



Prioritizing Staff Retention to Build an Inclusive Institutional Culture in Higher Ed

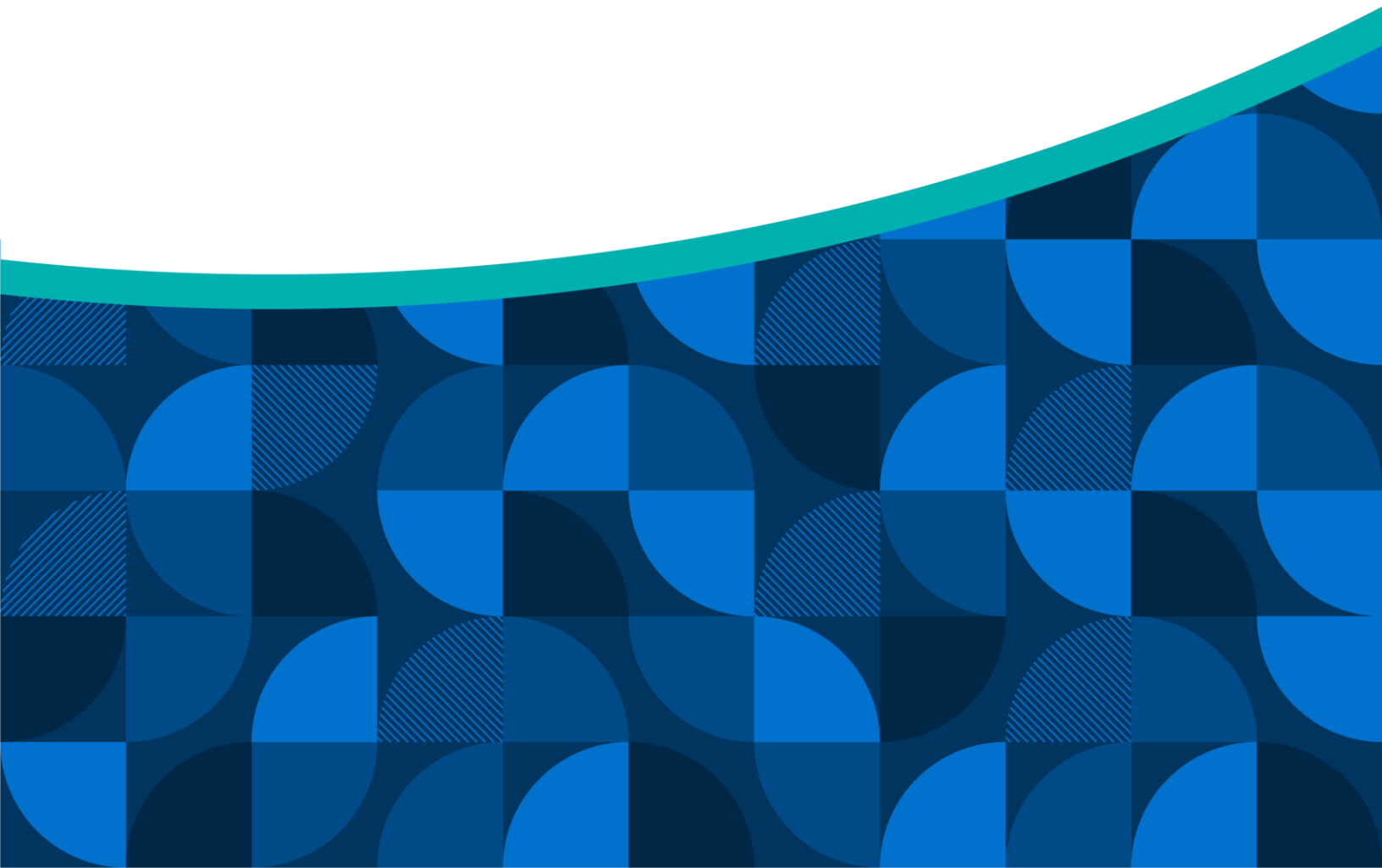


Table of Contents

Three Common Retention Gaps	3
Develop Data Collection Methods to Set Retention Goals and Monitor Progress	4
Use external data to benchmark your institution against regional and national labor market data.....	4
Track demographic data throughout the employee lifecycle.	5
Create a listening strategy with frequent opportunities for feedback.	5
Deploy exit surveys to better understand who leaves and why.	6
Engage Staff in Establishing New Workforce Norms	7
Establish flexible work policies.	7
Involve staff in the creation of new policies to increase voluntary engagement.....	7
Provide clear career pathing and professional development opportunities.	8
Hire Local to Build Trust, Economic Inclusion, and Career Pipelines	9
John Hopkins University case study	9
The Technical College System of Georgia case study	9
Northwestern University case study	10
Drexel University case study	10

Three Common Retention Gaps

As the Great Resignation rebrands to the [Great Reshuffling](#), staff retention at higher education institutions remains as important as ever. In 2020, higher education institutions lost about 650,000 workers, whether to retirement, resignations, or involuntary separations. Between 2020-2021, the rate of staff turnover from resignation came out on top as nearly 10 percent of non-exempt full-time staff and eight percent of exempt full-time staff left higher education.¹

While many institutions cannot change pay grades nor their location, there are retention best practices which can enhance an inclusive culture on campus. For example, institutions can embed intentional and inclusive staff retention practices by tracking demographic data and collecting feedback, creating flexible work options and transparent career pathways, and integrating training and hiring efforts within the local community. Such retention efforts are proactive, rather than passive, because they encompass the entirety of the employment lifecycle, encourage employee participation, and build relationships and trust.

