

**The
Oregon Health Career Center
Presents**

**The N2K
Nursing Education Model**

**An
Implementation Manual**



**Oregon Health Career Center
25195 SW Parkway Avenue, #204
Wilsonville, Oregon 97070
503.682.1300
www.ohcc.org**

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Participation in Designing a Nurse Education Program

Overview

Human resource managers of healthcare employers throughout the state of Oregon are buzzing with talk of the looming nursing shortage and the resulting crisis that it will no doubt bring to Oregonians in need of quality healthcare and to the systems providing that care. Professional nursing organizations and nurse education programs (both at the associate degree and baccalaureate degree level) are currently in a “scramble” mode to design and implement programs that will expand education capacity, reduce student attrition rates and increase nursing retention in their efforts to meet the growing demand.

If successful, those strategies currently being implemented will better position healthcare employers with an improved opportunity to recruit and hire the quality and quantity of nurses necessary to meet their staffing needs. However, even the most optimistic projection for increases to the state’s nursing profession over the next decade will still leave many employers with an unacceptable number of vacancies, thereby relying on “agency” contracts, temporary help and unscheduled overtime to meet their staffing needs.

Even employers with significant resources and the ability to implement aggressive recruitment strategies for hiring nurses will be challenged, often competing with one another for new graduates of nursing programs. Some healthcare employers, particularly those in the more rural areas of the state, will remain at a distinct disadvantage to the healthcare systems of larger cities when competing for nurses, regardless of the number of graduates that may be produced by advances in the education process. **The reason:** *most strategies being developed today still place the healthcare employer in a passive role; one in which increased numbers to the system are promised, but one that does not ensure any specific employer will be able to attract nurses at a level sufficient to meet staffing needs.*

In other words, most healthcare employers will take a back seat for the next several years, waiting and watching. When graduates come out of the pipeline produced by the new improved system, healthcare employers throughout the state will jump in and hope they net their fair share of the catch - quality nurses. And, of course, there will be winners and there will be losers.



The **N2K Nursing Education Model** is a concept that is designed to increase the capacity of the educational delivery system while allowing **healthcare employers to participate in the design and implementation of a program which targets their own employees as the nursing students, and ultimately, members of their nursing staff.**

The Concept

The N2K Nursing Education Model is a unique program based on the concept of healthcare employer organizations actively participating in the design and supporting the education necessary to meet their professional nurse staffing needs. The N2K concept enables employers to negotiate and enter into “contract education” arrangements that will provide an identified number of their own high-performing employees with an opportunity and support to receive the formal education and meet the academic requirements necessary **to receive either an associate degree (ADN), or a bachelors degree (BSN) in nursing.** The participating employee, upon receiving a nursing license, then agrees to return to work for their employer as a staff nurse for a specified period of time based upon conditions and terms identified in a previously executed “participation agreement”.

The model provides for the employer(s) to contract for a specific number of qualified (completion of all required nursing prerequisite courses and meeting all nursing program entry requirements) employees to enter the program as a cohort (usually 18-24 students). The cohorts’ class, laboratory and clinical **schedules are modified** in a manner that allows participants to continue working in their current job on a part-time basis while engaged in the required academic activities. Individuals in the cohort participate in and complete all of the academic requirements as a group, either in a site-based cohort with a specific college educational partner, or in a geographically dispersed cohort, utilizing distance learning technology. In prior experiences with this model, some employers have provided employees with incentives of **paid release time** while participating in the program to ensure loss of their regular income does not become a reason for highly qualified individuals to forgo the opportunity to participate.

*Should an employer not be able to identify a sufficient number of qualified students ready to enter the nursing degree program, the N2K Model provides an option in which selected employees can participate in a **nursing preparation program** and complete the prerequisite coursework that will make them eligible for entering the nursing program. This program, also through a contract education arrangement in which a specific number of employees participate as a cohort, provides a series of accelerated courses that reduce the length of time required to have employees prepared to begin nurse education.*



The nurse education is provided by an accredited associate or bachelors degree of nursing program, typically in affiliation with one of our partner colleges. The cohort operates through a contract education arrangement that is similar in process and identical in content to that received by “traditional students” who enter nursing programs. While the N2K associates degree program incorporates two full academic years (six terms) of education, the terms do not necessarily run concurrently with a traditional program (September through June) and the amount of time between terms and the start date of each term can be adjusted based on mutual agreement between the employer(s) and the educational provider. If the employer and student agree to a continuation to a Bachelors degree, options are available to complete the additional academic year. A significant part of the education relies on the participating **healthcare employers identifying and recruiting qualified staff nurses** to assist in providing the academic experience by serving as clinical and laboratory instructors to the participating students. The staff nurses are assigned adjunct faculty status with the educational provider and are supervised by a regular member of the nursing faculty.

