HPOG STAFF TRANSITION PLANNING TOOLKIT

HPOG Health Profession Opportunity Grants OFFICE OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE

Purposes and Uses of This Toolkit

Departures of key HPOG team members can leave staffing gaps that have a dampening effect on program performance and participant outcomes. This toolkit provides practical and actionable information and customizable tools to help HPOG Project Directors (PDs) and their teams more effectively manage staff transitions by:

- **Preventing Turnover:** Ongoing program management and leadership practices can help prevent some team contributors from deciding to look for jobs elsewhere. (Pg. 2)
- **Limiting Disruptions Caused by Turnover:** Ongoing program and process management practices can reduce the risk of service disruption, compromised program performance, and undue stress on remaining team members in the event of a staff departure. (Pg. 4)
- **Effectively Managing Staffing Gaps:** A suggested six-step process to follow after a resignation occurs. (Pg. 6)

This toolkit features guidance and specific practices recommended by HPOG PDs and Office of Family Assistance Program Specialists, as well as external resource links. The Appendices have several tools: tips to reduce employee turnover from an experienced HPOG PD, a sample agenda for the first meeting with a new hire, a summary of a program staff handbook from an HPOG project, and a transition planning checklist to use when a team member resigns.

Top Tips From HPOG PDs

When asked to suggest top tips to effectively manage the risks of staff turnover, HPOG directors highlighted ways that they communicate with and support their staff teams.

“Help staff know how they are making a difference and encourage them to keep looking forward. Have an entrepreneurial mindset—nothing is etched in stone. Be flexible and opportunistic as a manager. Be ready to take advantage of opportunities that face you.”
—Charlie Thompson, HPOG Project Director, Edmonds Community College*

“Know your staff and how best to communicate with them. Create and maintain open communication for the wins and challenges. Ask them regularly, ‘what do you need this week in order to be successful in your job’? Staff are most successful when they feel supported and appreciated.”
—Elizabeth Bouldin-Clopton, HPOG Project Director, Goodwill of the Valleys

“Have a plan in place; have things documented. Be open to transition and support your team and listen to them because they often know best.”
—Janae Bradford, HPOG Project Director, CAP Tulsa

*See Appendix A for additional tips to reduce turnover, provided by Charlie Thompson, HPOG PD, Edmonds Community College.

Effects of Staff Turnover

The loss of experienced HPOG staff or partner team contributors can have several negative effects on different stakeholders and the success of the program. Three frequently observed effects of turnover are described below. The practices recommended in this toolkit are aimed at reducing the risks of effects such as these.

Disengagement by Students: When a coach or navigator leaves, the students that they had formed a relationship with may feel abandoned. One frequent response by students is to disengage and resist others' attempts to engage them in additional important services. With less engagement and support, students may also drop out at higher rates.

Diminished Trust With Partners: When a staff member who served as liaison with important outreach, training, or employer partners leaves, the personal trust that formed the basis of a working relationship goes with them. If the trust is not rebuilt quickly, partners may respond by sharing less information and scaling back their program interactions until they are confident that they can count on other individuals with the HPOG program. Less engaged partners can result in lower recruitment and referrals, less responsive training programs, and erosion of employment onramps for HPOG candidates.

Increased Staff Burden and Shaken Confidence: Losing an important team member often adds new responsibilities to other staff who may already feel over-burdened. If there are multiple departures, the extended experience of being over-burdened and sense of ongoing instability can shake confidence in program leaders and lead staff to begin exploring other career opportunities. Over-burdened and less committed staff translates into diminished program quality in many small ways that are often hard to see.

How To Prevent or Avoid Turnover

HPOG PDs and field experts agree that leaders can best retain key staff (and partner) team contributors by achieving strong project results that people want to be part of. By fostering a workplace culture and set of continuous improvement practices that lead to rising outcomes, PDs build confidence among team members that their efforts make a difference, which is a primary reason that many of them chose this kind of work in the first place. In contrast, one expert noted a common misconception by managers and leaders that compensation is the primary reason staff leave, when studies show that most leave for non-compensation reasons that managers can directly influence. One experienced HPOG Project Director echoed this point: **"People come to work here because they want to make a difference.** Demonstrate the value of their work. Tell them you appreciate what they did because it really changed the student's life. Be specific. Constantly remind people of why we're here. Feeling truly valued is more important than a raise." (Charlie Thompson, HPOG PD, Edmonds Community College)

One large study on voluntary turnover in human service organizations identified high-performance practices that are projected to result in a 29-percent reduction in voluntary turnover (e.g., staff resignations). Three specific leadership practices were most closely associated with lower staff turnover.

