

# Early Head Start Workforce at a Crossroads

2022

Presented by



REGION NINE HEAD START ASSOCIATION

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Elevating the Head Start Community

This report reflects the data collected from surveys to program leaders and program staff by the Region 9 Head Start Association during the month of June 2022. This project is funded by the California Head Start State Collaboration Office. Data and findings from this survey will be distributed to grantees operating in Region IX. This includes grantees in Arizona, California, Hawaii and the Pacific Region, and Nevada.

A special thanks to staff and consultants at Region 9 Head Start Association for their support on this project – most importantly Dylan de Valk, Student Intern, Boston University and Shafer, Early Head Start Consultant.

Region 9 Head Start Association (R9HSA) is dedicated to elevating the Head Start Community. A membership association of Head Start and Early Head Start programs operating in the states of Arizona, California, Hawaii and the Pacific Region, and Nevada. To learn more about the programs and services of R9HSA go to: [region9hsa.org](http://region9hsa.org)

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## Executive Summary

Region 9 Head Start Association (R9HSA) conducted surveys with Region 9 program leaders and program staff on Early Head Start (EHS) staff professional development strategies and examined if staff retention was linked to professional development. This report will discuss staff retention pain points, proposed solutions by program staff, and staff retention strategies some programs are implementing to reduce turnover. Additionally, professional development strategies agencies are currently implementing including training and preferred methods for follow up implementation from both groups will also be discussed. How programs are evaluating professional development and how they use that information for agency planning will be looked at. Finally, workforce development strategies agencies use to meet requirements will be shown.

Findings suggest professional development is linked to staff retention. The issue of retention is a significant challenge for Early Head Start programs. The data shows that for experienced staff, those working 3+ years a significant number are “likely/very likely” to leave their positions. For many, training, education, and other professional development opportunities can also open doors for advancement. Compensation and growth opportunities were often linked together. It is recommended that future focus group discussions dig into this connection deeper, finding out staff motivations behind professional development and growth opportunities. For example, do staff want to move up for compensation increases only, or are they interested in and prepared for roles such as management? This could help guide leaders on providing more leadership-based skills training from an earlier point. Additionally, some agencies are providing more robust onboarding programs as an antidote to high staff turnover with first year employees. Follow up on the outcomes of these new programs from both leader and staff perspectives, and how they linked to staff retention, would be a great point of discussion for future focus groups.

Preferred professional development strategies from both leaders and staff favored small groups and relationship-based learning and implementation. There were differences between groups with leaders preferring internal training staff, and program staff preferring external contractors and community resources.

Professional development evaluations heavily inform agency strategic goals and grants, influence budgeting, and guide hiring training contractors and community partners. Because of how professional development evaluations are deeply connected to agency strategic planning, it would be expected for agencies to place a high level of importance on evaluations. However, findings showed that collecting evaluation data and regular review of data is not happening consistently, or at all in some cases. To further explore the link between professional development evaluations and staff retention from a leader perspective, future focus group discussions could examine the

strategies 39% of agencies use to collect data related to professional development and link it to job satisfaction, retention indicators, established formal surveys, and self-reported data.

Agencies and program staff are participating in workforce development, with over 50% participating in higher education. Although this is positive for the development of the early childhood workforce and meeting requirements, findings demonstrate program staff feel compensation and wages do not match the level of education they either already have, are in the process of obtaining, or will be required to have.

Early Head Start staff professional development strategies and retention are linked together, and the findings resulting from these surveys suggest they are also nuanced and interwoven. Staff turnover for experienced staff is an essential topic to explore. Many programs provide significant investment early in a staff member's journey, but should be exploring strategies that meet the challenges of staff members as they become more seasoned. Future focus group discussions could be powerful in obtaining more qualitative data and anecdotes from leaders and staff on strategy outcomes.

### **Background and Objectives**

Region 9 Head Start Association received a grant from the California Head Start State Collaboration Office to design and conduct surveys on Early Head Start Staff Professional Development strategies for both Region 9 program leaders and staff in Early Head Start. The purpose in conducting these surveys is to examine the link between staff retention and professional development and assist agencies in offering the best, most effective professional development for staff now, and throughout their careers.

