

one | PEOPLE team | PLAN

2023 – 2026



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Message from Chief Administrative Officer

Our people are our organization's most valuable resource - the foundation of the critical services and quality programs we proudly provide to the Niagara community daily.

By providing essential services, each of you delivers meaningful work to our residents, businesses and community partners. From children's services to seniors services, ensuring we have reliable roads to drive on, safe water to drink, access to housing, public safety, emergency services, health resources and more – you take care of Niagara.

But we also need to take care of you. Our employees also need to be a priority. We must make sure that you are equipped with the supports and resources required to succeed personally and professionally.

That is why in 2021 we embarked on a journey to re-evaluate the plan for our people.

We spent time talking to employees across our organization, learning about what's important to you as our employees, our leaders and our organization. Our employees embraced this project through an incredible and much appreciated level of insight and feedback. We acknowledge and thank everyone who took the time to participate and help shape our People Plan.

We heard you and we learned from you.

Our People Plan is our guiding path to the end of 2026, where we will be an organization that:

- Attracts, selects and grows **top talent**
- Has inclusive and **strong leaders**
- Offers a **flexible workplace** shaped by the diverse programs and services we provide
- Supports **healthy and well employees and workplaces**

As One Team, this is your People Plan, shaped by your insight and ideas, and I encourage each of you to take ownership to keep our plan moving on its path forward as we put those ideas into action.

Together, we can achieve what we have set out to accomplish by 2027.



Ron Tripp
Chief Administrative Officer

Guiding Principles Developing Our Plan



In 2021 Niagara Region embarked on a journey to update our People Plan. Since we launched our last Plan in 2016, there has been significant change in our organization from our work practices and experiences, to the structure of our organization and teams, expansion of services and the new faces we continue to welcome.

Through our 2023 – 2026 People Plan, we aim to connect and support our employees' health and well-being, providing the experiences and resources needed to grow careers, and offer the flexibility required for our employees to be their best, at home and work. This plan incorporates the principles of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, woven through the four themes, to ensure our work place is welcoming and inclusive for everyone; working to eliminate barriers and discrimination. Our employees are critical to our organization – they are the foundation of the services and programs that we provide to our community. Our People Plan serves as a framework for the supports, resources, programs and experiences our employees need to be and do their best for the residents of Niagara.

Our approach to developing our Plan was comprehensive and founded in understanding what's important to our employees, our leaders and our organization.

Engaging Employees

Our employees and leaders are at the centre of our People Plan, as such they are at the heart of how we developed our Plan. We invited our employees and leaders to share insights on their thoughts and experiences working at the Region - and they embraced the opportunity.

We were very fortunate to receive insightful and candid feedback through over 900 connections with our team members:

- 610 Survey responses
- 150 Virtual whiteboard participants
- 47 People concept campaign submissions
- 15 One to one interviews with senior leaders
- 12 Leader participants of non-headquarter focus groups
- 87 Long-term care whiteboard participants

The information received from our team has informed and shaped our People Plan.

Evidence Based Decision Making

Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered and analyzed from a number of sources in an effort to create a balanced and informed understanding of our employees' work experience, as well as key organizational drivers and requirements. Sources include:

- 2019 Niagara Region Engagement Survey and the 2020 Niagara Region COVID-19 Employee Experience Survey were reviewed and analyzed for relevant data and insights

- One-on-one interviews with senior leadership to understand employee opportunities and challenges now and into the future, as it relates to organizational, departmental and divisional requirements
- Focus groups with leaders of employees who work at locations outside of Niagara Region headquarters to understand their experiences
- Voluntary, virtual focus groups with employees throughout the organization to understand their experiences at Niagara Region and what's important to them and their career
- Virtual focus group with members of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team to provide input into the People Plan
- In-person focus groups at Niagara Region's long-term care homes
- Niagara Region employee data and external best practice reviews
- Niagara Region Strategic Plan 2019-2022
- Human Resources Best Practices Guidebook: How to Increase Diversity and Inclusion in Recruitment, Hiring, and Promotion
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan

Alignment to Regional Council's Business Plan and Niagara Region's Strategic Direction

The People Plan cannot operate in isolation and must have a direct connection to organizational drivers as well as corporate mission and vision. It must also align with and complement other strategies such as our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy, Corporate Communications Strategy, Technology Strategy and Corporate Culture.

Living Document

The Region, our employees, programs and services operate within a very dynamic environment. As our internal and external environments continue to evolve, it's important that the People Plan reflect our employees and our organization through ongoing review and revision.

Project Process



The People Plan was developed over four phases to ensure there was an appropriate level of internal and external research, data collection, analysis and engagement considered throughout the project.

The span of the project was from June 2021 until official launch in June 2023. The timeframe was of a longer duration for two reasons:

1. Due to overwhelming interest in our Phase Three engagement period, which solicited employee and leader feedback.
2. Include additional engagement/input from senior leadership groups as well as to finalize funding and resourcing for Corporate Leadership Team/Chief Administration Officer approval prior to launch.

Phase One - Our Needs

Purpose

- Gain an understanding of current and future requirements relative to our workforce
- To understand best practice and other relevant research relative to People Plan

Elements

- One-on-one interviews with senior leaders inclusive of Corporate Leadership Team, Chief Administration Officer
- Focus groups with senior leaders
- Research and literature review
- Like organization, best practice review
- Niagara Region data review

Phase Two - Draft

Purpose

- To develop a draft People Plan framework for organization review

Elements

- Creation of clear objectives
- Development of draft framework
- Compile engagement results
- Measure identification
- Alignment of measures with corporate metrics
- Draft People Plan with feedback from engagement

Phase Three - Engagement

Purpose

- To ensure employee and leadership alignment with People Plan outcomes and framework
- To engage employees in the development of framework content

Elements

- Employee and leadership engagement, with feedback into plan

Phase Four - Roll-out Initiation - June 2023

Purpose

- To fully engage our organization in the People Plan

Elements

- Implementation plan
 - Leadership engagement
 - Employee awareness campaigns
- Evaluation/tracking/measuring plan initiation
- People Plan actioning

Key Findings

What We Heard



We were fortunate to receive considerable feedback from employees and leaders from all parts of our organization. As our aim was to engage as many employees as possible, it was essential that our employee input methods were highly accessible; providing flexibility and time related options required to engage in the process.

