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ESE EMPLOYEE FUNNEL MAP

DEVELOPED FOR: **REDF**
Flying Whale Strategies

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GLOSSARY

Employee Success Program: An ESE service to support an ESE participant worker's success while working at an ESE and if or when they move on to the next job. An employee success program is a structured set of activities and services through which employment social enterprises (ESEs) address the barriers to employment faced by their participant workers supporting participant workers reach their goals.

Retention: An organization's ability to support participants through a successful exit or completion

Drop off rate: The rate at which individuals exit an ESE prior to completing the full experience. The drop off rate is the opposite of the retention rate.

Program funnel: A participant's journey through ESE programming. A complete program funnel would include moving from initial entry to program completion.

Program stages: The phases or milestones that make up a participant's journey through the ESE. Stages are designed to ensure that participants learn or accomplish certain things at certain times.

PURPOSE AND INTRODUCTION

Participant workers stop engaging with an employment social enterprise (ESE) for a variety of reasons, such as child care constraints, transportation barriers, a new job opportunity—among others. Typically, ESEs note whether an individual completed the ESE experience and track overall retention rates. Rarely do practitioners evaluate what happens along a participant's experience in the program and how that may contribute to whether or not they drop off prematurely. This makes it difficult for ESEs to identify the root causes that drive low retention and intervene appropriately.

The purpose of this toolkit is to support ESEs in looking at retention comprehensively. We begin with an overview of adult education theories so ESEs can better understand what helps to create engaged, motivated learners. Next, we include a participant map that shows the process by which participants move from initial entry to a successful program exit. Finally, we help ESEs analyze the factors that prohibit retention by providing a tool to track participants through each milestone of the participant experience. After reviewing these resources and implementing the tools in their own contexts, ESEs will be better equipped to design an environment that prevents drop-offs and to understand the factors behind retention trends.

ADULT ENGAGEMENT

One strategy for responding to the issue of retention is to apply the principles of adult engagement and learning. Often, practitioners take the reasons participants give for exiting an ESE at face value. Although challenges like transportation, getting another job, or competing priorities can be legitimate, there is value in looking deeper. Many programs fail to dig beneath these surface-level explanations and account for the importance of adult learning principles and sustained engagement. When participants don't see a clear path for growth or feel disengaged from the process, they may cite external challenges as reasons for leaving, when in reality, the program's design doesn't align with how adults best learn and remain motivated. In an ESE, helping participant employees progress from their initial entry into the program to a successful exit requires more than delivering information and offering services.

Adult engagement means participants not only absorb knowledge but also begin to see its relevance to their daily tasks and future goals–deepening their commitment to the program. This is critical to their immediate success within the ESE because it empowers them to take ownership of their learning and apply it in meaningful ways, enhancing their performance and personal growth. Therefore, reflecting on the way that your program facilitates learning experiences is a vital part of promoting retention.

We believe that this more effective kind of learning happens when the experience is set up for discovery rather than covering material. This is the difference between dissecting a squid alongside a list of analysis questions and listening to a lecture on squid biology. It's also the difference between being told that emotional regulation is important on the job and debriefing a situation where a mentor helps you identify that your reaction to a stressful task was triggered by past experiences and guides you in managing those triggers more effectively in the future. We strive to curate experiences that allow learners to realize concepts rather than listen to them.

We also believe that adults metabolize learning by comparing new experiences to other relevant knowledge. Thus, we do well by asking them to make those connections out loud in order to deepen their learning. This may also include asking them to wrestle with prior knowledge that conflicts with new knowledge. We are motivated to learn when we find out that there's something we thought we knew all along, but don't.

Adults are also more motivated by learning that increases performance than learning for knowledge. Because of this, in all of our foundational or theoretical sessions, we aim to explicitly tie the theory to increased retention.

Examples of incorporating Adult Engagement into the ESE experience:

Example 1: Connect This to That
Ask participants to connect a new task or skill to something they already know or have experienced.

During a training on customer service, ask participants:
"Can you think of a time outside of work when someone handled a difficult situation with you really well? What did they do? How can we apply that here when dealing with a tough customer?"

Or, when teaching how to read a production schedule:
"Have you ever planned a family event, like a birthday or graduation? How did you keep track of what needed to happen and when? What systems did you use that we can adapt to your workstation today?"

