



Wellness Programs in Nonprofit Organizations

A **Nonprofit HR Solutions** White Paper

By **Julie Gallion**, SPHR
Senior HR Consultant, Nonprofit HR Solutions
www.nonprofithr.com

March 25, 2010

Contents

Introduction	3
Program Design	4
Wellness Program Components	4
Physical Fitness	4
Healthy Eating	5
Health Education	5
On-site Clinics	6
Additional Tips	6
Resources	7

Introduction

Nonprofit organizations often lack wellness programs as part of their benefits packages often because leadership believes they have no merit related to possible costs. There are solutions to the cost issue and wellness is a must for any benefits package.

Key Issue

Nonprofit leaders often don't recognize wellness programs as an important component of an organization's total benefits package. Many leaders have little to no interest in such programs especially when there are costs involved.

Key Solution

Nonprofit HR professionals can influence leaders that it is beneficial to the organization for its employees to be healthy; they can often get the buy-in needed by developing a program with minimal administrative burden and costs.

Nonprofit HR Solutions' Guidance

If your nonprofit organization is seeking guidance or consultation concerning wellness programs or other HR issues, please contact Julie Gallion at Nonprofit HR Solutions, (202) 785-2060 or via email at jgallion@nonprofithr.com.

Wellness Programs in Nonprofit Organizations

A **Nonprofit HR Solutions** White Paper

Introduction

The success of every nonprofit organization is based on its mission and the skills of the employees that the organization is able to attract and retain. Effective nonprofit leaders realize the importance of providing quality employee benefits programs in order to attract staff who will be committed to fulfilling the organization's mission and vision. These leaders approach benefit programs strategically by reducing the costs associated with health care, retirement income and balance between work and life. However, nonprofit leaders often don't recognize wellness programs as an important component of the total benefits package. Wellness programs add value to both organizations and staff by providing resources to assist employees with living a healthy lifestyle. A culture that clearly supports employee wellness shows the organization's commitment to the overall well-being of its employees.

The coming year will continue to bring changes to the health care industry. With the cost of benefits rising, organizations are intentionally taking a proactive approach to health care by encouraging employees to live healthier. It is critical that nonprofit human resources professionals lead their organizations to ensure that wellness programs are implemented as an important part of the total benefits package and cost containment strategies.

Over the past decade, human resources (HR) professionals have been flooded with information about the positive effects wellness programs can have on employees and the organization's bottom-line. However, the information about the benefits to an organization's bottom line is often countered by fears about HIPAA regulations and the restrictions that those regulations place on wellness programs. The thought of having to create a program that meets the requirements outlined in the HIPAA regulations can be daunting and has resulted in HR professionals shying away from implementing wellness programs. In addition, small to midsize nonprofits have been slow to implement wellness programs in the past due to the perceived administrative burden and costs.

Many articles written about wellness programs start with the importance of getting leadership buy-in. Although it is definitely beneficial to have leadership buy-in when developing a wellness program, it may not be critical to the program's success. Many leaders have little to no interest in such programs especially when there are costs involved. If HR professionals can influence leaders that it is beneficial to the organization for its employees to be healthy, they can often get the buy-in needed by developing a program with minimal administrative burden and costs. For example, most leaders will support HR convening a volunteer committee of employees who work toward developing a program that will be of minimal cost to the organization. This is the first step in the process of creating a wellness program.

The following sections of this article outline the steps for developing a program, explaining the components of a program and providing resources for creating a program. Your organization can successfully implement a wellness program and be instrumental in moving your staff toward healthier living regardless of staff size, level of leadership interest /commitment in such programs, or budget size.



Program Design

Following the steps outlined below will help you to develop a starter wellness program.

1. **Educate yourself about wellness and healthy living.** It is important for you, the person overseeing the program, to understand what it means to be healthy. Gather as much information as you can so that you have the necessary tools to support program participants.
2. **Solicit a volunteer staff committee to develop and administer the program and to be the program's ambassadors.** The committee will be responsible for determining the program goals and elements of the program. They will also be responsible for developing communication materials, administering the program, and making the financial case for the program, if necessary.
3. **Determine the goals of the program and decide on the components.**
4. **Communicate, communicate and communicate.** A wellness program cannot be successful if staff does not know about it. Continuously providing information about the program to staff not only encourages participation but also keeps the idea of healthy living in the forefront of their minds. If your organization doesn't have the funds or resources available to create fancy brochures or posters, contact your local college or university and ask if their marketing students are interested in designing materials for you as a class project. Communicate with employees about the program as often as you can and in any way that you can.

Wellness Program Components

Most wellness programs include the following components: physical fitness, healthy eating, health education and on-site clinics. Here are some ways your organization can create these components of a wellness program.

Physical Fitness

Local fitness centers can often be approached and are often willing to offer a corporate discount to employees of your organization. The National Fitness Network is an excellent resource for corporate wellness programs and provides discounted gym memberships and free educational seminars.

Depending on the space you have available, bring fitness classes on-site by having Yoga or other types of instructors available during lunch once a week. If your organization can't afford to pay for the instructor, ask employees who are interested to contribute to any costs or partner with another nearby nonprofit and share the costs across both organizations.

