southcentral
- District 4 – Northcentral
- District 5 – Southeast
- District 6 – Northeast
- District 7 – Greater Philadelphia area

**Q Are there district leaders?**

**A** Per CCAP’s bylaws, a representative from each of the seven districts is elected annually to serve as a voting member of the CCAP Board and to represent the members within their district.

**Q What are the responsibilities of the CCAP District Representatives?**

**A** The District Representatives serve as liaisons between the CCAP Board and their respective counties. They serve as strong advocates for the association and connect with their members to encourage active participation and engagement in CCAP. They also help share legislative updates and calls to action with their members and advise the CCAP board on themes or trends affecting the counties within their geographic area.

**Q Who selects the district representatives?**

**A** Voting for the district representative position takes place during the district meetings at the CCAP Annual Conference in August. Voting is open to all registered county electors attending the conference in person.

**Q How do I get involved with my CCAP district?**

**A** There are scheduled district meetings at each of CCAP’s three major conferences. Additionally, each District Representative plans at least one in-district meeting or event to take place throughout the year. District Representatives can also always serve as a resource to have questions answered or receive more information about programs and services at CCAP.

**Q Who are the District Representatives for 2025?**

- A** CCAP congratulates the following individuals elected to serve their districts for 2025 –
- District 1: Tricia Durbin (Warren County)
  - District 2: Pat Fabian (Armstrong County)
  - District 3: Amy Webster (Blair County)
  - District 4: Preston Boop (Union County)
  - District 5: Christine Reuther (Delaware County)
  - District 6: Lori Vargo Heffner (Northampton County)
  - District 7: Brian Smith (Wayne County)



# THE EVOLVING WORKFORCE PROCESS

according to a Human Resources Director

By **Lori Altman**  
Butler County

## How long have you been in your position and/or working in HR?

I've worked in HR for over 30 years and have been director for 24 years. I received the added duties of Chief Clerk in 2018, and I've been with the County for 27 years.

## How has HR evolved throughout your time in the industry?

HR has really evolved over the years. Previously, it was essentially focused on payroll, benefits and maintaining a personnel file with mandatory paperwork. Over the years, the HR role has shifted more towards the employees needs to balance their personal lives with their professional lives, which helps the employee be more productive.

Technology has changed and employees are more engaged with the onboarding process and are able to use technology to get questions answered faster. HR is a fine balance with many more benefit resources and implementing labor laws that are constantly changing. The usage of AI is also becoming more prevalent, and HR will eventually utilize that technology to a large extent.

## How has the hiring process changed?

HR is becoming more accommodating for interviews than ever before. HR professionals wear many hats and are always looking at ways to streamline the work to make it more user-friendly and modernized. Workforce priorities have shifted more towards life balance and cultural fit than just monetary compensation. As HR professionals, we are doing much more advertising and branding to find a more broad pool of candidates.

## What are the biggest concerns for potential candidates in today's age?

The evolving workforce has opened up a number of issues. Many employees are no longer looking for a single, long-term position and are changing jobs more frequently throughout their career. With this, employers are spending more money and resources to advertise for positions.

Employers are now taxed with attracting good candidates, training those employees with the skills needed for the job and helping the candidates fine the balance they are seeking.

## What is something that most people don't know about HR?

The HR office is a support office. We are a voice of reason when there is any type of conflict, and we advocate to ensure everyone is treated fairly. We are a resource center for employees in many ways and our utmost responsibility is to treat all employees equally and with respect.

## What do you do to keep up with trends?

It's crucial to be adaptable. There can be a lot of things, such as bargaining agreements, that can change the HR process suddenly. So, it's important to be consistent, work with the employees and employer with any situation and come to a conclusion that everyone can live with. We encourage learning and skill development to keep everyone updated on currently trends and regulations.

