

# 2019 NPCR VIRGINIA SUCCESS STORY

Virginia Cancer Registry: Laurel Gray, CTR; Leslie Hoglund, PhD

*Recruitment Is Low Because  
Retention Is High!*

## NATIONAL PROGRAM OF CANCER REGISTRIES SUCCESS STORY

**SUMMARY:** Flexible hours, telecommuting, and inclusion have been both a recruitment and retention success for the Virginia Cancer Registry (VCR). These improvements have reduced travel time and increased production. To keep our team connected and our community of practice strong, everyone comes into the office on Wednesdays. Our average staff retention is seven years. Our secret is empowering staff members by bringing them into the decision-making process. As a result, they not only enjoy flexible hours and the ability to work remotely, they also become an integral part of the team.

**CHALLENGE:** In this time of optimistic economy, unemployment is down to 3% in Virginia. The Virginia Cancer Registry budget is set. We are mid-cycle on our five-year grant. As a result, retaining staff and growing the Cancer Registry is a challenge. How can we propose and implement new positions and processes and keep salaries competitive without overspending?

**SOLUTION:** The Virginia Cancer Registry (VCR) has been in the process of implementing several strategies. Like the old movie “9 to 5”, our first move was to empower the employee. We started by allowing all staff members to choose their own hours. The flexible hours allow our staff to coexist equally with their personal needs; not work first, personal life second. Our second policy encourages telecommuting through virtual private network (VPN) access on VCR provided computers. Each employee can choose up to 3 days per week to telecommute. On Wednesdays, everyone is in the office by 9 a.m., which allows for weekly group meetings.

Our last strategy is to hire promising people with or without a CTR credential, which works because we provide funding for online CTR courses and additional study time during working hours. We have found that mentoring new CTRs also benefits our existing staff by keeping them up-to-date with new trends and allowing them to share their own CTR experiences and knowledge.

Our leadership this past year did more than just a policy change. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) revamped the pay structure. From the point of hire, VDH no longer looks at previous salary; pay is based on knowledge, skill and experience in the job. All VCR positions were realigned, based on a new classification created for registrars, and CTR pay became more competitive with the open market.

The last item our new leadership tackled was adding a dedicated IT person to the Cancer Registry staff. The difference has been dramatic. We no longer have to re-educate a new IT person whenever we need to upload software. Better yet, when there is a software issue, we have a skilled technician who knows our software and can solve our problems quickly.

**RESULTS:** What we initially thought would be a division or isolation of staff by telecommuting ended up being our best retention, as well as recruiting, tool. When we do come together each week, everyone is excited to hear what is new and to interact with each other. Production and quality are at an all-time high. There are a lot of impromptu question and answer group discussions. Staff members are eager to interact with each other and to extract knowledge from each other.

All team members work as an integral part of the Registry and are cross-trained to work in any position. We have become a team that allows all staff to contribute to projects and capitalize on their personal strengths and abilities. Implementing a process flow board (“Flo”) in our main hallway allows everyone to see our current and finished projects. Any staff member can suggest new projects to “Flo” to break down information silos. We added a process chart to the “Flo” board showing every step of each project, including all stakeholders or partners involved, so that we can keep a continual line of sight into our improvements and projects.

Last year, we hired a contractor to embed within the Registry. This proved to be highly impactful so we arranged funding to support the addition of a permanent Cancer Registry IT position. This ensures we have our software/hardware needs met on a timelier basis. Because of this position, we are able to provide more services to our reporters such as follow-up linkages.

Keeping our management style as a team approach has been successful for us. Every staff member is an integral part of the team. The team approach has encouraged staff members to take leadership roles that cater to their personal skills, which is good for retention.

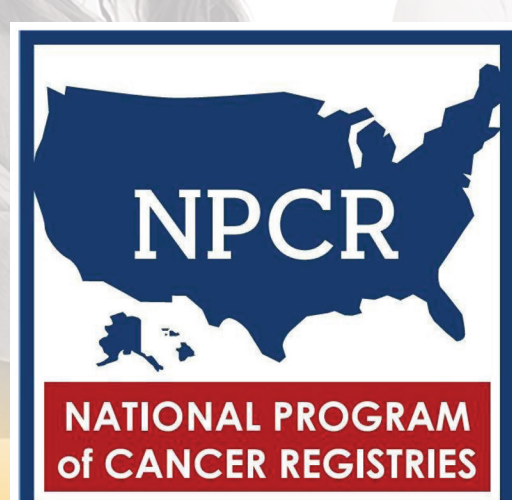
**SUSTAINING SUCCESS:** Our goal for 2020 is to have all possible auto processes in production to relieve some of the manual time-intensive requirements. Our auto-deduplication process has been quite successful. Making the cancer IT position permanent assures the continuity of these software and hardware updates. The new “Flo” board shows our accomplishments as well as areas that might still need improvement. We value our team and providing CTR training and reclassifying their positions for more equitable pay contribute to our ability to retain exemplary staff.

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