

# **BUILDING AND SUSTAINING THE NEXT-GENERATION LAND-GRANT WORKFORCE AT K-STATE**

## **TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

JUNE 2023

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### **BACKGROUND**

Kansas State University is filled with dedicated faculty and staff who are passionate about the institution and committed to the success of the students and communities they serve. Many members of the K-State workforce are not only employees, but graduates and alumni of the institution with children who now attend the university, representing a full generational cycle of commitment to K-State.

In recent years, K-State has not been immune to workforce challenges that have impacted higher education institutions across the nation, where universities have struggled in maintaining high morale and retaining faculty and staff amidst increasing competition for talent, changing perceptions surrounding the value of higher education, changing demographics, shifting demand for and the very real challenges associated with responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, among other factors. At K-State, these challenges have been compounded by declining student enrollment and state funding that traditionally ranks in the bottom quartile nationwide, presenting budgetary impacts and straining resources that have impacted quality of life and stability among K-State's workforce. As K-State positions itself to become a next-generation land-grant university, it will be crucial to both address near-term challenges and build an environment long-term that attracts and retains top talent. In both scenarios, K-State must focus on building on, but not exclusively relying upon, the inherent passion and affinity faculty and staff hold for the university.

To start, K-State must establish a solid foundation that enables it to build the next-generation land-grant workforce, inclusive of a culture, systems, and structures that value, incentivize, recognize, and support faculty and staff – which is inclusive of both graduate students and undergraduate employees as valued members of the K-State workforce. This also comes with a recognition that expectations and preferences surrounding how people work are continually evolving. K-State must redefine its own workplace and workstyle culture as both a competitive workforce retention and recruitment strategy, as well as to elevate the work product of faculty and staff based on where they are best positioned to thrive. As K-State advances its strategic enrollment management initiative and grows student enrollment as a result, it must recognize that more efficient processes and the strategic increase of faculty, graduate students, and staff will be required to support these students. Further, as student demographics continue to evolve and K-State positions itself to attract more diverse students, the university must similarly adapt with a focus on workforce diversity and consider the experiences these learners have with the workforce in place to support them.

Underlying all of these strategies must be an inherent focus on driving robust communication across the institution, where the university is actively working to bridge siloes and build an environment that promotes and rewards knowledge sharing and collaboration among K-State’s workforce – one in which best practices are fluidly shared, faculty and staff actively work with one another across colleges and units, and the output of the university across all three pillars of teaching, research, and engagement is amplified in exciting, transformational ways.

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## PROCESS

A task force comprising some of the university’s leading voices and diverse perspectives assembled to better understand the current state of the workforce across the institution and identify opportunities to better support K-State employees.

### TASK FORCE MEMBERS

- Rana Johnson, Vice President for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, Task Force Co-Chair
- Karin Westman, Professor and Head, English, College of Arts & Sciences, Task Force Co-Chair
- David Brown, Director of Operations, Human Capital Services
- Marcellus Caldas, Professor, Geography & Geospatial Science, College of Arts & Sciences, and Assistant Provost for International Faculty Collaboration and Educational Programs
- Linda Craghead, Director of Facility Services, Administration and Finance
- Trisha Gott, Assistant Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Programs, Mary Lynn and Warren Staley School of Leadership
- Kevin Gwinner, Dean, College of Business Administration
- Troy Harding, Professor and Head, Integrated Studies, K-State Salina
- Derek Jackson, Associate Vice President Student Life, Housing & Dining
- Julia Keen, Professor, Architectural Engineering and Construction Science, Carl R. Ice College of Engineering
- Amanda McDiffett, Budget Director, College of Business Administration
- Audrey Mross, Attorney and Senior Partner, Munck, Wilson, Mandala in Dallas, TX, K-State Alumni
- Adam Petrea, Director of Project Management, Information Technology
- Marta Richenburg, Senior, History and Political Science, College of Arts & Sciences
- Meagan Sadler, Director of Business and Fiscal Affairs, K-State Olathe
- Anthony Tarpoff, Associate Professor, Animal Sciences & Industry, College of Agriculture
- Zane Whitney, Doctoral Student, History, College of Arts & Sciences
- John Wolf, Operations Manager, Animal Sciences & Industry, College of Agriculture
- Shanna Legleiter, Associate Vice President, Human Capital Services, ex-officio

This task force met four times from February to April 2023, participating in discussions, reviewing data and best practices, defining the ideal future state for K-State, and developing ideas for bridging the gap between the university’s current and future state.