## What is your favorite part of being in HR?

Every day is very different. We are people that love to help others in a positive way. It is rewarding when you know you have helped an employee by providing the proper resources to assist them handle any issue they may be having. We help people with many different issues, all with maintaining a fun, positive, consistent, work environment

## Why is an association like SCHRPP (Society of County Human Resource Professionals) important for HR professionals?

To listen, suggest, give advice and share resources. It's nice to have a platform to bounce ideas off your colleagues, and to know you are not alone with unusual situations. 🍷





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# Navigating Intergenerational Workforces: A Mental Health Perspective for County Government

By **Ethan Troutman**  
Public Contracts Manager, M&S

In the evolving landscape of Pennsylvania's county governments, one of the most pressing challenges is managing a workforce that spans generations—from the seasoned Baby Boomers to the tech-savvy Generation Z. Each generation brings its own set of values, communication styles, and approaches to work, shaped by distinct historical and social contexts. Understanding these generational differences isn't just a nice-to-have; it's critical to fostering a supportive and productive work environment that prioritizes mental health.

In this article, we delve into the unique dynamics each generation brings to the table, explore how to communicate effectively across these age groups, and offer practical strategies for providing mental health support tailored to each generation. The ultimate goal? To help county government leaders create workplaces where every employee feels valued and supported.



## GENERATIONAL PROFILES AND WORKPLACE DYNAMICS

### BABY BOOMERS (Born 1946-1964)

Baby Boomers are often seen as the stalwarts of the workforce—hard-working, loyal, and structured. They grew up in a time when face-to-face communication was the norm, and many spent the bulk of their careers before the digital revolution. This generation brings a wealth of experience and institutional knowledge, making them invaluable assets. However, they might be less inclined to embrace new technologies quickly, preferring tried-and-true methods of getting the job done.

### GENERATION X (Born 1965-1980)

Known for their independence and pragmatism, Gen Xers are the bridge between the old and the new. Their formative years, marked by economic uncertainty, have made them cautious, self-reliant, and direct in their communication.

They value work-life balance and tend to appreciate autonomy, often preferring to work independently rather than as part of a collective.

### MILLENNIALS (Born 1981-1996)

As the first generation to grow up with the internet, Millennials are comfortable with technology and thrive in collaborative environments. They seek meaningful work and crave regular feedback, blending their personal and professional lives more seamlessly than previous generations. Flexibility, professional growth, and a sense of purpose are key motivators for this group.

### Generation Z (Born 1997-2012)

Digital natives to the core, Gen Z values efficiency, transparency, and inclusivity. They expect quick communication and immediate feedback, and they are particularly attuned to issues of mental health and workplace inclusivity. With a strong entrepreneurial spirit, they are eager to make their mark and are less likely to tolerate outdated systems or rigid structures.

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION ACROSS GENERATIONS

Communication is the linchpin of effective leadership, especially in a multigenerational workforce. Here's how to tailor your approach to each generation:

**Baby Boomers:** Engage them through in-person meetings and clear, respectful communication. Acknowledge their deep experience and involve them in decision-making processes. Consider creating mentorship opportunities where they can share their knowledge with younger colleagues, keeping them engaged and valued.

**Generation X:** Communicate directly and concisely with Gen Xers. They value autonomy and clear objectives, so steer clear of micromanagement. While flexible work arrangements might be limited in county government, giving them some control over their tasks can help maintain their work-life balance.

**Millennials:** This generation thrives on collaboration and regular feedback. Use digital tools to engage them in team projects and encourage participation. Focus on providing opportunities for professional development, as Millennials are often driven by a desire for growth and advancement.

**Generation Z:** For Gen Z, digital communication platforms are key. They expect transparency and immediacy in feedback, so be prompt and clear in your interactions. Open discussions about mental health and inclusivity resonate particularly well with this generation, helping to foster a supportive work environment.

## SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH ACROSS GENERATIONS

Mental health support is essential, but it should be tailored to each generation's unique needs:

**Baby Boomers:** This generation may be less accustomed to discussing mental health openly. Offering confidential resources like Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and encouraging their use without stigma can help address their needs.

**Generation X:** Gen Xers often prefer to handle mental health privately. Virtual counseling and promoting mental health as part of overall well-being can make support more appealing. Leaders should foster an environment where mental health is discussed openly and without judgment.