The explicit interests of the research with program leaders included:

- Strategies agencies utilize to meet the requirements of licensing agencies, Office of Head Start and other related parties.
- Strategies that increase the capacity of individuals and groups to provide high-quality services to children and families.
- Detailed examples of strategies program leaders believe result in staff retention.

The explicit interests of the research with program staff included:

- Strategies for effective professional development.
- Strategies agencies use for staff to be more effective in their role.
- Strategies and efforts agencies use to increase employee happiness and have a positive impact on employment longevity.

Results of this research will be shared with Region 9 program leaders and used to guide professional development recommendations to agencies within Region 9, which includes Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada.

## Survey Method

Region 9 Head Start Association (R9HSA) collected the data on Early Head Start (EHS) staff professional development strategies from Region 9 program leaders and program staff. The survey questionnaires were completed through Survey Monkey and sent as a link via constant contact emails, the Heads Up newsletter, and through various Region 9 Head Start Association social media accounts. Program leader email addresses were collected from a Region 9 program director list. The program leader survey received 99 responses, 56 of which were complete responses. The program staff survey received 676 responses, 489 of which were complete responses.

The completed program leader surveys ranged in agency type as shown in Figure 1 below. Program options included Early Head Start, Early Head Start/Head Start, Early Head Start Family Childcare partnership, and Migrant Head Start.

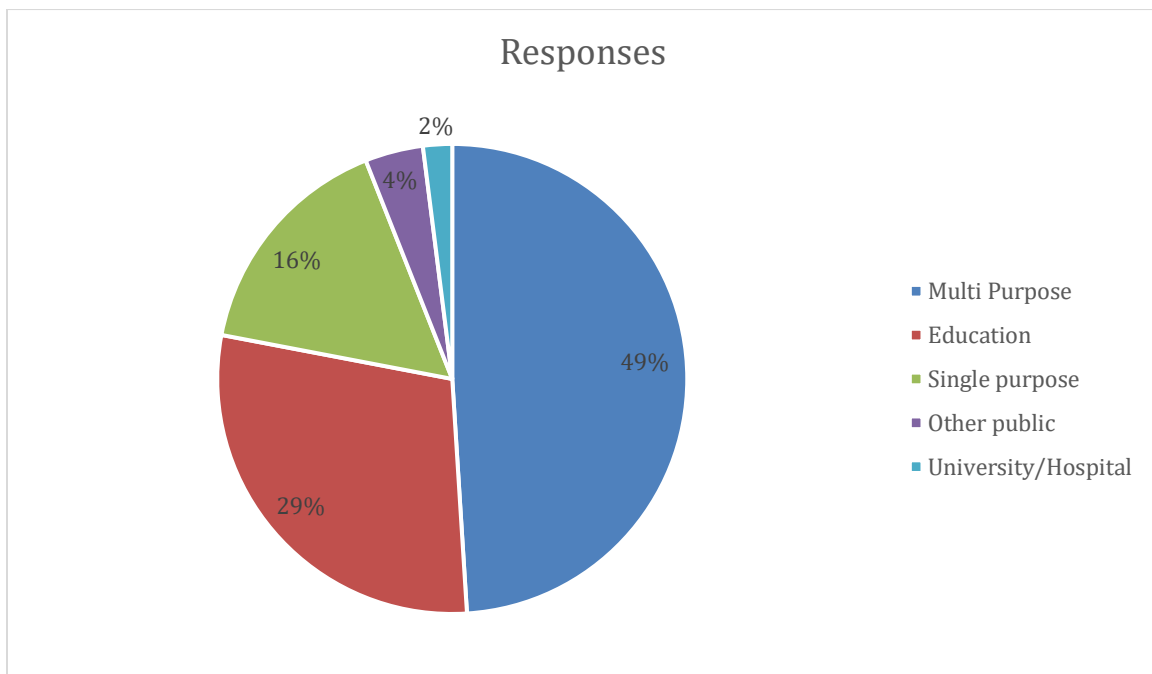


Figure 1: Response by agency type

## Survey Results

### Staff Retention Strategies

One focus of this research was to examine the link between staff retention and professional development.

