



Returnship Toolkit

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About the Returnship Toolkit

01

WHAT IT IS

A set of tools to support employers in acquiring and retaining talent from a population of candidates coming into or returning to the electricity sector after a period of absence from the labour market.

WHO CAN USE IT

HR professionals, leadership/hiring managers, and others involved in attracting and retaining talent.

PURPOSE

It will help

- Identify, locate, recruit, onboard, integrate, and retain talent returning to the workplace after an extended period of absence due to systemic or caregiving needs (children/elder/other).
- Anticipate and mitigate common barriers to recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and retaining talent from this candidate population.
- Influence, support, and challenge decision makers (and employees) to enable the organization to fully harness the benefits that a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce can bring.
- Model bias-aware communication and interpersonal skills to help foster a culture of engagement.

WHAT IT INCLUDES

- Best practices talent acquisition “how-to” strategies.
- The full HR cycle: recruiting and hiring, onboarding, and retention and engagement.
- A focus on a target population, mainly women returning to the workplace after a lengthy absence from the electricity sector, who can be valuable members of an employer’s workforce.

HOW IT WAS DEVELOPED

This toolkit has been informed by learnings from an environmental scan of related employment programs, case studies, and research projects. Additionally, consultation sessions were held on January 18 and 27, 2022, with seventeen participants from stakeholder groups such as employers, labour, and industry organizations that work to attract and support underrepresented groups to the sector.

This insight has been invaluable in shaping the toolkit contents to ensure they are practical and effective.

Introduction

02



The “War for Talent” continues—Canadian job vacancies have soared. Employers need to fill over 1 million jobs.

There has been an ongoing labour shortage in the electricity sector in Canada over the last decade.

Recognizing the benefits of having diverse and fully inclusive workplaces, EHRC (Electricity Human Resources Canada) is supporting employers to identify and recruit from a population of individuals who are either coming into or returning to the electricity sector workplace after having been away from the workplace for an extended period of time.

Beyond absolute numbers, there is also a well-understood need to increase the diversity of the sector’s workforce. Diversity brings an opportunity for employers to obtain many important benefits such as better competition for talent, increased innovation, improved productivity, reduced turnover, better understanding of customers and stakeholders, and a more equitable and inclusive industry.

Research has shown the pandemic (COVID-19) has had a significant negative impact on employment for women,¹ Indigenous peoples, racialized people, and newcomers to Canada.²

During the pandemic, women were more likely than men to leave the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities (children or elders), disruption of childcare services, and school closures.³

However, the pandemic has only highlighted longstanding trends within the labour force.⁴ A LinkedIn survey conducted in February 2020 found that almost half of working mothers take an extended break after childbirth, with the average break being approximately two years.⁵

DID YOU KNOW

- There were **1,014,560 vacant jobs** in September 2021, an increase of **16.4%** from a month before.
- **143,560 more vacant jobs in a month**, a number greater than the total population of St. John’s, NL.
- The total number of unfilled jobs is nearly **a third the size of Toronto’s total employed population.**⁶

A particularly compelling opportunity for the sector is to increase its number of women.

Women leave the workforce for various reasons, including caregiving, but also due to experiences of unwelcoming workplaces, barriers to learning and advancement, and lack of benefits that meet their needs.

Further, Armine Yalnizyan, an economist with the Atkinson Foundation in Toronto, coined the term “she-cession” in 2020 to describe the disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on women in the Canadian workforce. At the time this toolkit was developed, the most recent report (February 16, 2022) from Statistics Canada’s monthly Labour Force Survey showed that because

DID YOU KNOW

- While the proportion of women in the electricity sector is rising, it remains well **below the average** for the Canadian workforce.
- Women make up approximately **26%** of the electricity workforce.
- Within trades occupations in the sector, women represent **less than 7%** of employees.



From her experience... Ms. O, a single working mother of two, resides in Bruce County, Ontario. When the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in 2020, she left her job. The pandemic and the lockdowns forced her to leave her job as a professional technician to care for her children, who were attending elementary school. After two years of surviving on government assistance, and with the lockdowns lessening across the province, Ms. O is ready to return to work. She began networking with other mothers in her community to see what job opportunities were available. She shared her desire to return to work with her professional networks and friends, but she feels no employer would consider her as skilled as she was prior to her exit from the workforce. At the same time, many local employers in the electricity sector are facing shortages of staff in critical roles.

women were more likely than men to leave the workforce, they were at higher risk of long-term job separation.⁷ There are opportunities to recruit from this pool of talent when these workers are ready to return to the workforce.

Labour market terminology refers to this population as returners. Employer practices to recruit from this population have been referred to as returnships, a re-launch, or re-engagement.

- Re-entering the workforce after a prolonged career break is a challenge and women often have trouble returning at the level they held prior to their absence.
- Returning employees who are away from the workplace may be apprehensive when applying to jobs, if they feel their skills may have lost value during their leave from the workplace.

- There may be barriers or limited resources that affect their ability to return to work safely and affordably; and
- Employers may have limited resources or tools to use in recruiting this talent.

This practical easy-to-use toolkit was built to support employers across the electricity sector and to provide innovative practices for organizations when looking to attract this returning population of talent. Developing a pipeline of labour to ensure an adequate pool of experienced workers for both today and tomorrow is critical to ensuring the long-term stability of Canada’s electricity supply.

According to a March 2021 report by RBC

- Nearly **500,000 women** who left the Canadian workforce during the pandemic, some due to caregiving responsibilities at home, had not returned to work by early 2021.
- More than **200,000 women** slipped into the ranks of the long-term unemployed.

“COVID Further Clouded the Outlook for Canadian Women at Risk of Disruption”, March 4, 2021, RBC



Understanding the challenges of returning to the workforce helps employers recruit and retain this talent.

Caregiver Profile

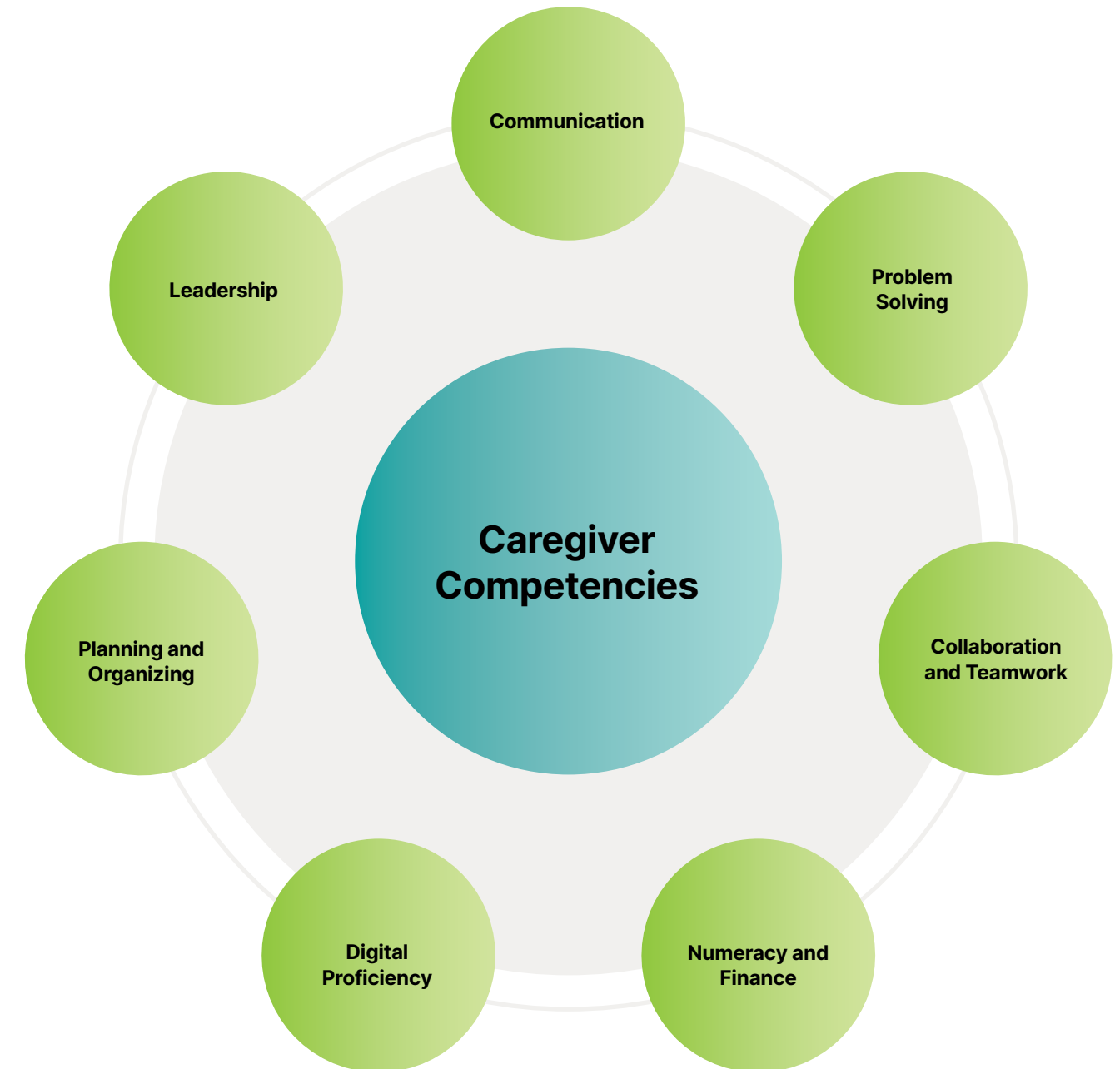


A caregiver is an individual who tends to and cares for another person or person(s) including children, the elderly, or individuals with short- or long-term limitations due to illness, injury or disability.

Caregiving often takes place in the home, and results in an absence from the organized/formal workplace. A period of caregiving is often (wrongly) perceived as a gap in a resume, but in actuality, caregivers develop and use a range of skills and knowledge that are also extremely valuable to the workforce upon their return.

CAREGIVER COMPETENCIES*

*Competencies refer to skills and abilities that Caregivers use on a regular basis that are transferable to the workforce.



CAREGIVER COMPETENCIES (CONT'D)

Communication

The ability to receive, understand, consider, and share information and ideas through speaking, listening, and interacting with others.

Caregivers are able to:

- Adapt their communication style to different audiences
- Use the most appropriate means of communication to convey their message, e.g., verbal, written
- Articulate themselves to be understood by the listener/audience
- Listen actively
- Present information to groups
- Engage their audiences
- Gauge understanding and modify delivery if required

Problem Solving

The ability to identify, analyze, propose solutions, and make decisions. Problem solving helps us to address issues, monitor success, and learn from the experience.

Caregivers are able to:

- Research potential solutions and options
- Assess potential solutions and options
- Make decisions based on outcome when faced with multiple scenarios
- Mediate disagreements
- Identify alternatives and/or contingencies
- Promote consensus and compromise
- Support others to solve their own problems
- Adapt to unforeseen changes
- Brainstorm innovative approaches and potential solutions

Digital Proficiency

The ability to use digital technology and tools to find, manage, apply, create, and share information and content.