**Millennials:** Millennials expect proactive mental health support from their employers. Integrating

mental health into the organizational culture through wellness initiatives and open dialogue is crucial. Regular check-ins and virtual counseling options can help meet their needs.

**Generation Z:** Gen Z is highly aware of mental health issues and expects employers to provide comprehensive support. Offering resources like virtual counseling and peer support networks can help create a supportive environment. Open communication about mental health resources is essential for this generation.

## STRATEGIC APPROACHES FOR LEADERSHIP

To effectively lead a generationally diverse workforce while prioritizing mental health, county government leaders should consider these strategies:

**Develop Inclusive Policies:** While flexible work arrangements might be challenging in a government setting, strive to create policies that accommodate generational needs. Offer a variety of communication channels and support systems that cater to different preferences.

**Encourage Cross-Generational Mentorship:** Establish mentorship programs that leverage the strengths of each generation. Baby Boomers and Gen Xers can share their experiences, while Millennials and Gen Z can offer fresh perspectives and technological insights.

**Promote Continuous Learning:** Offer ongoing professional development opportunities that appeal to all generations. This not only keeps Baby Boomers engaged but also meets the desire for growth

and advancement among Millennials and Gen Z.

**Foster Mental Health Awareness:** Cultivate a workplace culture where mental health is openly discussed and supported. Ensure that resources like EAPs and virtual counseling are well-communicated and accessible, promoting a culture of well-being across all generations.

## CONCLUSION

Navigating the complexities of a multigenerational workforce in county government can be challenging, but with the right strategy, can be very rewarding. By understanding the unique needs of each generation and tailoring your communication and mental health strategies accordingly, you can create a workplace where every employee feels valued and supported. While these generational profiles offer a helpful framework, remember to treat each employee as an individual. By doing so, you will not only enhance employee well-being but also strengthen the communities your county government serves. ▾

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# FOSTERING A CULTURE OF WELL-BEING

## Inside CCAP's Employee Wellness Program

By Tom Stark  
Executive Director, PACSHA

In today's demanding work environment, the health and well-being of employees is more important than ever. Recognizing this, CCAP offers a very robust employee wellness program designed to foster a healthier, more engaged workforce. This initiative highlights our commitment to not just improving individual health but enhancing the overall workplace experience.

### PROMOTING WELLNESS

At the core of CCAP's wellness program is a straightforward yet powerful mission: to promote the well-being of our employees for a healthier workplace. The vision is to ensure that every employee

has access to valuable information on health improvement programs to encourage positive changes in lifestyle based on employee needs. The program offers a diverse range of activities to support employees' individual goals and foster a workplace culture centered on wellness.

### EMPLOYEE-LED PROGRAM

The success of CCAP's wellness program is driven by an active, employee-led committee dedicated to the well-being of their colleagues. This committee, comprised of representatives from every department, oversees the program, ensuring that it remains relevant, engaging, and responsive to the needs of our

workforce. Their hands-on involvement helps the program adapt based on employee feedback and emerging health trends.

### ENGAGING ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

The wellness program offers a variety of activities designed to promote employee health and well-being. Each month, we host "Lunch and Learn" sessions featuring experts on a range of topics. Recently, a local physical therapy group offered an onsite clinic to provide strategies on proper posture, helping employees improve their workstation ergonomics and reduce discomfort. In another session, a dietician held a live demonstration on how to prepare healthy meals, providing practical tips and samples for better eating habits.

We also place a strong emphasis on mental health by working with our EAP provider to offer sessions that focus on strategies for managing stress, building resiliency, and accessing support services. Additionally, through our collaboration with the Penn State Extension, nearly half of our employees are trained in Mental Health First Aid, equipping them with valuable knowledge and skills to offer initial support and guidance to those facing mental health challenges or crises.

Beyond educational sessions, our program includes a variety of wellness activities such as step challenges and lunchtime wellness walks. These initiatives encourage physical activity and offer employees a refreshing mental break from their daily routines. Seasonal after-work hikes at local parks provide further opportunities for exercise and social interaction across departments.