It was also essential that our communications strategy to create awareness of the project and engagement opportunities, reached employees where they were, across our organization. To this end, as a part of Phase Two, an initial outreach to key interested parties at the Department and Divisional levels was conducted to understand best methods of outreach to employees. Similar research was completed to understand and acquire tools that would provide variety and choice in participation for our employees. As a result, the following was conducted:

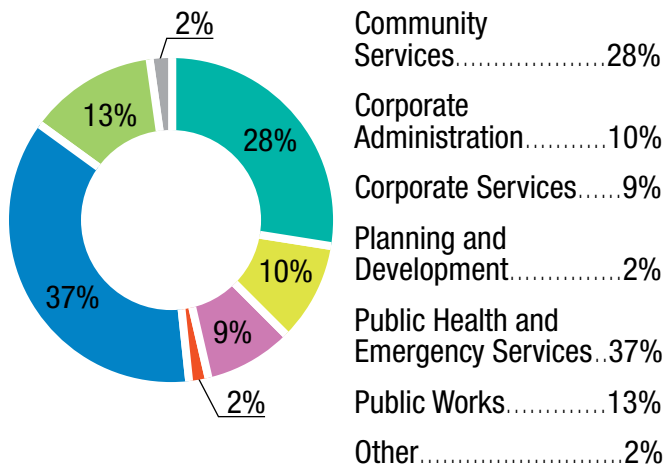
- **Employee survey:** a survey tool, Alchemer, was selected for its reporting capacity. A poster campaign with a QR code was launched to engage employees in their workplace, supporting survey completion at a time and location of their convenience. Vine and internal communication channels were also leveraged. As a result, we received 610 survey responses.
- **Virtual whiteboard sessions:** Miro, an online collaboration platform, was used to host collaborative virtual whiteboard sessions for employees to provide input into the process.

These were hosted as open sessions for any/all employees to participate in, group sessions that were held for full teams, including Human Resources, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Public Health. As a result, we engaged 150 individuals in this process.

- **People concept campaign:** through our process, we collected a number of 'buzz words' that were often used throughout our organization, but lacked a clear definition of the intended meaning, for example 'Collaboration'. Through Vine and internal communication channels, a monthly campaign was run to engage employees in sharing their definitions of these words, and gain a better understanding of their meaning within our organization. We received 47 responses.
- **One-on-one interviews:** at the start of our process, senior leaders were interviewed to understand their current and future people requirements. We also gathered their perspectives on leadership and what that means at Niagara Region. 15 one-on-one interviews were conducted.
- **Focus groups for leaders:** a series of focus groups were conducted with Director level roles with larger employee groups outside of Niagara Region headquarters. The intention of these groups was to gain an understanding of people and leadership requirements and experiences and how they differ from the experiences at headquarters. 12 leaders were interviewed.
- **Long-term care whiteboard sessions:** we received an invitation to bring our whiteboard sessions to Long-term Care to provide these employees with an opportunity to understand the People Plan concept and provide input. 87 employees participated in these sessions.

Through our engagement process, we were able to receive feedback from across our organization.

Participation by department (across all channels)



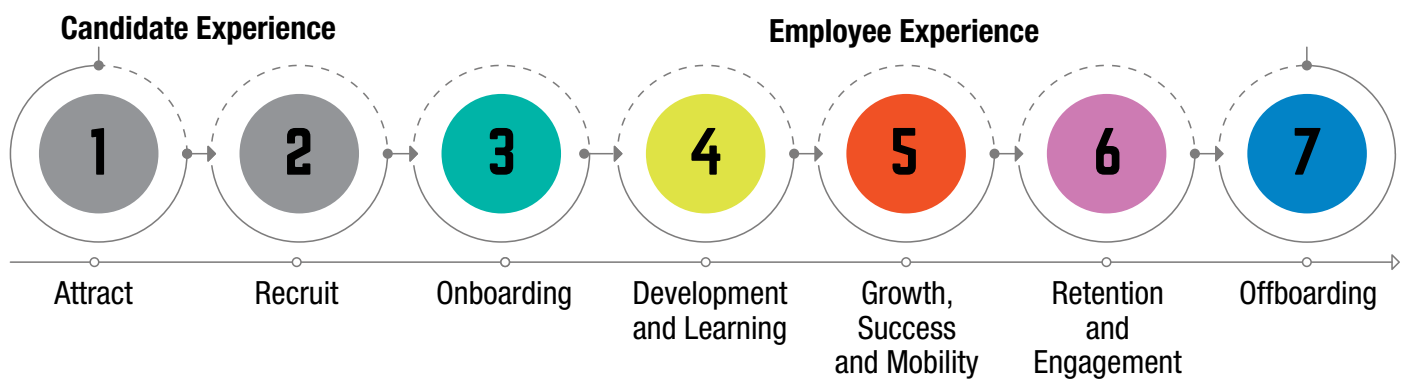
To sort the information received in a way that connected with our leader and employee experiences, an employee lifecycle model was used. The model feedback was sorted into more standard Human Resource groupings, while also being reflective of employee experience elements. Through this sort, the information was compartmentalized in a manner that supported the identification of overarching themes, and ultimately action items. For our process, it was important that the model was inclusive of the employee experience in our organization, as well as their experience as a candidate prior to joining our organization; with a strong overlap on onboarding, which is a shared experience between a new and existing employee.