Employer Benefit

The most significant advantage of the N2K program is the guaranteed opportunity for healthcare employers to determine the number of nurses that will be educated and the ability to participate in the selection, from their own workforce, of whom those nurses may be.

Key Components

There are several key components of the N2K Nurse Education Model that distinguish it from most traditional nurse education programs:

- 1) **“contract education”** allows the employer to negotiate the terms of an educational contract that addresses issues such as number of employees educated, modifications to course schedule, flexible start and end date(s), tutoring services, payment schedule, etc;
- 2) **employer involvement in student selection** allows the employer to identify, screen, and select the high performing employees who are eligible to participate based on meeting criteria established by the organization as well as the academic and other requirements of the education provider;



- 3) **employee commitment contract** in which employee participants acknowledge in writing their commitment to return to work as a staff nurse for the employer for a specified length of time upon successful completion of the education program;
- 4) **adjunct faculty participation** in which the employer commits to provide paid release time (plus differentials, if necessary) to qualified staff nurses from within their organization to serve as clinical and laboratory instructors under a special arrangement with the education provider;
- 5) **student support services** in which an array of resources, provided by the college, the employer and OHCC, are available to provide a source of ongoing support and counseling for participating employees on both academic and non-academic issues which can impact student success;
- 6) **employee paid release time** in which the employer provides participating employees with a specified number of hours of paid release time to attend required academic activities instead of being assigned to their regular work assignment, (this is an optional feature that some employers choose);
- 7) **project management services** in which experienced professional project management staff and consultants from the Oregon Health Career Center provide a source of ongoing management support on policy related issues, financial analysis and contract administration, as well as rapid intervention and problem-solving when required.

IS THIS PROGRAM RIGHT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION???

The Need

While the concept of being involved in the design and implementation of a nurse education program that ensures your organization will be a direct beneficiary may sound attractive, it is important that any decision to participate is based on sound business principles. After all, one of the primary goals of this project is to actually hire the graduates once they have been educated, presumably because you have a need for nurses, and this program will provide them.



The N2K Nursing Education Model offers potential benefits from a financial perspective, and also from an employee relations perspective. Conversely, as with most programs related to recruiting or education of professional staff, there will be costs. Costs associated with this program will be incurred through both the outlay of monies and to the commitment of human resources.

Because involvement in this program will, in most cases, be a business decision, most organizations need to envision their participation as an investment. Executive management will most likely want to see a return on that investment. Therefore, it is important that those decision makers have reliable information with which they can identify the need for increased nurses in their workforce and perform the cost-benefit analysis that is necessary in making the determination to participate. That information can only be provided by staff within your own organization. This is where you, as the healthcare employer, need to start.

Part 1 Identifying the need

1. Do you have a need for nurses, both long term and short term? It is important to understand the nature of the current staffing situation within your organization and the profile of the nursing staff. For example, do you have the capability of monitoring the number of current vacancies, the turnover rate, and the average length of time required to fill a vacancy. Are there trends? What percentage of your current nursing staff is contemplating retirement or a reduction in work hours in the next five years, or ten?

In addition, it is extremely important to know if the organization is contemplating any significant expansion in the next five to ten years that would impact nurse staffing requirements.

2. How effective is your current recruiting plan in meeting your need for nurses? How well do you compete with other healthcare employers in your service area? How confident are you that should a crisis occur, you would be able to attract the number of qualified nurses that would allow you to maintain a desired staffing level utilizing your traditional recruitment strategies?

3. Can you determine the financial impact of your current nursing vacancies? It is important that your organization have the ability to identify the additional costs associated with a nursing shortage by capturing information that reflects the amount of monies incurred by the need to provide unscheduled (mandatory) overtime, temporary help, and agency contracts (travelers, etc.) to meet regular staffing needs.



4. Are there other organizational needs related to nurse staffing that aren't being met by current recruiting strategies and tools? For example, does the ethnic diversity of your nursing staff reflect the diversity of your client base? Is there a need for more male nurses? Do you increasingly rely on less than optimum interpreter services to meet some patient needs?

All of the above issues should be taken into consideration to determine if this education model is an option for your organization in meeting some of your current or projected nurse staffing needs. **If you know there is an ongoing need for nurses that is not being met by current recruiting strategies, and your organization is financially impacted by the additional costs associated with current vacancies to meet staffing needs, then the N2K Model can provide benefit.** *A program that can ensure a steady stream of new nurses to an organization has the potential to significantly reduce the additional costs an employer incurs as a result of a nursing shortage.*

If your organization seeks greater diversity within the nursing staff, then the N2K Model provides opportunities to meet those goals that may not be as available through more traditional hiring practices. It works because you become involved in the selection of employees who will participate and, as the employer, can establish basic criteria, including language skills and other diversity factors, for participant eligibility.

