
Overview

The Turnover Tool Kit is designed for public-sector and non-profit child welfare administrators and Human Resources Management professionals who are trying to understand the causes of staff turnover and looking for retention tools.

What is the Turnover Tool Kit?

- The Turnover Tool Kit provides you with tools to help you determine if you have a turnover problem in your agency and why.
- The tools include strategies and tactics to address problems with turnover.
- Although we designed the Tool Kit for child welfare agencies, these tools can easily be adapted for any type of human services organization.

The Turnover Tool Kit includes:

Tool 1 – [Calculating the Cost of Turnover](#) offers guidelines on how to determine the cost of turnover to your agency. Knowing the cost of turnover to your agency will allow you to evaluate the cost effectiveness of any turnover-reduction strategies you consider implementing.

Defining Turnover

Turnover: The number of workers leaving an agency or category during a given time period.

Turnover Rate: The number of workers leaving an agency or category during a given time period divided by the average number of workers employed by that agency/category during the same time period.

Turnover and the **Turnover Rate** can be measured at many levels/categories. You can measure the number of employees leaving an agency, a department or division, a classification, or a single position.

Preventable Turnover: Turnover caused by factors an agency can control, i.e., salaries, caseload sizes, training, work schedules.

Non-preventable Turnover: Turnover over which an agency has no control, i.e., employee relocating, retiring, returning to school, etc.

Tool 2 – [Designing and Analyzing Turnover Data Reports](#) provides practical examples for designing turnover reports that can help you identify the magnitude of your turnover problem, give you some further insights about why the problem exists, and allow you to track the success of any strategies you implement to address the problem.

Tool 3 – [Exit Interviews and Exit Surveys](#) describes how you can use exit interviews and surveys to identify some of the root causes of turnover in your agency. We include samples of each.

Tool 4 – [Targeted Strategies and Solutions](#) links strategies and solutions to specific causes of turnover, and provides an overview of each targeted solution.

Appendix A – [Research and Further Reading](#) discusses in-depth the causes and consequences of turnover for human services agencies, and includes a bibliography of the literature and websites

Is all Turnover Bad?

Every organization experiences some turnover, and in our view, some turnover is healthy for an organization. Some degree of turnover provides an opportunity for the infusion of new ideas and renewed energy. The turnover of weak performers provides an opportunity to hire more capable employees. Turnover rates as low as five percent in non-child welfare organizations are not uncommon, and are considered by those organizations to be reasonable and appropriate.

Steps to Addressing Turnover

Table 1 below outlines the phases and basic steps you'll need to take in addressing turnover in your agency.

Table 1: Phases and Steps to Addressing Turnover

Phase I – Understanding the Costs and Impacts of Turnover
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Calculate the costs of turnover to your agency.<input type="checkbox"/> Identify adverse impacts turnover has on your agency.<input type="checkbox"/> Understand the causes of turnover.
Phase II – Find Out Why You Have a Turnover Problem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Collect turnover data, including basic demographic data.<input type="checkbox"/> Collect employee feedback.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exit interviews• Employee focus groups• Supervisory focus groups• Attitude surveys<input type="checkbox"/> Objectively assess agency's performance.<input type="checkbox"/> Analyze information and data to determine the causes of preventable turnover in your agency.
Phase III – Develop Retention Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Identify how Human Resources and program staff will work together.<input type="checkbox"/> Organizational readiness
Phase IV – Implement Tactics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Implement solutions appropriate for the causes of turnover in your agency.

Phase I – Understanding Turnover

Understanding the causes, consequences and amount of turnover in your agency is a prerequisite to identifying possible solutions for reducing turnover.

Consequences

High turnover among child welfare workers can lead to:

- Adverse impacts on children and families.
- Failure to attain federal child welfare outcomes.
- Cost to the agency in lost time, personnel and money

Workforce instability and high turnover result in child welfare workers having less time to conduct frequent and meaningful home visits; establish relationships with children and families; and make thoughtful and well-supported decisions regarding safe and stable permanent placements.

Causes

The causes of turnover among child welfare workers are as varied as the agencies in which they work. Although there are some common causes such as low pay and heavy workloads, the reasons for turnover in your agency may be very different. Turnover among child welfare workers can be caused by a number of factors, including:

- Low salaries.
- High caseloads.
- Paperwork and other administrative burdens which detract from professional social work activities.
- Lack of supervisory support.
- Unavailability of training and/or insufficient time to participate in training.
- Requirement for working evening and weekend hours.
- Lack of resources for children and families.
- Low morale.
- Risk of violence.

See Appendix A for a detailed discussion of the research on the causes and consequences of turnover among child welfare workers.

Phase II – Identifying the Reasons for Turnover in Your Agency

The first step in addressing turnover in your agency is to figure out why it's happening. As with most serious problems, getting at the root causes of turnover may not be as simple as you might think. Gathering different types of information from multiple sources will give you a broader perspective crucial to helping you develop the most effective solutions.