The information gathered across our channels identified key priorities (programs, services, supports and areas of focus) for our leaders and employees, and was distilled and sorted into the employee lifecycle as follows:

Attraction

- Allowing candidates to understand who we are as an organization, how we can support them in the future, and demonstrate engagement factors such as making a difference in our community for prospective employees
- Accessible application materials and resources; ease of application
- Job opportunities reach target candidates, proactive candidate outreach (candidate pipelines), including promotion to diverse candidates groups and reducing barriers to applying to roles
- Employee brand ambassadors; leveraging leadership and staff to promote open positions and to promote the Region, our culture, the team and the work
- Promoting opportunities internally, ensuring all employees are able to understand career opportunities available to them at the Region and how to pursue them

Our employee lifecycle model:



Recruiting

- Inclusive, transparent process for recruitment ensuring best candidates for role
- Expedient workflow; reducing time to hire to reduce vacancy strain on existing employees and to retain candidates through the recruitment process
- Ability to hire for experience and skills; ensuring job descriptions are representative of success factors in roles, where good candidates are not declined unnecessarily, making the recruitment process more inclusive
- Strategic approach to internal people movement and opportunities; ensuring stability in teams; ensuring policies, procedures and practices support efficient, equitable internal movement of candidates
- Strong candidate pools; providing hiring managers with the ability to identify and select candidates that will be the most successful in the role

Onboarding

- Ease of paperwork submission; as this is the cross over between the candidate and employee experience, ensuring that new employees feel supported from the moment they join the Region and that we are not losing employees through the onboarding process, this is also supportive of moving people quickly from offer to first day on job
- Access to information about the organization, role and total rewards; connecting new employees quickly and effectively to the elements they require to understand the organization and how to navigate within it, information for their role and allow them to understand and leverage Total Rewards and other offerings that are important to them and part of the advertised Brand/Value Proposition

- Connection to leader and team; understanding key success factors, objectives, collaboration and socialization
- Support for internal hires; supporting existing employees as they move across the organization in new roles

Development and Learning

- Multi-modal learning – channels and experiences; accessibility of learning was a key topic; employees and leaders require learning opportunities that align with their time and preferred learning styles, making corporate learning more accessible
- Learning focus on mental health, safety and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; employees and leaders are looking for formal training and self-study resources to expand personal knowledge and to support employees in the workplace
- Job and/or team specific training; support with training and learning that is function specific
- Leadership development prep programs; those interested in becoming a leader as a part of their career path seek development that will support them in understanding the role of a leader and begin the process of developing the competencies required for leadership
- Professional development for intermediate leaders; experienced leaders require ongoing development in a collaborative peer environment
- Competency/skill-based leadership development; becoming specific regarding the attitudes and behaviours required of a leader at Niagara Region; continuing to develop leaders based on core knowledge and skills

Growth, Success and Mobility

- Succession programs; formally identifying and developing key talent
- Career ladder development and programs; supporting employees in understanding career opportunities within the Region and how to align development planning
- Workforce planning; supporting business continuity through critical role planning (temporary staff fulfillment during recruitment process); future planning for vacancies; ensuring required skill sets and work alignment in the future
- Ease of movement for key talent; strategic approach to internal people movement and opportunities; ensuring stability in teams; ensuring policies, procedures and practices support efficient, equitable internal movement of candidates
- Better performance management program; assessment and restructure of performance management and appraisal program

Engagement and Retention

- A values-based, inclusive culture; where employees and leaders demonstrate the values and inclusivity in their approach to people and work
- Progressive and collaborative peers and leaders
- Link to corporate strategy and clarity around role and responsibilities
- Understand the importance of work contributions; this is a differentiator for the Region, a key engagement factor and attraction factor is work that matters to the community and makes an impact in the community both directly and indirectly
- Supportive and strong leaders; employees acknowledge the importance of leaders in creating

and sustaining a strong, inclusive, values driven culture and workplaces

- Strategic investments in benefits based on the needs of the employees, organization and disease states
- Understanding and access to wellness, benefit programs and resources; empowering employees to manage their own health and wellness
- Understanding and access to resources to support significant life/health events and requirements
- Clear processes and accountabilities in relation to reporting and responding to incidents that go against respectful workplace conduct
- Flexibility and work-life balance, ensuring employees are able to achieve this in the context of their role
- Access to time-off for mental health, medical and religious holidays
- Compensation strategies for hard-to-fill roles, and hard to retain roles; ensuring Niagara Region is competitive

Offboarding

- Understanding and access to retirement resources
- Data and knowledge to understand voluntary employee departures

As the People Plan is an employee-centric plan, it is critical that the Plan be presented in a way that employees can see themselves in it - feeling heard and supported. To this end, working across the employee lifecycle, four key themes were identified: Top Talent, Strong Leaders, Flexible Workplaces and Healthy and Well Employees and Workplaces. In the next section “At the Heart of our People Plan” there is an explanation of each theme with related action items.

At the Heart of Our People Plan



Our 2023 - 2026 People Plan is anchored in four themes that reflect the requirements of our employees, leaders and organization:

- **Top talent**
- **Strong leaders**
- **Flexible workplaces**
- **Healthy and well employees and workplaces**

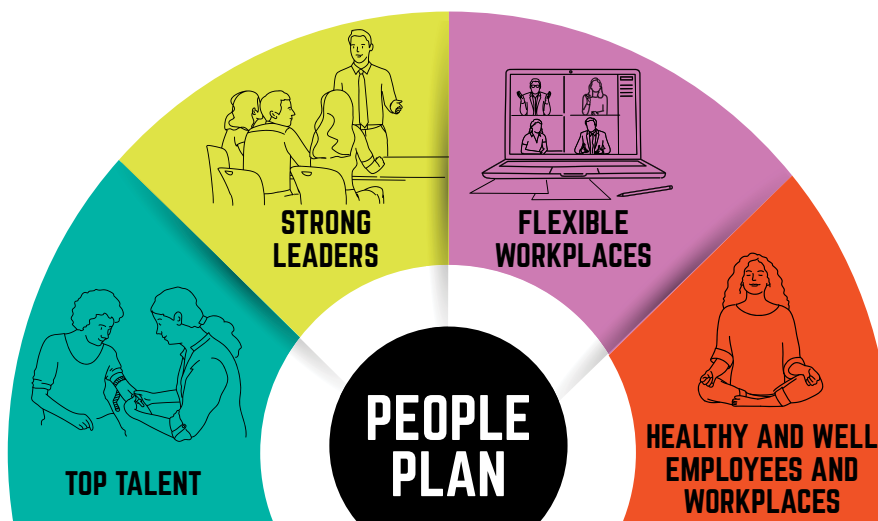
These themes were identified through employee and leadership input, validated against prior employee feedback including the 2020 COVID-19 Employee Survey, 2019 Employee Engagement Survey, internal (Region) people data and balanced against best practice research. The Plan model also identifies key drivers; making this the employee-centric plan it aspires to be.