With holistic retention practices, higher education institutions can create a welcoming work environment for a diverse workforce and enhance their reputations as an employer of choice. As your institution continues to build an inclusive culture, there are three common gaps to address related to retention:

- ▶ Develop data collection methods to set retention goals and monitor progress
- ▶ Engage staff in establishing new workplace norms
- ▶ Hire local to build trust, economic inclusion, and career pipelines

1) EAB Analysis of 2021 CUPA-HR data

Develop Data Collection Methods to Set Retention Goals and Monitor Progress

Frequent feedback and data collection is necessary to truly understand if employees are engaged or at-risk of attrition. While many institutions have instituted a campus-wide climate survey, they are often too infrequent to elicit the kinds of analysis or trends needed to drive meaningful change and near-term action on campus. In addition to these large surveys, institutions have several ways to collect important data.

The first step in measuring progress is to understand the institution's status quo. Therefore, start with collecting data from internal and external sources to understand baseline metrics and prioritize areas for improvement. Once the baselines and benchmarks are set, you can measure your institution's progress towards a truly diverse workforce and inclusive institutional culture.

Use external data to benchmark your institution against regional and national labor market data.

Institutions can unpack demographic data and identify industry standards like compensation benefits by analyzing information from peer institutions, other companies in the region, and similar schools across the country. Additionally, understanding national and local turnover rates and labor shortages will pinpoint whether issues are institution-specific or part of a wider labor issue.

Places to collect external data:

- The [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) can help you understand how your institution's salaries compare to national averages.
- The US Census can help you [compare](#) your institution's demographics against your state's, and provides several [data equity tools](#) to improve your evidence-based DEIJ efforts including the ability to identify underserved areas in your community
- The [National Center for Education Statistics](#) provides demographic data and trends throughout the U.S. including faculty pay by gender and racial/ethnic breakdowns of both staff and faculty.
- The [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#) is a helpful way to compare your school's data against other institutions.

Track demographic data throughout the employee lifecycle.

Track demographic data to understand who is in your applicant pool and how the pool changes throughout the interview process. Who is ultimately being offered positions and who chooses to accept or deny an offer? This information also helps pinpoint gaps like areas that are struggling to attract a diverse pipeline of candidates or places where talent continues to depart after one to two years. You can also use this information to analyze progress towards institution-wide DEIJ recruitment and retention goals. Update this data to track trends as employees accept promotions, earn raises, or eventually leave. See examples from two partner institutions below.

- **Interactive dashboards** at the [University of Illinois-Chicago's](#) Office of Institutional Research allow internal and external stakeholders to view racial and gender breakdowns for employees, including data by college, tenure, and new hires. The dashboards also provide simple line graphs to illustrate the data's historical trends.
- The [University of Washington](#) began publishing an annual **staff demographic report** in 2020 to aid their [Diversity Blueprint goal](#) of attracting and retaining a diverse workforce. In addition to looking at all staff and new hires, they also provide information on the year's terminations and applicants. Their report moves beyond gender and race/ethnicity to address veterans and staff with disabilities as well. Rather than simply report numbers and percentages, the university goes one step further to provide analysis and observations.

Create a listening strategy with frequent opportunities for feedback.

Beyond campus-wide climate surveys, many opportunities to collect feedback throughout the year already exist on campus. Pulse check surveys, town halls, and performance reviews are helpful ways to gather real-time data on current issues and questions from employees. Platforms like Blackboard, [Qualtrics](#), Microsoft, and Google Forms all provide ways to create and send surveys with straightforward results. Gathering more continuous feedback helps gauge progress on current university initiatives.

University of Alberta **created a [landing page](#) to share various ways employees can provide ongoing feedback.** The page includes a link to a digital feedback form, dates for community town halls, open university meetings, and results from monthly [pulse check surveys](#).

Deploy exit surveys to better understand who leaves and why.

Engaging employees on their way out is your final opportunity to collect honest, constructive feedback that can be used to target areas for improvement. Institutions can connect employee feedback with demographic data such as gender, length of employment, and pay to understand whether shared trends exist amongst departing employees.

The [University of California, Berkely](#) engages departing employees in both exit interviews and [surveys](#) to track the school's attrition rates, better understand their "competitive positioning in the marketplace," and to collect recommendations for improving retention. The university uses real-time dashboards to track exit data that can be segmented by demographics and time.

Use other school's exit surveys to help guide the development or improvement of your own:

- [California State University Northridge \(CSUN\)](#)
- [Williams College](#)
- [University of Louisville](#)
- [Florida State University](#)

Engage Staff in Establishing New Workforce Norms

Establish flexible work policies.