Caregivers are able to:

- Use communication applications, e.g., instant messaging, e-mail, videoconferencing and text
- Use common software applications, e.g., word processing software, spreadsheet software
- Conduct online research
- Follow cybersecurity best practices
- Troubleshoot issues with applications and computers

Planning And Organizing

The ability to proactively plan, establish priorities, and allocate resources to achieve positive results.

Caregivers are able to:

- Establish routines
- Prioritize tasks
- Develop action plans
- Monitor and adjust action plans to accomplish goals
- Manage competing priorities/multi-task
- Coordinate resources

Collaboration And Teamwork

The ability to contribute and support others to achieve a common goal.

Caregivers are able to:

- Recognize the value of all team members
- Establish roles and responsibilities to foster collaboration
- Provide and/or receive constructive feedback when required
- Take responsibility for own actions and roles
- Negotiate with others to achieve a common understanding
- Support diversity and inclusion
- Deal with difficult personalities
- Mentor, teach and counsel others

Numeracy And Finance

The ability to find, understand, use and report mathematical and numerical information presented through numbers, words, symbols, and graphics.

Caregivers are able to:

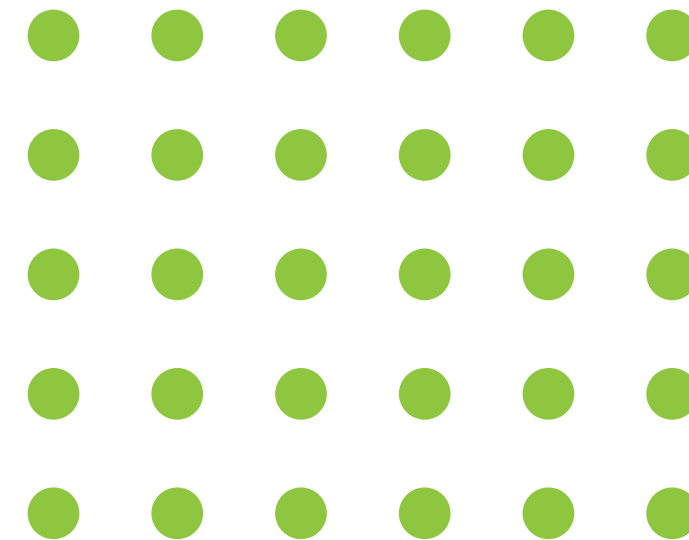
- Develop, monitor, and manage budgets
- Manage cashflow
- Maintain financial records and accounting information
- Identify efficiencies to enhance value
- Manage time and resources
- Develop schedules

Leadership

The ability to influence, guide and set an example for others through actions and behaviours.

Caregivers are able to:

- Advocate for the needs of themselves and others
- Take initiative
- Delegate tasks to others
- Respond to emergency, unplanned, or unexpected events and situations
- Manage stress and personal wellness
- Participate in personal and professional development and learning opportunities



Part I: Getting Ready

03

Articulating the Business Case for a Returnship Focus

CALL TO ACTION FOR LEADERS

Employers need to be deliberate in their strategies to close the gender gap and address the inequitable distribution of women in the electricity industry. Leaders must have a clear understanding of the benefits, yet also the challenges, of enhancing the organization's ability to reach, hire, and retain good talent. A particular focus can be on the untapped talent that is available and ready to return to work after an extended period away from paid employment. It is the role of leadership to define the business case that demonstrates why and how returners are important for their organization.

THE SUCCESS STEPS FOR ARTICULATING THE BUSINESS CASE

A tailored business case can encourage decision makers to recognize the benefits when they:

- Recruit for hard-to-fill positions with an available pool of talent ready to return to the workplace.
- Leverage the value of available transferable skills in the labour market that are needed in the organization.
- Challenge assumptions about the skill sets and potential of returners.
- Intentionally increase diversity and inclusion through identifying women and caregivers to fill vacant positions, both skilled and unskilled.

A business case for decision makers will be more relevant and more likely to be operationalized when it is customized. A successful tailored assessment will include:

- Specific information about the skill sets that are in short supply in the organization.

In an example of improved benefits for all employees, Schneider Electric positioned themselves to attract returners by offering hybrid and remote work options, and benefits like discounts for caregiving services and more extensive mental-health benefits.

- Actions that will attract the highest-quality candidates from the returner talent pool.
- Focused messaging to address any misconceptions and bias about skills erosion – the assumption that the longer the individual has been out of the workforce, the less valuable their skills.
- Clear examples of relevant transferable skills and new knowledge that returners may have acquired through life experiences or additional training during their absence from the workforce.
- Approaches for filling in any competencies and knowledge gaps with cost-effective in-house support mechanisms such as customized on-the-job learning, mentoring, buddy systems, and employee resource groups.
- Evidence that returnships are valuable because organizations can hire from a larger pool of candidates with diverse experiences.
- Other return-on-investment (ROI) indicators for actions with wide-reaching organizational pay-offs such as: updating and extending employee benefits; developing business-effective training and development supports; and promoting products and services to certain customer segments by branding returnship as a value of the organization.

TESLA

In an example of business-relevant branding, Tesla launched its ground-breaking 26-week **"Women Recharged"** returnship program. The launch included their first ever virtual kickoff event.

Highlights

- Successfully hired contract to permanent roles.
- Job ads explicitly reached out to returners with a career gap of at least one year: **Are you ready to Recharge your career?**

Initiating a Returnship Focus

CALL TO ACTION FOR LEADERS

Organizations that adapt to workforce changes will attract the most talent. Adopting a strategic, sustainable approach to recruiting and hiring returners will require advance consideration and solid planning. An early decision that will be required is whether to immediately launch a returnship program or to start by learning from experience with some individual hires. In either approach, leaders must set the tone by expressing their commitment to taking a fresh look at policies and practices. Successful introduction of change will require leaders to be active in communicating to the rest of their organization – why it is valuable to welcome returners, what changes will be required, and how those will be put into practice.

From her experience... “I was determined to use this opportunity as a means of entering back into the workforce and upgrading my skills. I didn’t have all the listed skills for the position at IBM but a few of my programming and development skills were transferable. I have always enjoyed working in IT and believed that I could learn other skills required for the job. Willingness to learn is the key to a successful career,” **shares Anam.**⁸

THE SUCCESS STEPS FOR INITIATING A RETURNSHIP FOCUS

Preparing to focus on attracting a talent pool of returners has three essential steps:

1. Identifying the best returnship opportunities within the organization.
2. Reviewing the organization’s human resource policies and practices to ensure they reflect the approaches that will successfully attract, engage and retain the talent pool of returners.
3. Managing the changes within the organization by engaging internal stakeholders who may be affected and by communicating the business case, the challenges and the opportunities of returnship.

01

IDENTIFY THE POSITIONS THAT ARE BEST SUITED TO A RETURNSHIP APPROACH

Different types of positions have their own benefits and challenges for hiring returners.

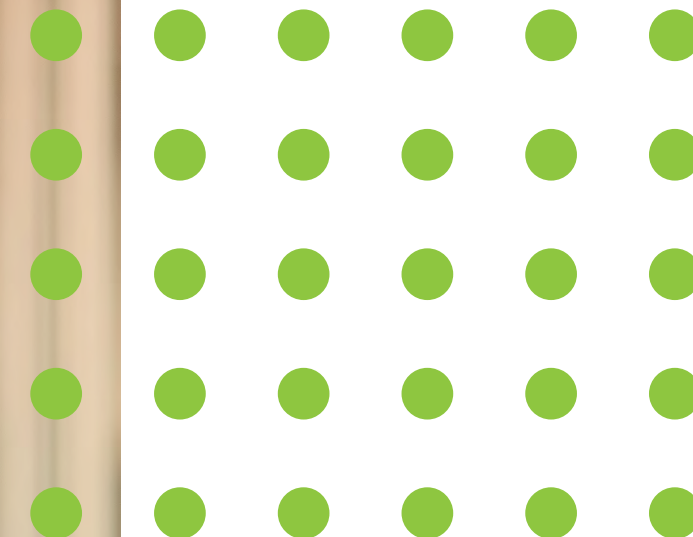
Jobs with fewer skill requirements can provide an immediate wider net and the flexibility to recruit talent that is more readily available in the market. Skilled jobs on the other hand, are difficult and expensive to recruit and train for and the highly competitive nature of the market can make it challenging to retain skilled workers. Advertising skilled jobs or professions (e.g., electrical engineers) as returnship opportunities, with the chance to train for these jobs, could attract individuals looking to return.

Here’s a thought... some organizations have designed formal approaches to returnship opportunities in a robust year-over-year talent strategy. These programs are **cohort based**

with rigorous **skills training and support** that are implemented on a consistent basis. Typical returnship programs offer fixed-term positions, leading to regular full-time positions at the end of the returnship. A [Returnship Roadmap](#) in the toolkit’s Conclusion section outlines the key steps that successful companies have undertaken.

Employers looking to hire returners for skilled jobs may qualify for subsidy programs if they are willing to commit to programs provided by the federal and provincial governments (a listing of some of these subsidy and funding programs can be found in the [Appendix B](#) of this toolkit).

IBM’s Tech Re-Entry Program welcomes women back to work by providing them with skills training and mentoring while being paid. Launched in 2016, the program was developed in partnership with the **Society of Women Engineers (SWE)** and iRelaunch, and actively hires skilled professionals for roles such as software developers, data scientists, and technical project managers. Program participants are hired for a 6-month returnship program to refresh skills and prepare for a transition to full-time opportunities. The experience provides personalized technical learning to update and gain additional skills and earn credentials. Both Anam and Neha, who joined IBM Canada in 2019 through the Tech Re-Entry program, now work full time at the lab in Toronto.



02

REVIEW HR PRACTICES

Human Resources best practices involve thoughtful planning and consideration of all stages in an employee's "human resources life cycle".

While many employers in the electricity sector already have solid policies and practices in place, it is nonetheless important to take a fresh look at them. Returners will have specific characteristics that will need to be reflected in all of the HR systems.

Once committed to hiring the returner, the employer must be prepared to provide the resources and supports that may be needed to ensure readiness for an employee returning to work.

If a mother had left because of family commitments such as caregiving, there are considerations before returning (child/elder care availability, budget/cost to return to work, etc.). Anticipating a return to the workforce doesn't mean those commitments are no longer important. The individual returning may need to return in a flexible manner (reduced hours or adapted schedules) with consideration given to the supports and resources available to transition back to work.

Other factors may have influenced many individuals to opt out of paid work for a period of time. For example, if a woman felt she had little opportunity for advancement due to unconscious bias or systemic barriers, this may have led her to choose to leave the workplace to devote her time to raising her children. A newcomer to Canada may have faced racism or barriers to achieving Canadian credentials or positions appropriate to his training, leading him to take time away and care for aging parents while re-training.