Recognizing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion's significance across all four themes, it has intentionally been integrated throughout the plan rather than separating it as a distinct theme. Quite simply, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion needs to be a part of everything we say and do at the Region and to this end, is throughout the plan.

Fundamental to the plan is the interdependencies of the four themes. No one theme can be successful without the others. We require flexibility in our policies, practices and approach to enable change in the four themes. Health and wellness is dependant in part on workplace environments and flexibility, and is also very connected to the strength of our leadership team. Our employees must feel supported and have strong leaders to identify their key strengths, and support their professional and/or career growth. When engaging in feedback and input with our employees, regardless of the topic, we would hear “.....and our leader.....”; connecting their perceived role of their leader or leadership team in enabling the stated requirement.

Another interdependency required for the success of the People Plan is the support, understanding, engagement and ownership of the People Plan by our employees and leaders. The People Plan is about creating an employee-centric workplace that everyone can thrive in. Ultimately the People Plan is how we choose to engage as individuals in our own development; how we choose to support our peers; how our leaders choose to lead and model inclusive behaviour; as an organization, we intend to support programs and initiatives within it. It is also about the development and interpretation of policies and procedures.

By continuing to support and grow in each of the four theme areas, Niagara Region will foster environments where everyone feels included and can be their best.



Our People Plan



Top Talent

Niagara Region attracts, selects and grows strong talented employees who align with our values and enable our community-driven mission

Top Talent grew from the belief of our employees and leaders that skilled employees, who are well suited to their roles, and have meaningful opportunities to grow, is the formula for the achievement of top talent. We also heard loud and clear that for our employees to truly be engaged in the work that they do, they need to understand how their role makes a difference in their community, their organization and the people they serve.

Another clear and universal message was that the engagement, acquisition, development and retention of top talent is not wholly dependant on any one People Plan factor; instead, Top Talent, is inclusive of effective execution of the other three themes of the People Plan: Healthy and Well Employees and Workplaces, Flexible Workplace and in particular, Strong Leaders.

Our focus for Top Talent

Attract the best possible talent to our organization through inclusive and meaningful work, strong leaders and competitive offerings

Hire the right people for the right roles, have effective candidate pipelines, engage in succession planning for hard to fill and critical roles; ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion, in our hiring practices, approach and population

Grow our employees while in their new, current roles and/or for their future roles

Internal movement to provide permanent and temporary career opportunities for our employees; making employee selection and movement into new roles equitable, effective and efficient; maintaining operational stability

Retain top talent reducing employee turnover

At an individual level, everyone has a different idea of career and what they want to achieve. Quite often, employees will evolve their notion of career at different points in their employee lifecycle, wanting different things at different times. Career and professional choices often result from a desire to do well and grow in a new or current role; efforts to maintain work-life balance, or as a part of their career journey. To this end, we must be able to support people in creating and executing on short and longer term career goals.

Organizational fit is important. As an organization, we need to be adept at not only attracting talent to our organization, but creating a clear and accurate picture of our culture, our organization and the roles available. This involves building and upholding a culture that is inclusive for all employees so that they can maximize their individual potential, while working towards shared Regional goals. It is important that future employees choose us because of our value proposition, a place where individuals can make a meaningful impact. To accomplish this, our hiring managers must be skilled at selecting top talent; removing barriers to job entry for qualified applicants and identifying and supporting motivated employees who possess the necessary knowledge, skills and experience.

As we explore Top Talent, we must continue to grow our existing employees to keep pace with changes in their current roles and for future roles. It is important we are identifying and developing employees succeeding who have potential for advancement within the organization. Business continuity demands that we are creating readiness for employees to step into critical roles, supported by efficient policies and procedures to enable ease of transfer and reward our employees taking on new challenges.

We heard from our employees that being successful in their work is important to them. Line of sight to key priorities and strategic drivers at all organizational levels is viewed not as a nice to have but as a need to have. We also understand that employees must feel connected to, and supported by, employee rewards programs and offerings that foster attraction, engagement and high-performance, positioning Niagara Region as an employer of choice.

Lastly, we need to be able to retain our top talent. Employees stay at organizations where they are part of a supportive system. Where they feel they have leaders who support them in their work and career. Employees stay at organizations where they feel recognized and rewarded; their contributions are noticed and valued; and where they believe there is fair compensation and benefits. Employees stay at organizations where they are supported in reasonably managing their personal and professional priorities within the context of their working life at Niagara Region. For Niagara Region employees, they also stay when they feel their work makes a difference in their community, for their residents and organization.

During the development of this plan, opportunities presented themselves to align to the People Plan. In 2022 the following was completed:

- Corporate Learning Calendar courses were evaluated for alignment to the People Plan; as a result, some courses were discontinued and additional courses were adopted
- Working with our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team, a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion recruitment question set has been finalized. The purpose of these questions is to assess the applicant's skills and knowledge on the value and importance of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.
- A Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Award of Excellence was launched in 2023 in collaboration with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Team. This award was created to highlight the permanence and importance of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in our

workplace. It is also to reinforce positive behaviours by recognizing a peer role model.

- The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team is executing on a corporate learning plan, which is aligned to this strategy
- Long-term Care Recruitment project. This project addresses attraction and retention issues in Long-term Care. Through this project, significant workflow issues were addressed; greater maximization of existing technology, Candidate Gateway expanded usage in PeopleSoft, and retention strategies in Long-term Care. The decision was made to suspend use of Lifemark assessments as a part of the onboarding process to help reduce the amount of time to an employees' start date. To further reduce time to start date, new Long-term Care employees are offered in-house tuberculosis (TB) testing. As a result of this project, Long-term Care benefited from a 70 per cent reduction in vacancies compared to 2020 (2020, 150 vacancies, 2022 50 vacancies). This work will continue through 2023 as part of a second phase.
- Attraction and selection practices and enhancements/candidate pipeline:
 - Temporary employee position was leveraged to revitalize our social media presence for attraction purposes and to work with Corporate Communications to revitalize our careers website
 - Employment branding language was developed based on the People Plan and used on LinkedIn and Indeed sites, creating consistency in language and appearance. A posting strategy was developed and executed, to provide insights into life at the Region with a particular focus on People Plan themes such as recognition. As a result 9,671 page views (up 1141.1 per cent from 2021); 7,453 unique visitors to our LinkedIn Page (up 1,094.4 per cent up from 2021; Average of 300+ new followers each month.
 - This role has also taken their brand concept and created collateral for job fairs and other attraction collateral supporting candidate pipeline/targeted attraction work