Example 2: Discover Something
Set up a challenge or scenario that encourages learners to uncover an insight for themselves rather than being told. Before teaching formal communication norms, ask participants to role-play a mock phone call to a supplier or manager without any prep. Afterward, debrief together:
"*What did the caller do that made them seem professional?"*
"What did they say that made you feel less confident?"
"Let's make a list of the qualities of a phone call that demonstrates your professionalism."

Example 3: Update an Old Theory
Invite participants to test or re-examine something they've long believed or assumed. Introduce a conversation around professionalism by asking:
"What does being 'professional' mean to you? Where did you learn that? Let's compare it

with what employers are actually looking for in this setting. Where does it match? Where does it conflict?"

Or, in a discussion about time management:
"Some of us have learned that multitasking is the key to success. Let's try a few tasks back-to-back and then all at once—what happens to quality, accuracy, and stress levels? What might this mean for how you work best?"

Reflection:

- ☐ Have we ever collected or analyzed feedback about program exits beyond the surface level explanation? (e.g. childcare constraints, lack of transportation)
- ☐ How do we convey key learning during the ESE experience? Lecture style, on-the-job coaching, or some other way?
- ☐ Where in the participant experience could we infuse principles of adult engagement?
- ☐ What changes in program structure or staffing would we need to make those changes?

PROGRAM PROGRESSION

Once you have incorporated principles of adult engagement into the ESE experience, it's time to map the stages of a participant's journey through the ESE. This is essential to understanding drop off rates and planning effective interventions.

Conversion Funnels in Marketing

Marketing professionals use the term "conversion funnel" to describe the journey that potential customers take when they first hear about a product to hopefully making a purchase or taking a desired action (conversion). The funnel metaphor illustrates the idea that a large number of potential leads enter the top of the funnel, but as they progress through the stages, fewer individuals move toward conversion and ultimately, making a purchase.

Stage of Conversion Funnel	Description	Actions that Trigger Next Stage
Awareness	Potential customer becomes aware of product/service through marketing efforts.	Potential customers are exposed to product through advertising, social media, and/or word-of-mouth.
Interest	Prospect interacts with content and shows interest by exploring more about the product.	Prospects engage with content like blog posts, emails, social media, and peers.
Consideration	Prospect compares options and evaluates whether products can meet their needs.	Prospects explore product comparisons, read reviews.

Intent	Potential customer expresses plan to buy through actions like adding items to cart or going to store	Individual adds product to cart, requests demo, engages with sales team
Evaluation	This is the final decision-making process where a customer assesses if they should continue with purchase.	The individual makes a decision after reviewing offers, guarantees, or customer support.
Purchase	The individual completes the transaction and becomes a paying customer.	The customer provides payment to close the deal.

Marketers watch the funnel like a hawk to see where in the funnel people get stuck (they call it "friction") and what they need to move to the next stage as well as to understand where they drop off instead of continuing toward making a purchase. This allows them to understand the customer's pain points and develop a strategy to intervene–to ensure that they, or future customers like them, re-engage with the product.

Program Funnels for ESEs

Similarly, ESEs can be thought of as having their own funnel—a structured program model with critical stages that participants move through, from initial intake to achieving employment and long-term economic mobility. Just as marketers monitor friction in the conversion funnel to see where potential customers drop off, social enterprises must pay close attention to where participants disengage or exit the program prematurely. These drop-off points can reveal underlying challenges, whether they are related to skills gaps, external life circumstances, or mismatched expectations. By identifying these critical points, social enterprises can develop targeted interventions to keep participants on track, re-engaging them and improving overall program outcomes. The goal is not only to ensure participants' success but also to strengthen the program for future participants, much like refining a conversion funnel to maximize customer retention.

Below is an example of a funnel for an ESE. To understand the factors that lead to program drop off and customize your own program funnel, practitioners should identify the stages of their own participant experience and what milestone they hope participants will ultimately achieve.

Stage of Program Funnel	**Length of Time**	**Activities**	**Actions that Trigger Next Stage**
Intake	1 hour	• Attend information session • Complete intake meeting	Participant self-selects to attend orientation meeting.

