

## Strategy Guide: Employee Engagement and Retention

### Introduction

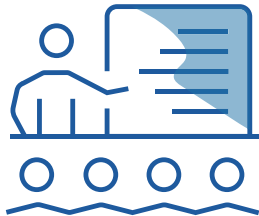
A healthy workplace environment is ideal for employees. According to Gallup, the work environment has the biggest influence on employee engagement and retention. A healthy work environment boosts employee morale, which can increase productivity and efficiency. When employees feel good about their work and their environment, they become more engaged in the workplace.

Engaged employees have never been more important to the mission than they are right now (Gallup, 2021). A Gallup survey revealed that organizations with high employee engagement are more resilient and able to manage through turbulent times. Engaged employees have a sense of belonging, staying power, and positive employee experiences. Although there is no single one-size fits all solution to improving employee engagement and retention, strong and intentional strategies improve engagement (Lavigna and Basso, 2020).

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## Defining...



### Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is the level of commitment of each employee to the organization and its goals. Employee engagement is demonstrated by how employees think, feel, and act. Engagement is also shown in the emotional connection employees feel towards the organization. In fact, employee engagement is now considered essential for bottom-line success. The study of engagement is constantly evolving (O’Gorman, 2020). We know that engaged employees are involved in and enthusiastic about their work and workplace (Harter, 2021). Engaged employees have a strong and deep connection to their work. They are deeply connected to their organization, their colleagues, and the people they serve (APHSa, 2020, p. 17). Research has shown that employee engagement improves retention, organizational performance, and improved outcomes for clients.

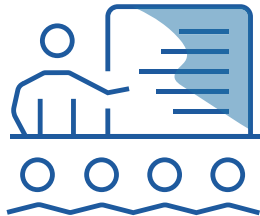


### Employee Retention

According to Wigston (2018), “Employees who are engaged are more likely to stay with their organization, reduce overall turnover, and the costs associated with it.” Additionally, they feel a stronger bond to their organization’s mission and purpose. This makes them more effective brand ambassadors. They also build stronger relationships with their customers.

To retain talent, employers are reviving stay tools. For example, the stay interviews. Stay interviews are one of the many tools that employers use to retain talent. A stay interview is different from a hiring interview or an exit interview. A stay interview explores what it will take to keep an employee. They focus on current employees that have not yet developed a reason to leave. Stay interviews are typically one-on-one meetings between managers and their employees. They discuss what’s going well, what’s not going well, and what could change. A major focus in these meetings is on the individuals’ professional and life goals (Morrison, 2021).

# Strategies to Consider



## Employee Engagement

There is not a single one-size fits all solution to improving employee engagement (Lavigna and Basso, 2020). However, the following strategies have proven effective:

- Measure employee engagement levels through weekly or monthly pulse surveys or focus groups
- Analyze and share employee feedback
- Use the findings from employee feedback to take action to improve employee engagement
- Evaluate actions and sustain engagement
- Incentivize loyalty by updating compensation packages, offering bonuses, paying off student loans, offering work from home stipends for non-classroom staff
- Offer growth and advancement opportunities
- Ask employees what it would take for them to stay
- Invest in taking care of your employees and their families
- Embrace flexibility and include employees in shaping the flexibility



## Employee Retention

Employee retention is expensive. Here are a few proven strategies to reduce costs and encourage employees to stay:

- Create professional development opportunities based on an employee's individual career needs
- Create career advancement opportunities
- Document an employee's experience journey, from pre-hire to post-exit
- Appreciate and recognize your employees
- Make sure your employees don't feel overworked and overwhelmed
- Create flexible working arrangements





# How the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and Employee Engagement and Retention **Align**



The following Head Start policies and regulations are directly linked to employee engagement and retention:

- [Strategies to Stabilize the Head Start Workforce ACF-IM-HS-22-06](#)
- [Office of Head Start \(OHS\) Expectations for Head Start Programs in Program Year \(PY\) 2021–2022 ACF-PI-HS-21-04](#)
- [Supporting the Wellness of All Staff in the Head Start Workforce ACF-IM-HS-21-05](#)
- [Training and professional development, 45 CFR §1302.92](#)
- [Management System, 1302.101\(a\)\(2\)](#)
- [Staff health and wellness, 45 CFR §1302.93](#)

## Knowledge of Employee Retention

Programs should implement strategies to retain their top talent. Strategies may include actionable tips or developing an employee retention plan. According to the Quantic Blog (n.d.), a feasible employee retention strategy is a distinctive marker of an organization destined for long-term success.

When programs create an intentional plan to retain talent, they save the time and resources they would use to hire and onboard new staff. Make it a difficult decision for your employees to leave by creating an effective employee retention plan. Include forward-thinking plans to improve revenue, productivity, and company culture.