The task force developed the following recommendations – including priority areas, initiatives, and metrics – that will guide progress related to the K-State workforce in the years to come.

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## PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

### **ESTABLISH K-STATE AS A LEADER AMONG LAND-GRANT INSTITUTIONS IN WORKFORCE COMPENSATION, BENEFITS, AND OPPORTUNITY**

Like students, faculty and staff are the heartbeat of any educational institution. A university's ability to attract and retain top talent is often contingent upon its ability to build a culture and environment where faculty and staff feel rewarded and appreciated for their contributions and commitment. While there are certainly other influencing factors, in today's competitive war for talent, employers must aggressively work to maintain pay practices and philosophies that demonstrate their commitment to their workforce.

As K-State works to adopt a next-generation mindset in all it does, the university must regularly evaluate and fund a competitive compensation structure to become a top employer of choice in the region and among peer institutions for prospective employees while demonstrating its value and appreciation for its current workforce. It must also build on recent successes and momentum in providing merit raises, creatively and aggressively working to identify ways to reward faculty and staff for their contributions in a way that is consistent and equitable across the institution. The same is true for how the university rewards and appreciates graduate students, who are an integral part of the K-State workforce. Effective, ongoing communications are also integral to advancing this priority. K-State must constantly work to understand the needs of its workforce to align compensation practices accordingly to what they value or need the most, while transparently communicating both the successes and challenges in a way that fosters understanding and support among the broad workforce – building an environment where faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate student employees are constantly reassured that as they work for the institution, the institution is also working for them.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

TIMEFRAME	HIGHER PRIORITY	LOWER PRIORITY
<p><b>SHORT-TERM (0-3 YEARS)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a modern compensation philosophy clearly outlining what K-State is striving towards in terms of competitive compensation practices and aligns compensation approaches across the institution</li> <li>• Complete a holistic position description and market compensation review for all faculty, staff, and graduate students and establish new compensation structure</li> <li>• Identify funding to offer equitable, competitive salaries and benefits</li> <li>• Establish robust and ongoing budget and compensation policy training for all college, unit, and department leaders</li> <li>• Create equitable and clearly defined career pathways for employees</li> <li>• Implement standard workforce development plans to include performance reviews, regular feedback, and consistent processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build an environment and standard approach for encouraging faculty sabbaticals</li> <li>• Explore additional benefits to support all employees</li> <li>• Establish more nimble policies for providing one-time bonuses and raises at the department or unit level to reward good work</li> </ul>
<p><b>LONGER-TERM (4-7+ YEARS)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move K-State to the top quartile in market-based compensation practices</li> <li>• Establish a baseline funding package and expectation for graduate students that can be supplemented by colleges or academic departments</li> <li>• Explore the feasibility of more flexible contract periods based on college, department, unit, or faculty needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand creative compensation and benefits structures with options tailored to employee needs (e.g. child care, elder care, transportation benefits, home office assistance, etc.)</li> <li>• Establish recruitment compensation pool for employees outside the state of Kansas to increase K-State’s national competitiveness</li> <li>• Establish annual cost of living compensation increases for all employees</li> </ul>

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## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

### **ATTRACT AND RETAIN HIGH-PERFORMING, TALENTED, ENGAGED, AND DIVERSE FACULTY AND STAFF**

While competitive compensation practices are a key influencer behind employee retention and recruitment, there are many other factors that contribute to a faculty or staff member's decision to work at a given institution. K-State must continually focus on identifying, recruiting, and retaining top talent deeply engaged in the university's mission who demonstrate alignment with and commitment to K-State's culture, values, and strategic direction.

Institutionally, as K-State works to diversify its student population and as it grows overall enrollment and opens its doors to different types of learners, it must prioritize recruiting and retaining high-performing faculty and staff, including graduate students and undergraduate employees, with similarly diverse backgrounds and experiences that mirror its student population and the state the university serves. In doing so, K-State must continually focus on building a workforce culture and promoting an environment that welcomes and celebrates diversity of thought, identity, and experience for all employees. K-State must also distinctly apply this focus toward graduate students in redefining the graduate student experience, appreciating and welcoming these students as valued members of the K-State workforce.