Simple consistent cardiovascular walking is a benefit to all staff. Consider asking a member of the wellness committee to organize Friday lunch time walking groups. Some major cities have neighborhood walking maps that you can download to make walks more interesting. Then

provide pedometers to employees and educate them about the benefits of walking by creating individual or organizational goals and/or competitions. (Pedometers range in price from \$1.50 to \$15.00, depending on the features and brand.)

Healthy Eating

One key to any wellness program has to be the changing of bad or unhealthy eating habits. Making healthy snacks available to staff is a great first step. Many organizations have vending machines available for staff use. If you have such machines, contact the company who supplies those snacks and request that they provide healthier options for purchase.

If your organization does not have vending machines but still wants to help provide health snacks for staff, try having them delivered to your office. Local grocery stores often offer delivery services. Organizations can order fruits and other healthy snacks on a weekly or biweekly basis for staff to enjoy. If your organization can't afford to pay outright for such services, place a box in the kitchen and ask employees to pay for what they take. This convenience is still easier for employees than running out to purchase unhealthy snacks from a street vendor or corner store. Placing newsletters and brochures focused on healthy eating on the tables in your kitchen or lunch area can also help staff break their unhealthy eating habits. Also help staff expose each other to new eating habits by asking them to contribute healthy recipes to your employee newsletter.

If your staff is large enough - say 25 or more - consider arranging for Weight Watchers to come to the office for lunch time meetings.

Lastly, reinforce your new healthy eating culture by providing healthy meals when hosting meetings in your office. Always replace sodas, cookies and chips with nuts, fruit and water.

Health Education

Employees of any organization will benefit from simple health and well-being information and tips. It is very easy for organizations to host healthy living seminars onsite during the work day. Some fitness centers offer to come to your organization and conduct seminars for free to encourage your employees to join their clubs. Their sales pitches are often full of health and wellness tips.

If your organization has an employee assistance program, they may also offer on-site healthy living seminars for free or at a discounted rate. Plus, there are numerous organizations, profit and nonprofit, that provide healthy living seminars for a small fee. Remember to always ask if they offer discounted fees to nonprofit organizations.

On-site Clinics

With epidemics getting worse each year, a major value-added benefit program can be to bring a flu shot clinic onsite. Flu shots cost about \$12 per person. If your organization's budget does not allow for this expense, you can split the costs with staff, partner with another nearby nonprofit, or just ask the employees to pay the full fare. Either way, the convenience can be a real plus for busy staff.

Additional Tips

Many insurance companies include free wellness resources to their plans simply because healthier employer groups are less expensive to insure. Some insurance companies even include discounts to fitness centers and weight loss programs for their participants. Make sure you and your employees know all of the wellness services provided by your health care plan and that those benefits are communicated each year during open enrollment and throughout the year.

If you have any funds available for wellness activities, you might consider contributing to employees' fitness center memberships or weight loss programs to encourage participation.

Tracking Wellness Program Results

Tracking the results of wellness programs can be challenging. A voluntary confidential survey of staff may be the easiest way to determine if your wellness program is achieving program goals. Review the HIPAA regulations to be sure the survey questions and administration of the survey are HIPAA-compliant. For more information on HIPAA compliance, visit www.hhs.gov or www.hipaa.org.

Another way to track results is through Health Risk Assessments (HRA). HRAs are surveys that can be administered to employees and that are composed of a series of questions related to a person's current health (i.e. age, blood pressure, weight and body mass index), their healthy activities (i.e. do they smoke, how often do they exercise etc), and their history (i.e. history of illness, family history, etc). These surveys are sometimes completed annually and compiled by a database into a report that is provided to the program administrator.

A program administrator can compare these reports annually to determine if the staff is becoming healthier. There is usually a cost associated with HRA's and if your organization is small you may be able to compile the results of a survey yourself eliminating the need for a formal HRA. Some organizations offer employees rewards for completing HRA surveys or participating in program. If you choose to do this, make sure you fully understand HIPAA regulations regarding rewarding for results, as there are some restrictions.

If you would like to provide rewards for results or participation in your wellness program but do not have the budget for doing so, you might consider contacting the health care vendors you work with to ask for donations. Gift cards and small amounts of cash are usually effective rewards for wellness program participation. A reward may also be the organization's payment of the employee's gym membership for a certain period of time or other healthy living activities.

Resources

The following is a list of resources that may assist you in developing your wellness program:

American Cancer Society Workplace Solutions, www.acsworkplacesolutions.com

National Fitness Network, www.nationalfitnessnetwork.com

Weight Watchers at work, www.weightwatchers.com/about/cpp/index.aspx

Wellness Council of America, www.welcoa.org

INOVA flu shot clinics, www.inova.com/healthcare-services/flu/index.jsp

Wellness Corporate Solutions, www.wellnesscorporatesolutions.com

YMCA, www.ymca.net

Wellness programs can be implemented easily, with little expense and can be seen by staff as a major employee benefit. These programs can say a lot about an organization's commitment to the overall well-being of its employees. At a minimum, wellness programs are definitely worth an investment in time and staff resources if the budget for such program is not available.

If your nonprofit organization is interested in developing a wellness program, please contact Julie Gallion, Benefits Practice Leader with Nonprofit HR Solutions, at jgallion@nonprofithr.com or 202/785-2060.