

590 MCRT Learning Collaborative: Hiring and Retention of Engagement Specialists

Division of Mental Health

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Help is **Here**





Hiring and Retention

- Search Activities
- Detailed Job Descriptions
- Staff Qualifications
- Relevant Employment Laws
- Questions That Can and Cannot Be Asked
- Interview Formats
- Competitive Pay and Benefits
- Reasonable Accommodations
- Onboarding Experience



HELP
WANTED

Expand Search Activities

- Define the “recovery community” as expansively as possible
- People in recovery are part of every community, so be sure to advertise in traditional outlets
- Network with CRSS/CPRS Success Programs at colleges/universities
- Key words are key!
 - Lived experience
 - Recovery
 - Peer support
 - CRSS, CPRS
- DMH Efforts underway to connect employers with job seekers

Write Detailed Job Descriptions

- Invest time upfront to define the specific role
 - Sample: Engagement Specialists are individuals who have personal experience of mental health and/or substance use recovery and are trained to support individuals experiencing crisis. Engagement Specialists assist the people they serve by providing supportive presence during times of distress. They offer encouragement and hope by sharing their story and helping others to discover their strengths.





Identify Core Responsibilities

- Provide detailed examples of the position's core responsibilities. Examples:
 - Education and skill-building, including but not limited to the following:
 - Wellness planning
 - Crisis planning
 - Psychiatric Advanced Directives
 - Self-advocacy skills including connecting to professional services when appropriate
 - Services that help individuals to do the following:
 - Identify their strengths and to use their strengths to reach their recovery goals
 - Identify and overcome barriers to participation in community resources
 - Connect with resources, including:
 - Visiting community resources to assist them in becoming familiar with potential opportunities
 - Teaching and modeling the skills needed to successfully utilize community resources

Main Purpose of the Position

- Summarize the main purpose of the position within the team in one sentence
 - Sample: “Engagement Specialists use a non-clinical approach to support individuals in discovering their strengths and resiliencies and developing their own unique recovery goals.”





Centrality of Lived Experience

- Be clear about the centrality of lived experience (essential function)
 - Sample: “As current or former recipients of mental health services, Engagement Specialists share their own experiences and what skills, strengths, supports, and resources have been helpful in their recovery. When appropriate, Engagement Specialists share their own recovery stories and demonstrate how they have directed their own recovery processes.”
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines allow employers to refer to psychiatric disability within a job description and posting if having had this life experience is related to an “essential function” of the job.

Define Staff Qualifications

- Clinical status should **not** be utilized as a job qualification (i.e., “x years in recovery”)
- Identify how you would determine whether the candidate would be able to function as a **credible role model** to the people they will be supporting.
 - Has this person's life experiences with the behavioral health system and with other factors often associated with behavioral health conditions (such as poverty, unemployment, and discrimination) been sufficiently similar to those they will serve in this role?
 - Will their recovery story speak to the participants they are trying to connect with?
 - Can the person effectively leverage their recovery story to build rapport and promote hope?





Define Staff Qualifications

- Are aware of their own strengths and challenges
- Establish rapport with others
- Exhibit clear boundaries
- Do not personalize an individual's comments
- Are organized and exhibit time management skills
- Exhibit a flexible attitude: if a situation arises, able to switch gears quickly
- Are adaptable to the work environment
- Have work or life experience with people in recovery from mental health or substance use challenges
- Can create and maintain good records
- Present themselves in a professional manner through their attire, verbal, and nonverbal behavior