Beyond the hallmarks of culture, there are real opportunities to realign underlying processes and streamline pathways to increase the institution's competitiveness as an employer of diverse faculty and staff – from innovative mentorship and communication initiatives that foster a positive sense of place at the university for all employees to strategic employee recruitment and retention efforts, including a commitment to hybrid and remote work. This is a mindset and responsibility that must be shared broadly by all across the university. Ultimately, by prioritizing the university's standing as an employer of choice for diverse faculty and staff, K-State will not only create an environment that facilitates more robust and varied dialogue about the pressing issues of today and tomorrow, but support other key priority areas like growing student enrollment that are a direct reflection of maintaining a workforce they connect with and who best connect with and support them.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

TIMEFRAME	HIGHER PRIORITY	LOWER PRIORITY
<b>SHORT-TERM (0-3 YEARS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a culture of mentorship to support all faculty and staff</li> <li>• Expand access to professional development opportunities to build internal pipeline of talent</li> <li>• Enhance faculty and staff onboarding, to include cultural competence and awareness</li> <li>• Expand supports and programming for special employee populations like foreign nationals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equip alumni to serve as workforce recruitment ambassadors</li> <li>• Expand and innovate recruitment strategies beyond traditional job advertising</li> </ul>
<b>LONGER-TERM (4-7+ YEARS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand workforce culture surveys and demonstrate meaningful, positive change in overall workforce climate</li> <li>• Refine technology infrastructure to streamline job posting and application processes and experiences</li> <li>• Build relationships with target doctoral programs to recruit diverse graduates to work at K-State</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a cluster hiring initiative aligned with teaching and research priorities focused on increasing faculty diversity</li> </ul>

**ELEVATE EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AT ALL LEVELS OF THE UNIVERSITY**

In recent years, K-State faculty and staff have navigated numerous crises ranging from budget cuts to the COVID-19 pandemic, challenging the wellbeing of employees in unique and unprecedented ways. As the university reverses enrollment declines that have challenged budgets and destabilized employment levels and emerge from the pandemic, K-State must aggressively work to elevate employee wellbeing as an institutional priority – recognizing this sentiment as both a human imperative and that an empowered and content workforce leads to a more productive workforce.

The solutions to building such an environment are multifaceted in nature. In some instances, they include a more robust focus on training and development, focusing on flexible work arrangements that are consistent across the university and put talent in a position to do their best work, revisiting the university’s academic calendar in ways that better serve students and smooth workforce demands across the year, or increasing access to wellness resources and programming that rewards employees and builds community. Any such solutions must be mirrored by building a culture of continuous improvement across the university – from modernizing policies and processes that administratively challenge employees in performing their work to constantly reviewing and equitably distributing workloads among faculty and staff. In doing so, K-State will not only build an environment where people can do their best work, but one where people are energized, thriving, and empowered – and one that reaffirms the university’s standing as a place where people want to come and work.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

TIMEFRAME	HIGHER PRIORITY	LOWER PRIORITY
<b>SHORT-TERM (0-3 YEARS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote workforce reward and recognition for faculty and staff at all levels</li> <li>• Streamline key workflows and processes to reduce administrative burden</li> <li>• Revisit and modify university flexible work policy with a focus on overall university use, market competitiveness, and internal equity</li> <li>• Establish a university wellbeing philosophy</li> <li>• Expand mental health counseling and support resources for all employees (faculty, staff, graduate students)</li> <li>• Create one-stop online resource to direct employees to wellbeing resources in and outside the university</li> <li>• Continue to assess and balance employee workloads with a focus on equitable distribution of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modify policies to enhance the university's ability to reward and discipline employees based on performance</li> <li>• Require supervisors complete annual leadership and supervisory training</li> </ul>
<b>LONGER-TERM (4-7+ YEARS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance workspace accessibility and overall work environments</li> </ul>	

## SUCCESS DEFINED

The task force identified a number of prospective metrics to monitor the success of these priority recommendations and the outcomes they are designed to generate for the institution, including the following:

- Competitive minimum compensation for all faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate positions
- Competitive and equitable compensation
- Reduction in number of unfilled positions across the institution
- Foundationally stable, agile, and appropriately resourced workforce to meet future needs
- Faculty and staff retention rates
- Workforce demographics aligned with student demographics and state demographic trends
- Employee wellness, engagement, and satisfaction rates
- Increased support and resources for international hires that is comparable to peer institutions