One of the highlights of this program is the annual "Wellness Week," held every spring. This dedicated week, organized in collaboration with other employee committees, includes a series of programs and activities centered on different aspects of health and well-being. Additionally, the "Health and Benefits Fair," occurring every fall, provides onsite flu shots, biometric screenings, and opportunities to engage with local vendors specializing in health and wellness. This fair supports employees in managing their health while also offering valuable information on our benefits.

### REWARDING HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

Central to CCAP's wellness program is a robust reward system designed to encourage and recognize healthy behaviors. Employees can earn points through participation in a variety of activities across 50 different categories. These activities include attending wellness events, engaging in routine and preventative screenings, taking wellness and mental health courses, and participating in physical fitness challenges. Points accumulated through these activities contribute to an end-of-year wellness bonus, offering employees a tangible reward for



After-work hike at Dauphin County's Wildwood Park

their wellness efforts. We were purposeful in designing this system to ensure that every employee has the opportunity to participate, regardless of their fitness level or health background.

### A COMMITMENT TO EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

CCAP believes that investing in employee wellness is integral to our overall success. As we continue to expand our wellness program, we remain committed to fostering a culture that prioritizes well-being. Through our employee-led program, we not only enhance individual health but also contribute to a positive and productive work environment. At CCAP, wellness isn't just an initiative—it's an important

part of who we are and how we work together.

### WHAT IS WELLNESS?

Wellness is more than just being free of illness. It involves actively becoming aware of and making choices that lead to a healthy and fulfilling life. This journey includes change, growth, and behavior modification, with the goal of achieving complete physical, mental, and social well-being.

### WHAT IS WORKPLACE WELLNESS?

Any workplace health promotion, activity, or organizational policy designed to support healthy behaviors and to improve health outcomes. 🍎



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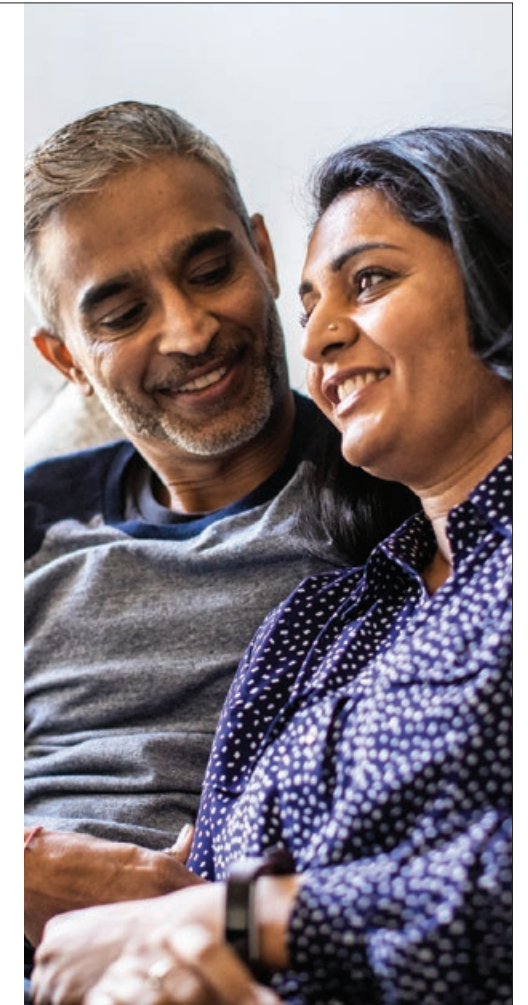
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# The Human Resources Director in County Government

By **Christopher Gabriel**  
Gabriel Fera, P.C.

I hear America  
**singing,**  
the varied carols I hear,  
those of mechanics,  
each one singing his  
as it should be,  
blithe and strong...

—Walt Whitman

If employers were automobiles, Human Resources directors would be the tuner mechanics who adjust timing or tolerance, tweak tension or roll, lean mixtures, add camber, and the thousand other barely-tangible finings that transform an already-operating car into a race-ready machine poised for peak performance on the track.