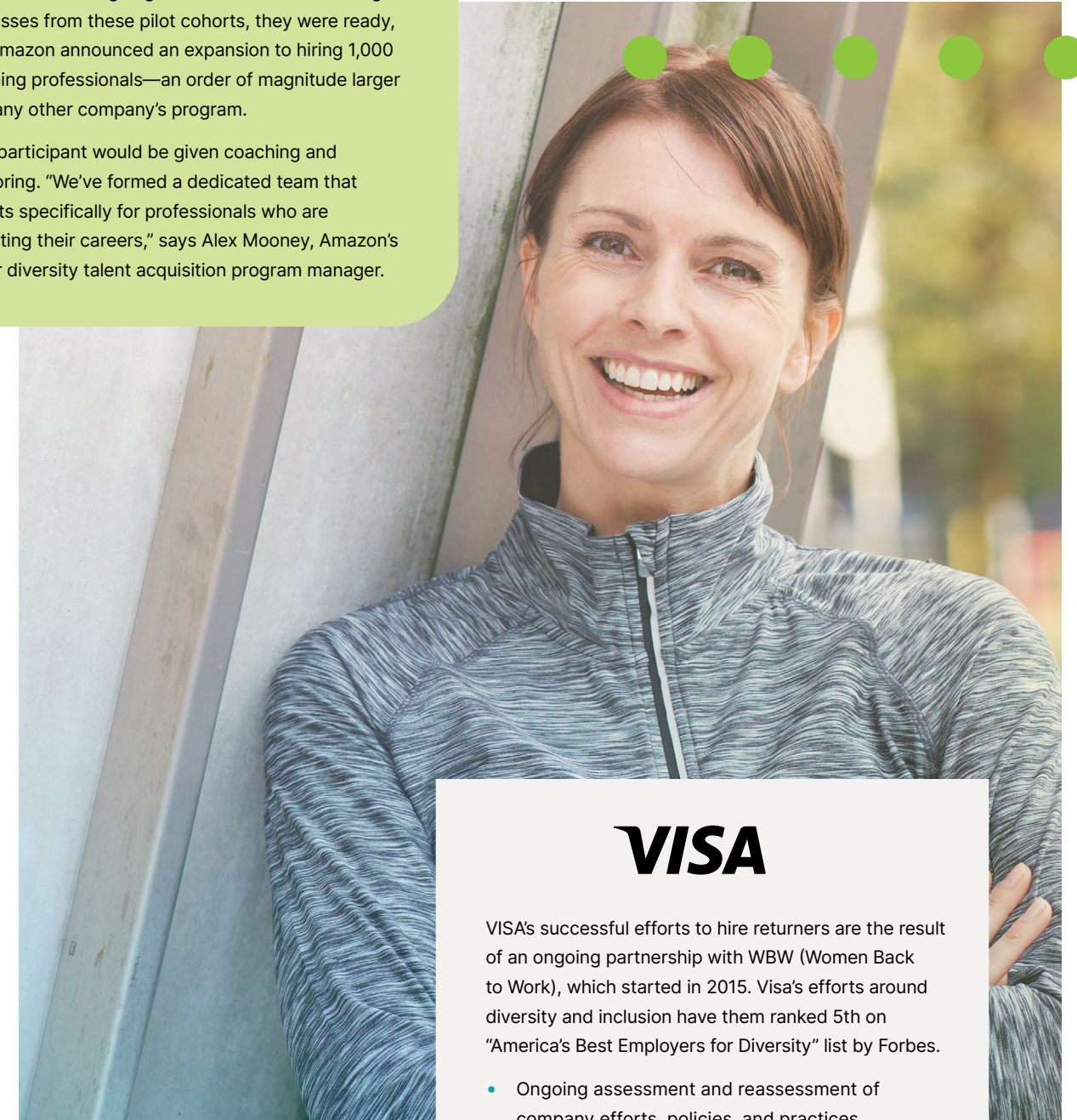
Identifying gaps in the current state of the organization (workplace policies, systems, processes, and culture) allows for the opportunity to plan. The organization can work to align its employment practices with innovative solutions for work-life integration, and then provide supports as needed to ensure a successful transition back to the workplace.

Intentional efforts to attract returners to the electricity sector will yield benefits.

Through Trial and Error... Lessons Learned

Amazon has been experimenting with programs to recruit mid-career professionals who have spent a few years away from the workforce. Like most other companies, the online retailer started out small, hiring a few dozen people at a time in pilot cohorts. But in June 2021 after ongoing assessment and reviewing successes from these pilot cohorts, they were ready, and Amazon announced an expansion to hiring 1,000 returning professionals—an order of magnitude larger than any other company's program.

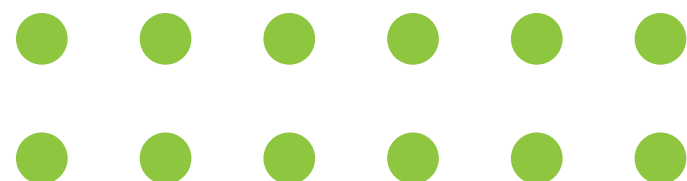
Each participant would be given coaching and mentoring. "We've formed a dedicated team that recruits specifically for professionals who are restarting their careers," says Alex Mooney, Amazon's senior diversity talent acquisition program manager.



VISA

VISA's successful efforts to hire returners are the result of an ongoing partnership with WBW (Women Back to Work), which started in 2015. Visa's efforts around diversity and inclusion have them ranked 5th on "America's Best Employers for Diversity" list by Forbes.

- Ongoing assessment and reassessment of company efforts, policies, and practices.
- Ongoing/rolling returnship opportunities.
- Returners hired into contingent roles. (Client Success Stories [womenbacktowork.org](https://www.womenbacktowork.org))



03

INVEST EFFORT IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A successful returnship approach will require consistent support from HR, managers, unions, and colleagues.

It is important to provide these stakeholder groups with detailed support and guidance. Consider the time and effort of everyone involved in the process. Understanding how their work might be affected is the starting point, followed by a solid communication plan.

- **HR staff:** Ensure they are trained in the specifics of recruiting, onboarding, engaging and retaining returners. The tips and tools on the following pages, as well as the additional resources in [Appendix C](#) are good starting points. Plan ahead to address any anticipated outcome that might add additional work or effort. Engage other stakeholders who own systems (HRIS, payroll, policies) and propose solutions to mitigate/delegate the work.
- **Hiring managers:** Ensure they are genuinely and fully supportive of investing effort in hiring returners. Ask them to actively promote the concept of returnship. Clarify expectations about hours of work and flexibility; about job duties; about training support.
- **Union(s):** Engage the union(s) and describe the benefits of returning members to work (e.g., increase in skilled trades and in union memberships). Discuss how to approach any particular needs for flexibility,

accommodation or additional training that might arise.

- **Colleagues:** Invite them to be buddies, mentors and informal support networks for the new returner hire. Explain the nature of the returnship program or agreement. Highlight the benefits that will come from emphasizing returners in the company's talent strategy.

Embrace best practices for organizational communication. When developing and championing a talent-acquisition strategy, key messages should be delivered consistently across the organization. Reinforce the messaging in the tailor-made business case, strengthening the link between solid, innovative talent management practices and the organization's success.

- Consider who will champion the returner approach, and who will develop the communication strategy and its outcome.
- Identify all stakeholder interests and design messages to help communicate the strategy to each audience.
- Internal communications flow across every part of the organization. Consider all meetings/gatherings as opportunities to communicate the goal of returning people to fill vacant positions.

“The best way to predict the future is to create it”

– Peter Drucker⁹



Tool: Using Baseline and Readiness Assessments

Assess the current state of the organization (workplace policies, systems, processes, and culture) to identify gap areas for individuals returning to or entering the workplace.

What supports are needed? Explore innovative solutions to work-life integration practices, such as leaves, flexible work policies, hours of work, and accommodation practices.

PLANNING

A robust review of all foundational systems: policies, procedures, processes, and support areas all require alignment in how individuals returning to work will be supported throughout the human resources life cycle.

- Are workplace policies and procedures provided in advance to the returner, before their first day?
- Does the organization offer monetary and non-monetary benefits or value-added incentives that would be attractive to individuals returning to work?
- Does the organization offer subsidized childcare, elder-care benefits, or provide on-site day care?
- Are workplace policies and procedures reviewed with all new hires and by whom?
- Is the Health & Safety program robust? Does it allow for additional cost and budget allowances for providing a safe return to work?
- Is there an employee handbook that provides contact names, titles, and departments, including Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) provider details?
- Are policies and programs open and inclusive? Not all returners will be women.
- Does the organization provide flexible or reduced working hours that may not be **regular working hours**?
- Can the work be completed during **non-regular working hours**?
- Does the organization have an accommodation program? Is it inclusive and does it speak to all provisions under the relevant Human Rights Code?
- Does the organization provide permanent working-from-home/remote work options for identified occupations?
- Does the organization have roles that could be shadowed or shared safely?
- Does the return-to-work policy and procedure provide consistent follow up with the employee returning to work?

Brief description of findings to be filled in by user

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Reach individuals who have been away from work, the plant, or the office and may not have the network of opportunities to apply to positions. **Reaching** them should take into account the networks/platforms that are available to them.

- Identify where returners spend time and advertise/promote to these groups in these locations (e.g., Facebook groups).
- How are jobs advertised? Are they advertised to the targeted population on Facebook Groups and other social-media platforms? Are job descriptions up to date with transferable skills and/or competencies identified within them?
- Is the website and intranet branded and savvy to individuals returning to work?
- Is the language reflective of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programming at the organization?
- Do recruitment practices and policies reflect individual barriers faced by the person returning to the workplace?
- Does the organization (recruiters) have the expertise to source, screen, and hire individuals returning and to be able to select candidates based on transferable skills?
- Are work references of job applicants checked? If so, does the candidate have some flexibility in choosing the referral source and the employment time period?

Findings...

ONBOARDING

Consider what the transition from home to work may look like. It could be a transition from home to being physically at work and on site, or it could be a hybrid of on site and remote work.

- Are new hires provided an orientation? Is there flexibility around when to schedule the training and whether it would be on location or remote?
- Does the organization have a mentor and/or buddy system provided to all new hires? Are these programs available during onboarding only or at any time during the employee life cycle?
- Are new hires trained appropriately for their job? Is there (upgrading) skills training offered?
- Are employees given training for new processes and procedures required to complete their job duties?
- Are employees provided with opportunities to develop their existing skills? If so, is skills training provided to new employees so that they develop new skills at the outset?
- Is an employee's performance reviewed after completion of training programs and are they provided feedback and resources to support further development?
- Does the organization have technology that is easy to access, secure, and cost effective should an employee only be available to complete training from home?

Findings...

RETENTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Providing a safe space in the physical workspace can be done with programming for returning employees by introducing or complementing general HR best practices such as employee resource groups, mentorships, and ambassador support programs.¹⁰

- Does the organization promote and allocate budget for employee resource groups?
- Does the returner know who other returners are?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure effective follow up with employees who have returned to the workplace, beyond their immediate manager?
- Does leadership champion, promote, and participate in discussions around returners and returner programs?

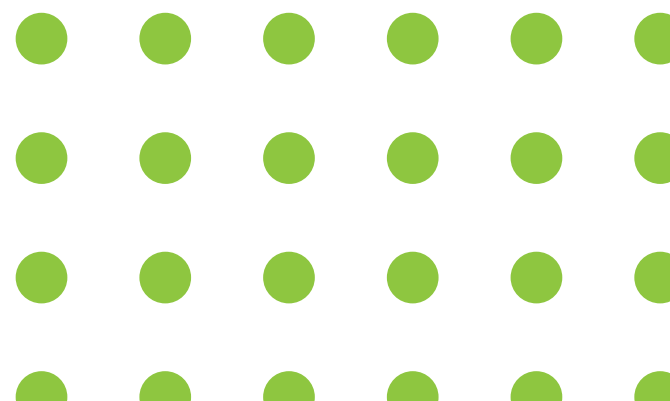
Findings...