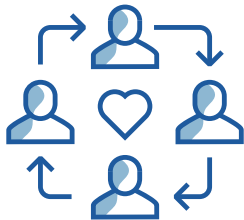
Follow these steps to create a workable employee retention plan:

1. Evaluate current employee retention strategies.
2. Document what you currently do and what you don't do.
3. Review relevant metrics and note how the findings impact them.
4. Ask your employees for feedback on what they desire. Don't make assumptions about your employees.
5. Meet employees individually and rally consensus.
6. Build on this consensus in the next stage.
7. Decide which strategies you're going to implement. This depends on the findings from your evaluation, a program's business model, and employee expectations.
8. Start implementing. Don't try to do it all at once. Note how employee engagement metrics change over a year.
9. Keep adding and testing to see what works.

# Knowledge of Employee Engagement Metrics

Employee engagement metrics affect organizations at macro levels such as financial, people performance, and operations (Gallup, Inc.). Each of these areas provide several micro level scores which, when combined, gives an overall metric of employee engagement. See: [The Essential List of Employee Engagement Metrics](#). These metrics may include:

People Performance Metrics	Financial Metrics	Operational Metrics
Productivity	Strategy	Output
Recognition	Retention	Loyalty
Skills	Training	Quality
Wellness	Occupational Health	Safety



## Knowledge of a Culture of Engagement

A culture of engagement is a set of accepted organizational values, behaviors, and practices which promote increasing levels of engagement as a cultural norm (Lavigna and Basso, 2020). Primary characteristics of this engagement culture include:

1. Regularly measuring engagement and acting on the results
2. Collaboratively working to improve engagement at every level of the organization
3. Making engagement efforts visible across the organization
4. Linking human resources systems to engagement (i.e., the organization hires, evaluates, rewards, advances, and trains with the goal of maintaining engagement)
5. Frequently communicating about engagement, particularly from senior leadership





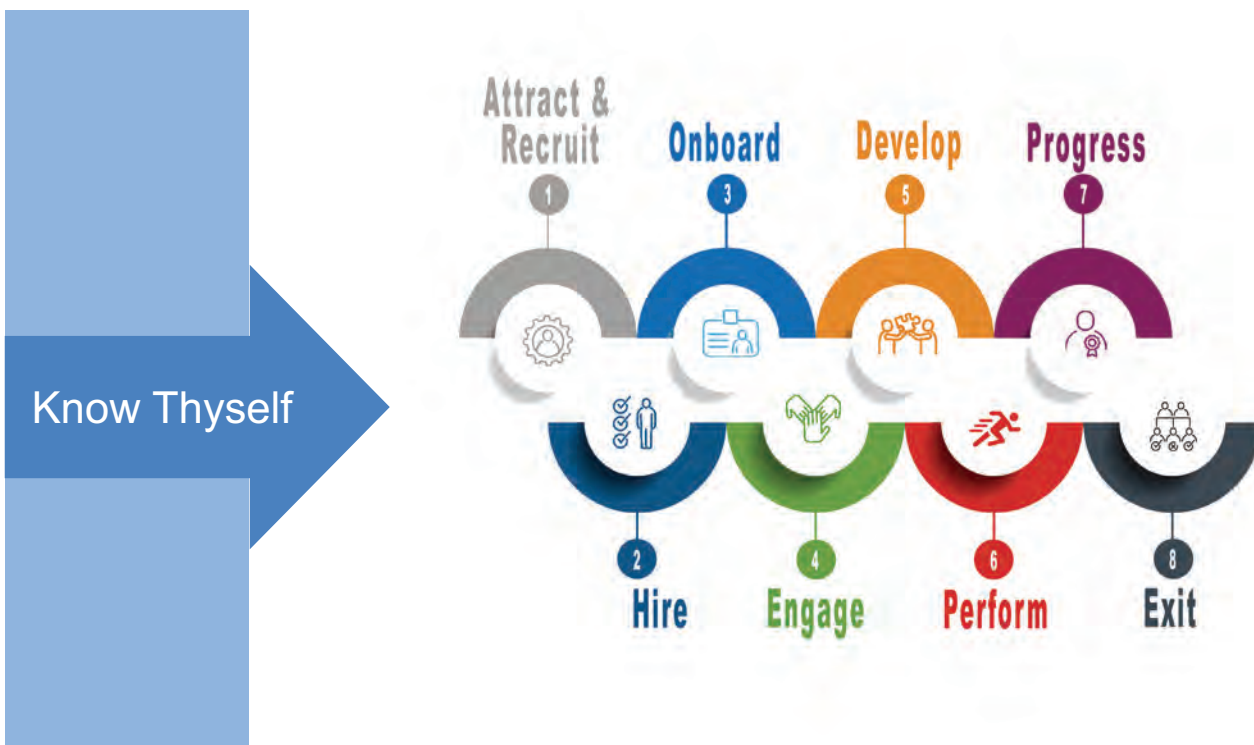
## Knowledge of Belonging

Belonging is a fundamental human need. In every aspect of our lives, we seek connection with and acceptance from one another. According to Qualtrics (2020), a sense of belonging emerged as the strongest driver of employee engagement. For employees to feel a sense of belonging, they must believe the organization cares about them. Here are three steps to cultivate a culture of belonging:

1. Eliminate “outsiderness”
2. Bring everyone on board
3. Demonstrate care through benefits and initiatives

## Knowledge of Employee Experience

Employee experience encompasses the entire journey an employee takes within a company. It begins pre-hire and continues post-exit. The employee experience includes where someone works and the tools they use. Other parts are the resources available to them and their interactions with their coworkers. See the graphic below for an overview of an employee’s journey.





## Skills and Abilities

- Capacity to operationalize Gallup's 12 Engagement Elements
- Capability to create an employee engagement action plan
- Capacity to create an employee retention plan
- Capability to develop and implement policies and procedures that reflect/support employee engagement
- Ability to guide managers and supervisors in implementing an employee journey map for each employee as a valuable retention strategy
- Capacity to collect, analyze, compare, use, and share employee engagement metrics

## What Else Do I Need to Know?

### Considerations for Innovation

- Build "Strengths-based Teams"
- Measure employee engagement. Measure what affects your organization's finances, employee performance, and operations.
- Create an employee engagement action plan. Use engagement metrics to identify changes and trends. Take action to drive performance that aligns with engagement goals.
- Adopt intentional employee engagement policies and procedures. Center these policies and procedures on engagement goals.
- Use employee experience journey mapping. Visually plot out the end-to-end experience your employees have in the early stages of their tenure with your organization. Identify areas for improvement. Bring awareness to the good and the bad parts of the experience. Drive their engagement in the organization.

### Considerations for Growth and Development

- Offer training at the leadership and management levels on how to use Gallup's 12 Engagement Elements to build an engaged workforce.
- Use Employee Experience Journey Mapping to focus on employee engagement and retention.
- Empower managers to drive engagement at their level.
- Employ the [Elements of Belonging](#) in the workplace to create a sense of belonging for direct reports.
- Decipher [The Belonging Index](#) and use the results for HR strategic planning.
- Collect and analyze employee engagement metrics.
- Create an Employee Engagement Action Plan.





## Where can I find more on this topic?

- **[Gallup's Guide to Engaging and Retaining Employees](#)**  
There are many factors you can't control. What can you do to engage your employees and keep their talent inside your organization? This list offers several practical strategies that make sense and can make a difference.
- **[Employee Retention Strategies You Can Apply Today](#)**  
Use this form to identify action steps your program can implement immediately to promote staff retention. It can guide discussions with leadership and management teams on how to retain the talent you need to build a cohesive workforce for your early childhood program.
- **[Increasing & Sustaining Belonging](#)**  
Belonging is an individual-internal experience; a sense of one's self in relation to a community, organization, or institution. An individual's sense of belonging is supported by the demonstration of inclusion, from being acknowledged when passing in hallways, to seeing one's image reflected in publicity, and having tangible opportunities for everyone to participate and contribute.
- **[Creating A Strong Sense of Belonging for All](#)**  
Think of your experiences at work or in your personal life where you felt fully valued, understood, and seen. This guide is for individuals and teams to learn more about the value of belonging at work. It discusses how to lead in ways that create a positive belonging experience for ourselves and our colleagues.
- **[Developing an Inclusive Listening Ear](#)**  
Listening is one soft skill leaders need. However, they need to not only hear but also understand all employees, regardless of their accents.
- **[The Employee Journey: A Hands-On Guide](#)**  
The employee experience is a journey. It encompasses every interaction employees have with your workplace, from Instagram posts they see before they apply to conversations they have with seasoned colleagues. An exceptional employee experience results when employees have more than just a few great moments. It's the result of frequent, meaningful interactions over the course of their employment.



## Where can I find more on this topic? *Cont'd*

- **[Employee Experience Journey Mapping](#)**  
Employee journey mapping is a way to measure the employee experience. This includes every stage of an employee's tenure at the company. The employee experience is how the employee feels about workplace interactions and events. One example might be performance reviews during their employment. By analyzing a map of the employee journey, HR teams can identify areas for improvement.
- **[The Essential List of Employee Engagement Metrics](#)**  
What does engagement look like, and how can you measure it? This list includes metrics that affect your program's financials, your people's performance, and your organization's operations. By tracking those metrics, you can identify changes and trends. Taking action will drive performance that aligns with your engagement goals.

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