Still interested? Read on!

Available Resources?

Now that we have established that your organization has a need.....and an interest, the next level of consideration understandably revolves around the level of cost and commitment. **Implementation of the N2K Model may require a substantial commitment of resources from participating healthcare employers.** Healthcare employers should not begin a serious planning process for participating in this program without commitment to provide a significant level of funding to offset anticipated costs.

Depending on the number of students assigned to an academic cohort and the level of project components an employer decides to implement, total costs will probably run in the range of \$25,000 to \$30,000 per student.



For this reason, healthcare employers need to compare the additional annual costs they are currently expending as a result of the nursing shortage with the costs of participating in a contract education program such as N2K. In many cases, the costs of the program can be easily justified by this comparison and employers will realize a return on their investment in a relatively short period of time (2 years or less).

State government workforce development grants and various healthcare foundation grants are often available to organizations facing the challenges of the nursing shortage and may be available to employers, particularly partnerships, providing career ladder opportunities for their employees. Critical Access Hospitals and other smaller, rural hospitals may be able to get significant portions of educational costs reimbursed through their Medicare and Medicaid Reimbursement Plans.

Employers should also expect to assign a management level person(s) to serve as an in-house project coordinator and liaison to other project partners including students and the education provider.

Part 2 Matching your need with available resources

1. Which components of the N2K concept do you want to incorporate into your program? All of the key components (previously listed) of the N2K Model are considered essential to the project. They have been introduced and tested with previous employer groups who have implemented this project in the recent past. Some of these components are central to the N2K concept and could not be reduced or eliminated without seriously jeopardizing the purpose of the project.

Other components, while important, could be implemented at varying levels based on need, available funding options, and the availability of in-house support to provide some of the identified services more cost effectively than sources. Employee paid release time, for example, may fall into this category.

With the exception of paid release time, it is highly recommended that all components be included in a local project at some level to ensure success.

2. What additional resources will be required of your organization to participate in this project?

Even though employers will contract with OHCC to provide overall project management services, the employer must designate someone from within the management of their organization to serve as an **in-house project coordinator**. This individual should be authorized to represent the employer, and becomes the employer's face on the project to the students, faculty, and other project partners. Depending on the number of employees selected to participate and the scope of



involvement of the individual, this assignment could require anywhere from a 2 to 6 hour weekly commitment to administer the internal aspects of the program and serve as employer liaison – particularly during the start-up and recruitment phase.

In addition, you will be required to assign staff nurses from within your organization to serve as **adjunct faculty** during the education. The number of nurses serving in this role will depend on the number of employees from your organization participating in the education. Specific requirements will vary, depending on the N2K program that you join. However, all staff nurses participating as adjunct faculty will be supported by, and closely supervised by a clinical supervisor from the regular faculty of the education provider.

3. Will the cost of providing nurse education to an (cohort of) employee(s) be offset by anticipated reductions in the amount of additional costs incurred as a result unmet staffing needs? This will be an important exercise for you to conduct. If your current nursing vacancies result in staffing shortages that are addressed by scheduling mandatory overtime and outside nurses through temp agency contracts, both extremely costly options, then a strong case can be made that any financial outlay associated with a nurse education program that **ensures** a stream of nurses into the organization could be a very cost-effective solution in reducing a much larger amount of overtime and agency help.

4. Are you willing to partner with other healthcare employers to share fixed costs and reduce the cost per student? Developing a partnership with other healthcare employers may provide some financial advantages to your organization, particularly if your available resources are limited. This approach may be especially attractive to smaller employers who may choose to only sponsor two or three employees at a time.

The **Need** is confirmed, the **Resources** are available, and the **Commitment** to proceed has been made. **Right?**

Assuming the answers are Yes, Yes, and Yes.....you are now cleared for take off. Buckle up and enjoy the ride!



Chapter One ASSIGNING AN IN-HOUSE PROJECT MANAGER

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Defining the role and clarifying the importance of an in-house project manager
- Drafting a job description of an in-house project manager
- Identifying and assigning an employee(s) to assume the role

The in-house project coordinator will be an extremely important role and the ability of this individual to perform effectively in this role will determine, to a great extent, the success of the project.

Because the N2K Model is an unique, non-traditional approach to educating nurses and solving nurse staffing needs, there is the possibility that initial project activities will generate some amount of confusion, misunderstanding and, sometimes, cynicism from within an organization. Problems may surface at both the management and staff levels. The larger the organization, the more likely that there may be issues of miscommunication and distrust.