- 33% of program staff said their agency's professional development offerings influence their decisions about staying or leaving their current position.

Program staff also reported how likely they were to leave their current position in the next 0-1 years, 1-3 years, and 3+ years as shown in Figure 2 below.

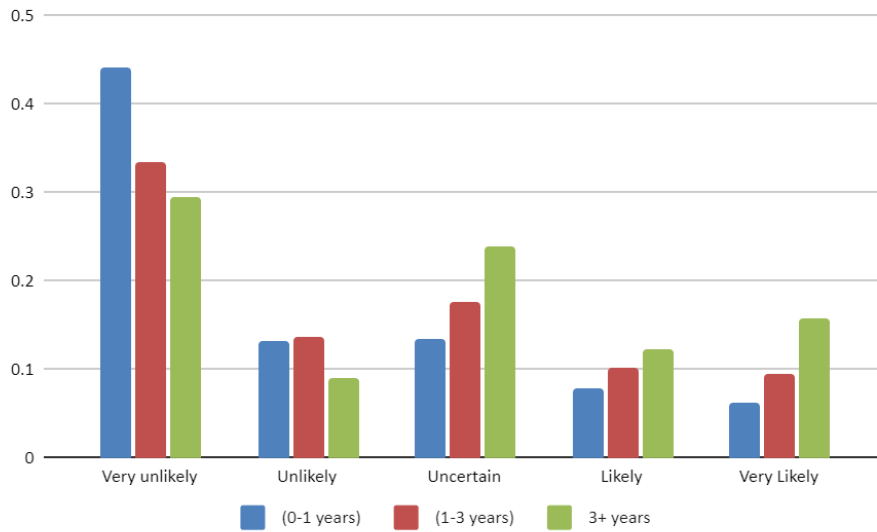
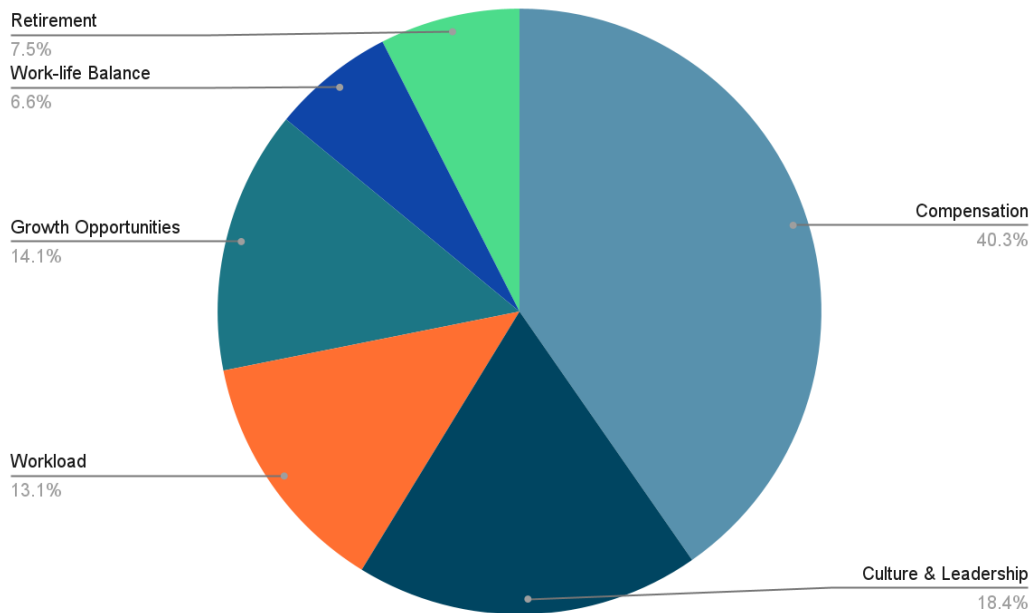


Figure 2

Program staff were asked what would need to occur in order to reconsider resigning. The following category trends emerged, with many of these woven together and linked with each other. As expected, compensation and retirement benefits increase combined made for 47.8% of the response. However, three items may present programs with opportunities linked to professional development. Culture and Leadership, Workload, and Work-life balance totaling 38.1% of the respondents suggest that a closer examination training practices could positively impact retention.