We must walk before we run, and so first let us understand the traditional duties that all Human Resources directors fill, both in and out of government. These break down into three basic categories. First, Human Resources directors serve as what is sometimes referred to as the “Chief Wellness Officer,” or “Chief Morale Officer,” of a company indicating a role in which the profession looks to create happy conditions for an efficient workforce. Next, in support of this and their other functions, Human Resources directors also have a significant role in development,

implementation and administration of policies to support the aim of the enterprise. Finally, in support of these other two basic roles, Human Resources directors provide necessary training and administer discipline to ensure that the workforce is comprised only of those who both know how and want to do their jobs.

## SUPPORT, TRAIN, TRIM.

In the role attempting to lift employee morale, Human Resources directors work at two ends of the employment spectrum. At the top-down end of the working relationship, they attempt to have understandable, even-handed, and accessible policies on behalf of the employer that enable employees to know what is expected of them, provide reasonable job performance, and also live their lives. This last quality sometimes includes time off for the myriad things that life throws at us all. The delicate balance here is between the abilities and understanding of the low performing but still acceptable employees and the always high expectations of the employer. At the bottom-up end of the spectrum, Human Resources directors seek to make the intangibles right for employees by ensuring adequate opportunities for training, for recognition, and for the receipt of pay and benefits, which sometimes includes wellness and other programs to reduce health insurance costs and/or voluntary training programs with pay incentives.

The development of policy is, of course, not merely focused on employee morale because there is a significant focus on compliance with the ever-growing set of employment laws and regulations that employers

have to navigate. There are both federal and state anti-discrimination laws, as well as affirmative requirements for properly calculated and prompt and accurate pay, accommodations for incidents of medical needs or disabilities, rules for aging employees, for service and companion animals, and many other subjects. The Human Resources director is ordinarily the primary source of information for the employer about these laws — “what do you mean he can bring his dog!?” and, like their efforts to support morale, their efforts to be in compliance with the law involves an effort in two directions. Human Resources directors must keep an eye out for changes in the law and vigilantly train employees on them, and also educate managers and decision makers about the same requirements, which often are less than obvious. Therefore both above and below them Human Resources directors have fellow employees who do not understand, do not want to comply, and who would affirmatively benefit if only they could be convinced to accept the advice.

Nor is it all education and training. Human Resources directors serve the sometimes-unenviable role of thinning the herd from employees who underperform or misbehave. This requires several essential skills that are unusual in managers of other departments. To administer discipline, the Human Resources director must have first ensured sensible development and wide distribution of the rules, and then they need enough longevity in their own position and support from managers to ensure that those rules are evenly applied over time. Failure in this is the stuff of every plaintiff’s lawsuit or union grievance. Neither should it go without men-

tioning that the person tasked on the one hand with being the “Chief of Morale” must, wearing this other hat, be razor tough enough both to confront the underperforming or misbehaving employee and terminate his or her employment. That is easier to read about here than it is to do.

**Diplomacy, n.**  
**is the art of**  
**letting**  
**somebody else**  
**have your way.**

—David Frost

At base, county Human Resources directors are different from their counterparts in private enterprise because local government is subject to far more laws, rules and regulations than private business. Where every employer is subject to laws regarding employment discrimination, government employment from the employer’s perspective adds on the extra requirement of significant due process in the form of civil service laws and union contracts. In addition, while it is unwritten, the removal of the ability for the employer to fail (e.g. actually to not have enough money and close) creates in neutral third parties, employee advocates and judges, a willingness to impose financial hardship where it is perceived to be “more fair” that private employers deal with to a far lesser degree. As an example, public sector unions routinely pursue wage proposals that would bankrupt any private company, and (more to the point) stick to those proposals far



into negotiations or even through interest arbitration in a way that is not normal in other contexts.