Good Communications

Initially, it will be an important responsibility of the executive management team to communicate with all levels of the organization and clarify their reasons for participating in the program and the expectations they have of all employees in helping achieve successful results. Once done, it will be the responsibility of the project coordinator to effectively manage the internal operations of the project by ensuring there are timely, clear communications throughout the organization - particularly to those other employees who are either directly or indirectly involved in the implementation. Those most impacted by the project and the most in need of good communications could range from the participating students, their supervisors, staff nurses serving as adjunct faculty, union leaders, to anybody providing even a minor support role.

Job Description

The in-house project coordinator will perform the following tasks and assignments including, but not limited to:

- 1) participate in planning meetings with project manager and education provider to clarify the educational implementation plan and the course schedule;
- 2) design and implement an internal recruiting plan to attract qualified applicants;
- 3) coordinate the screening and selection process of applicants;



- 4) design and coordinate a student orientation program;
- 5) maintain regular communication and coordination with the project manager and educational coordinator;
- 6) provide regular communications to students during the education process on all matters related to policy and practice ;
- 7) provide ongoing communication with students and their supervisors on matters related to the coordination of academic and work schedules.

The Right Person

The keys to the process of deciding who from your organization might be the right person to assume the role of in-house project coordinator is identifying an individual who really wants to do it. It should be someone who believes in the concept, is effective in working in a non-traditional environment, and has a strong desire to make the project succeed. It must be an individual who comes with a solid history of credibility and competence within the organization and is comfortable representing the organization (and the project) to other employees and outside project partners.

Of course, it will be up to management to ensure that whoever takes on this assignment is given the support and tools necessary to foster success. At a minimum, this may require realigning current workload issues in a manner that acknowledges this assignment could require a significant amount of time, again, depending on the number of students who will participate.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Describing the program (in general)**
- **Describing employer's objectives**
- **Determining the conditions of participation (in general)**
- **Defining criteria for applying**
- **Disseminating program information**

Developing a well conceived recruitment strategy

One of the first significant tasks of the assigned in-house project manager will be managing the **design and implementation of a recruitment plan** that will attract those high performing, excellent employees from within the organization who are genuinely interested in pursuing a career in nursing.....and want to work for you (hopefully for a long time).

The effort to develop an effective recruitment strategy should not be minimized. In previous experiences, it has been very evident that those employers that invested significant time and effort in the early stages of recruitment design saved themselves considerably more time, effort and headache down the road in the screening and selection process. A program of this nature will attract employees throughout the organization, regardless of their qualifications or motivations.

The goal of an effective recruitment plan is to implement a strategy in which those qualified, high performing, highly motivated employees you are seeking become informed of the program, identify themselves as excellent candidates and take the necessary steps to apply. Other employees who may have some interest will clearly understand that their qualifications and skill sets may not fit with the needs of the program and choose not to apply.

A well conceived recruitment strategy and implementation plan should leave everybody in the organization having positive thoughts about the program, even those who applied and were not selected.



Why are we doing this anyway?? The Management Vision

It is extremely important that the in-house management team supporting this project has a written objective(s) which clearly indicates why the employer is embarking on this non-traditional approach in meeting their nurse staffing needs. *This type of statement can serve as the starting point for any promotional material that will be disseminated throughout the organization announcing the program and the recruitment plan.*

Program Content

The management team also plays a key role in deciding the level of support that will be provided to those employees who are selected to participate in the education program. Decisions related to employee support need to be made prior to the launching of the promotional campaign that describes the program to interested employees.

Based on previous experiences with this model, the single most important financial issue for employees who may want to apply to the program is the **ongoing maintenance of full health coverage benefits** provided by the employer.

Various of our previous employer partners have provided some level of paid release time for participating employees.....others have not. Both approaches have been successful. However, if paid release time is not provided, additional effort will be required to help participating employees design and implement a personal financial strategy to successfully get them through the program, i.e. loans, scholarships, etc.

Program Description A Win/Win Opportunity

Promotional material should provide a general description of the program with a strong message announcing the *great career advancement opportunity* that the organization will be making available to a number of qualified employees. For most employers, effective promotion of this program provides a significant *employee relations opportunity* as well, especially if financial support is one of the components.

In previous experiences with this model, frequent comments of staff (not only the selected students, but other employees as well) of the participating healthcare employers indicated that this program was the most significant effort their management had ever undertaken on behalf of their employees.

Don't take shortcuts with this opportunity. Flaunt it!



Employees say, “this opportunity is too good to be true. What do you want from us?”

Of course. We previously indicated that this program has potential to be a great win/win situation. The winners are not just the employees who are selected to participate, receiving a fully paid education, and fulfilling a long standing passion for a career in nursing. Employers are, in fact, making a significant investment. And yes, they are looking for a return on that investment. Remember, the nursing shortage??