1. **Onboarding and Orienting New Team Members:** How new staff are welcomed, trained, equipped, and supported in their first few weeks on the job was the most influential turnover prevention practice uncovered by the study.

   Examples of Onboarding and Orienting Practices Used by HPOG Directors:

   - Engage existing HPOG staff in the hiring process by having them participate in team interviews for finalist candidates, so that existing staff are engaged from the beginning in selecting and supporting new team members.
   - Create a comprehensive onboarding, orientation, and staff training process (see Appendix B for a sample agenda for a first meeting with an HPOG new hire, from Edmonds Community College).
   - Invest time in getting to know your staff. Ask them how they want to hear feedback and how they want to be supported.
   - Have new HPOG team members "job shadow" experienced staff to learn to perform new responsibilities that involve various constituencies, such as doing outreach and recruiting events, interviewing program applicants, leading partner meetings, and facilitating employer advisory meetings.
   - Give new hires a thumb drive with all of the key documents that they need to have in one place, and explain the importance and use of these documents.

2. **Succession Planning:** Employees value opportunities to develop new skills via cross-training and to prepare for higher level accountabilities in supervisory or leadership positions. Such work-based learning opportunities for HPOG staff can pay off in program performance, as well as promoting staff retention.

   Examples of Succession Planning Practices Used by HPOG Directors:

   - Build a culture of teamwork, such as periodic staff assignments to perform related roles when needed due to vacations/absences or peak workload demands, regular case review discussions with staff teams, and team review and discussion of job descriptions to identify changes needed and overlaps in duties that require coordination.
   - Develop a program handbook that describes the HPOG program services and staff assignments throughout the HPOG student experience (See Appendix C for a summary of an HPOG staff handbook from CAP Tulsa).

- Ask staff specialists to develop and share checklists and other tools they use to perform their roles.
- Hold frequent “staff huddles” (not formal meetings, but quick group conversations) to encourage communication and teamwork on addressing hot issues that emerge.
- Identify team members who can be cross-trained to perform some of the Project Director duties as needed, such as reviewing and approving quarterly reports, facilitating team meetings, and leading important new HPOG initiatives or changes.

3. **Employee Relations:** The quality and nature of relationships among staff and program leaders makes a measurable difference in staff retention. This can include frequent two-way communication, a perception of fair treatment, and promoting work-life balance. As one HPOG PD emphasized, “A lot of managers say they have an open-door policy, but what they really mean is come to me with any problems you have. Instead, get out and get to know your staff. If they don’t feel they are being heard by their supervisors, they feel isolated in doing their jobs.” (Elizabeth Bouldin-Clopton, HPOG PD, Goodwill of the Valleys).

   Examples of Employee Relations Practices Used by HPOG Directors:

   - To encourage continuous adaptation and program improvements, use timely two-way communication to make sure that staff feel fully engaged and that they buy in to changes.
   - Acknowledge the emotional toll that comes with high levels of student engagement, and develop expectations and practices or policies to avoid staff burnout, such as instructing case managers and navigators to leave corporate cellphones at the office when they leave for the day. Have staff practice self-care.
   - When staff work longer-than-usual hours and/or in stressful situations, offer informal flex time or comp time to enable them to recharge.
   - Give staff time off to choose their own community volunteering projects, such as encouraging them to join in volunteer projects with HPOG students or HPOG community-based partners or choose a group project together as an HPOG staff team.

How To Limit Disruptions Caused by Turnover

One study on turnover of social workers for children found that success rates of over 70 percent when a child had one consistent case manager plummeted to less than 20 percent when there was caseworker turnover, because, as one expert said, “every time there’s turnover, you start from scratch." While the effects on results in HPOG may not be quite as pronounced, Office of Family Assistance Program Specialists have observed that frequent staff turnover exerts a significant drag on HPOG enrollments and outcomes. HPOG Project Directors echoed this concern, especially with turnover of case managers and navigators: "They are the ones who are the initial contact with clients; they are a big part of a client's life and success. If a coach turns over, you have to start that relationship all over again. That has been enough to derail someone in the past." (Janae Bradford, HPOG Project Director, CAP Tulsa)

Throughout the HPOG network, PDs use a variety of ongoing program management practices to "inoculate" the program, so that when turnover occurs, it isn't as disruptive to relationships and services, and results are at less risk of dipping. In other words, PDs can use a variety of management practices *now* as an insurance policy to prevent significant *future* disruptions in services when a team member leaves. Several HPOG examples of these practices are summarized below.