- VidCruiter, a recruitment tool, has been purchased to help reduce time from application to start date. This tool has been launched in Long-term Care and is initiating in the remainder of Community Services in 2023 with roll out scheduled for the rest of the organization through 2024/2025.
- Expanded our use of Indeed recruitment to enhance our site and enable our ability to recruit within the tool. LinkedIn and Indeed are the primary recruitment sites visited by candidates interested in roles at the Region.

Key Initiatives 2023 - 2026

- **Leadership exploration learning path for non-leaders (2023):** providing classroom and just-in-time learning opportunities for non-leaders to understand the role of a leader, including expectations and competencies, at Niagara Region. The intention is for employees to identify whether people leadership is something that aligns with their interests and career goals, as well as to provide opportunities to develop leadership competencies.
- **Critical role and high potential stay interviews (2024):** a standardized question set that will be utilized with employees in critical roles and/or are high potential. The goal being to aid retention of the employees through a discovery of what they like about their role, and what they would like to change. Stay interviews are an opportunity to both uncover what motivates that employee and to also build trust and engagement.
- **Competency based questions for people leaders (2025):** will develop a competency set for leadership that will translate into questions to ensure consistency in behaviour/attitudinal questions across all leadership roles at the Region
- **Mentorship program review (2025):** will lead a review of current Mentorship program to determine how it can better support our People Plan and provide the best possible mentorship experience for participants

Strong Leaders

Niagara Region is guided by inclusive leaders that are driven to grow and support their employees, recognize achievements and create employee connections to work priorities and strategic drivers

An important message we received from leaders and employees through our People Plan engagement process, is that leaders are at the heart of the employee experience. Employees look to their leaders to provide context for work priorities, provide direction on accountabilities, break down success barriers, and to be a partner in their current and future job/career related goals. Senior leaders rely on our leadership team to drive our organization forward and to ensure the programs and services we deliver are timely, relevant and high quality. Senior leaders also look to our leadership team to create and maintain work environments where our employees want to stay, grow and do their best work. Our managers and supervisors look to their leaders to provide strategic direction and the resources and tools required to be successful.

Our focus for Strong Leaders

Develop and grow leadership skills to enable employees for success in their current and future role(s)

Recognize individual employees and teams in ways that are meaningful to them

Cultivate and promote inclusive work environments

Link work to plan supporting employees in understanding how the work they do supports our residents, community and our organization's priorities

Niagara Region has a broad range of leadership positions. Within this range of leadership, expectations and accountabilities vary from directing the work of a specific function to providing strategic oversight of an entire department or organization. What is common among all our leadership roles, is that our leaders have accountability in shaping and sustaining the employee experience. A key theme in the People Plan is Strong Leaders. The defining element between a leader and a Strong Leader is that a Strong Leader understands that leadership is a practice. Leadership is something that a leader is continually refining in an effort to enable service excellence and engage individuals and teams to meet business requirements today and tomorrow.

Leaders are accountable for cultivating employee inclusion and belonging, ensuring employees feel recognized and valued for their unique strengths, as well as the contributions and effort they bring to their work, team(s) and community. Leaders are critical in fostering a values-based culture where respect, inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility principles and practices are the foundation of what we say and do. Strong Leaders encourage diversity of thought, new ideas and experiences, and the use of best practices and tools. Employees prosper with support from leaders who motivate, model the way, and create a clear and inspiring purpose and vision.

Strong Leaders also understand that their employees and teams need their support in their professional pursuits, and in some circumstances in providing flexibility and direction to resources to manage their personal situations. They understand their role in directing employees to available Region resources and/or tools, and the importance of being reasonably flexible to ensure employees are able to be their best and do their best.

Strong Leaders cannot be successful on their own. Their success, in part, is dependant on the system in which they work. Leaders need Strong Leaders who are growing and supporting them in the development of their leadership practice, providing them with insights into the impact they are having on others

and the work, as well as providing them access to the knowledge, skills and experiences required for their on going development. Strong Leaders also need to be recognized and rewarded for the work they do and have policies, procedures and resources supportive of role success.

During the development of this plan, opportunities presented themselves to align to the People Plan. In 2022 the following was completed:

- **LinkedIn learning for leaders pilot:** we heard from leaders that they required greater flexibility in their learning options, specifically access to just in time learning. To this end, we launched a one year pilot in January 2023 providing all people leaders with access to LinkedIn Learning with 50 per cent of all licenses activated in the first 60 days of access.
- **McMaster DeGroote mid-career leadership program:** our experienced people leaders were seeking opportunities to continue their professional development in a structured way. They wanted access to programming that would develop their leadership skill set. We launched our one year learning program with McMaster's DeGroote School of Business in January 2023. 20 people leaders from a variety of departments and roles (e.g. supervisors to directors) are participating in this program, which will culminate in a Capstone project. The Capstone will provide leaders with an opportunity to provide a recommended solution for a real issue and/or focus area for Niagara Region.

