

# Conducting Stay Interviews



In today's challenging environment, where staff and faculty can easily seek new opportunities elsewhere, it is crucial for universities to retain their most valuable talent. Staff and faculty may consider leaving for various reasons, including better compensation, relief from burnout, or a desire to revitalize their careers.

Stay interviews are becoming an essential strategy to prevent the loss of key personnel and expertise. These interviews will help our university understand the factors that might lead employees to consider leaving and identify what changes or improvements could encourage them to stay. The insights gained from stay interviews provide an opportunity to take proactive measures before it's too late.

This toolkit offers foundational guidance for conducting stay interviews. Over time, leaders can adapt the questions to address their staff and faculty's specific needs and concerns. The ultimate goal of the stay interview is to help team members envision how their roles can be shaped to enable them to do the best work of their careers at the university.



# Conducting Stay Interviews

Stay interviews are an excellent tool for gaining insight into how valued staff and faculty perceive their roles and the university—before they contemplate leaving. These interviews show that you appreciate their contributions and can signify a shift in your team's culture, fostering deeper commitment and engagement.

These interviews are simply conversations that help leaders understand why employees stay or what might cause them to leave.

In an effective stay interview, leaders ask consistent, structured questions in a relaxed, conversational tone. Though a stay interview typically lasts only 20-30 minutes, it sends a powerful message to staff and faculty that they are valued.

**Here are best practices for conducting an effective stay interview.<sup>1</sup>**



**Schedule ahead of time.** Show that you respect their time by scheduling the meeting in advance.



**Make sure the purpose of the meeting is clear.** Explain to employees what a stay interview is, and that you intend to collect feedback that will help you proactively address issues or barriers to success.



**Give employees time to prepare.** Consider sharing a high-level outline of the points you intend to cover so they can collect their thoughts and be well-prepared.



**Choose a comfortable setting.** Stay interviews are conversations that are best held in person, if possible. However, if you must use a video conferencing platform, choose a convenient time that avoids a busier part of the day.



**Separate stay interviews from performance reviews.** In stay interviews, your employees are evaluating the performance of the leadership team and the organization. It's essentially the reverse of a performance review and neither has an impact on the other.

# Conversation starters and questions to consider

**Strike a balance between asking some predetermined question while also allowing the conversation to head in other unanticipated directions.**

Start by expressing your appreciation for their efforts and contributions to the team. Highlight specific ways in which they excel in their role. Then, ask what aspects of their work bring them the most satisfaction.

Share your commitment to achieving strong team performance and the overall success of the university. Emphasize that while results matter, you also care deeply about who they are as individuals and the challenges they face. Ask how you can demonstrate support for them in their current role or in preparation for any future role.

Ask about their progress in achieving personal growth and career goals. Make it clear that you are open to making changes where possible and that you genuinely value their feedback. Let them know that their input is important and ask about any changes that could positively impact their experience.

## **Additional question to ask during your conversations:**

- ☐ What kind of feedback or recognition would you like about your performance that you aren't currently getting?
- ☐ What talents, interests, or skills do you have that we could be utilizing more?
- ☐ What have you felt good about accomplishing in your job and your time here?
- ☐ What kinds of flexibility would be helpful to you in balancing your work and home life?
- ☐ If you could change one thing about your job, team, or company, what would it be?



During the conversation, be attentive to any warning signs that an employee may need additional support. Aim to uncover challenges they face before these issues escalate to the point where they might consider leaving.

Effective stay interviews should guide you in taking proactive steps to ensure your top talent remains committed to the university. For instance, you might discover that a high-performing team member finds fulfillment in helping others succeed. In such cases, you could explore mentoring opportunities that align with this interest.

Stay interviews can also reveal simple, low-cost adjustments that significantly improve how employees feel about their work environment. Even small actions can demonstrate your responsiveness and understanding, leading to stronger engagement and loyalty.