- Compensation pain points included lack of raises (outside of COLA's), low wages that cannot accommodate the increasing cost of living, low salaries that do not match the increased responsibilities and workloads or level of education staff have obtained.
  - Solutions included wage and salary increases in addition to COLA's, removing salary caps, reducing workloads, better benefits, tuition and student loan support, stipends and incentives.
  
- Culture and leadership pain points included disrespect from management, lack of recognition and appreciation, not feeling valued, poor communication, not enough support, and favoritism.
  - Solutions included listening to staff without judgment, clear communication between management and staff, advocating for staff, transparent and ethical leadership, and strengths-based leadership.
  
- Workload pain points included short staffing, unreasonable workloads, additional responsibilities without compensation, added stress, and lack of support.
  - Solutions included re-evaluating current job responsibilities, reducing workloads, hiring more staff, providing mental health support for staff, and offering more support in the classroom.
  
- Growth opportunity pain points included limited opportunity for advancement, needing more positions that match advanced education, and not having enough growth and professional development offerings.
  - Solutions included more room for advancement, education opportunities, more workshop or training opportunities, better support for employee growth and continuous advancement, and having a different process for employees to apply and grow within the company in comparison to outside applicants.
  
- Work-life balance pain points included year round work, long hours, and commute times.
  - Solutions included offering more flexibility through remote work opportunities, options to work less hours, work part time, or part year, and to support staff requests for time off.
  - 1 staff member shared, "I wouldn't leave because work recognizes the need for work life balance and is switching to 32 hour work weeks and i love it!!!!!"
  
- Additionally, 24 program staff noted upcoming retirement within the next few years as their reason for most likely leaving.

### **Turnover**

Program leaders reported their agencies experience the highest turnover rates with new hires (0-1 years), followed by established staff (1-3 years), and lastly experienced staff (3+ years).

To address new hire (0-1 years) staff turnover:

- 16% of agencies are offering a more “extensive”, “comprehensive”, or “in-depth” onboarding program.
- 14% of agencies are using mentoring and coaching strategies.

To address staff turnover with established (1-3 years) and experienced (3+ year) staff:

- 14 % of agencies are offering financial incentives including stipends, bonuses, college and certification reimbursements, membership fees, and conference/travel costs.
- 14% of agencies are using mentoring and coaching strategies

### Professional Development Strategies

Another goal of this research was to explore strategies that increase the capacity of individuals and groups to provide high-quality services to children and families. Agencies shared a variety of ways they provide and evaluate professional development efforts, and what strategies are impactful for their staff. Program staff also shared the strategies they find impactful for their own professional growth and to be effective in their role.

Leaders indicated that EHS staff learned most effectively during professional development sessions that were done in smaller groups. The larger the group, the less impactful sessions were for learning. Program leaders viewed in-person sessions as having a greater impact over virtual sessions of the same group size category. Program staff were aligned with leaders, with the only difference being in the 75-150+ category. In descending order from *most* impactful to *least*, here is how each of the 8 categories ranked. Leaders and staff ranked 1-6 in the same order.