Key Initiatives 2023 - 2026

- **Leadership objective to support the People Plan (2023):** with the launch of the Plan, a formal leadership objective will be created. All leaders will be assessed against the objective as a part of their annual performance appraisal.
- **Inclusive leadership development Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (2023):** led by our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Indigenous Relations team, required leadership learning will be issued to all new and existing people leaders

- **Leadership expectations (2023):** as part of the program launch, work will begin with the Director level leaders to identify and formalize leadership expectations aligned to the People Plan. These expectations will be incorporated into new leader onboarding and learning, performance appraisals, competency development and assessments for new and existing leaders. They will also be utilized in our employment brand.
- **New leader supports for internal/external leaders (2024):** we have heard from our leaders that additional supports are required for on-the-job success. This requirement is for leaders new to our organization as well as leaders who are new to their role. This has been selected as a Capstone project topic (McMaster DeGroote leadership program 2023).
- **Succession and critical role panning (2024):** supporting the development and retention of top talent in our organization by increasing internal movement of top talent, specifically succession talent, across our organization. Our former Succession and Critical role program is being assessed, evaluated and redesigned for a 2024 relaunch. This work also supports internal talent as best long term candidates and short term solutions for critical roles. This work will look at policies, recruitment and pay treatments that support succession planning. Have funded, actioned development programs with shared accountability between employee and leader.
- **Leadership assessments (2025):** it is important that leaders understand the impact of their leadership on direct reports, peers and interested parties. As a part of the overall performance management and performance feedback process, we will engage in scheduled leadership reviews. This will be inclusive of 360 or Individual assessments, to be determined for each individual leader.

Flexible Workplace

Niagara Region is an employee-centric organization where our policies, procedures and practices are supportive of engaging in the best possible solution for our employees, service delivery and our community

Niagara Region has over 3,500 employees working in our many, diverse programs and services. Our employees have different work arrangements, different skill sets and different accountabilities. Our employees have different work experiences and different life experiences. We are an organization of individuals.

Our employees drive our programs and services. Our employees make the needs, requirements and well-being of the residents of Niagara, our greater Niagara community, and our many visitors their priority. Our employees are community-centric. It is our challenge to be an employee-centric organization, firmly placing our employees at the centre; being an organization where our employees feel connected to our organization, and feel that our practices reasonably support employees in prioritizing what is most important to them. This includes supporting employees in critical areas such as health, wellness, lifestyle, relationships, ethnic/cultural heritage, religion/spirituality, and careers in the context of their working life at Niagara Region.

Our focus for a Flexible Workplace

Work-life balance where employees are able to establish and maintain a reasonable balance between the demands of their working and personal lives

Policy and procedures that are aligned to the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion, and support flexible workplace practices in all areas of the People Plan

An employee-centric work environment requires strong, supportive leadership that continuously seeks to welcome, grow, recognize, include and connect team members to meaningful work. Further, an employee-centric work environment is one which supports its employees in their overall health and wellness. Our employees made it clear that work–life balance is important to them. They talked about their commitment to their work and the people they serve, also stressing the importance of being able to take uninterrupted time away from their work to recharge and reset. Time away from work was identified as critical to avoid burnout and to maintain engagement. Our employees talked about alternate work arrangements. Many employees based on their role, through COVID-19, learned that they can be productive working from home. Many cited an enhanced ability to focus and increase their productivity. It was also felt that working from home, in some capacity, provided an element of work–life balance. Leaders mentioned the competitive advantage of working from home arrangements for some roles in hiring and retaining talent. It must also be noted that many of our employees must be at their physical work location every time they work to support service delivery. It is incumbent on our organization to understand and enable work-life balance across multiple lines of business, shifts, roles and breadth in service delivery.

Time is important to our employees. For example, many employees celebrate important cultural events outside of our statutory holidays. We heard about challenges of being able to reasonably have time off to celebrate with friends and family. We heard about challenges in getting time for appointments with practitioners other than physicians. We heard from employees and leaders

that they would like a better understanding of our policies and procedures relating to work–life balance, attendance supports, hybrid work and other areas that lend themselves to flexibility.

Workplace flexibility is about creating policies, procedures and practices that are supportive of engaging in the best possible solution for our employees, service delivery and our community. Flexibility requires leaders and employees to understand policies and procedures and collective agreements, ensuring we are doing our reasonable best for our employees and our community. During the development of this Plan, opportunities presented themselves to align to the People Plan. In 2022 the following was completed:

- **Hybrid work program review:** a survey was completed to understand the overall satisfaction level with the current Hybrid work program. Recommendations to maintain program were presented and approved.
- **Grade 12 and out of country qualifications for recruitment procedure:** to ensure maximum flexibility in our recruitment process, and to eliminate a barrier to accessing talent, a new procedure was created allowing for alternates to the General Education Development (GED) certificate requirements and to allow for the Region to accept some Out-of-Country qualifications. These changes resulted in higher volume hiring activity in our long-term care homes, significantly reducing vacant positions.

Key Initiatives 2023 - 2026

- **Policy and Procedure Recruitment Refresh for Ease of Internal and External Hire (2023):** review of current policies and procedures relating to internal and external hiring to ensure they are inclusive and supportive

- **Work-life balance program review (2023):** defining what work-life balance means and understanding the existing options and opportunities in different parts of our organization. Recommendations for future will result from this process.
- **Employee Centre/Vine review (2023):** the Employee Centre is the key information source for employees relating to their employment. It is critical that this site presents information in a way that resonates with employees, is accessible and has the information they require to manage their working life.
- **Policy review (2024):** will review current policies relating to our employees' experience to ensure they are inclusive and are aligned to diverse individual and program needs

Healthy and Well Employees and Workplaces

Niagara Region creates and supports psychologically healthy and safe workplaces and overall positive health and well-being for employees

The theme of Healthy and Well Employees and Workplaces acknowledges that health and wellness extends beyond safety on the job. While on the job safety is critical and will always be a priority; overall physical and mental health requires equal consideration and prioritization as a key issue for our organization. The theme of Healthy and Well Employees and Workplaces is inclusive of programs and services provided, organizational support, policies and procedures and most importantly, the ownership and commitment of staff and leaders to foster and sustain healthy and well work environments.

Our focus for Healthy and Well Employees and Workplaces

Benefits that are inclusive and support overall health and wellness

Supportive leadership that are inclusive and support overall health, wellness and lifestyle, and understand their role in the overall health and wellness of employees in the workplace

Access to mental health resources that are supportive of health and wellness in the workplace – where employees understand the resources available and are comfortable accessing them

Our employees want to work for an organization that values and promotes their overall health, safety and wellness.

The topic of health and wellness is very important to our employees and was a consistent source of discussion and feedback. What we learned through our employee engagement process is that health and wellness does not have one definition. For many, it meant safety on the job. It also meant having access to proactive options including fitness facilities, paramedical services, counselling and other wellness resources.