ADDRESSING ATTRITION

Should a returner unexpectedly leave the workplace, it is important to ask why. A well-structured exit interview conducted by an impartial third party (i.e. not direct supervisor/manager but Human Resources or a third party provider) can provide valuable data for success and learning.

- Are exit interviews conducted?
- Do exit interviews include a category for returner status? Was the employee leaving a returner?
- Was the returner new to the organization or had they returned to the organization after an extended leave?
- Was the returner provided opportunities to engage in returner activities (e.g., mentorship, buddy for returning while onboarding, resource/ambassador groups)?
- How did the returner prepare themselves for their return to work?
- Why is the returner leaving? What would make the returner stay?

Findings...





Tool: Example Internal Communication Plan

GOAL(S)

EXAMPLE: To integrate returnship opportunities into current talent acquisition strategies. Recruitment activities will be designed to target candidates who have been away from the workforce for an extended period of time, specifically women, individuals belonging to racialized groups, Indigenous peoples, and newcomers to Canada. This is to complement existing talent acquisition approaches and foster inclusivity and equity within the organization.

Audience	Responsible	Strategy	Key Message	Channel(s)	Date
All company	CEO, top leadership, champion of program	Deliver communication to energize and engage the organization with the concept of hiring workers who have been out of the workplace for an extended period of time (to fill in demand/vacant/skilled jobs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The company is embracing the opportunity to welcome people back to the workforce. Returnship practices will be inclusive of and directed to many populations of talent looking to return to work, including those who may be under-represented women, individuals belonging to racialized groups, Indigenous peoples, newcomers to Canada, and persons with disabilities. These practices will broaden diversity and inclusion within the organization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All staff CEO update Town hall Newsletter 	
Leadership	Human Resources Senior Leader	Create consistent and transparent communication about the new talent acquisition strategy for leadership, managers, and staff; guide changes and provide updates to the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organization has heard from hiring managers they cannot find candidates for their vacancies. There is a labour shortage and jobs in the electricity sector are growing; however, talent is in demand. The organization will complement existing hiring practices to be inclusive and equitable by further reaching and promoting company vacancies towards the goal of returning people to work. Innovative solutions for tapping into candidate pools have been researched and this is what the organization is doing about it. Recruiting efforts will be deliberate in identifying strategies to locate and hire women, individuals belonging to racialized groups, Indigenous peoples and newcomers to Canada. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intranet Email Newsletter 	
Managers	Human Resources Senior Leader	Make the concept of returnship a talking point in business/staff meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The concept of returnship or hiring returners is new for the organization. There is a wide population in the labour market that is available to work but has not necessarily been reached for the organization's vacancies. To reach this population will require deliberate action from the organization. HR has developed tools to recruit candidates who may already be skilled for open positions. There has been proven success in these approaches in other industries and HR will guide and support both the returner and manager after hire throughout the employment life cycle. Feedback on these strategies is encouraged and will be solicited throughout the process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business meetings Email One-to-one meetings 	

Audience	Responsible	Strategy	Key Message	Channel(s)	Date
Staff/Team	Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the team an opportunity to make suggestions and become actively involved in returner talent acquisition strategies, recruiting/networking, and onboarding/engagement. • Solicit feedback and listen to any hesitations and comments. Engage the team for ideas of where to reach candidates and how to welcome returners. Encourage them to become allies and supporters for these initiatives (especially if there is a vacancy on the team). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization recognizes staff are stretched and trying to balance the demands of work and personal commitments. On top of this, there are vacancies in the department, and everyone is aware of the shortage of available labour in the electricity sector. • There will be new recruiting efforts put in place that will look to new ways to recruit people into the jobs that are open (in this team). • An announcement went out on ___ whereby the organization will be expanding recruiting efforts to target people looking to return to work after a lengthy absence. Some of those people have the skills for _____ position on this team. • Recruitment activities and HR programming will create opportunities to expand diversity among the team (and organization) by actively recruiting women, individuals belonging to racialized groups, Indigenous peoples, and newcomers to Canada who are looking to return to the workplace. • Members of this team/department may be approached by HR to participate in these activities throughout the various stages of the employment life cycle such as reaching candidates through personal/professional networks/social media, onboarding activities (e.g., buddy program or a mentor), or as a participant in a resource group. (All these activities should be available to existing staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team meetings • One-to-one meetings 	
<p>External partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment agencies • Post-secondary institutions • Women’s professional associations • Networks 	Recruiter	Promote the organization’s returnship opportunities to outreach partnerships to solicit candidates for returnship opportunities and to advertise the organization’s returnship activities	The organization is excited to announce new innovative recruiting efforts put into place. The organization is reaching out to ask your organization to work with us in identifying people who are looking to return to work after a lengthy period, specifically in the communities of women, Indigenous peoples, individuals belonging to racialized groups, and newcomers to Canada.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email 	

Part II: Recruitment and Hiring

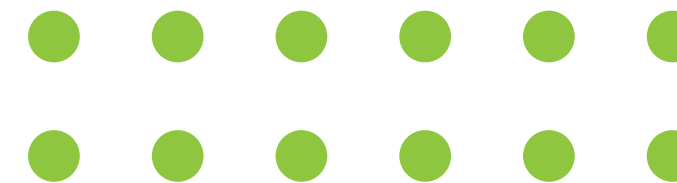
04

CALL TO ACTION FOR LEADERS

Leaders and hiring managers who want to attract and hire returners have at least two critical roles for the recruitment and hiring process. First, they need to allocate the effort and resources to make the changes required to reach and engage returners, including revamped recruitment materials, flexibility to consider non-traditional pools of talent who might have transferable skills, and a willingness to be intentionally inclusive and supportive during a returner's early contacts with the organization. Second, they have to challenge their own thinking, unconscious biases, and comfortable ways of identifying talent and assessing candidates. Leaders will be called upon to demonstrate a heightened level of inclusiveness, in order to create a welcoming opportunity for returners.

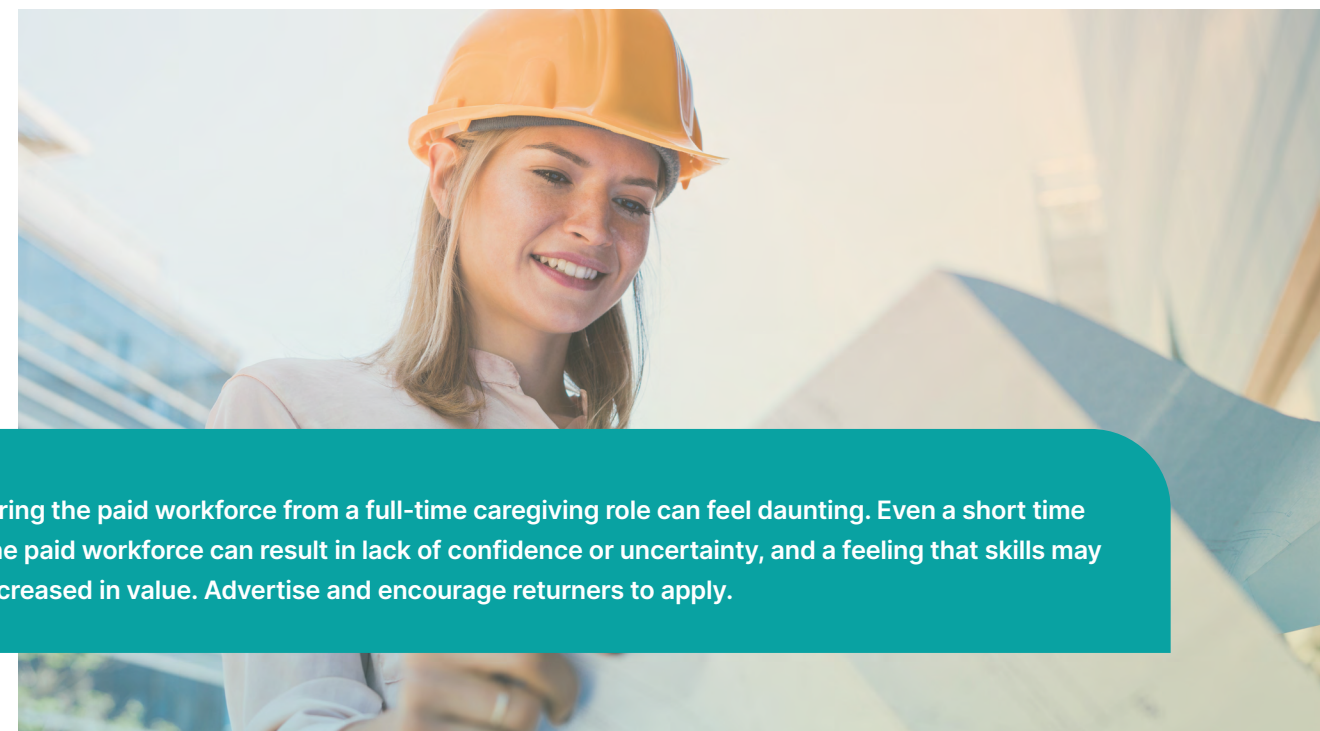
THE SUCCESS STEPS FOR RECRUITMENT AND HIRING WITH A RETURNSHIP FOCUS

The typical HR practices of outreach and selection can be more effective when re-designed with a returner population in mind. Outreach will require looking beyond traditional candidate sources. Selection will require looking beyond a screening out process based on a direct match to very specific skills.



Reach Out and Branding

Extend the reach for returning candidates by questioning, refreshing, and moving beyond traditional approaches.



Re-entering the paid workforce from a full-time caregiving role can feel daunting. Even a short time out of the paid workforce can result in lack of confidence or uncertainty, and a feeling that skills may have decreased in value. Advertise and encourage returners to apply.



TIPS FOR BRANDING THE ORGANIZATION'S WEBSITE TO ATTRACT RETURNERS

A website that is more intentionally user-friendly and inclusive will reach individuals looking to return and encourage returners to apply to vacancies.

- Highlight the organization's commitment to the deliberate recruitment of individuals looking to return to the workforce.
- Explain that candidates from all types of ethnic background and education/experience background, in various stages of their career, can return to their previous career or explore something entirely different.
- Post videos of real employees from a wide range of diverse jobs and functions, describing their job and their returnship experience or showing them in action. Give examples of how they leveraged their transferable skills.
- Add a link to the EHRC's [Mentor Junction](#) to provide prospective returners interested in working in the electricity sector with the opportunity to learn from an experienced mentor in the industry. This is a free, online mentorship platform for Canada's electricity sector.
- Advertise about accommodation, compensation, benefits, and/or back-to-work training program, which could be needed by returning candidates.
- Use inclusive language to promote higher employee engagement, superior customer service, and increased productivity—all important aspects of a positive work culture.
- Adopt a welcoming layout that is easy to navigate, with clearly designated returnship opportunities.
- Create a returnship newsletter that returners can subscribe to, sharing stories and jobs at the organization.
- Include engaging messages about the positive impact and great future of the electricity sector.
- Provide a single-click link to a registration page for a returnship opportunity. This can be a link for receiving job alerts for returnship opportunities, which leads to a form a candidate completes and is routed to the returnship talent pool.