- Expose students to multiple HPOG staff by having staff share some accountabilities (e.g., workshops led by two staff, student events with multiple staff, etc.) and cross-train one another on individual areas of expertise so that there is never just one individual team member with unique capabilities.
- Maintain a detailed system of case notes accessible to appropriate team members and use staff meetings to share information about student cases. Similarly, create systems to document employer relationships, such as contact information, and important knowledge learned about employers' hiring processes, talent needs, and workplace cultural expectations.
- Document and frequently update important HPOG processes, which could take the form of checklists used by case managers/navigators for various student services, process maps, or a guidebook describing service delivery flow and processes (See Appendix C for a summary example of an HPOG Handbook).
- Use natural peak demand cycles to cross-train staff and build teamwork, such as having team members assist in outreach and recruiting during the heavy recruiting season, and asking additional staff to pitch in with employment readiness workshops when large cohorts of students are graduating.
- Cross-train multiple staff on data entry, management, and reporting, and ask the team's data specialist to carefully document all data management processes as a guide for consistent reporting when this role transitions.
- Make sure that at least two HPOG staff are known by key contacts at important training partners and employers, so that partnerships aren't placed at risk if one team member departs.

How To Effectively Manage Staffing Gaps

Many of the previously mentioned program management recommendations help mitigate the risks of service disruption and loss of institutional knowledge that can happen in the wake of staff turnover. When an HPOG team member resigns, PDs can follow an additional step-by-step process to further reduce these risks.

How a manager handles staff turnover "depends on the circumstances of the situation" as one HPOG PD noted; and can be "a really hot mess" if the staff departure results from an ongoing conflict, bad experiences, or termination for cause. The step-by-step process outlined below is based on the assumption that the departure is not one of these types, but a more cordial parting of ways. The steps outlined below are based on a review of expert recommendations (see especially What to Do When an Employee Resigns, from *Forbes Magazine*) and interviews with HPOG PDs. See Appendix D for a transition planning checklist that aligns with the recommended steps below.

1. **Meet with the departing staff member:** When first learning of the resignation of a team member, ask for details about what led to this decision to determine if there are factors that a manager can influence now or in the future. Gauge the mindset of the departing worker and assess his or her willingness to participate actively and constructively in a transition and knowledge transfer plan.
2. **Jointly develop a transition plan:** Carefully review and update the departing staff member's job description to reflect actual and effective processes, and use this conversation to identify any unique knowledge or skills the staff member has that are important to preserve for the success of the project. Review the departing team member's contacts with partners and employers, etc., and determine how best to notify particularly sensitive contacts. If the individual manages student cases, review the caseload and ensure that client files and case notes are up-to-date. Determine who can pick up cases, important tasks, and projects that need to be handled immediately going forward and those that will need to be addressed in the upcoming 1–2 months. Decide which tasks and projects can be deferred until later with little risk to program performance. Ask for the departing employee to commit to specific transition plan actions and timeframes. Write it all in a plan that can be shared with the staff team.
3. **Announce the departure and discuss the job description/role and transition plan with the HPOG staff team:** It is important that the PD and departing team member jointly announce the departure, in person during a team meeting if possible. Engage team members in reviewing the updated job description to reflect a consensus on how best to utilize this role and where it connects with others' roles. Discuss the initial transition plan with the team and seek agreement from staff being asked to step up in new ways during the interim.

4. **Communicate the departure and transition plan with key stakeholders:** Identify key contacts beyond the staff team who need to know, such as recruiting, training, and employment partners and assigned clients. Develop overall messaging about the departure and transition plans. If any of these are especially sensitive, develop individualized communications plans and/or hold a personal conversation.
5. **Preserve and transfer important knowledge and expertise:** Once you have identified the departing individual's unique areas of knowledge, skills, and expertise, the transition plan should include actions to preserve this knowledge, such as the creation/updating and posting of documents (process/project descriptions, data reports, case files, checklists/tools, contact lists, etc.) on a shared drive. Ask the departing staff member to meet with specific colleagues to share information and expertise with peers who will be taking on interim assignments from the departing team member.
6. **Monitor the transition plan and close on a high note:** Be sure to check in several days prior to departure on the status of transition plan actions, both with the departing employee and peers engaged in handoff meetings. Avoid taking out frustrations on departing employees or overloading them with transition requests. Be sure to celebrate their accomplishments and help them depart on a high note.