If our subject were Human Resources directors in general, or even local government Human Resources more broadly, these differences from the private sector would be enough to fill all the space. But county Human Resource directors face circumstances even more unique. As readers of this publication surely know, county



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government in Pennsylvania locates budget authority mostly with the commissioners, but permits the exercise of substantial authority in the employment sphere by elected row officers and county judges. This division of authority, and moreover the separation of authority and financial responsibility over employment matters, creates exceedingly delicate and unusual challenges for the county Human Resources director.

The last forty years have seen an explosion in legal requirements applicable to the employment space and as noted above, most of this applies to government employment and a good portion of it only applies in that context. In that time, counties have hired and developed their Human Resources offices so that they are for the most part staffed with trained professionals, who have the benefit of decades of seasoning. This is broadly not true in the offices of those other elected officials, whose operations are much more focused on the doing of whatever work is given to them by statute. County Human Resources directors therefore have another dual set of challenges as they attempt to develop, educate and implement policies for county employees. In the row offices and the courts, there are county employees who are under the authority of non-commissioner elected officials, but whose pay, benefits, and many employment rights attach to the county treasury. This means that, even just doing the ordinary parts of their jobs for many county Human Resources directors puts them at the center of controversy about whether and how those other elected officials will accept and enforce employment policies for employees in their offices. This separation of authority is made more acute by the fact that the County Code requires the commissioners to engage in collective bargaining with employee unions on behalf of the row officers and judges. Collective bargaining is largely focused on the county budget, which is the main reason it is given to the

commissioners, but necessarily involves day to day employment rules like how much vacation one gets, how it works when someone calls in sick, and do employees have a right to file grievances over discipline and/or other decisions of those other elected officials. To work properly this system requires a professional who both understands the law and also has sufficient credibility with competing elected officials that they can provide guidance that has some hope of being accepted. County Human Resource directors fill this extremely challenging role and for the most part do it very well.

**When you counsel someone, you should appear to be reminding him of something he had forgotten, not of the light he was unable to see.**

—*Balthasar Gracian*

**SUPPORT, TRAIN, DO DIPLOMACY.**

Human Resources director is not a position mentioned in the county code, and that fact hints both at its uniqueness and its importance in modern, professionally administered counties. The IRS exempts certain categories of duties, certain types of work from the overtime pay requirements, provided that employees occupying those jobs make over a certain salary threshold. One of the exemptions is for “administrative work.” There is often confusion about

what “administrative duties” are, with most people assuming anyone who works in an office and/or does paperwork is an “administrative” employee. This is not correct. The rule of thumb is that administrative work in this context is work done so that the other workers can provide services to the customers. The Human Resources director is a great example of this. They do not provide services to the public. They provide service to the elected officials, managers, and other county employees so that those people can deliver services to the public. Sheriff deputies serve court papers. Clerks in the prothonotary office file things and keep the dockets, GIS employees make and improve maps, but the Human Resources office serves all of these county employees so they can do their jobs.

This lubricating the parts of the engine so that they can move more freely and efficiently, together with the unique attributes of county government have given rise to two qualities in county Human Resource directors that either are not true in the private sector, or at least are more true in Pennsylvania counties. First, county government requires an extreme level of malleability in the Human Resources professional. Things change, elected officials move in and out of positions, and all the while there is a need for intelligent continuity. That requires someone with smarts who can be both well liked and plain spoken, even blunt. The repeated application of these qualities sharpens the skill of the Human Resources director over time to the point where commissioners learn to rely on them over large stretches of time (a career in many cases).

In many places across the Commonwealth, Human Resources professionals have carved out for themselves an essential role by providing a steady hand on employment matters. These last decades of service have made this non-statutory position one of the commissioners’ most essential and trusted advisors and that is just as it should be. ▾



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# Protected Retirement Solutions With Pension-Like Income Gaining Traction In PA NACo Plans

For nearly 20 years, Pennsylvania has partnered with Nationwide, with over 30,000 participants in NACo plans. This makes Pennsylvania a national leader and the third-largest participating state. In the past four years alone, annual enrollment in NACo plans has doubled, positioning Pennsylvania at the forefront of retirement readiness.