Program Leaders:

*Highest Impact*

1. *In-person* small group meeting (6 or fewer)
2. *In-person* training classes (24-36)
3. *Virtual* small group meeting (6 or fewer)
4. *In-person* conference setting (mix of large & small group learning)
5. *Virtual* training classes (24-36)
6. *Virtual* conference setting (mix of large & small group learning)
7. *In-person* large group session (75-150+)
8. *Virtual* large group session (75-150+)

*Lowest Impact*

Program staff:

*Highest Impact*

1. *In-person* small group meeting (6 or fewer)
2. *In-person* training classes (24-36)
3. *Virtual* small group meeting (6 or fewer)
4. *In-person* conference setting (mix of large & small group learning)
5. *Virtual* training classes (24-36)

6. *Virtual* conference setting (mix of large & small group learning)
7. *Virtual* large group session (75-150+)
8. *In-person* large group session (75-150+)

*Lowest Impact*

Ranging from *very frequently* to *very rarely*, program leaders shared and ranked the delivery methods used to deliver professional development in their agency. For program leaders, internal training resources were preferred over contract course providers in the same category. However, for staff, contract course providers and community training sources are preferred over internal training resources. In descending order from *most frequent* to *least frequent*, here are the strategies leaders are engaging in to support staff:

*Most frequent across agencies*

1. *Mentor/coaching*
2. *Single topic trainings (regardless of length, wide range of topics) - Internal training resource*
3. *On-line learning / asynchronous opportunities*
4. *Peer to Peer Network - Skill building sessions lead by mentors/team members*
5. *Single topic trainings (regardless of length, wide range of topics) - Contract course providers*
6. *Conferences offered by Associations, Community Partners, Vendors*
7. *Multi session courses - Internal training resource*
8. *Multi session courses - Contract course provider*
9. *Organized Community of Practice - Guided or volunteer*
10. *Cooperative Learning/Community Based*
11. *Certificated Continuing Education Courses offered by Extension Programs*

*Least frequent across agencies*

### **Implementing Professional Development**

Ranking from *most preferred* to *least preferred*, program leaders and staff shared their favored approaches for implementing professional development:

Program Leaders:

*Most preferred*

1. *Supervisor's follow up*
2. *Ongoing coaching*
3. *Peer to peer supports*
4. *Compensation/financial reward*
5. *Compliance to continuing education plans*
6. *Organization recognition/celebrations*

*Least preferred*

Program Staff:

*Most preferred*

1. *Peer to peer supports*
2. *Ongoing coaching*
3. *Supervisor's follow up*
4. *Compensation/financial reward*
5. *Compliance to continuing education plans*
6. *Organization recognition/celebrations*

*Least preferred*

Although there are differences in ranking between the two groups, leaders and staff are in agreement with their top 3 strategies and aligned with their bottom 3 strategies. Both groups favored implementation strategies that are relationship-based.

### **Evaluating Professional Development**

When it comes to agencies evaluating their professional development efforts:

- 64% of agencies have a standard evaluation for all training efforts that are completed by attendees.
- 50% of program leaders shared training efforts are evaluated on an individual basis by the trainer or training source.
- 46% of agencies collect data on professional development impact from managers and supervisors.
- 39% of agencies collect data related to professional development and link it to job satisfaction, retention indicators, established formal surveys, and self-reported data.
- 17% of agencies conduct a scheduled follow-up with attendees after the training.

Professional development evaluations are reviewed the most by managers and coordinators, followed by program directors.