Orientation	1 week	• Weeklong orientation to program and job	Anyone who completes orientation is offered employment at the ESE.
First week of work	1 week	• Introduction to supervisor and team • On-the-job training begins	Participant attends work on time and completes on-the-job training as scheduled.
Stabilization Phase	4-6 months	• Up to 20 hours/week paid shift work • Up to 5 hours/week paid personal development work • Level 1 training across 3 stations	Passing grade on all Level 1 knowledge and skill assessments results in successful graduation or progression to Professional Growth Phase
Professional Growth Phase	2-4 months	• Up to 25 hours/week paid shift work • Up to 10 hours/week paid personal development work • Level 2 training across 3 stations	Passing grade on all Level 2 knowledge and skill assessments results in successful graduation or progression to Personal and Professional Maturity Phase
Personal and Professional Maturity	4-6 months	• Up to 30 hours/week paid shift work • Up to 10 hours/week paid personal development work • Shift lead training	Passing grade on all Shift Lead knowledge and skill assessments results in successful graduation or transition to Operations Manager

Reflection:

- [ ] Can we define the “seasons” or “chapters” of an employee journey that describe our priorities for them?
- [ ] Are there natural transition points where participants gain new skills, responsibilities, or roles within the enterprise? How would we label these stages separately?
- [ ] How do we define the end goal for participants? Is it skill-building, retention, leadership, or advocacy?
- [ ] What specific outcomes or behaviors mark a participant’s movement from one stage to the next (e.g., successful training completion, job mastery)?
- [ ] At what points (if any) during the participant journey do we formally check in on progress (e.g., first week, end of training, three months into the job)?

- ☐ What information or feedback do we gather during these check-ins to learn how participants are feeling about their journey through the ESE?

DROP OFF ANALYSIS

Calculating Drop Off Rate

Just like marketers, ESE practitioners can and should pay attention to where participants exit prematurely. At the individual level, checking in on a participant's journey can allow staff to make accommodations to promote retention, such as referring to a needed support service or other action planning. More broadly, understanding patterns and trends through drop off analysis helps ESE leaders to make needed adjustments in the program, enterprise operations, and available support services.

The sample tool we've included with this resource calculates the drop off rate at each stage in the funnel. Doing this allows practitioners to confirm where participants most commonly drop off rather than simply assuming.

To calculate drop-off rates, divide the number of participants who exited the program at a certain stage by the number of participants who started it within the same period. Multiply the product by 100.

$$\textbf{Drop off rate} = \frac{\text{Number of participants who exited the ESE after intake}}{\text{Total number of participants who started intake within the same period}} \times 100$$

For example, if 5 participants exited the ESE after intake in Q1 and 25 participants started intake during Q1, the drop off rate would be 20%.

Tracking Tool

We've created a tracking tool to help you calculate the drop off rate at each stage of a participant's journey through the ESE. This resource will streamline the process of monitoring the drop off rate, allowing you to spend more time collecting qualitative data, hypothesizing, and making changes to improve retention.

Start here:

- ☐ Copy the names of the participants in your first cohort into column A.
- ☐ Record the total number of participants who started the stage in row 23.
- ☐ When a participant drops off from the program, mark an X in the cell that corresponds with the stage where they exited.
- ☐ At the end of each program stage, total the number of participants who dropped off and record it in row 24.
- ☐ View the drop off rate for each stage in row 25. This cell is populated with a formula set to calculate the drop off rate automatically, using the data you entered in row 23 and 24.
- ☐ Repeat for each stage of the ESE experience.
- ☐ Input additional cohorts in new tabs.

Analyzing Findings

The purpose of drop off analysis is to answer two core questions: 1) Where in the program experience are participants dropping off? and 2) For what reason(s)? To answer question one, review the row labeled “Drop Off Rate” (row 25) on the sample tab of the tracking tool and note the top phases where participants exit prematurely.

In addition to the quantitative calculations tracked on the spreadsheet, it can be beneficial to collect qualitative data from participants as various phases of the employee journey. This helps practitioners gain information about why employees drop off at particular stages. ESEs can use exit interviews or surveys to ask former participants why they left the program or what challenges they faced. Look for patterns in responses related to program design, support, or external challenges. We’ve included a few sample qualitative, open-ended questions in the appendix of this toolkit to consider implementing. Click here for our resource on developing employee feedback surveys.

Reflection:

- [ ] Based on drop off rate calculations and qualitative findings, where are the most common drop off points at this ESE?
- [ ] Does the data show that the most common drop off points are similar to or different from what I expected?
- [ ] Do check ins or interventions exist at these points in a participant’s experience?
- [ ] Do we believe the drop off is “normal” or more than we thought?