Recent legislation has enabled this partnership to further improve saving for retirement by providing income solutions during retirement.

Protected retirement solutions, which allow participants to turn their defined contribution plan savings into a stream of income they won't outlive, are a newer class of retirement plan investment options. They continue to support employees after their tenure and can boost employee engagement by demonstrating a commitment to their long-term financial well-being. We've heard from plan sponsors that this commitment aids employee retention and overall satisfaction with the retirement plan's offerings.

According to a recent Nationwide Retirement Institute® survey of plan sponsors and workers nearing retirement, dramatic shifts in the economy and markets have many workers worried about their financial futures, with many delaying their retirements based on fear of outliving their income. Consequently, there is increased interest in having access to pension-like retirement income in employer-sponsored retirement plans.

In that same study, 74% of employees believe that employers should offer financial health resources, especially those aged 22 – 34. Among retirement plan sponsors, 39% report an increase in employees leaving for other companies that offer better benefits.

Additionally, plan sponsors indicated that employees' lack of confidence in having saved enough for the future has led to a spike in delayed retirements. This has resulted in paying higher salaries for longer-tenured workers, more expensive health care costs, inability to hire or promote younger talent, as well as diminished morale and productivity according to the survey.

Public employers in Pennsylvania are helping participants access these options, with almost two hundred plans offering a protected retirement income solution. These options are made possible by Secure Act provisions, which opened the door for guaranteed income solutions in investment offerings. This strategic move is designed to bolster the financial security of employees as they approach retirement.

Counties in Pennsylvania are leading the way, with some plans having as much as 15% of their assets under management in a protected retirement solution. This reflects a broader trend in the accelerated adoption of these solutions that Nationwide is seeing in plans the company supports across the country. In the past year, the company has tracked a 565% increase in plan adoptions and 23% increase in participants implementing protected retirement solutions in their portfolio.<sup>1</sup>

"Our protected retirement solutions marry some important benefits of both defined benefit and defined contribution retirement planning solutions to offer plan sponsors the next evolution of retirement plan benefits, and participants the tools they need to retire with confidence, said Eric Stevenson, president of Nationwide Retirement Solutions, we're excited to see adoption of these solutions accelerating in Pennsylvania public sector plans."

Nationwide is hearing from participants how these solutions are making a difference in their retirement confidence. During a semi-annual visit to Bradford County, a soon-to-be retiree shared her readiness to shift focus from building her account to generating income. She was genuinely concerned about outliving her savings. After considering her options, she decided to move forward with a protected retirement solution that relieved her worry about running out of money during retirement.

This is something that wouldn't have been possible within her retirement plan even as recent as a few years ago. Thanks to this recent innovation, she's able to work within her NACo retirement plan to not just save for retirement – but to create a true income plan that can help carry her through retirement.

Nationwide is committed to helping more workers achieve a brighter financial future. This is why we offer an innovative suite of protected retirement income solutions for workplace retirement plans. These investment options provide support to simplify investing, build confidence, and promote greater financial security in retirement.

For more information, please visit our protected retirement solutions resource hub: <https://bit.ly/3WRMd21> and watch this quick video: <https://bit.ly/4dyGxzw> with available solutions for participants in your plan. Please reach out to Matt Ring at [ringm3@nationwide.com](mailto:ringm3@nationwide.com) to discuss which solutions work best for your plan. 📌

Source: Nationwide Retirement Institute Protected Retirement Survey 2023.

<sup>1</sup>These numbers include assets from a recordkeeper and insurer perspective.

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Association of Pennsylvania

# 2024 CCAP Fall Conference

**Nov 24-26, 2024**

Join us in "The Sweetest Place on Earth" where you'll meet with colleagues from across the state to deliberate on the hottest topics shaping our counties' futures. A robust agenda offers engaging breakout sessions that spotlight the key issues you care about that will help shape our priorities for the upcoming legislative year. From thought-provoking discussions to networking galore, this is your chance to be at the forefront of county innovation and collaboration.

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