Practical resources to assist NRM staff

Three toolkits to help you develop and retain staff in the Western Australian NRM sector
Introduction

The Natural Resource Management (NRM) sector provides many unique challenges. The changes in funding mechanisms and priorities have required catchment councils and non-government organisations (NGOs) to regularly reposition themselves regarding revenue streams.

There have also been challenges in staffing. Here in Western Australia, being able to attract experienced (or any) staff during the mining boom was a huge challenge in the NRM sector. Now many organisations are experiencing new challenges in being able to continue to fund positions and projects within the NRM sector.

Having policies, processes and resources to address the staffing issues has been an ongoing ‘work in progress’ for many organisations. This series of toolkits has been produced to assist you to develop appropriate processes with a focus on practical resources.

Overview

The toolkits have been developed for catchment councils, subregional groups and other NRM-focused organisations that need to attract, retain and develop quality staff.

They’ve been designed to be put to use to assist you to provide a stimulating and productive introduction to your organisation. And to clearly map out a skill development pathway for new and existing staff. The kits will also help you to establish guidance, feedback and ongoing development for staff through mentoring programs.

The kits do this through three components:

1. Induction tool kit
2. Skill development tool kit
3. Mentoring tool kit

Oh – they’re not your normal toolkits either. They’re practical. They’re not meant to fill shelf or hard-drive space. Yes the language is less formal – in the hope that you won’t find this dull, boring or detached. That’s because the beauty of the NRM sector is that most of the people working in it are down to earth with a real concern for what they do. Sound familiar?

So the kits are designed for people. Like you – and your staff. There’ll be some challenges thrown in as well. These may startle and possible offend some people – but the challenges are real and we can guarantee you’ve come across them.

You’ll be able to use them either on a stand-alone basis or as an integrated part of your staff attraction, development and retention strategy.

Why should you use these kits?

Attraction, retention and development of staff in the NRM sector has never been easy. Often it has relied on the ‘good will’ of staff to stick with an organisation rather than seek more lucrative opportunities elsewhere. Even with the recent economic ‘slump’, you’ll face several challenges regarding staffing.

Here’s some recent proof. Leadership Management Australasia’s 2008 survey (of 1000 staff and 600 managers) identified three main areas for managers to work on in order to improve staff attraction and retention:
1. Managers need to provide competitive salaries and better *communicate salary expectations* as it has now become the most important factor in retaining or attracting employees.
2. Managers need to provide employees or potential employees with a *clear understanding of their career progression* both in the short and long term.
3. Managers need to provide *training and development programs* which cater to individual employee career maps.

The toolkits can assist you to address each of the above areas. Using the toolkit s will save you, your staff and your organisation time and money.

Just imagine an organisation where staff:
- Clearly understand the organisation’s purpose
- Have clarity on their own role and responsibilities
- Are self-directed in their learning
- Are continually developing new skills
- Share knowledge and expertise with peers
- Develop others

Sound unrealistic? Possibly. However, using the toolkits and developing or further improving your organisation’s induction, skill development and mentoring processes will help you reach this reality.

The kits will help you to:
- Plan and coordinate some of the basic HR requirements with your staff including induction and review processes
- Effectively and economically allocate resources for staff development
- Understand the key principles of mentoring and how they can be applied within your organisation

The toolkits are ideal for you if you:
- Have staff management responsibilities
- Are experiencing challenges with ongoing staff turnover
- Are concerned about loss of ‘corporate knowledge’ from your organisation
- Don’t have a huge HR department within your organisation
- Don’t have a HR background
- Have limited resources (including time) for staff management and development

**Seven reasons not to use the toolkits**

Sadly our research brought up numerous examples of staff jaded by first, second and third impressions of their organisations. What did (or usually did not) happen on day one; poor clarity of their role and little support for their ongoing development were all cited as reasons for being dissatisfied.

Here’s seven reasons *not* to use the toolkits:
- I’m too busy
- There’s too much detail to cover
- There isn’t enough resources
- I’ve got a(nother) meeting
- It takes up time I don’t have
- It didn’t work last time
- Staff don’t stay that long anyway
How many were you able to tick? Don’t feel guilty about it – the above ‘reasons’ reflect the tough working environment that you’re working in.

There’s no need to despair. The toolkit will help you address all of these issues. It provides you with a stepwise, systematic approach to assist you to retain and develop your staff.

The three toolkits

**Induction toolkit**

This will enable you to make a *positive* and *lasting* impression with new staff members. It provides you with a *structured and planned* approach to help guide the staff member through their initial days, weeks and months. A *staged* approach is recommended where induction consists of written materials, face-to-face meetings, familiarisation with systems, and the assignment of a buddy or mentor to assist with integrating into the organisation. This will assist both you and the new staff member in overcoming information overload.

The induction toolkit provides you with:
- Guidelines to assist you to successfully induct new employees into your organisation
- A checklist of key tasks to help you to plan, prepare and coordinate the induction process
- Administrative templates – to help you keep track of standard employee information requirements

**Skill development toolkit**

This will enable you and your staff to gain clarity on the skills needed for their roles and how these can be developed over the next three years. This timeframe is important. Without a ‘longer’ term outlook mapped out, staff won’t see a longer term outlook. Which poses the risk that they’ll go somewhere else to find one – costing you time and your organisation money.

The skill development toolkit provides you with:
- A list and description of the core skills required by staff in the NRM sector
- Recommendations regarding methods to develop staff skills
- A suggested timeframe for development of these skills
- A list of training providers that deliver programs focusing on these skills
- Skill development planning templates for staff
- An introductory guide to using reflective practice to embed learning

**Mentoring toolkit**

Mentoring is one of the most effective and underutilised methods of skill development and sharing of expertise. Whether used informally or formally, mentoring can have enormous benefits for your organisation in retention of corporate knowledge and staff development.

The mentoring toolkit provides you with:
- An outline of the mentoring process and its benefits
- A description of the roles of mentors and mentees
- A step-by-step plan to develop your own mentoring program
- Templates to implement a mentoring program
Toolkit structure
Each of the toolkits comes in two parts. The first part describes the kits purpose and how it can be used. The second part comprises MS Word templates to be used or adapted by staff to suit their roles.

Follow-up resources
Reference material related to each of the kits will be available through the State NRM website (www.nrm.wa.gov.au) NRM project officers will also have access to an online forum where they’ll be able to share ideas, develop networks, seek information and exchange resources.

The site will also include a Training Calendar and downloads covering all the core skills needed for your staff’s development. It also includes resources to assist development of capacity building programs as well as tips for governance for community groups.

There’s also a short guide to assist you and your staff to put your practical experiences to ongoing use - through using structure reflection and debrief processes. The guide steps through the process and gives several examples of how it can be applied in the field as well as with work teams.

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