There are three basic levels of inquiry required to get the types of information you'll need to accurately identify the causes of turnover in your agency:

1. Collect Employee Data

By developing and analyzing detailed turnover reports, you will gain valuable insight into the reasons for turnover.

Although many child welfare agencies track turnover at the "macro level," our research suggests that relatively few agencies track and analyze turnover by work unit, length of service, college major/degree, race, gender, and other demographic characteristics. Developing turnover reports that generate such detailed information will provide useful information about the possible causes of turnover and may help answer such questions as:

- If your agency has multiple work locations, are there differences in turnover among them?
- If child welfare workers in your agency specialize in specific programs (Protective Services, Foster Care, Adoption, etc.) do turnover rates differ between them?
- Is there a relationship between college degree/major and tenure?
- What is the relationship between length of service and turnover?

Your agency may not have the capacity to develop detailed turnover reports for multiple variables. However, any

turnover data you have will be helpful – start with the data you have and build more sophisticated reports over time.

2. Ask Employees

Many organizations routinely use exit interviews and/or exit surveys (EIS) to gather information about why employees leave. If done properly, the EIS can provide valuable and reliable information. Some organizations also use staff focus groups and staff surveys to gather information about workforce issues such as employee satisfaction, retention and turnover intention.

Exit interviews/surveys and focus groups each offer a valuable perspective. The EIS is geared to elicit information from employees who have made the decision to leave your agency. Focus groups elicit information from employees who are still working for the agency. Both perspectives are important, and we encourage using both sources of information.

Your supervisors are also a good source of information about why employees leave. They are close enough to the front line to observe what their employees find satisfying and what they find dissatisfying about their jobs. Asking supervisors what keeps – and what drives away – their best performers should provide useful and insightful information. Better yet, encourage your supervisors to ask their employees – individually – those very questions. Each employee is unique, and what keeps one employee may not work for another. Also, simply asking these questions – letting employees know that you care about them staying and value their contributions – is a good retention strategy.

3. Objectively Assess Performance

Before analyzing the information you've gathered, step back and take an objective look at your agency and its climate. Try to identify your agency's strengths and weakness. Examples of questions to ask about your agency include:

- Are your wages fair and competitive?
- Are your caseloads higher than nationally recommended standards?
- Are caseloads higher than those of other child welfare agencies in your community?
- Are there meaningful training and professional development opportunities for staff?
- How do these opportunities compare with those at other agencies?
- What steps has your agency taken to enhance worker safety?
- Are employees considered a valuable asset of your agency?
- Where are the workers who are leaving going?

By taking the time to ask for employee feedback, collect formal data, and objectively assess your agency's performance, you'll be better able to accurately identify the real reasons for turnover in your agency.

Phase III – Develop Retention Strategy

Organizational Readiness

Preparing your organization *before* you begin implementing solutions to turnover is critical to the success of those solutions. Answering these questions will help ensure that your agency is ready to begin addressing the problem of turnover:

- **Resources** – Does your agency have the financial, technical and personnel resources required to implement the solution?
- **Buy-in** – Will your agency's administration, management and staff “buy into” and support the solution?
- **Timing** – Is it the right time for your agency to be thinking about implementing change?

Forming a Strategic Partnership with Human Resources

Developing a strategy to reduce employee turnover is hard work. Using the suggestions in the Turnover Tool Kit will help, but the tools alone won't do the job. You are going to have to decide which tactics to use – and how you're going to use them. In addition, using these tools and using them cost effectively will require effort and commitment from many parts of your agency. A coordinated effort will be required from the folks in IT, the budget and finance office, and those who write policy. To ensure success, however, a

strategic relationship must be forged between Human Resources (HR) and Operations.

Identifying the causes of turnover in your agency is a critical first step in beginning to address the problem. Most of the data you will need to determine these underlying causes either resides in HR, or will require HR's involvement to develop. Virtually all of the strategies and tactics we identify focus on workforce issues that require HR's leadership to successfully implement.

In order to maximize HR's contribution to the agency's effort to reduce turnover, HR must be fully integrated into the strategic planning and overall operations of the agency. HR will need to fully understand the business of child welfare. They must truly serve as a "business partner" with operations, and gear their programs to support the long-run strategic goals of the agency.

Phase IV – Implement Tactics

Just as there is no single cause of turnover, there is no single solution. Your agency's unique situation will determine which tactics you choose to implement. In addition, exactly because each organization is unique, the impact any given solution may have on that organization is difficult to predict.

Choosing the Right Solution

If the overall turnover rate in your agency is 20 percent, but the turnover rate of employees with less than one year of experience is 40 percent, a possible explanation is that the new hires are finding that they are a "poor fit" for the job.

Raising salaries and reducing caseloads will likely have little impact on reducing turnover of those new employees coming to the realization that they are not well suited to child welfare. Alternatively, changing your recruitment strategy to better inform job applicants of the "realities" of the job may have a significant impact on reducing turnover.

Reducing turnover is a complex issue that will take some time to resolve. In fact, no matter how effective your approach, you probably won't be able to measure your success for at least several months.