A clear, well written “**conditions of participation**” allows the employer to articulate what they expect in return for supporting the nursing education experience of their employees. For example, some employers may want to ensure their employees stay focused on the education by limiting the number of hours they work while they participate in the program. In addition, most employers will want to receive commitments from employees obligating them to return to work as a staff nurse for a specified length of time once they become licensed.

Regardless of what you may want to include in this contract, it is highly recommended that any “conditions” proposed by the employer be included in promotional material to avoid confusion and misunderstandings at later stages of the recruitment and selection process.

Who are we looking for, anyway? Defining the criteria

There are a number of attributes an employer should be seeking that will make an employee an attractive candidate for selection to this program. Clearly, the most important criteria for an employee to be considered is academic preparation.

All candidates must have completed a series of required prerequisite courses, typically science based, as approved by the assigned education provider of this program. Beginning with the 2007 academic year, the prerequisite requirements of the several community college nursing programs in the state participating with OHSU in the Oregon Consortium for Nursing Education (an OHCC partner), are being standardized in a manner such that course work taken at one community college will be accepted by the nursing program of another. (In addition to prerequisites, students must meet all nursing program entry requirements of the education provider.)

Employers will also want to develop criteria based on the candidates’ experience and history with the organization. Factors such as longevity, performance reviews, attendance records, other language skills, can be factored into the criteria for consideration.



Contents of Promotional Material

At a minimum, all of the factors described above should be included in the promotional material that will be used to market this program. They include.

- 1) management statement describing the objective
- 2) program description
- 3) eligibility criteria
- 4) conditions of participation
- 5) application and selection process

Getting the word out

Depending on the size and complexity (various campuses, etc) of an organization, most human resource departments already have an effective information dissemination system in place.

Because most variations of the N2K model provide an employee relations opportunity, employers should make a significant effort to capitalize on their investment in this program by embarking on an extensive marketing effort.

In previous experiences, for example, a large metropolitan health system has implemented all of the following communication channels to announce the project and recruitment effort by:

- 1) mailing business postcard to home address of all employees;
- 2) distributing system wide email announcement;
- 3) placing large posters in employee cafeteria and other large gathering sites;
- 4) convening a series of system wide informational meetings with detailed brochures.

All of the written products were professionally designed and edited in a manner that reinforced the idea that this program was a “big deal” to the organization.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Developing an applicant screening matrix**
- **Developing an application screening process**
- **Convening an applicant interview panel**
- **Selecting the finalists**
- **Completing the selection process with the education provider**

The process is important

The process of deciding which of your outstanding employees will make outstanding students in the program, and, ultimately, which of them will make outstanding nurses for your organization is extremely important. From the employer perspective, each of the employees selected to participate represents an investment of considerable resources. The process must allow you an excellent opportunity for a reasonable return on that investment by ensuring the most qualified applicants are selected.

Because this program is usually seen from an employee perspective as an incredibly attractive career ladder opportunity, the process must provide assurances that all of the applications were given consideration and a fair and equitable review. If the recruitment and marketing plan is effective, there will be many more applications than there will be available slots.

The process will typically start with an application screening review that should clarify the more tangible qualifications of the candidates measured against the previously identified criteria. The process should then allow for personal interviews of finalists to evaluate the more intrinsic qualities of a candidate such as their commitment to pursuing a career in the nursing profession and their commitment to the organization.



The criteria/applicant screening matrix

The most significant criteria that determines eligibility to the N2K Model program is completion of all of the **nursing prerequisite coursework** and meeting all nursing program entry requirements. Required coursework should be clearly indicated on all materials promoting the program. Without meeting this requirement, a candidate should not move forward in the process.

The application screening matrix should highlight academic prerequisite requirements. The OCNE standardized prerequisites are used for many of our N2K programs. OHCC will consult with the education provider and employer to identify the required courses prior to the start of the recruitment. The education provider will also be available to interpret transcripts.

Other criteria that can be applied to the selection process revolve around the performance of the candidate as an employee of your organization. Criteria that have been applied by employers with previous experience in this program include:

- 1) length of service with the organization
- 2) performance review by supervisors
- 3) attendance history
- 4) 2nd language skills
- 5) nursing aptitude assessment as provided by supervisors
- 6) prior academic performance, especially with prerequisite coursework

Employers often weight certain areas more heavily depending on the value placed on a particular criteria. If second language skills have become critical to the mission of the organization, this criteria may weigh more heavily than length of service, for instance.

Application screening

The purpose of an application screening is to ensure that only those candidates who have a reasonable chance of being considered will move on in the selection process. Occasionally, there will be some internal dynamics within an organization that require some flexibility in managing this aspect of the process. Again, it is important to remember that applicants are treated fairly in all stages.