TIPS FOR LEVERAGING NETWORKS AND ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Sourcing through and across wider and broader networks, partnerships, and member organizations that are diverse and inclusive expands an organization's talent pool.

Social Media Presence

- Choose a platform. See below for suggestions for social media platforms that are accessible on computers and mobile devices.
- These platforms offer a way to create a "group" of connected people—with control over who joins and with various levels of privacy.
- Groups allow members to post information, ask questions, and participate in conversations.
- Some platforms include a function to categorize the content, create polls, or host events—which can be good ways to keep members engaged.
- Ask member groups or individuals returning to work to add/invite the organization to their membership or ask to be introduced via Zoom **OR** create an online community for returners on the organization's website.

Leverage online networks and social media platforms to promote and advertise organizational commitment to returning individuals back to the workplace after an extended period of time.

FOUR COMMON PLATFORMS:

Google+

The Google platform has its own social networking layer.

- "Communities" are a way to connect people with common interests.
- Setting it as private allows the moderator to control who can join and see the content; searchable allows people to find the community and ask to join.
- Connects easily with other features of the Google platform.
- Google's basic guide to get started is available online.

Amazon's Returnship Program has a designated landing page for candidates and includes a link directly to their YouTube channel

Facebook

Create a group with a closed or a secret privacy setting.

- Identify the administrators for the group; they will share the work of facilitating the network.
- Facebook offers some tips online.

LinkedIn

Create a members-only group and designate an owner, one or more managers, and moderators to share the workload.

- See the online field guide from LinkedIn for more information.
- In LinkedIn groups, every piece of content must be approved by a moderator.

Meet-Up

Meet-Up groups connect people with shared interests, who arrange to meet regularly face-to-face.

- Current members located in the region where a new group is established, as well as members who have indicated they are interested in the topic the group focuses on, will be automatically notified that it has been created.

Advertising and Posting

Design job/role opportunities to be attractive to returners

- 63% of working mothers who took a career break or are currently on one say that they did it to spend more time with their children.
- Over half (54%) of mothers who have returned from a break say they engaged in work-related activities while on leave; enrolling in online courses, keeping up with their professional network, and in some cases, taking on part-time work.¹¹
- A study done by Hewlett-Packard, and supported by a similar study from LinkedIn, determined that many women will hesitate to apply to job postings that list even a few “desired” skills they don’t feel they have, unless they feel they have 100% of the skills required. Demonstrate commitment to investing in candidates by encouraging them to apply.

Consider using language in a job posting that identifies transferable skills and competencies, rather than a list of very specific “must have” knowledge and skills.



TIPS FOR CUSTOMIZED LANGUAGE IN JOB POSTINGS

- Candidates who have been out of the workforce for some time have potentially developed skills they did not have when they exited the workforce.
- Language in a job posting that is relatable, practical, and that describes transferable skills, may attract a returning individual back to work.
- Encourage candidates to actively apply to jobs by highlighting skills they may have acquired during an absence from the workforce. Try the suggested language to be included in job ads:
- “You don’t have 100% of these skills? Maybe just 75% or 80%? Apply anyway!”
- “If you have been away from the workplace for an extended period of time, you might possess skills that are transferable to our organization, such as the ability to adapt to change and thrive in an unpredictable environment, balancing the demands of different stakeholders, being able to remain calm during a crisis and a desire to teach others... if so, then this job is for you!”

Example of a job posting advertising and soliciting returner candidates back to the workplace

Amazon.ca—returnship ad on Indeed:

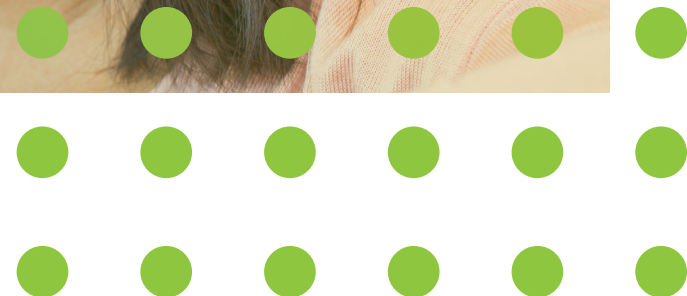
“Are you ready to restart your career and build the future? The Amazon Returnship Program offers you an opportunity to reboot your skills, refresh your resume with new experience, and relaunch your journey toward your professional goals in a supportive, real-world environment.”



Tool: Reference Guide for Describing Transferable Skills in Job Ads and Postings

Core Qualifications and Soft Skills	Language Used in Job Posting
<p>Customer Service</p> <p>Support, empathy, guidance, and conflict resolution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocates for customer. • Displays empathy. • Conveys emotions appropriately. • Provides support for others. • Motivates others. • Counsels, addresses, guides. • Cooperates for optimum possible outcomes and win-win results. • Delegates with respect. • Perceives feelings or situations accurately. • Develops rapport with others.
<p>Written and Verbal Communication</p> <p>Expression, transmission, and interpretation of knowledge and ideas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writes clearly and concisely. • Listens attentively. • Reports information. • Provides appropriate feedback, either independently or when asked. • Expresses ideas. • Perceives and accurately interprets nonverbal messages. • Persuades others. • Sells ideas or products. • Facilitates group discussion. • Negotiates. • Speaks clearly and provides clear directions.
<p>Problem-Solving</p> <p>Ability to think critically, creatively, or fluidly</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forecasts and predicts. • Imagines alternatives. • Sets goals. • Defines needs and requirements. • Creates ideas. • Identifies problems and potential solutions. • Identifies appropriate resources. • Gathers information. • Solves problems. • Extracts important information. • Analyzes information. • Develops evaluation strategies. • Conceptualizes situations.
<p>Organizational Skills</p> <p>Responsibility to complete tasks on time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handles details. • Coordinates and plans tasks. • Follows through on tasks. • Demonstrates effective time management.

Core Qualifications and Soft Skills	Language Used in Job Posting
<p>Leadership Skills</p> <p>Supervise, direct, and guide individuals and groups in the completion of tasks and fulfillment of goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages groups. • Delegates responsibility to others. • Teaches. • Counsels. • Coaches. • Promotes change.
<p>Decision-Making Skills</p> <p>Promote effective production and work satisfaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes a position and determines course of action. • Makes decisions based on comprehensive thought. • Uses objective rational thought to follow through on tasks. • Allows practical experience to move projects forward. • Knows when to listen to subject matter experts for sound advice.



Networks and Partnerships for Returner Talent Pools

REACH ACROSS

In addition to leveraging current networks, try tapping into markets where returners may be members, especially when their interest is to work in the electricity sector. These resources could provide a partnership with their membership base, which may not typically be included in posting of positions and advertising returnship opportunities. Expand the **reach** to not for profit, green energy, and skills development sectors to reach their members who are looking to return to work.

EXPAND

Broadening candidate reach to include diversity and inclusion can further encourage populations in the market who have been away from work and looking to return: women¹², Indigenous peoples, newcomers. Tapping into the services and resources that potential returners may be engaging in can provide opportunities for further reach and networking with available talent, and talent looking to upgrade/up-skill ([Appendix D](#)).

See [Appendix B](#) for some ideas of organizations that might have strong contacts with like-minded candidates who would be interested in the electricity sector.

In 2016, the Society of Women Engineers partnered with Boston-based return-to-work services firm iRelaunch to create internships for returning female engineers. They were deliberate in their attempts to solicit women to apply.

More than 100 women participated, and more than **90%** of them were hired by the companies where they interned. The program was so successful that the society is doing it again. Its industry partners include such notable employers as Ford Motor Co., Johnson & Johnson, and Northrop Grumman

"Employers Are Seeking Women Returning from Career Breaks", April 6, 2017, shrm.org

Screening and Hiring

Every stakeholder has a vested interest in hiring a successful recruit. Although these interests may vary (as a hiring manager, a recruiter, or a leader) all stakeholders share the common goal of hiring the right candidate for the position.

HR best practice selection processes typically involve expertise to identify skills readily listed on a resumé and screening in candidates whose skills best match the requirements of the job. Those who do not meet the specific listed skill set of the role are not selected to move forward in the recruitment process. If it is not obvious on the resumé that the candidate is able to do the job, they risk being **screened out** of the selection process.

TEACH LEADERSHIP, HIRING MANAGERS, AND RECRUITERS TO SCREEN IN

Teach stakeholders and recruiters the value of transferable skills and identify a broader range of language to look for in a resumé.

Beware of bias in the resumé gap...

Women who have left the workforce primarily for caregiving responsibilities may have, during their absence, upgraded their skills or learned a new set of skills. Teaching recruiters, hiring managers, and HR staff methods of identifying transferable skills, alternative interview methods, and prompting relatable identifiable skills needed in workplace may be an opportunity to develop talent-acquisition techniques. Screen candidates into the recruitment process.

Use with Caution...

Valuable experiences beneficial to an organization may be overlooked using traditional methods of recruiting such as Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS). ATS and other common recruitment practices may eliminate

good candidates who may be screened out of the selection process due to a break in employment or a non-traditional skill set.

Don't Assume...

A gap in a resumé automatically reflects stale or unused skills. Rather, a gap in paid employment might reflect an opportunity to learn outside of employment or having acquired new skills during the absence.

Complementing recruitment selection processes with screening for transferable skills, opens the candidate selection pool to returners who may have these skills. Choose to **screen in** candidates to move through the selection process. Screening in candidates creates a larger pool of talent who may be qualified for future opportunities



TIPS FOR SCREENING IN CANDIDATES

- Look for training that may have occurred during the absence or gap in a resumé, and experiences/transferrable skills developed (e.g., resiliency, personal budget management, logistics support).
- Consider candidates whose certifications may be outdated or requirements may need renewing: They could be screened in at a lower level until their licensure requirements have been met. Additionally, this could open opportunities for newcomers to Canada applying for positions.
- Explore resúmes and applications for transferable skills: Does the resumé outline a broad range of functions, responsibilities, and training?
- Look for skills and abilities within the resumé that showcase the returner's

success with managing change and taking the initiative to seek out opportunities for growth and learning. Does the resumé describe initiative such as taking a course while away from work? Did they list accomplishments or showcase a track record for taking on new tasks? Was there a change in career paths or evidence of having learned new skills by being self-taught? The answers to these questions may predict a person's ability to adapt to change and making a transition back to work a success.

Also... refer to the EHRC website for helpful resources.

The recent [National Occupational Standards](#) and [Electricity Competency Framework](#) help chart the transferable skills and knowledge required to perform some of the most in-demand roles in the electricity sector.