To retain a diverse workforce, institutions can't revert to "business as usual" and pre-pandemic norms. Many higher-education staff members are [considering leaving their positions](#) as they are being called back into the office and in person. As a result, more institutions are creating flexible work policies including fully remote positions, hybrid schedules, and flexible work hours.

Flexible work options can increase applicant pool numbers and diversify applicant experience-level and background. These options also improve the work experience for existing employees, such as those with disabilities and those with children. Allowing flexible work policies can boost employee morale and reduce stress levels, which enhances retention and strengthens the leadership pipeline.



Explore EAB's [Remote Work and Hybrid Workplace Resource Center](#) to learn more in-depth about the many benefits of flexible workplace options for employees, such as better work-life.

Involve staff in the creation of new policies to increase voluntary engagement.

Employees who feel a sense of ownership in the [decision-making process](#) are more engaged and invested in their work, making them less likely to leave. When involved in the creation of institutional policies, employees feel heard and have a better understanding of the complexities of such processes. Perhaps even more importantly, including a wide variety of people adds a diverse set of perspectives and knowledge.



To involve faculty and staff, ask a variety of employees what kinds of trainings are required by the professional organizations with which they are involved. Then, create tailored campus trainings that fulfill these membership requirements, thus increasing voluntary faculty and staff participation.

Provide clear career pathing and professional development opportunities.

An integral component of active retention is a commitment to the personal and professional growth of the institution's employees. Involve staff in creating opportunities for upskilling and career pathways for promotion to build a transparency and cooperation. With such intentional and inclusive efforts, even those who eventually leave will be more likely to feel grateful for their experience and speak highly of it to future colleagues and acquaintances.

Professional development at the department level includes clear career pathways, specified trainings, and opportunities to experience varied responsibilities. Most often, these opportunities begin at the department or unit level before they are scaled. The most successful programs will incorporate the practices mentioned above, including goal setting, metric tracking, and feedback implementation.



Texas A&M University The Division of Human Resources and Organizational Effectiveness at Texas A&M University created a [series of career pathways](#) for units across campus, including advising, human resources, and IT.



Ohio State University created a Career Roadmap for staff with a career framework and job catalogue. The [career framework](#) lays out a pathway of promotion for individual jobs, along with a job profile including information on job functions, career bands, and career levels.



University of Wisconsin-Madison created a [job rotation experience](#) for early-career employees in which participants rotate through four assignments over the course of two years. The program provides mentorship support and trainings for each cohort participant through a customized learning path. The institution created metrics to measure the program's success in supporting varied employees, including goals of 50 percent female representation and 25 percent of underrepresented populations.

Hire Local to Build Trust, Economic Inclusion, and Career Pipelines

Higher education institutions are integral to the economic vitality of their local community. They have the power to be active participants in the well-being of their community and act as “an economic engine to create lasting opportunities in [their town or] city” ([Johns Hopkins](#)). Hiring local talent builds positive relationships and trust among the community. Additionally, hiring local keeps employees local, creates a talented workforce with needed skills, and supports [economic justice](#).

The four examples below not only highlight the efficacy of using data and partnerships to unpack local needs and diversify the institutional workforce, but also the potential impact of institutions on their community.

John Hopkins University sets meaningful goals to hire local and boost economic prosperity

In 2015, Johns Hopkins University began HopkinsLocal—an initiative to buy, hire, and build local—to increase economic growth throughout Baltimore. To set realistic and achievable goals, they began by reviewing data on current university expenditures and Baltimore’s demographics and workforce needs. Their first hiring goal was to fill 40 percent of targeted positions from selected Baltimore zip codes by fiscal year 2018. After meeting that goal, they increased it to 50 percent. As of the last fiscal year, 52 percent of targeted positions were filled by area residents. Additionally, their current hiring goals aim to broaden employment opportunities to citizens with criminal records, increase employee use of tuition benefits, and improve onboarding and professional development.

The Technical College System of Georgia provides local companies with free workforce training

[Georgia Quick Start](#), administered by the state’s technical college system, provides free, individualized workforce training programs to qualified companies looking to upskill employees. By providing on-the-job training, the college system and its statewide network help companies meet their business goals, increases the number of trained employees, and promote economic development.

Northwestern University partners with city train locals in trades

Northwestern University, in partnership with the city of Evanston, IL, established the [Evanston Trades Program](#) to hire and train historically underrepresented groups within the skilled trades. Each year, participants are trained through a year-long skilled trade apprenticeship program in the Facilities Management Division. The institution benefits from the city's talent pipeline while the city leverages Northwestern's educational resources.

Drexel University established community center to provide career readiness programming

The [Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships](#), located in a low-income neighborhood, provides community members with digital skills training and access to computers and Wi-Fi to apply for jobs. The center also partnered with [Goodwill Helm's Academy](#) to offer free GED-completion programming, no-cost community college credits, and career support and counseling. The center leverages its location, Drexel resources and knowledge in experiential learning, and local partnerships to create strong ties between the university and the community.

To learn more about hiring locally, review this step-by-step guide from [Drexel University](#).