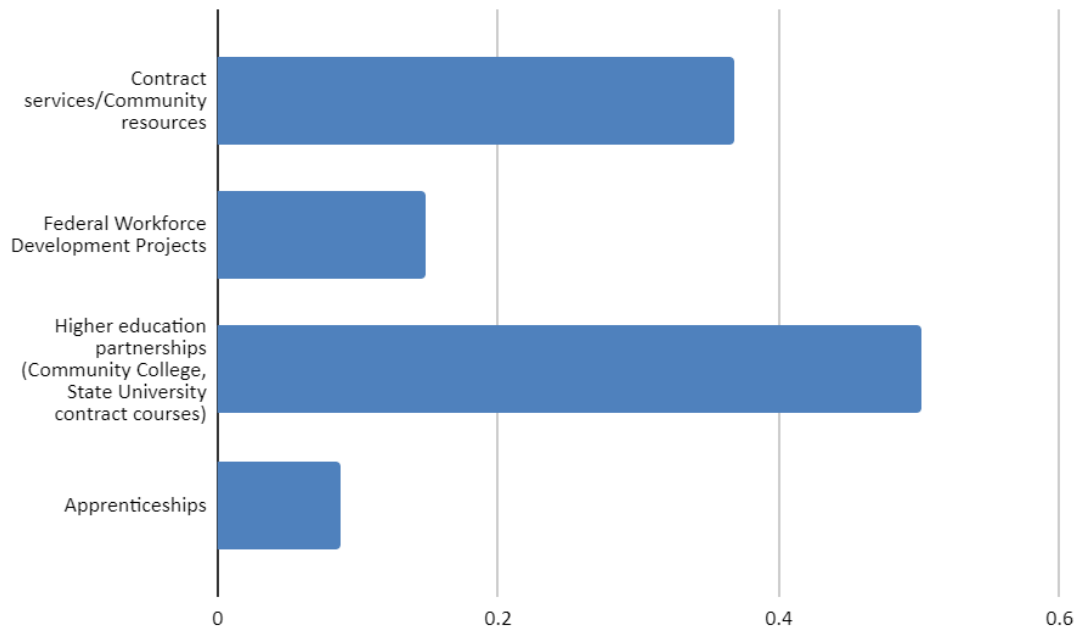
- 41% of agencies review evaluations annually.
- 34% of agencies review evaluations quarterly.

Agencies use evaluation data from professional development efforts to influence agency planning in a number of ways. From goal setting and budgeting to hiring contractors and community training resources, managers and directors are active in sorting data for the purpose of improving practices.

### **Workforce Development Strategies**

A final focus of this research was to discover workforce development strategies agencies utilize to meet the requirements of licensing agencies, Office of Head Start, and other related parties. Higher education partnerships were the most used, followed by contract service/community resources, federal workforce development projects, and apprenticeships. Few agencies who responded are involved in apprenticeships at this time. Recently, this

strategy has had wide discussion maybe in planning stages therefore not showing up in the data collected.



To support staff member’s record keeping of their professional development courses, agencies and staff use the following:

	Statewide Workforce Registry	Child Development Associate Credential	Child Development Training Consortium	Early Childhood Mentor Project
Leaders	69%	53%	51%	19%
Staff	55%	35%	28%	13%

Both program leaders and staff report wide use of Statewide Workforce Registry. This creates a possible nexus for evaluation of professional development course offerings and training aspirations by staff participants.

## Appendix

### Notes:

1. Q9 - PD by length of service
  - a. Program leaders answered pretty evenly across the board for all pd topics, except leadership skills were reserved for experienced 3+ year staff.
  - b. Program staff answers heavily weighted PD topics towards experienced 3+ year staff. Did these staff indicate that they received pd in these topic areas once they were experienced staff, or were they answering as experienced staff when asked to “indicate below the topics you have covered in your professional development”?
2. Staff retention questions & turnover:
  - a. In the past, it has been common that new hire turnover is the highest. However, is there a shift beginning to happen where more experienced, high performing staff are leaving? Some work coming out on the “Great Resignation” happening post Covid is finding in some industries there are greater resignation rates with high performing, experienced employees. Looking at what program staff said on how likely they are to leave at 0-1 years, 1-3, or 3+ may be an area that is beginning to show this shift. It would be interesting to explore this topic deeper, based on trends that emerged around wages, workloads, growth opportunities, etc.
3. Room for advancement and increased pay were often linked in individual responses. Is the workforce more interested in growth opportunities and advancement to be able to make a living wage, or are they interested in advancing for reasons like leadership, personal growth, growing a specific skill set, etc.
  - a. How can agencies grow leaders from the beginning? If employees received more leadership training and skills earlier on, would they feel they have more options for upward mobility into different roles?
4. How do agencies prepare for staff retiring? Do they spend time developing their current workforce to promote, cross train, etc?
5. How are agencies thinking about workforce development as it relates to longevity for the agency?