We heard that safety and wellness is also about working within an equitable and inclusive environment, with supportive peers and leaders - where one is able to do their best work. We heard about the importance of having access to safety and wellness benefits and resources for our employees and their families. Lastly, we heard about the significance of having programs and policies that are supportive of employees managing health challenges, and their ability to remain in or return to the workplace. We also heard loud and clear, that health and wellness requires having access to supportive mental health programs and benefits.

While access to effective tools, resources and programs is essential for Healthy and Well Workplaces the impact of the work environment on health and wellness cannot be underestimated. Employees need to feel respected and supported in safely executing their role, in a physically safe environment. There also needs to be a shared understanding for the importance of working in, and enabling, an inclusive and respectful environment. The role of all employees as peers, team members and leaders in cultivating and holding each other accountable to safe environments is a critical part of our corporate culture and our People Plan. The open and honest conversations with our employees challenged us to frame health and wellness in a way that is productive for our organization and our employees. As an organization, having informed and supportive employees (team members) and leaders is paramount. We need inclusive and supportive policies, procedures and benefits.

We need to have access to tools and resources that reasonably empower employees to understand and access resources that are supportive of their requirements.

During the development of this Plan, opportunities presented themselves to align to the People Plan. In 2022 the following was completed:

- **Pharmacy speciality care program:** through our partner, Green Shield, we launched the Preferred Pharmacy Network to provide our employees with the option for home delivery of medication for over 170 specialized medications, as well as clinical expertise relating to their medications.

Key Initiatives 2023 - 2026

- **Non-union compensation and benefit review:** working with external consultants, this will be a comprehensive review of our current benefit and compensation strategies. The focus will be on competitiveness, equity, affordability, current trends and inclusion. Program changes and related cost recommendations will be presented for approval.
- **Leader health and wellness toolkit (2023):** we will provide leaders with resources for their own knowledge and development in areas of health and wellness, as well as to enhance their ability to direct employees to information on resources that will support their needs and requirements
- **Healthy and well employee working group (2023):** a cross functional employee group will be created to provide input and feedback on health and wellness at Niagara Region
- **Employee resources/supports awareness Campaign (2023):** to provide employees with resources for their own knowledge and development in areas of health and wellness on a regular basis, across multiple mediums
- **Mental health training for leaders (2025):** all people leaders engage in mandatory mental health training program
- **Change of life resources (2025):** will develop reference materials that enables employees to self navigate through critical life situations where they need to engage with our partners such as Green Shield, OMERS and Sun Life

Measuring Progress

To ensure that this Plan is sustainable and meets our intended outcomes, a robust evaluation strategy has been developed. This evaluation plan will include a corporate dashboard which features metrics for employees, the Corporate Leadership Team, leadership, and human resources.

The intention of the evaluation plan is to ensure that each audience has the information required to:

- Feel connected to the plan
- Track progress and success at a level that is appropriate for different interested parties roles
- Dive deeper into results to grow or correct where required

Plan progress and effectiveness data is to be collected based on output measures (quantity/usage) and performance measures (quality/effectiveness) and target measures which will be featured in a corporate dashboard. The metrics package (dashboard, output and performance measures) is directly aligned to the key intentions of the People Plan. For example, our intention to “Attract the best possible talent to our organization through inclusive and meaningful work, strong leaders and competitive offerings”, has its own set of performance, output and a dashboard measures. These metrics alignment will provide the appropriate interested parties with the depth of information required to understand, expand or course correct as required.

Data and information will be collected through a number of sources:

- **Engagement survey:** the most effective way to understand how different plan elements and the plan itself resonates with our employees is through an engagement survey. It is intended that the Region will engage in a regular feedback process, through an engagement survey every third year, and pulse surveys in the ‘in between’ years.
- **Human Resources Information System:** will include recruitment data, candidate self-identification (diversity), internal/external hire data, promotions, retention, employee time
- **Manual tracking:** tracking will reference referral program usage (future); critical role and high potential (current), hard to fill roles, mentorship program, recognition, leadership assessments, performance management (current), and hybrid work
- **Software:** tools and resources will be reviewed including: succession talent (future), learning, engagement survey, performance management (future), benefits, and wellness/health resources

The information collected will be shared in a number of ways:

- **People Plan dashboard:** this will be available for all Region employees, and will provide high level metrics alongside context, that will allow everyone to track Plan progress and understand the metrics provided. This data is likely to be a combination of metrics from all sources listed above, with progress updated bi-annually, annually or every third year, depending on the metric and how the information is collected. Region Business Intelligence data warehouse will be increasingly leveraged as Human Resources information becomes more available in the tool.
- **Corporate Leadership Team reporting:** regular updates will be provided to Corporate Leadership Team on Plan progress and effectiveness
- **Management and employee updates:** reporting on plan progress, and effectiveness will be provided through a number of methods as outlined in our roll out/communication plan
- **Human Resources and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team:** access to all appropriate metrics will be provided to support the program/initiative owner in managing their program(s)

Dashboard Metrics

Overall Engagement Metric

Niagara Region engagement score of 75 per cent by 2027

Top Talent

Objectives	Success Measures	Targets
Attract the best possible talent to our organization through inclusive and meaningful work, strong leaders and competitive offerings	Quality of candidate pool	30 per cent of applicants identified as 'interested' or 'interview' in permanent roles candidate pools by 2027 - PeopleSoft (Benchmark 12 per cent)
Hire the right people for the right roles, have effective candidate pipelines, engage in succession planning for hard to fill and critical roles; ensuring diversity in our hiring practices, approach and population	Preferred candidate acceptance success rate	90 per cent of offers accepted by preferred candidate by 2027 - PeopleSoft (Benchmark 85 per cent)
Grow our employees while in their new, current, and/or for their future role(s)	Employee perception of their ability to grow and develop professionally at Region	80 per cent of employees agree they are able to grow and develop at Region - Engagement survey (Benchmark 73 per cent)
Internal movement - provide permanent and temporary career opportunities for our employees; making employee selection and movement into new roles equitable, effective and efficient; maintaining operational stability	Leader roles filled Internally	68 per cent of people leader roles are filled internally by 2027 - Currently 81 per cent for reporting period July 1-Dec 31 2022
Retain top talent reducing employee turn-over	Overall retention rate	80 per cent of permanent Region employees choose to stay with Niagara Region by 2027 - Currently 90 days - 92 per cent, one year - 78 per cent, three years - 52 per cent, ten years - 63 per cent