Part III: Onboarding

05

CALL TO ACTION FOR LEADERS

The first steps in welcoming any new employee are always important. Particularly for returners, their leaders and hiring managers will want to be intentional in treating the returners as individuals. There may be a number of factors that influenced them to leave the workforce and they may still have significant concerns about their return. Managers will want to be open to understanding the returner's lived experiences and their perspectives, while still providing a safe conversation and respect for the individual's privacy. Regular check-ins with leaders and managers in the early days will help to ensure a successful onboarding experience. See the tips below.

THE SUCCESS STEPS FOR ONBOARDING WITH A RETURNSHIP FOCUS

New hire onboarding is an HR best practice for welcoming new employees into an organization and familiarizing them with the work environment. Providing a thorough onboarding experience during an employee's first 90 days greatly increases the likelihood of retention and productivity.

For returners, numerous organizations have highlighted the importance of planning and preparing a successful

onboarding experience – one that is structured and that has supports in place, processes outlined, and programs available to transition a returner back to the workplace.¹³

Mapping a direction towards reintegrating into the physical work environment and wraparound supports may foster a welcoming return. Consider what the working environment looked like 3 years ago, or when the returner left the workplace. Returners absent from the workplace for a lengthy period did not have the advantage of being at work when changes were made, receiving system updates, or learning changes and new policies that are now in place.

An onboarding process map for returners can provide:

- A support process designed to **gradually** manage a variety of tasks and requirements.
- An opportunity for the manager to speak with the returner about individualized onboarding plans that are built around expectations and scheduling.
- An opportunity to eliminate assumptions around what the returner needs (e.g., assuming the returner is coming back because they were the ones taking care of the children).



TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ONBOARDING OF RETURNERS

- Be mindful that onboarding may take place in a virtual work context. Provide the returner with access to systems and technologies prior to beginning onboarding activities. Don't assume returners will be familiar with Zoom or organizational platforms that have become more widely used during their absence from the workplace, particularly with the rise of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Design onboarding with the needs of the individual in mind. For those with caregiving responsibilities, onboarding that requires travel or takes place after hours could be a barrier, and transportation to and from the work location may be limited or costly (public transit or Uber/taxi).
- Make useful connections: Set up one-to-one meetings between the returner and people who can help welcome and support them to start building their internal network and introduce them to other returners. Work with the returner to identify other key people to meet based on their expressed areas of interest and areas for support.

A detailed **Workplan and Onboarding Map with timelines** including milestone events (1-, 3-, and 6-month reviews and check-ins) can provide the returner with opportunities to solicit information and feedback and generate conversations with their supervisor/manager to develop an engaging integration into the workplace. Depending on the returner's new role, the mapping may have planning to include training and assessment of recertifications.



TIPS FOR MANAGERS ONBOARDING RETURNERS

- **Know who to go to for support and guidance.**
- **Book all meetings listed in the onboarding map** in the returner's calendar before their first day.
- **Provide availability** at the start—let the returner know when the manager is not available, as schedules, flex time, and remote working environments can change.
- **Offer a walkthrough** of organizational technologies with IT: Zoom, MS Teams, helping them set up accounts and practice in no-risk calls.
- **Don't make assumptions:** Avoid assuming what the new hire knows or needs—be sure to ask and remain open for questions.
- **Watch for any unintended bias:** Keep an eye on, and address, any tensions or negative micro-messages that can have subtle but significant effects on how welcome returners feel. This could include being unintentionally left off distribution lists or invitations to team social events or being skipped over at meetings when input is invited.
- Open the discussion by asking the returner why they left the workplace and stating that the reason for asking is to avoid making assumptions.
- Ask why they wanted to return and why now. This is an opportunity to assess the readiness of the returner and the preparedness of the organization in supporting a return.

MAKE IT A TEAM EFFORT!

Transitioning Back to Work

In addition to being mindful of the needs of the individual, it is important to balance the needs and work styles of existing staff; some of whom may be long-tenured employees.

A broader team effort can lead to a more positive and productive returning experience for the individual and colleagues. Transitioning back to work after a long absence requires a collaborative effort, commitment, and participation from everyone involved to be successful.



TIPS TO ENSURE ONBOARDING ACTIVITIES ARE INCLUSIVE OF THE TEAM

- **Be empathetic and transparent:** in onboarding activities by communicating and listening to existing staff's comments or questions.
- **Be proactive—and positive—in preparations:** before the returner begins, share information with the team about the qualities, expertise, and experience the returner brings to the organization.
- **Inclusion is everyone's responsibility:** the manager can communicate to the team what role each team member can play, provide specific examples of what this could look like, and highlight how this will benefit the team.

Participants who successfully complete the IBM Tech Re-Entry Program have had the opportunity to refresh professional and technical skills through mentorship, one-on-one training with subject matter experts, and self study of curated learning paths that include critical skills development and soft skills for client engagement, adaptability, collaboration, communication, presentation, critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making. [Tech Re-Entry Program | IBM](#)



“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” – Maya Angelou



Template: Sample Workplan and Onboarding Map

Reminder... integrate deliberate efforts for the returner into the organization's established onboarding program.

EMPLOYEE NAME—ONBOARDING SCHEDULE		
Month 1		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General orientation for new hires (such as HR policies, HRIS Time Management Systems overview, compliance training, etc.), PLUS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how the organization has adapted and changed over the recent years, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Remote work access, videoconferencing platform. + COVID-19 PPE, workstation, and protocols. + Vaccination status (if applicable). + Recent policy changes, restructuring, new organizational priorities, etc. Administrative issues specific to the returner, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Subsidies/funding agreements. + Union dues/membership (re)activation. Assign buddy and send invitations to Employee Resource Group (if available). Meet with sponsor of returnship/returner. Introduction meeting with supervisor, manager, and/or director. Introduction meeting with team members. Check in with employee (ongoing weekly). 	Week 1	<p>Day 1: Welcome with _____</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onboarding Package. Lunch with supervisor/manager. <p>Day 2: Lunch with team</p> <p>Day 3: Lunch with buddy</p> <p>Day 4: Lunch with ambassador of returner resource group</p>
	Week 2	Check in
	Week 3	
	Week 4	Check in
Month 2		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Book stakeholder/business lead meetings. Recertification training. Meet with relevant employee networks. 	Week 1	
	Week 2	Check in
	Week 3	
	Week 4	Check in
Month 3		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-month review. Book stakeholder/business lead meetings. 	Week 1	
	Week 2	Check in

Buddy Program

Consider buddy systems and provide the returner a buddy on their first day.¹⁴ The benefits of programs and mechanisms that foster engagement and cohesiveness with co-workers can provide an additional level of support from a peer of the returner.

A buddy system offers direct peer support to a returner. The buddy can provide access to colleagues who are currently working at the organization. Buddies are not necessarily subject-matter experts in the role/skills/function of the job a returner is hired for; rather, they can be a resource for the returner. They are someone the returner can ask about organizational practices or working culture observations and questions, without having to go to their manager.

A BUDDY CAN:

- Check in frequently: Having several “drop on in” sessions with a returner during the first week of work can significantly contribute to their engagement.
- Help a returner understand the “unwritten rules” of an organization’s culture.
- Provide the context needed for the returner to successfully become part of the team—such as how the team communicates, collaborates, and other team norms (such as providing feedback or handling difficult conversations).

A BUDDY SHOULD:

- Have good knowledge of the returner’s role.
- Be in a position—and freed up—to welcome the returner on day one, answer questions, and dedicate a pre-specified amount of time to provide support.
- Ideally, report to the same manager as the new hire, to facilitate access to other team members.

The Value of a Buddy

A pilot onboarding program with 600 employees at Microsoft found that pairing up a new hire with a buddy:

- Boosts productivity:** The more the onboarding buddy met with the new hire, the greater the new hire’s perception of their own speed to productivity.
- Improves the new employee’s satisfaction:** After the first week on the job, new hires with buddies were 23% more satisfied with the onboarding experience, compared to those without; at 90 days, there was a 36% increase in satisfaction.

New hires with buddies also report having more active support from their manager and the broader team.

“Every New Employee Needs an Onboarding Buddy.”, June 06, 2019, Harvard Business Review.



Be cognizant of the demands that ongoing and added learning and development activities (buddy systems, employee resource groups, mentoring, etc.) can place on a participating individual’s time, possibly leading to new work-life challenges. Don’t make it mandatory. Ask the returner if these groups are something of value to them.

Part IV: Retention and Engagement

06

CALL TO ACTION FOR LEADERS

The business case for focusing on the talent pool of returners rests on the value these individuals bring as full contributors to the organization. Leaders and managers bear the responsibility for ensuring that the environment allows returners to bring their best to the workplace. This can require allocating resources to improved people management policies and practices. Most critically, it will require the leaders and managers to be personally and actively involved in fostering an inclusive workplace.

THE SUCCESS STEPS FOR RETENTION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH A RETURNSHIP FOCUS

Here's a thought... Encourage returners to connect with Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). If no group exists, create a returner resource group and give it a name like Returnship Ambassador Resource Group. Encourage participation!

Create mentorship or buddy programs that foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with organizational mission, values, goals, business practices, objectives.

From her experience... "I returned to the workplace in July 2021. I had left due to the pandemic as I wasn't able to work full time. I had to take care of my kids and homeschool them as well. I kept in touch with my employer throughout the year during COVID in 2020 and in the summer of 2021. I told them I wanted to come back. I had quit my job in March 2020. To my surprise, they offered me a return after being away for over a year.

After numerous attempts of trying to go into work physically on site, it was not working. When I went in to resign, my employer surprised me. She asked me what it was she (the company) could do to have me stay. I explained my situation, and she was able to talk to Human Resources and work through a more flexible working arrangement with me. Had I not had the conversation with my supervisor to allow us both to explore options, I would have quit." **(Rose- anonymous employee in Canada.)**

Mentoring, Employee Resource Group (ERG)¹⁵, and Returnship Ambassador Resource Group Programs

Mentor Program

Another approach available to provide returners with support is a mentor program¹⁶: a traditional mentor/mentee relationship is the standard of this dynamic. Mentor programs don't necessarily require the mentor to be an active employee of the organization.

Mentorships support career development and professional success. Mentor relationships offer benefits to mentors and mentees alike. Mentees grow their professional network while receiving career guidance. Returners, in particular, can benefit from

increased confidence and sense of belonging to the organization and the sector. Mentors often gain insight into the challenges faced by employees in diverse groups.

If the organization has a mentor program, it may be beneficial to offer this support system to the returner.

If the organization does not currently have an active mentor program, EHRC has developed a mentorship platform called Mentor Junction, specific to Canada's electricity sector.

EHRC (Electricity Human Resources Canada) provides Mentor Junction, a free, online mentorship platform for Canada's electricity sector. The user-friendly platform facilitates mentor relationships among current and prospective workers in the sector.

TD Bank believes return-to-work professionals should be able to excel in the workplace just like their peers who did not take career breaks. TD is working with iRelaunch, the pioneering career re-entry company. The program includes skill refreshers, mentoring, coaching, networking, and a personalized development plan.

Employee Resource Group

RETURNSHIP AMBASSADOR RESOURCE GROUP

Individuals returning to work may share common experiences, reasons for leaving the workforce, increased demands for caregiving at home or abroad, and reduced resources available to them.

However, experiences are worthy of sharing because we can learn from them and apply new practices to reach this candidate population of returning individuals.