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Appendix A: Tips to Reduce Employee Turnover

From Charlie Thompson, HPOG Project Director, Edmonds Community College

Be the boss you wish you had!

Hire right

- Extra effort on Job Description, does it really let the employee know what is expected?
- Hire the best fit, not the most qualified.
- Employ Appreciative Inquiry (strength-based) interview questions.
- Talk about the challenges of "soft money—grants."
- Don't hire people just like yourself—need a variety of skills, backgrounds, communication styles.
- Pay as much as you can, keeping in mind what other similar positions on staff already pay.
- New staff member is a valuable partner—money talks.

First Day—it is a big, big deal—might be after institution orientation

- Celebrate!! Introduce new hire to everyone.
- Have computer, parking permit, desk, keys, etc., all ready, prepared and welcoming.
- Create lists of contacts, meetings, resources, core values.
- Share your vision of the project and how the new staff member will be contributing to it…convey that the new staff member is important.
- Review expectations, job description, and how staff member will be evaluated.
- Open communication—this is a team, (s)he is a partner, and will get feedback.
- Invite feedback of your style and communication.

Maintain a Positive Work Environment

- Supervise by walking around--- ask questions, stay in touch—monitor stress.
- If you don't pay attention, their work must not be important.
- Recognize good work, praise often, and remind how important their work is.
- Be flexible, think first *why not?* Instead of *ummmm I don't know….*
- Make sure praise is specific…*when you did this, this great thing happened….*
- Foster disagreement—but be respectful.
- Learn what is important to each individual….. how can you help them reach their goals?

- Ask often what you can do to help them grow—promote and finance professional development.
- Praise in public, but not just group praise, *good job everybody*, instead be specific in praise to each individual and his/her contribution to the team success.
- Conduct exit interviews—celebrate promotions….better jobs….
- Do not demean each other, your institution, your boss, or partners and don't let others either.
- If something bothers you….do something about it, *we can talk about it, don't whine*.
- Don't allow one to speak on behalf of the "others" (*Everyone is upset about……* My answer…*Are you upset about…I want to understand.)*

Redirection (Corrective Action)

- Everyone wants to do a good job.
- Everyone needs to feel needed and worthwhile.
- Seek to understand before judgment, take your time and know the facts.
- Make sure your expectations are clear.
- Be honest and open.
- Feedback should just be that….feedback, not punishment.
- Feedback should be timely and specific…. When you did this, something went wrong.
- If you let someone come in late for months you have just changed the standard, you can't nail them for it when you may be upset with them. Don't keep a list going and hit them all at once.
- Keep in context, don't just follow rules, they exist for a reason. *When you are late, students cannot reach you [or describe other outcome]*. Communicate to staff they are needed.
- If it doesn't matter, be flexible… move their schedule because they can't drop their kid at daycare until 8 and have a 30-minute drive.
- Don't sandwich good—bad—good. They will only remember the good and minimize the bad.
- Praise in public, redirect in private.
- Be direct, get right to the point, but be kind….. *You are important to our project and to our students. I value our relationship and want to work together for the rest of the grant. BUT….. when you….*
- If they resist feedback, redirection, and keep making the same mistake, make sure they know it is not acceptable and ask how you can help them meet expectations and keep

documentation of this process and conversations. Let them know the next step, based on HR policies, union contract….make them fire themselves.

- If they improve…… make sure they know that you have noticed!
- Help them keep their personal goals and their career growth in mind.
- Annual reviews should only be a review of things you have talked about, good and bad; there should never be a new topic brought up. If it was not important enough to talk about at the time, then it is not important.

Questions, comments, advice? I'm happy to help as I can.