Typically, the screening process is managed by the in-house project coordinator with assistance from an employment specialist with the human resource department, an individual with experience in employee selection. Employers with a strong organized labor presence may choose to include a union representative to be a part of the screening team. If the screening matrix was developed effectively, this phase of the process should be straightforward and somewhat of a routine administrative task.

Getting to know the finalists

A personal interview with finalists is crucial to the selection process. An employee who looks extremely promising “on paper” sometimes reveals characteristics or attitudes in a face-to-face conversation that may cause you serious concern about his or her “fit” for this program. The interview process should be structured in a manner that allows you to really understand the individuals who have applied to the program; their motivations for pursuing this opportunity, their abilities to communicate effectively (an absolute must for the nursing profession), and their understanding of the demands for successfully completing the program.

Again, the typical interview panel is managed by the in-house project coordinator with assistance from an employment specialist with the human resource department. A **faculty member** of the education partner should be included on the panel to provide important insights on the academic potential of individual candidates in addition to being a resource for programmatic questions. It is also important to include someone from **nursing management** or who serves in a nursing leadership role with the employer to evaluate the professional potential of the candidates. And again, employers with a strong organized labor presence may choose to include a **union representative** to the interview team.

Remember, this may be your last, best chance for evaluating a candidate and protecting the investment you are about to make. Selecting your interview team wisely will, in all probability, ensure you will make a good student selection as well.

The selection

You have now made the selection of those employees who will be participating as nursing students in the N2K Model program. Although this may be the end of a long, involved process within your organization, in many respects, the program is just now starting.

Before we go any further, there is some remaining mop-up work that needs to occur.

Those candidates not selected should be notified in a timely manner, preferably by a personal phone call soon after the decision was made. Presumably, each candidate



that advanced as far as a personal interview had invested considerable time and effort into the process and should be treated accordingly. *Ensuring continuing staff support requires an organization to implement good employee relations strategies at a number of milestone events during the life of the project.* This is one of them.

Now the fun part.

Because the organization has already made the N2K project a highly visible nurse recruitment strategy, you should view the selection of the employees who will participate in the program as a significant promotional event. Again, this is another great employee relations opportunity that should be shared throughout the entire organization. Be creative!



IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Finalizing the conditions of participation**

What we provide for you, what you give to us

In effect, the “conditions of participation” is the written agreement between the employer and the employees who have been selected to participate in this program. As previously discussed, the employer will be providing a specified level of financial support and job flexibility to the employees selected as students. In return, the employer expects to receive certain commitments from the employees to ensure successful outcomes and organizational objectives are realized.

In general terms, all of the conditions should have been clarified in written promotional materials used in the recruiting process. However, now that selection process has been completed, a written agreement provides a final understanding between the two parties of the parameters for participating in the program.

The content

First and foremost, employers will clarify and itemize all components of support that will be provided to an employee while participating in this program. Some examples might include:

- 1) tuition, books, fees and other educational expenses
- 2) number of hours of paid release time at regular salary (if provided)
- 3) number of hours of authorized work time (maximum and minimum)
- 4) retention of benefits and seniority (if provided)
- 5) uniform and personal equipment allowance (if provided)
- 6) reimbursement for travel costs (if provided)

Employers should then clarify all expectations of the students such as:

- 1) consequences (if any) of withdrawing from the education prior to completion;
- 2) requirements for outside study or tutoring if recommended by education provider;



- 3) employment options for students successfully completing the education;
- 4) work obligation of students successfully completing the education with reimbursement provision for those who do not fulfill commitment
- 5) additional expense obligations not provided by employer

A well thought out and written “participation agreement” will prevent the possibility of confusion and hard feelings between the employer and participants somewhere down the road.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Establishing a partnership/clarifying relationship with the education provider**
- **Defining the program**
- **Clarifying minimum qualifications for participation**
- **Defining conditions of participation**
- **Disseminating program information/selling the program**
- **Finalizing selection process with education provider**

Overview

The **employees** who will be participating as students in the nurse education project have now been selected and the **education provider** is prepared to move forward with a customized curriculum and course/clinical schedule to meet the needs of the employer. However, the final leg to this three legged chair is the employer commitment to provide a select number of high-performing, qualified nurses from current staffing to serve in an **adjunct faculty capacity** of the education provider and assist in supervising the clinical experience required for each of the participating students.

How it works

Each adjunct faculty member would be responsible for managing the clinical experience and the necessary clinical preparatory and written evaluation work for assigned students. A clinical supervisor from the regular faculty of the education provider, in turn, would supervise nurses serving as adjunct faculty. The clinical supervisor would be responsible for reviewing the student evaluations performed by adjunct faculty for purposes of quality assurance and to ensure adherence to OSBN accreditation standards.