The organization could provide a platform for a Returnship Ambassador Resource Group, which would:

- Allow returners to share experiences and skills gained while away from the workforce.
- Encourage returners to refer people they know for future vacancies.
- Provide connections between the organization and networking groups or local event organizers.
- Share success stories of returning to work.
- Promote the organization on social media as a **returnship savvy** employer of choice and attract new candidates to vacant jobs.

Leverage Employee Resource Groups

Up to **90%** of Fortune 500 companies have realized the value that Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) can bring to supporting employee inclusion.

- **Benefits:** Increases employee engagement and retention, develops new leaders, and helps refer and reach out to high-quality and diverse talent.
- **Key activities:** Welcome diverse hires, new hire buddy support, social events, professional/skill development opportunities, networking, and sharing best practices and lessons learned.
- **Expertise to solicit:** Employee experiences, including possible issues and barriers to address customer and market understanding.

How employee resource groups are reinventing the workplace. March 31, 2018. National Post; 7 Best Practices for Maximizing the Value of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). August 13, 2019. Affirmity.

“Their empathy, professionalism and ability to see all situations from both employer and employee viewpoints is what makes each of them an integral part of our Reintegration Support Programme.”

– Founder Mums@work, [JumpStart Reintegration Programme LinkedIn Post](#)

Reviews, Evaluations, and Feedback

Performance reviews and evaluations are typically an organizational practice and policy. Individuals returning to the workplace would be subject to these policies and practices. As a general best practice, revisit policies around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); performance management; and evaluations to ensure this particular population is included. There probably would not be deviations from the typical performance review practices; however, this is another opportunity for the organization to assess how robust feedback mechanisms are.

In addition to formal performance reviews and evaluations, ongoing informal discussions and check-ins are encouraged between the manager and returner. Foster open dialogue from the start, remembering that the returner has a unique experience of being away. Don't make assumptions around the reasons the returner decided not to work and assumptions around coming back.



TIPS FOR PROVIDING FEEDBACK TO RETURNERS

- Recognize different approaches to achieving goals. How different people complete work varies (e.g., some people are more effective during the day or later in the afternoon, outside of regular business hours).
- Keep in mind **how** these meetings are conducted. Provide inclusive and conscientious feedback and be aware of language, tone, and non-verbal gestures.
- Consider the returner's perspective: what message are they hearing and does it change based on who gives the message?
- Give the returner the opportunity to raise any concerns (e.g., work challenges, time management).
- If appropriate, go back to the returner's stated reasons for leaving the workforce, or any concerns they had when they were hired. Explore the returner's recent experience in those areas.
- Consider conducting “stay interviews” that focus on the employee's experience in the workplace and any risks to retention and engagement.

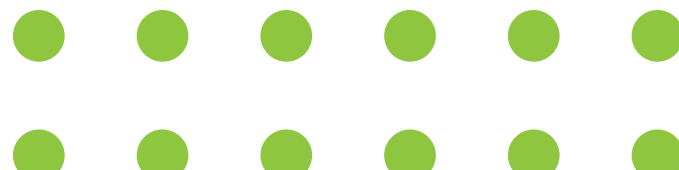
Addressing Attrition

When an employee decides to leave an organization, the reasons could be simple or complex. A returning employee who decides to voluntarily exit the organization could provide valuable insight into why it did not work out or give ideas about how it might succeed next time. The exit interview should be conducted by a neutral interviewer such as HR, to encourage transparent and candid conversation.

Exit interviews are an HR best practice most organizations perform when an employee decides to leave. Areas to probe during an exit interview for a returner:

- Was it a matter of the timing of their return that would have made a difference?
- Should there been more/fewer check-ins with the manager? What would this have changed for the returner?
- Were there supports that weren't in place but should have been?
- Were there supports in place that were not helpful? If so, how could they be improved upon?
- Would they return in the future?
- Was the onboarding not effective or welcoming? Were the right resources available?
- Was it not cost effective for them to return to work?
- Benefits—were there other benefits that could have been provided that would have made a difference?
- Did the returning individual feel that front-line managers, supervisors, and administrators were able and willing to support them?
- Was there training that could have been provided?
- Was the role not what they expected? Could another position, if available, be more appropriate?

Consider this... for people leaving who are not returners, suggest they consider a return to the organization when they are ready, as there may be returnship opportunities available.



Conclusion

07

CALL TO ACTION FOR LEADERS

Overall, a focus on a talent pool of potential returners to the electricity sector can be a compelling opportunity to enhance diversity, minimize talent shortages, and benefit from an array of new skills. Whether it is one-by-one, or through an annual cohort hiring process, the strategic use of a focus on returnship is worth a leader's attention.

THE SUCCESS STEPS FOR A RETURNSHIP FOCUS

Complementing ongoing talent acquisition strategies with the creation of returnship opportunities can be successful when the actions are deliberate. Returnships are changing the way organizations hire diverse talent by

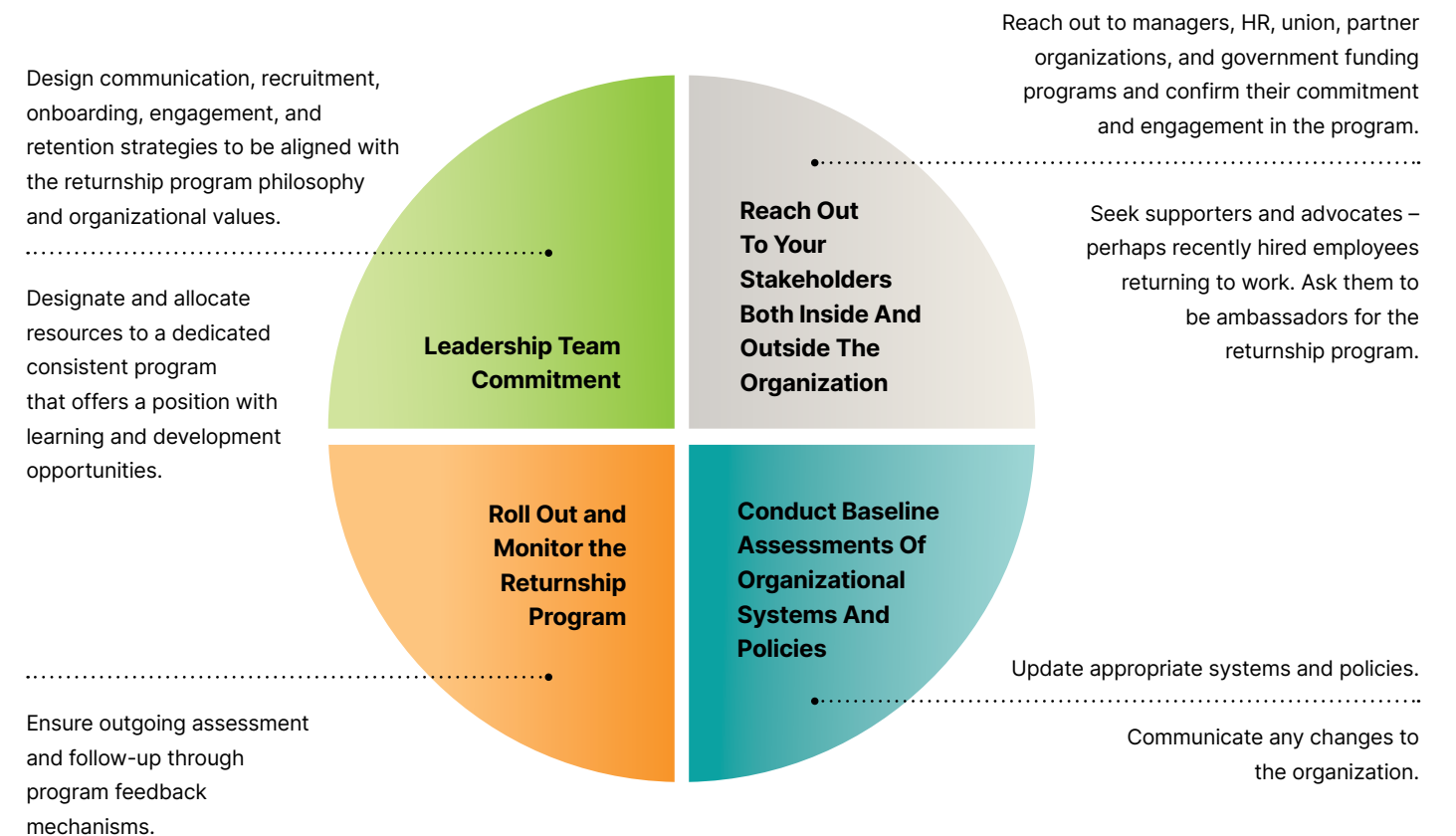
creating opportunities for women to fill jobs and reduce the gender gap in the electricity sector. This strategy also provides another solution for organizational stability by filling positions where there is high demand in the electricity sector. Returnships can have an impact not only within the organization's talent acquisition efforts but also in communities where people are ready to return to work.

Organizations who have been successful with returnship opportunities and programs have been intentional in the planning efforts for each stage of the employment life cycle, with ongoing assessment, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms, and they have applied existing best practices with the needs of the returner in mind.



Tool: Summary – Returnship Roadmap

Organizations fully prepared to invest in developing a robust returnship program require full commitment from the top down. Outlined below are key steps that successful returnship programs have in common.¹⁷



Appendices



Appendix A: Glossary

Ally: An ally takes positive action to address barriers, harassment, micro-aggressions, or other workplace situations that are likely to disadvantage members of equity-deserving groups (other than their own). Allyship goes beyond “see something, say something.” The most effective allies take self-aware, informed, strategic actions for systemic change.

Diversity: This term reflects the physical, psychological, and social differences that exist among people. It can include attributes such as age, race, education, mental or physical ability, learning styles, gender, sex, sexual orientation, immigration status, religion, socioeconomic status, family status, and others. A diverse organization is one where there is a variety of social and cultural characteristics.

Equality and Equity:

- **Gender equality:** Equal chances or opportunities for groups of women, men, and non-binary individuals to access and control resources, including protection under the law (such as health services, education, and voting rights). It is also known as **equality of opportunity** – or **formal equality**.
- **Gender equity:** More than formal equality of opportunity, gender equity refers to the different needs, preferences, and situations of women, men, and non-binary individuals. This may mean that different treatment is needed to ensure equality of opportunity.¹⁸

Gender: Socially constructed ideas and characteristics of women, men, and non-binary individuals – such as norms, roles, behaviours, and relationships.

Inclusion: An inclusive environment is open, safe, equitable and respectful. Everyone is encouraged to contribute and participate fully, and can enjoy a sense of trust, belonging, and involvement— regardless of personal characteristics such as race, ethnic origin, gender, age, disability, language, etc. Inclusion requires the identification and removal of barriers (e.g., physical, procedural, visible, invisible, intentional, unintentional) that inhibit participation and contribution.

Intersectionality: It is important to recognize that people have multiple identity and social factors (such as race, gender, age, family status, religion, socioeconomic status, etc.) that interact to shape their experiences and perspectives. An intersectional perspective provides a fuller understanding of systemic issues (e.g., racism, homophobia, sexism, etc.) that can have overlapping impacts on people. For example, the experiences of a racialized woman will be different from those of a racialized man, and also from those of a non-racialized woman.

