A New Public Health Laboratory Workforce: The Rise of the Millennial Laboratorians

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INTRODUCTION

As a public health laboratory (PHL) community, we need to find creative yet practical solutions that laboratories can implement to attract, support and sustain the next generation. To address the complexity of attracting and sustaining millennials in PHLs, the Association of Public Health Laboratories’ (APHL) Knowledge Management and Workforce Development committees collaborated on a joint project to gather recruitment and retention practices that have and have not worked across PHLs. These findings will help our PHL community find creative yet practical solutions that laboratories can implement to recruit, develop and retain the next generation of laboratorians.

Survey to PHL Lab Directors

APHL fielded a survey to state and local Laboratory Directors to learn and understand their barriers and strategies to the recruitment and retention of high performing millennials.

STATE PHLs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total Staff</th>
<th>Total Millennials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2345</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>129</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

26 Statelab responses

21% millennials in state PHLs (born between 1981 – 1996)

LOCAL PHLs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Total Staff</th>
<th>Total Millennials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>129</td>
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32% millennials in local PHLs (born between 1981 – 1996)

34 out of 44 respondents said “salary scale” was the biggest barrier to recruitment of millennials

19 out of 44 respondents said “salary scale” was the biggest barrier to retention of millennials

Laboratory Directors were asked to identify what they felt were barriers to the recruitment and retention of millennials in their laboratory. Below are the top 5 barriers:

**RANKING BARRIERS TO RETENTION OF MILLENNIALS IN PHLs**

1. The salary scale for employees
2. Lack of career path for employee growth/opportunity for promotion
3. The complexity of administrative bureaucracy
4. Continuing education opportunities
5. Lack of workforce engagement activities such as reward and recognition, volunteering, potlucks, etc.

**RANKING BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT OF MILLENNIALS IN PHLs**

1. The salary scale for employees
2. Lack of required experience
3. Lack of career path of employee growth/opportunity for promotion
4. Lack of required certification or licensure
5. The complexity of administrative bureaucracy

**Ranking Barriers to Recruitment of Millennials in PHLs**

1. The salary scale for employees
2. Lack of required experience
3. Lack of career path of employee growth/opportunity for promotion
4. Lack of required certification or licensure
5. The complexity of administrative bureaucracy

**Methods of Recruitment & Retention**

**Laboratory Director suggested methods to recruit and hire millennials:**

- Providing further training
- Internship programs
- Tours for students
- Disclosing benefit package
- Requiring no experience
- Attractive job postings

**Millennial suggested methods to recruit and hire millennials and the next generation:**

- Start at high school level – get kids thinking of public health
- Rethink promotion for jobs – millennials use Indeed.com and local university job posting site
- Go to where millennials are – social media promotion of PHL
- Participate in career fairs and use bench level staff, not Lab Director. Use personal stories/case studies and have Interactive fun activity for younger kids
- Partner with colleges to offer tours of the labs – make it less technical
- Talk about incentives
- Reach out to first year undergrad and grad students who don’t know what they want to do when they graduate

**Laboratory Director suggested methods to retain millennials:**

- Recognition of achievements
- Close work with Med-Tech programs
- Competency-based pay increase
- More growth opportunities
- Flexible working hours
- Cross-training
- Evaluation and auditing position classifications

**Millennial suggested methods to retain millennials and the next generation:**

- Talk about career paths, define them, have more opportunities to move up or increase skills and responsibilities
- Competitive pay
- Allow millennials to cross train in other areas – reduce redundancy so work remains fulfilling
- More opportunities for networking
- Continued opportunities for training

Acknowledgements / Sources

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