The education provider will design and implement a mandatory orientation and hands-on education process for each of the staff nurses selected to serve as adjunct faculty. Typically, each of the staff nurses selected will be required to make a specific commitment for a given academic term, usually 10 weeks. The initial adjunct faculty education should include all nurses who will participate during a given academic year. It is highly preferable to train and orient more adjunct faculty than may be needed if possible, thereby establishing a “stable” of staff nurses prepared for the education role. Those not directly assigned to students for a specified term can serve in a “back up” role, assuring program continuity in case of any unforeseen contingency (short term or extended illness, etc).

Specific roles and responsibilities of staff nurses as adjunct faculty will vary from cohort to cohort. OHCC will provide participating employers with clear participation expectations well before the beginning of any clinical education responsibilities.

Employer/Education Provider relationship

The relationship between employer and education provider in the N2K Nurse Education dynamic is unique and should be administered with a great deal of careful thought and attention to detail. Staff nurses serving as adjunct faculty in this program will remain on the payroll of the participating employers but will be supervised by regular faculty of the education provider, even while assigned to clinical sites of their employer.

The process of selecting and utilizing staff nurses from a participating employer to serve as adjunct faculty for an education provider requires a high level of communication and cooperation. This will no doubt involve a series of planning meetings with managers from all of the participating organizations including education provider, project manager and all employers that may be involved in a partnership.

Where to start

Any recruitment to fill a vacant position within an organization starts with clarification of the minimum qualifications of eligibility, and even a **volunteer** adjunct nursing faculty position in the N2K program is no exception. In this case, the academic and experiential requirements for all faculty positions of a nurse education program in the state are determined and administered by the Oregon State Board of Nursing (OSBN). The Board requires that all faculty positions have, at a minimum, a baccalaureate degree in nursing with three years of “recent” nursing experience and an “unencumbered” nursing (RN) license.



Identifying Ideal Candidates

Any given healthcare employer may have nurses on staff who meet the OSBN minimum requirements and would be great candidates for an adjunct faculty teaching position. In addition to the minimum requirements, a successful candidate would be someone with excellent communication, critical thinking and time management skills, the ability to effectively work with others and have recent experience with new technologies utilized in the nursing profession. Many of these high-performing nurses might see this program as an opportunity to “give back” to their profession and/or their employer while providing themselves with a “change of pace” from their normal working routines.

The key, of course, for employers is to identify those nurses from within their organization and encourage their participation. *Selecting the “right” individuals as candidates for this important role will be crucial to the ultimate success of the project.*

Every prospective candidate, of course, will want to understand the **conditions of participation** before deciding if this program holds some interest for them. Employers need to determine if any incentives (such as pay differentials, etc.) will be offered and how participation may impact an employee’s current work assignment. Those conditions need to be resolved and clearly articulated in any promotion that is disseminated announcing this adjunct faculty teaching opportunity.

Selling the Program

Because we have already determined that selecting the right individuals as adjunct faculty will be crucial to the success of the program, it is important that the in-house project coordinator(s) take extraordinary measures to “spread the word” and enlist the assistance of nursing supervisors and others within the organization to identify those high-performing, qualified candidates who would be excellent in this role. The recruitment must be an active process in which the recruitment seeks out those individuals instead of depending on a passive strategy in which there is hope that the “right” people apply.

Too much is at stake in terms of employer investment to just hope this process provides excellent results.



Similar to the student recruitment and selection process, convening a series of informational meetings to promote the project and its value to the organization and answer questions related to the adjunct faculty opportunity can be extremely beneficial.

The selection process

Ultimately, the final selection of the adjunct faculty team will be made by the education provider from the group of candidates that have been forwarded by the employer(s). It is the employer's responsibility to administer a screening and referral process that ensures that only highly qualified candidates will be recommended to the education provider for final consideration.

An effective selection process will require ongoing communication and collaboration between the employer partner(s) and the education provider.



Chapter Six PROVIDING ONGOING STUDENT SUPPORT

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Defining and clarifying the importance of student support
- Designing a job description
- Determining if internal resources are available

Overview

Providing a strong student support component to an education program is sometimes an overlooked aspect of the educational process. Though many traditional educational programs have student support resources, they generally anticipate that students will self-direct themselves to those resources, when needed.

The N2K concept relies heavily on a strong partnership to provide pro-active assistance to participating students in the many academic and non-academic related matters they sometimes encounter while involved in their studies. The N2K participants, by definition, are attempting to balance their “new life” as nursing students with the work requirements of their current jobs, and in many cases, while maintaining the responsibilities as heads of family. Sometimes, they need someone other than their instructors or their work supervisors to whom they can turn when dealing with times of stress and uncertainty.

A strong student support safety net can result in a significant reduction in the attrition rate of participating students.