Micro-aggression (or micro-inequities): Workplace micro-aggressions are subtle behaviours that affect members of marginalized groups but can add up and create greater impacts over time. Examples include ignoring or discounting the person's input in a meeting, making assumptions about

the person's place of origin, and making a comment (even a positive one) that reflects stereotypes.

Mommy-track: A disparaging term used to describe the limited career path of women who opted to sacrifice promotions and pay raises to devote more time to raising their children.

Returner: An individual who has been out of the workplace unemployed for an extended period of time (organizational decision however could be 12–24 months). Terminology typically found in the labour market refers to this population of individuals as **returners** or **individuals returning to work**. Practices to recruit from this population can be referred to as **returnship**, **re-launch**, or **re-engagement** activities carried out by the employer.

Sex: An individual's sex is based on biological and physiological differences of males, females, and intersexed individuals. Sex is distinct from gender, which is based on social constructions such as roles, norms, and patterns of behaviour.

Unconscious bias: Everyone has unconscious attitudes, assumptions, and stereotypes that their brains have developed about different groups. These can be positive, negative, or neutral; and they affect how we perceive and respond to people. Unconscious biases can be triggered within a fraction of a second, affecting decision-making and behaviour in ways of which we are generally unaware.

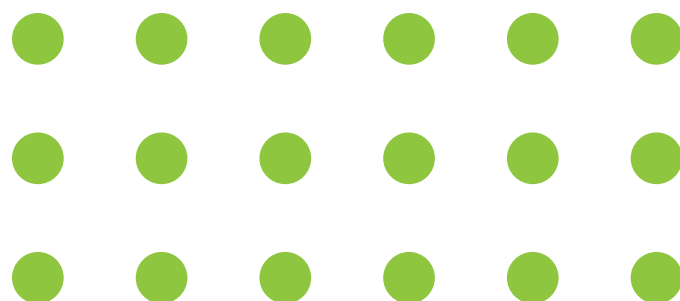
Appendix B

Tool: Subsidy and Funding Programs Available for Employers

Program	Details
Group Sponsorship Grant gov.on.ca Energy Partnerships—up to \$1,000,000 in grant funding	Group sponsorship arrangement to hire and train apprentices
Hire an Apprentice ontario.ca	Roadmap for hiring an apprentice. Funding is provided.
Canada-Ontario Job Grant gov.on.ca	The Canada-Ontario Job Grant provides direct financial support to individual employers or employer consortia who wish to purchase training for their employees. It is available to small, medium, and large businesses with a plan to deliver short-term training to existing and new employees. Employers may receive up to \$10,000 in government support per person for training costs.
Funding canada.ca	Apprenticeship grant for women

As funding availability and resources can change, a good practice is to bookmark the websites of interest. Frequently check the following link to the Ontario Government's funding website:

[Available funding opportunities from the Ontario Government | ontario.ca](#)



Tool: Resource List of Potential Partnerships and Networks

Organization	Description	Information
Clean Foundation	Clean Foundation partners with organizations to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce energy poverty. Promote social equity and support historically marginalized communities. Develop the green economy workforce. Protect the natural environment. Educate and promote action on climate change. 	Science Horizons - Clean Foundation
Employment in Energy Program— Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO)	Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) offers programs and services to the MNO labour market. They also offer a fully funded program to allow participants to pursue training in the trades toward occupations that are in demand within the energy sector in Ontario (Employment in Energy program)	Employment in Energy Program - Métis Nation of Ontario metisnation.org
Indeed.com	Indeed's website gathers information on returnship programs and links to job alerts for returnships	What Is a Returnship? Benefits of Return-to-Work Programs indeed.com
MaRS	MaRS describes itself as a launchpad for start-ups, a platform for researchers, and a home to innovators. It has over 100 tenants at North America's largest urban innovation hub, located in downtown Toronto. It has strong connections to innovators and entrepreneurs.	MaRS Cleantech marsdd.com How Lot Startup Aoms Partnered With Renewable-Energy Leader Opg - Mars Discovery District marsdd.com
New Canadian Jobs	Canada's Premium Job Board for New Immigrants and Newcomers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs can be sourced by industry and occupation. 	newcanadianjobs.ca
Skills Canada	Skills Canada encourages and supports a coordinated pan-Canadian approach to promoting skilled careers in trades and technologies to youth and their communities.	skillscompetencescanada.com/en
Women in Renewable Energy (WiRE)	WiRE's mission is to advance the role and recognition of women working in the energy sector, inclusive of all renewable energy and clean technologies.	womeninrenewableenergy.ca
YWCA	YWCA is a movement working for the empowerment, leadership, and rights of women, young women, and girls in more than 100 countries. The members and supporters include women from many different faiths, ages, backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures.	Current Opportunities YWCA ywcanada.ca

Appendix C: Additional Resources

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

- **Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success** by Sylvia Ann Hewlett
By documenting the successful efforts of a group of cutting-edge global companies to retain talented women and reintegrate them if they've already left, **Off-Ramps and On-Ramps** answers this critical question.
- **The First 90 Days: Proven Strategies for Getting Up to Speed Faster and Smarter, Updated and Expanded** by Michael D. Watkins
The first 90 days of any career transition are critical and can determine the success or the failure in the new role. In this book, Michael Watkins presents critical success strategies for new leaders at all levels.
- **The 40-Year-Old Intern** by Carol Fishman Cohen, November 2012 issue of *Harvard Business Review*.
How can employers set up successful returnships? Having studied programs at 14 organizations (including Goldman Sachs, Sara Lee, and Pace Law School) and interviewed program directors and dozens of participants, Carol Fishman Cohen offers seven recommendations.
- **Environmental Scan Report 30 by 30 and Beyond** by Engineers Canada
Recruitment, retention, and professional development of women in the engineering profession

WEBSITES

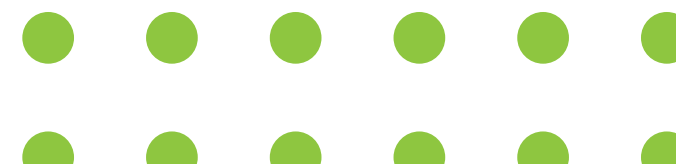
- [accenture.com/us-en/careers/local/return-work-program](https://www.accenture.com/us-en/careers/local/return-work-program)
Technology Returnship Program—bringing back the brightest talent ready to re-enter the workforce after 18 months or more with a 16-week, paid returnship.
- amazon.jobs/en/landing_pages/returnships
Amazon Returnship Program and job opportunities
- awsn.org.au/about-us/about-awsn
Australian Women in Security Network (AWSN) aims at increasing the number of women in the security community. They support, inspire, and act as role models. They connect women in the industry and those looking to enter the field with the tools, knowledge, network, and platforms needed to build confidence and interest.
- canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2022/01/skills-trade.html
Government of Canada promotes in-demand skilled trades as a first-choice career path.

- catalyst.org
Catalyst is supported by many of the world's most powerful CEOs and leading companies to help build workplaces that work for women.
- mentor.electricityhr.ca
Mentor Junction is a free, national tool from Electricity Human Resources Canada that can help build mentorships in the electricity sector.
- irelaunch.com
iRelaunch is a career re-entry consulting, training, and events company focused on bringing professionals back into the workforce after extended leave.
- hrkatha.com/news/diversity/o4s-upholds-commitment-to-di-launches-career-relaunch-2-0-programme
The SaaS startup launches a "Career Relaunch 2.0" program to help women on a break in their transition back to the active workforce.
- ibm.com/employment/techreentry
IBM's return-to-work program helps women ease back into the workforce following a career break.
- indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/returnship
Benefits of return-to-work programs
- medtronic.com/us-en/about/careers/engineering/professional-returnship.html
Professional returnship Medtronic careers
- reentry.swe.org
The STEM Reentry Task Force is an initiative to increase the number of technical women in the STEM sector (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) by providing support to women who are returning from a career break. It is designed to cause an institutional shift in the way employers engage with return-to-work professionals, using professional returnships programs as the primary vehicle when aiming to hire women after career breaks.
- swe.org
Society of Women Engineers empowers women to achieve their full potential in careers as engineers and leaders; expands the image of the engineering and technology professions as a positive force in improving the quality of life; and demonstrates the value of diversity and inclusion.
- womenbacktowork.org
WBW helps companies that value diversity and inclusion hire career-ready returners with technical backgrounds through custom returnship programs.

Appendix D

Tool: Resource List of Potential Services and Resources for Returners/Candidates

Organization	Description	Information
Electricity Human Resources Canada	Mentor Junction is a free, national tool from Electricity Human Resources Canada that can help build mentorships in the electricity sector. Individuals who are considering returning to the sector can find resources and guidance.	Mentor Junction - Canadian Electricity Sector Mentorship electricityhr.ca
Government of Canada	Encourages Canadians looking to upgrade their skills/ trade to "Follow your passion. Find your skilled trade." Provides a career quiz for individuals looking to work in a skilled trade.	Follow Your Passion. Find Your Skilled Trade canada.ca
Government of Canada— Employment and Social Development Canada	A comprehensive website that offers a one-stop national repository for information for more than 300 skilled trades in Canada and the Red Seal trade designation.	Government Of Canada Promotes In-Demand Skilled Trades As A First-Choice Career Path canada.ca
Indeed.com	Indeed's website gathers information on returnship programs and links to job alerts for returnships.	What Is a Returnship? Benefits of Return-to-Work Programs indeed.com
Job Bank Canada	Provides quizzes for individuals looking to expand their career path with options and resources.	Plan Your Career With The Career Quizzes Job Bank
City of Toronto	Provides resources for childcare.	Child Care Fee Subsidy Calculator City of Toronto
Province of Ontario	Provides access to adult learning through the Ontario Bridge Training Program	Adult Learning: Ontario Bridge Training Program ontario.ca
Second Career Program (Ontario)	The Second Career strategy launched by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities pays for the training or education that Ontarians require to get a better job. It provides financial help up to \$28,000, or more in some cases.	Second Career Ontario Government Funding



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“A Complete Guide to Implementing a Successful Returnship Program”, WBW Women Back to Work, womenbacktowork.org/comprehensive-returnship-guide
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We would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the following individuals who participated on the Returnship Steering Committee:

- **Chair | Jennifer Smith**, Burlington Hydro
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- **Mark Chapeskie**, Electricity Human Resources Canada
- **Anne-Marie Taber**, Ontario Power Generation
- **Brad Walker**, Elexicon Energy
- **Lana Norton**, Women of Poweline Technicians
- **Alison Bondy**, S&C Electric
- **Leigh-Ann Layno**, Nuclear Waste Management Organization
- **Pamela Flynn**, Electricity Human Resources Canada
- **Emily Griffiths**, Electricity Human Resources Canada

EHRC is proud to work with the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development in the production of this Returnship Toolkit. The ongoing support from funders, industry partners, and Steering Committee members has been invaluable. These insights help to ensure EHRC can successfully develop useful and leading-edge best practices across the electricity and energy sectors. We recognize that these views represent those of EHRC and its researchers, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Ontario.

Returns Toolkit



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