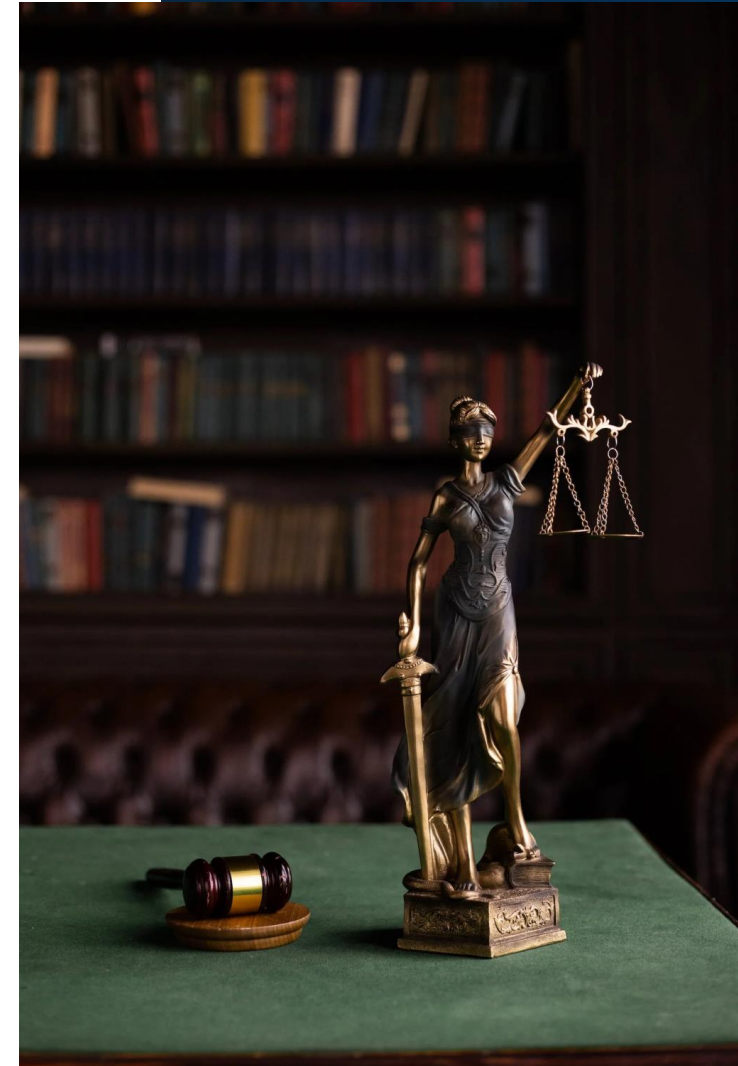
Understand Relevant Employment Laws

- **Rehabilitation Act** (1973): prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities; limited to programs conducted or funded by Federal agencies
- **Americans with Disabilities Act** (1990): prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in regard to job application procedures; the hiring, advancement, or discharge of employees; employee compensation; job training; and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment. Title I of the ADA provides extensive guidance for organizations and employers regarding compliance expectations both pre- and post-hire.
- **Family and Medical Leave Act** (1993): provides employees with up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave within a 12-month period (clock re-sets every year); guarantees job restoration unless the employee is unable to perform the essential functions of the job



Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

- Qualified individual with a disability: definition focuses on whether the person is regarded as having physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or a record of such an impairment.
- Some people with mental health conditions will have a disability that is covered under the ADA, and some will not.
- For substance use disorders, only those individuals in recovery who are not currently using substances may qualify as having a disability as covered under the ADA.
- Qualified employees may be held to the same standard as other employees.
- An employee cannot be terminated for having a disability, but the law allows for terminating employees for misconduct stemming from the disability.



Understand Questions That Can and Cannot Be Asked

CANNOT BE ASKED	CAN BE ASKED
How many years have you been in recovery?	Can you tell me some ways that you might use your personal lived experience to support the people you'd be working with?
Have you ever been hospitalized for mental health or been in a detox or rehab program?	How would you respond to an individual in crisis who says you don't understand what they're going through because you've never been facing a possible hospitalization?
What is your plan to prevent relapse?	Share some examples of why you consider yourself an effective role model for people who are early in their recovery journey.



Use a Range of Interview Formats

- **Screening Call:** to establish that the candidate meets some of the basic criteria for the job
- **Group Interview:** to provide a glimpse into the person's ability to work as part of a team
- **Individual Interview:** case scenarios and role plays for a more participatory interview process through which the interviewer can more carefully assess the candidate's core skills and evaluate individual readiness to take on the emotional and professional aspects of the job



Offer Competitive Pay and Benefits

- Competitive pay
 - Hourly Wage Range: \$7.75-\$34.13 (Peers in Texas: Workforce Outcomes Report, 2021 [Minimum Wage: \$7.25])
- Overtime pay/flexible work hours/flex time
- Supervision
- Specific efforts to minimize cooptation/acculturation
- Collaboration/networking opportunities
- Career advancement opportunities





Understand and Manage Reasonable Accommodations

- **Reasonable Accommodations** are not “special treatment” but are legally mandated modifications to a work environment or role that enable persons with disabilities to have equal access to employment opportunities.
- **Do Not Assume** staff in Engagement Specialist positions will require accommodations
- **Do Not Assume** performance issues are related to an Engagement Specialist’s mental health/substance use condition
- **Job Accommodation Network** ([AskJAN.org](https://askjan.org)): free consulting service from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy that provides individualized accommodation solutions and information on the ADA and services related to employment for people with disabilities.
 - A to Z searches:
 - Disability
 - Limitation
 - Work-related Function
 - Topic
 - Accommodation



Create a Positive Onboarding Experience

- **Announcement:** Promptly send an announcement of the new employee to all staff, including their name, title, and a brief bio. This reinforces the agency's commitment to moving the organization toward a recovery-oriented service approach, clarifies the Engagement Specialist role for existing staff, and sets expectations regarding teamwork and collaboration.
- **Organization-Wide:** Provide Engagement Specialists opportunity to learn about as many aspects of the organization as possible, even if they won't be directly working in those areas.
- **Shadowing:** Provide ample time for job shadowing before expecting Engagement Specialists to take on independent responsibilities.
- **Equipment:** Do not assume the existence of skills around the use of the photocopier, telephone system, and other office equipment.
- **Policies and Protocols:** Orient Engagement Specialists to **both** official office policies **and** general protocols (those which may not be available in writing).



TIME FOR QUESTIONS

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