Strong Leaders

Objectives	Success Measures	Targets
Develop and grow leadership skills to enable employee success in their current and future role(s)	Strength of leadership team	- Overall employee rating of 85 per cent or better on strength of leadership team by 2027 - Engagement survey (Benchmark 60 per cent)
Recognize individual employees and teams in ways that are meaningful to them	Recognition by leadership team	80 per cent of employees feel recognized by their leadership team by 2027 - Engagement survey (Benchmark not available)
Cultivate and promote inclusive work environments	Inclusive work environments	85 per cent of employees agree that their immediate manager creates an inclusive work environment where they feel heard, respected, and valued by 2027 - Engagement survey 79 per cent
Link to work plan supporting employees in understanding how the work they do supports our residents, community, and our organization's priorities	Link to work plan	90 per cent of employees understand how/believe their work makes a difference (meaningful) by 2027 - Engagement survey (Benchmark 90 per cent)

Flexible Workplaces

Objectives

Work-life balance where employees are able to establish and maintain a reasonable balance between the demands of their working and personal lives

Success Measures

Work-life balance

Targets

- 75 per cent of employees agree that they have work-life balance by 2027
- Engagement Survey (Benchmark 68 per cent)



Healthy and Well Employees and Workplaces

Objectives	Success Measures	Targets
Supportive leadership who understand their role in creating a culture of health and wellness and their role in the overall health and wellness of employees in the workplace	Leadership team supportive of health and well-being	80 per cent of employees agree that their leadership team supports their overall health and well-being by 2027 - Engagement survey (Benchmark not available)
Access to mental health resources that are supportive of health and wellness in the workplace - where employees understand the resources available and are comfortable accessing them	Employee satisfaction with available resources Employee awareness of available resources	80 per cent of employees are satisfied with the mental health resources available to them by 2027 - Engagement survey (Benchmark not available) - Benefits that are inclusive and support overall health and wellness - Target: 80 per cent of employees agree that their benefits package supports their overall health and wellness by 2027 - Engagement Survey (Benchmark not available) 80 per cent of employees are aware of the mental health resources available to them by 2027 - Engagement survey (Benchmark not available)

Conclusion

The 2023 - 2026 People Plan is our framework for people practices at Niagara Region. The success of this Plan is largely dependant on the support of our organization in shaping policies and procedures, as well as during bargaining and in providing required resources. Plan success will also be driven by our Strong Leaders. We look to our talented and committed leadership team at Niagara Region to join us in bringing this Plan to life, adopting the key principles and themes into their leadership practice. Lastly, success is driven through employee ownership; creating an inclusive, employee-centric environment for themselves and for others.

A common challenge with a multi-year plan, like our People Plan, is keeping it alive over time. Efforts towards momentum and sustainment have already started by integrating the principles into our collective bargaining, recruitment practices, our Total Rewards Plan, and through our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan. Regular internal communications and social media highlights, have and will feature aspects of the Plan, such as employee recognition or sharing our value proposition. In this document, we have provided insights into key projects that will drive our Plan forward, and how we will track and measure our success. An important aspect of driving this Plan forward is employee input. We will continue to seek out employee feedback and perspectives through engagement and pulse surveys, as well as other outreach methods to understand the impact of our Plan and to course correct, as necessary.

Our work to sustain the Plan will be supported and guided by integrated people related consultation, research, data, analytics, relationships and policies that enable strategic planning, decisions and operational accountabilities. In addition, efforts will be supported by effective workforce planning that strengthens our leadership team through effective people planning, as well as internal and external talent attraction and identification practices.

Lastly, the development of this Plan was a group effort. Our employees and leaders embraced this project through an incredible and much appreciated level of insight and feedback. A sincere thank you to the many employees who provided their feedback, ideas and insights; our Corporate Strategy Team partners who gave shape to our metrics work; our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Team Partners who reviewed and contributed to multiple drafts; our Communications partners for their support of our roll out plan and our Human Resources Team for their many contributions throughout the process. We also acknowledge and thank everyone who took the time to participate and help us shape our 2023 – 2026 People Plan.

Appendix A

We're Here For Niagara

Niagara Region is a regional municipality serving more than 480,000 people who call Niagara home. We provide services essential to day-to-day life, from clean water, roads and waste collection to public safety, housing, and more. We work hard every day to support our diverse community and make Niagara a more prosperous place for everyone.

We're One Team

We're inclusive, collaborative and treat each other with compassion and respect. We contribute to making a difference in the lives of our residents with care and excellence every day.

We're Here For Our Employees

At Niagara Region, we value our employees and strive to provide them with strong, inclusive and supportive environments that they can thrive in.

Our employees have purpose and their work directly impacts our residents and supports the growth of our community.

Supporting Our Employees: to support our employees we offer competitive salaries, comprehensive benefits and wellness programs, Industry leading pension plan (OMERS), flexible work options, employee and family assistance program, wellness centres and programs.

Supporting Our Communities: Niagara Region employees have been giving back to their community through the United Way for over 30 years. Regional staff have donated over \$2 million throughout the past 30 years to support United Way.

Inclusion And Belonging: the work being done at Niagara Region is meaningful, and our knowledge, skills and passion make positive impacts on our organization and the communities we serve. We all participate in a values-based culture where respect, inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility principles and practices are the foundation of what we say and do.

We continue to foster a collaborative network of leaders, peers and partners who encourage diversity of thought, and new ideas and experiences.

Growth And Performance: we believe that employees prosper with support from leaders who motivate, model the way, and inspire individuals and teams with purpose and vision.

We grow careers through fair and inclusive talent management practices. Providing our employees the opportunities to hone professional knowledge, skills and competencies through accessible learning opportunities and experiences.

We value and promote health, safety and wellness through activities, practices and policies.

YOU RADIATE PURE AWESOME!

Niagara  Region

June 2023