Insuring the employer investment

Employers in the N2K program need to have some level of assurance that participating employees will successfully complete the program. Each employee represents a significant investment. If an employee exits the program, regardless of the reason, the employer cannot regain the investment. The risk of losing your investment needs to be protected to the extent possible. An aggressive student support program coupled with an effective student selection process provides the employer with the best opportunity to realize a return on their investment.



What does a student support program look like?

The role of the student support network is to provide an array of services that best ensure that those employees selected to participate in the N2K program will successfully complete the program. This network will include the array of counseling, tutoring, advising and other services available through our college partner. OHCC project management staff can bring additional resources to bear when needed.

However, for now let's concentrate on what the participating employer can bring to the group. Typically, your employee who provides this service will be someone who has a professional background in nursing with good communication skills and understands the challenges students face in pursuing a career in the healthcare provider arena.

Duties of the Position

- 1) Meet with students in a group setting on a regular basis to assist in problem solving any employer-related or logistical issues that are encountered;
- 2) Meet with students individually on an as-needed basis to assist in problem solving and provide support for any academic, employer-related or logistical issues that they are encountering;
- 3) Meet with OHCC, educational provider representatives and program leaders on a regularly scheduled basis to review group and individual progress, problem solve areas of concern and identify additional resources that may be available to provide assistance, if needed.

Assigning the right resource now will pay great benefits later

Participating employers must make a decision related to the level of need they may have in providing a viable student support program. The higher the number of students an individual employer commits to the N2K program, the greater the need of a strong student support presence. Employers supporting a significant number of students (6-24) in this program will want to assure that there are resources within their organizations that are available and able to commit the necessary time and effort to this program.

Employers that sponsor a smaller number of students (1-3) will require a smaller time and resource commitment for the student support function. However, attention should still be paid to insuring that adequate support is available.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Identifying all project partners**
- **Communicating with employee supervisors**
- **Communicating with employee participants**
- **Communicating with the organization at-large**

Overview

As previously referenced in this document, the N2K Nurse Education Program is a unique approach to dealing with healthcare employer staffing problems brought about by the current (and future) nursing shortage. A number of our partners (hospitals, nursing education programs, governmental agencies, private non-profit organizations) have now accumulated several years of experience working with us in this new paradigm for nursing education.

They would all agree that a contract education concept that targets incumbent workers as the students may present as being rather straight forward and a simple program to administer. However, our experience has shown us that there are many moving parts that will require a significant level of attention, and most importantly, **GOOD COMMUNICATION** with all project partners.

Who within our organization will be impacted by the design and implementation of this project?

It is extremely important for the in-house project coordinator and other in-house project sponsors to identify all of those employees within the organization who will be impacted once the education program is underway. Obviously, those employees selected to participate will probably experience the most dramatic change to their everyday life as they will need to reconcile their work and family schedule with the time demands of the classroom, clinical and homework schedule.

However, many supervisors and program schedulers will also need to make adjustments to their staffing plans, providing backfill coverage during those days of the week when participating employees are involved in education activities. Human



resource and payroll staff may need to make adjustments in tracking and administering services related to employee participation in this program.

All of the personnel you will identify as impacted by this project need to be considered as partners in the process and ensuring you have their support and cooperation is key to having successful results.

Develop and implement a communication strategy

It is important that all of the project partners within your organization are kept informed as the project moves through stages of milestone events. Partners who have been included in the communications network will feel vested in the outcomes. If you ever need to call on one of them for an accommodation of some kind (on behalf of a student for example), those partners are much more likely to willingly assist in resolving a problem if they feel as if they were kept in the “communications loop”.

In previous N2K experiences, group email lists which allowed the in-house project coordinator to send regular project updates proved to be very effective in maintaining a communication link within the organization, particularly with supervisors of the students.

And remember, there may be a significant number of employees within the organization who have no apparent role, yet are very interested in how the project is progressing. Regular “all hands” type updates can be a very valuable employee relations strategy in gaining broad organizational support for this project and other similar programs that may follow.



Conclusion

Our hope is that this Implementation Manual has provided you with a guide through some of the planning that will need to occur as you begin your involvement in an N2K program. Yes, there are a lot of moving parts. But by approaching the introduction of the program thoughtfully and purposefully, you can avoid many of the problems that a less carefully designed approach might create.

Furthermore, you will have the resources and experience the Oregon Health Career Center has gained in building and managing N2K Nursing Education Programs since 2001. Your reading of this Manual has probably generated a number of questions about next steps, about process, about specific details and issues. Please call us. If you're ready to move ahead, we're available to begin working with you on timelines, tasks, strategies and implementation.

And thank you for your interest in the N2K Nursing Education Program.

Contact:

Gary Wappes, MSW
President & CEO
Oregon Health Career Center
25195 SW Parkway Avenue, #204
Wilsonville, Oregon 97070

503.682.1300 x104
gwappes@ohcc.org

