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*Human resources staff from 30 organizations attended the Council's recent HR Roundtable on Millennial Recruitment, held at TILL, Inc. in Dedham.*

## Adaptability a key to success in recruiting, retaining millennials

Panelists at a recent HR Roundtable hosted by the Providers' Council agreed that drawing millennial employees into the human services sector and keeping them requires an organizational culture shift.

More than 40 human resources staff and executives from 30 human service organizations joined panelists Dafna Krouk-Gordon, TILL Founder and CEO; Erika Dodson, TILL's Benefits Coordinator; and Pam Hoey, Senior HR and Recruitment Consultant from Insource Services to talk about hiring strategies and challenges. Roxbury Youthworks Executive Director Mia Alvarado, who co-chairs the Council's Millennial Workgroup, moderated the event.

Krouk-Gordon acknowledged that a lot of generalizations are made about the millennial generation, but "How we can be successful is to figure out 'Are there trends?' and then appeal to them for recruiting, and more importantly, retention," she said.

And that will require some degree of change. At TILL, some of these changes include more frequent and public staff recognition, making a dedicated effort to create career ladders and advancement opportunities and group team building and collaboration events. They're also making aesthetic changes to their Dedham offices, including the colorful new training space at which the roundtable was held.

One of the features of the room is the 50 flags along the back wall that represent the 50 different countries of origin of the agency's employees. The average length of stay among TILL's current employees is 6.4 years.

"We spend a good 50 percent of our HR Department time thinking about how we can get to know people and where they can move to within the organization," especially with regard to direct care staff, Krouk-Gordon said.

"We're really looking at what their experiences are, and we dabble in different things," added Dodson. "Then when we're talking about what else they might do, a light bulb goes off and they try new things."

Alvarado said that at her agency there's not a lot of opportunity for advancement because of its small size, but she has a good average retention rate of three years because all 34 employees have input.

"We do everything by volunteer committee," Alvarado said, noting she also holds a monthly all-staff meeting. "There are a lot of ways they can contribute and grow the program. And they all have access to me. We have 34 staff at eight different locations, so I work really hard to create a feeling of community."

Hoey talked about the need for employers to be able to set themselves apart in job postings and grab and hold this generation's attention. "If I'm looking to recruit millennials, I use different recruiting methods," Hoey said. "It's all about social media. Job ads should only be a couple of paragraphs and you have to differentiate yourself. If you can get them to make that first click, they'll read. Present something you did as a group. They want excitement and purpose."

Roundtable attendees also discussed different ways their organizations are approaching all recruiting, from WebEx presentations to speeding up the reference checking process, reaching out to candidates by text message instead of by phone or email and reaching out to young adults right out of high school.

"To Dafna's point about changing culture," Hoey said, "it's a must. If the environment isn't what (millennial employees) want, they're not going to stay." Most of the discussion, however, focused on getting candidates through the door in the first place.

Jackie Ross, Human Resources Manager for NFI Massachusetts, said she had been spending nearly 60 percent of her time calling potential candidates. Now she has started leading WebEx sessions that includes a PowerPoint presentation.

"It just seems to be working," she said. The technology is the key. They can take part in their jammies and they can figure out on their own if it's a fit or not."

Several participants noted that they often lose good candidates when the hiring process doesn't move quickly enough or those candidates get lost in the shuffle because program managers are pulled in so many directions before they get the chance to even schedule an interview.

One suggestion was to change to a centralized recruiting process. Another was to schedule the next interview at the end of the first one, using the Outlook calendars of all who need to participate. Alternately, Insource's Hoey suggested having "managers block off time in advance." Roundtable participants also agreed that texting potential candidates is OK because few millennial-age candidates check their voicemail and often don't check emails either.