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Appendix B: Sample Agenda for First Meeting with HPOG New Hire From Edmonds Community College

Checklist

- Office, iPad, furniture
- Phone, voicemail, business cards
- Keys—offices and classrooms
- Campus ID, email, parking
- New Staff Orientation in April
- HR and benefits—complete competency requirements, orientation when available

Part of the team

- Get to know I-CATCH staff at all three colleges and Workforce Snohomish, RISNW and TRAC and details of I-CATCH program so far
- Jump in to the design work being done—we need your outside perspective
- Understand roles and resources of community navigators in working with students
- Become familiar with HPOG program and PAGES—PAGES Authorization
- Help us all be better advocates for the needs of our student population

Academic Advising

- Learn general advising at EdCC—every Friday training, see schedule
- Become knowledgeable of our I-CATCH supported Healthcare programs at EdCC and EvCC
- Important relationship to build
- EdCC Healthcare faculty and leadership
- EdCC Advising Center—participate in campus Jumpstart
- Learn the online campus advising tools

Student Communication/Retention

- Get to know CATCH1 students that are still here
- Help us develop online tools for student contact especially between three schools
- Personal access to support staff (online appointments, office hours on- and off-line)
- Help us develop standards for student participation requirements and tech to support
- How to teach soft skills (manual CANVAS classroom?)
- Learn the tools that we have available…. CANVAS, Business Access portal, Blackboard Collaborate

College success in healthcare course

- Part-time Faculty paperwork at Division office
- Prepare to present and participate in planning redesigned college Success in Healthcare course

Professional Development

- Once you feel grounded in I-CATCH become part of the Edmonds CC Community—committee engagement, meeting other programs like TRIO, vets, etc.
- Join and participate with a professional academic advising organization

Appendix C: Summary of CareerAdvance® Staff Handbook from CAP Tulsa

CareerAdvance® is the name of CAP Tulsa's HPOG program. The program's leaders have developed a detailed 60-page handbook describing detailed processes for staff to follow in implementing program services and procedures that outline program policies. The manual is frequently updated to incorporate changes in program processes. The handbook is roughly organized according to a typical participant's experience, beginning with the application process, and continuing with specific steps to follow for different training programs, access to support services, initial steps for recording client data in PAGES, and certification testing procedures. There are separate process documents that have more details on data entry for reporting, and also for employment support services and employer engagement, which are led by CAP Tulsa's partner, Madison Strategies.

HPOG Directors or project team members are welcome to request CAP Tulsa's Staff Handbook as an example of the kind of information to include in their own handbook. To receive a copy, please email your request to CAP Tulsa's Project Director, Janae Bradford, at jbradford@captulsa.org.

As an example of what a detailed program manual contains, below are summary descriptions of a few initial sections within the CareerAdvance® handbook.

- **Eligibility for CareerAdvance®:** The eligibility section lists eight specific criteria for eligibility to apply, including income level, minimum level of English language ability, citizenship, etc. There's also a detailed chart showing minimum scores on entry tests and other academic requirements needed for each training program offered by CareerAdvance®.
- **Program Requirements:** The guide describes general attendance expectations and has links for staff to look up program-specific attendance requirements. There are also general descriptions and program-specific follow-up links for staff to review grade requirements by program and background tests results.
- **Program-Specific Entrance Procedures:** Once a participant is ready to apply for entry into a specific program of study, there are detailed descriptions of each program's application process for a participant to follow. These include applications to complete, assessments to take, and the random assignment process. Once accepted into a specific program of study, there is also guidance for academic coaches to follow for initial client meetings, including study tips, access to specific support services and equipment, and other initial coaching recommendations.

Appendix D: Transition Planning Checklist

The purpose of this transition planning checklist is to provide a manager with a step-by-step guide to follow when a staff member resigns, in order to facilitate a smooth transition that reduces the risk of disruption of services and diminished program performance. This transition plan checklist reflects recommendations from HPOG PDs and outside experts. For examples of a detailed transition plan template, see this tool on Idealist and this format used by a local government agency.

Step Number	Action Steps	Notes and/or Dates Completed
1.	Meet with the departing employee	
2.	Discuss and note the reason(s) for departure	
3.	Jointly review and update the job description	
4.	Identify knowledge, skills, and expertise to transfer to other team members	
5.	Jointly review participant cases and/or key partner relationships and contacts	
6.	Map out scheduled project tasks, events, and meetings to cover over the next 1–2 months	
7.	Differentiate accountabilities from above that *must* be covered from those that can be deferred or paused with little risk to the program	
8.	Identify team members to receive specific handoffs of responsibilities from departing staff member	
9.	Jointly document the above information into a transition plan and ask the departing team member to take responsibility for executing it	
10.	Discuss transition plan and job description with HPOG team and revise both as needed	
11.	Communicate transition plan with assigned clients and/or key partner contacts	
12.	Check in on the status of transition plan several days before departure	
13.	Ask the departing staff member if he/she is available for follow-up questions after departure date and get contact information	
14.	Celebrate the departing staff member's contributions to the HPOG project	