Developing Hypotheses

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data, an ESE could brainstorm several hypotheses to analyze drop offs. For example:

- **Hypothesis 1**: Participants are dropping off during the training phase because they don’t see a clear connection between the training and their job goals.
- **Hypothesis 2**: Drop offs occur during the first week of work because participants lack the technical skills or confidence to meet job requirements.
- **Hypothesis 3**: Participants exit after the first month because of external factors like transportation or personal responsibilities that the program doesn’t address.
- **Hypothesis 4**: Participants are disengaging because they aren’t receiving enough feedback or mentorship to help them navigate difficult phases.

Reflection:

- [ ] Are certain stages of the program more demanding or complex than others? Could the design of these stages be contributing to drop offs?
- [ ] How well does the ESE balance theoretical learning with practical, hands-on experience? Could participants be disengaging because they don’t see the relevance of the training to their job tasks?
- [ ] Could the ESE experience be misaligned with participants' expectations or needs, leading them to drop off when they realize it doesn’t meet their goals?

- [ ] Is there a pattern of certain demographics (age, background, work experience) dropping off more frequently? What might explain these trends?
- [ ] Do we offer flexibility to accommodate participants' personal circumstances or external barriers? Could a lack of accommodations be causing drop-offs at certain stages?

Testing Hypotheses

Hypotheses are just speculations about the reason for a particular phenomenon, so the next step is to test them by making adjustments to the ESE's operations.

- **Hypothesis 1**: Participants are dropping off during the training phase because they don't see a clear connection between the training and their job goals.
    - **Proposed change:** Adjust the curriculum to make the training more job-specific and emphasize how each module ties directly to job performance.
- **Hypothesis 2**: Drop offs occur during the first week of work because participants lack the technical skills or confidence to meet job requirements.
    - **Proposed change:** Introduce additional skill-building sessions or mentorship support for participants who are struggling early in the job. Measure whether these efforts reduce early job phase drop offs.
- **Hypothesis 3**: Participants exit after the first month because of external factors like transportation or personal responsibilities that the program doesn't address.
    - **Proposed change:** Provide additional resources (e.g., transportation assistance, flexible scheduling) and monitor whether these supports improve retention.
- **Hypothesis 4** : Participants are disengaging because they aren't receiving enough feedback or mentorship to help them navigate difficult phases.
    - **Proposed change:** Increase participant engagement by incorporating more feedback, interactive learning, or real world application projects.

Once you've made adjustments, continue to track drop off rates to see if the changes are having a positive impact. If certain hypotheses prove accurate, continue refining those program elements. If not, revisit and refine your assumptions.

APPENDIX

Sample Open-Ended Program Drop Off Questions

1. What factors influenced your decision to leave the program at this stage?
2. Were there any external barriers or personal challenges you faced that made it difficult to continue in the program? If so, what were they?
3. How well did the program meet your expectations up until this point?
4. Is there something that could have been done differently that would have prevented you from dropping off from the ESE?
5. Did you feel supported by the program staff throughout your journey? If not, what kind of support would have been helpful? What does "support" in the context of this ESE mean to you?

Implementation Checklist

The steps from this toolkit are listed below to help streamline the implementation process for implementing your own drop off analysis:

- [ ] **Apply principles of adult engagement:** Reflect on how your current approach conveys learning (e.g., lecture, hands-on coaching) and consider whether there are opportunities to engage participants more effectively.
- [ ] **Map program progression:** Identify the key stages and transitions of a participants' journey through the ESE and list to create your ESE's program funnel.
- [ ] **Track participants' journey:** Use the tracking tool to list participants and record drop offs at each stage of the employee journey.
- [ ] **Monitor the drop off rate:** Use the formulas in the tracking tool to monitor the drop off rate at each program stage or calculate it manually.
- [ ] **Collect quantitative data:** Identify the top phases where participants are most likely to exit the ESE prematurely.
- [ ] **Collect qualitative data:** Use exit interviews or feedback surveys to understand why participants drop off at each stage.
- [ ] **Hypothesize:** Based on drop off data and qualitative findings, develop hypotheses to explain the reasons for early exits from the ESE.
- [ ] **Test:** Brainstorm potential changes to test your hypothesis and continue to monitor drop-off rates to evaluate the impact of each hypothesis.
- [ ] **Make adjustments:** If your hypotheses are confirmed, implement those changes to the ESE's operations. If the changes do not improve drop off rates, revisit your assumptions and identify new hypotheses and solutions.
- [ ] **Repeat:** Continue to monitor drop off rates and collect qualitative feedback to identify opportunities to strengthen operations. .