

How Capital Region employers are recruiting and retaining workers

Email Share in Share Tweet Share Article Print Order Reprints



Susan Hollister, chief human resources officer for Pioneer Bank, says the bank has raised its entry-level wage to \$17 per hour.
DONNA ABBOTT-VLAHOS | ALBANY BUSINESS REVIEW



By Shelby Rosenberg
Jul 21, 2022 Updated Jul 22, 2022, 8:57am EDT

IN THIS ARTICLE

Recruiting & Hiring
Topic

Alaant Workforce
Solutions
Company

Pioneer Bank
Company

Miriam Dushane
Person

Susan Hollister
Person

Employers in the Capital Region are shoring up their workforces despite the threat of an economic downturn.

Although the national job openings rate decreased slightly in May, the most recent month for which data is available, that number has hovered around 7% since June of 2021- almost double what it was just before the pandemic started. Some employers are even turning to recruiters for the first time, as traditional hiring platforms fail to bring in the volume or quality of candidates they’re looking for.

As the fight for talent heats up alongside the cost of doing business, employers see labor as an area where they can’t risk cutting costs. In fact, they’re investing more in their workers.

“The majority of employers that we surveyed are staffing up hiring and they’re all continuing to hire far more people than they did, obviously, in past years with the pandemic,” said Miriam Dushane, managing partner of Alaant Workforce Solutions, an Albany-based recruiting and staffing agency. “It’s a very good job market in terms of people looking for jobs, and the companies we’re talking to are not slowing down their hiring at this point.”



Miriam Dushane is managing partner for Alaant Workforce Solutions.
DONNA ABBOTT-VLAHOS

Last month, Alaant released its Hiring Index survey, measuring hiring attitudes and plans among 82 hiring and human resource managers in the Capital Region. Of employers surveyed, 73% said they’ve increased hiring from last year, and 65% expect to increase hiring for the rest of 2022.

Susan Hollister, executive vice president and chief human resources officer at Pioneer Bank, said hiring for them is especially active in customer service, as well as customer-facing roles within insurance, wealth management and commercial lending.

Capital Region employers are also beefing up their employee incentives. Boosting salaries across the board and establishing a minimum starting salary were common responses among the employers surveyed. One of the companies surveyed, a manufacturing firm, opted to start all employees at \$25 an hour earlier this year.

Hollister said Pioneer’s minimum starting wage increased to \$17 an hour within the last few months - the first time it’s established a wage floor higher than the state minimum wage.

In addition to wages, Dushane is seeing a greater focus on other aspects of compensation, namely increasing contributions to employee health insurance and adding virtual mental health services. Embracing that trend, Pioneer recently partnered with Troy-based United Concierge Medicine Digital Health, which includes access to mental health counseling that Hollister says is one of their most popular benefits.

Employers are also finding ways to be more flexible with scheduling, particularly for companies with shift work that isn’t able to be done from home. For example, the manufacturing firm is phasing in a 2-3-2 schedule: an employee will never work more than three days in a row, and is guaranteed every other weekend off.

But even in companies where work can be done remotely, Dushane said employers’ willingness to offer that benefit is slowing, with less than half of the employers surveyed saying they plan to increase hybrid or remote work options.

“Flexibility on start and stop time, or being a little bit more creative on when people can come to work and how they get the work done, would be very beneficial to employers because that’s what we’re seeing some of the demands,” said Dushane. “Employees want flexibility, not necessarily that hybrid or remote work environment.”

Some employers are finding other creative solutions to bolster their workforce. For Pioneer, that’s come in the form of expanding its internship program.

“[Hiring interns] provides us with an opportunity to work with the emerging workforce and young professionals and help to develop that for future positions,” Hollister said. “So where some organizations that have faced challenges in hiring, we’ve found our internship program to be a great feeder pool to a number of our entry level positions.”

While Pioneer hasn’t struggled for labor overall, Hollister said they have had more difficulty recruiting for management-level positions, as these individuals now have more opportunities to work remotely for large international companies without leaving the Capital Region.

“On a very basic level, people have more choices than they ever did before, so you have to be in a constant evolution of improving your employee proposition,” said Hollister. “It’s a continuum of improvement, and listening and getting feedback from your employees, and just really believing in that. That’s how you really can survive an economic downturn.”