

Nursing Home Workforce: Stay and Exit Interview Toolkit

Practical stay and exit interview tools to monitor staff,
strengthen retention, and drive meaningful action

HSAG is the West Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Quality Innovation Network-
Quality Improvement Organization (QIN-QIO) Region 7.



Listening Is a Retention Strategy

Nursing homes are navigating one of the most difficult workforce environments in healthcare. Shortages of nurses and nurse aides, competition from hospitals and other employers, high turnover, and reliance on agency staffing all strain budgets, disrupt continuity of care, and emotionally drain the teams who remain. Each departure costs time and money, and each departing staff member takes valuable experience, resident relationships, and institutional knowledge that cannot be quickly rebuilt.^{1,3}

Many of these pressures, such as labor markets, demographics, and reimbursement, sit outside any one facility's control. What leaders can control is the daily work experience: whether staff members feel heard, supported, scheduled, recognized, and able to grow.^{1,4} People stay where they feel valued and leave where they do not, and focusing leadership energy on these controllable factors is the most practical path to a more stable workforce.^{1,4}

Stay and exit interviews are two of the simplest, lowest-cost tools for doing exactly that.^{1,3,5,6,7} Stay interviews keep a real-time pulse on what current staff need, surfacing small, fixable problems before they lead to resignations.^{1,4} Exit interviews capture honest lessons from those who leave, revealing patterns no single conversation can.^{3,5,6,7} Used together and reviewed through the Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement (QAPI) Program, they turn listening into a routine leadership practice and staff feedback into concrete, testable action.²

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit contains two companion tools: A stay interview toolkit to engage current staff and an exit interview toolkit to learn from departing employees. Each tool pairs a one-page interviewer guide with a ready-to-use interview form. Worksheets for QAPI follow-up are at the back of this document for easy printing. Together, these tools create a simple improvement loop.

1. **Interview.** Conduct stay interviews with current staff and offer an exit interview at separation.
2. **Document.** Record feedback objectively on the interview forms and mark the themes that arise.
3. **Review and act.** Bring themes to the monthly QAPI review, select one or two actions to test, assign an owner, and follow up on results.

Human Resources Notice

This toolkit is a workforce retention and quality improvement resource for skilled nursing facilities; it is not legal advice. Before implementation, review this document and any customized forms with human resources, compliance, and legal professionals to ensure consistency with organizational policy, employment practices, and collective bargaining agreements. Also review these materials to ensure compliance with applicable federal, state, and local requirements. Lastly, customize the content as needed. This notice applies to both the stay and exit interview tools.

Stay and exit interviews should be supportive conversations used to identify staff needs, retention opportunities, and workplace improvement themes. They should not be used as disciplinary meetings, grievance proceedings, or performance evaluations. Interviewers should focus on active listening, objective documentation, and practical follow-up. Avoid rebutting feedback, defending decisions, or making commitments that have not been reviewed or approved.

Tips for Getting Started

Review these tips with your leadership team before launching stay and exit interviews.

Decide Who Conducts the Interviews

- Stay interviews are usually most effective when conducted by the employee's direct supervisor, because that relationship is where retention is won or lost. Offer a neutral alternative, such as human resources staff or the administrator, when an employee is not comfortable speaking with his/her supervisor.
- Exit interviews should be conducted by someone other than the direct supervisor, such as human resources staff or the administrator, so departing employees can speak candidly.

Start Small and Pace the Work

- Plan for 15–20 minutes per interview and set a realistic monthly target based on leaders' capacity rather than launching a facility-wide campaign on day one.
- Consider piloting with one unit, shift, or high-turnover role, then expand the pilot as the routine takes hold.
- Reach night and weekend staff by scheduling interviews at shift change or during planned off-hours rounding.

Make Follow-Through Visible

- Share “you said, we did” updates in huddles, staff meetings, or postings so staff see that feedback leads to action. An interview program without visible follow-through can damage trust more than not asking at all.
- When a request cannot be made, say so directly and explain why. Honesty preserves credibility.

Protect Confidentiality and Manage Records

- In small facilities and teams, even aggregated themes can identify individuals. Share only broad themes and consider waiting until several interviews are complete before reporting.
- Before launch, decide with human resources, compliance, and legal teams where completed forms will be stored, who may access them, and how long they will be retained. Keep interview forms separate from personnel files unless policy directs otherwise.

Improve Exit Interview Participation

- Offer the exit interview before the last day worked and provide a written or phone option for employees who decline a face-to-face meeting.
- Exit interviews are generally most appropriate for voluntary separations; follow facility policy and legal guidance before including involuntary separations.
- Track the participation rate over time. A falling rate may itself be a signal of trust.

Connect Findings to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Facility Assessment

- Stay and exit interview themes feed the facility assessment and staff planning expectations in CMS guidance (QSO-24-13-NH) and strengthen QAPI documentation by showing how the facility identifies and acts on workforce risks.

Nursing Home Stay Interview Guide

Purpose

Use stay interviews to engage current staff before concerns lead them to consider leaving. The goal is to understand what supports staff satisfaction, what barriers may affect retention, and what practical changes leaders can test and follow up on to improve the work environment, workforce stability, and resident care.

When and How to Use This Tool

- Interview new hires at 30-, 60-, and 90-day intervals, and check in with current staff periodically.
- Prioritize roles, units, or shifts with high turnover, vacancies, agency use, or call-offs.
- Use results to inform action planning, leadership rounding, and the monthly QAPI review.
- Use the opening script (see below) to start the interview.
- Consider an electronic version of the questions, with advance notice to staff by email.
- Address any reportable concerns promptly, in accordance with facility policy.
- Have the administrator sign each completed form to confirm receipt and visibility of responses.

Interviewer Quick Reference Guide

Step	How to Prepare
Prepare	Review the employee's role, unit/shift, length of employment, and any known support need. Schedule a private conversation and explain that the purpose is support and retention, not discipline or performance review.
Listen first	Ask open-ended questions, take brief objective notes, and let the staff member share his/her perspective without interruption. Do not debate, defend, or rebut feedback; ask clarifying questions to understand what support or follow-up would help.
Close the loop	Summarize what you heard, identify one or two feasible actions, assign an owner, and set a follow-up date. Avoid promising changes that cannot be delivered or have not been reviewed by leadership.
Protect trust and confidentiality	Use feedback respectfully and communicate themes in aggregate during QAPI or leadership review without identifying staff unnecessarily. Route safety, employment, or compliance concerns through the facility's established process.

Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to meet. The purpose of this conversation is to understand what is working well, what could make your job better, and what may help you continue working here. This is not a performance review or disciplinary meeting. My role is to listen. I may ask clarifying questions, but I will not debate or challenge your feedback, and you may choose not to answer any question. Feedback may be reviewed in aggregate with other staff input to guide retention and QAPI improvement efforts.

Nursing Home Stay Interview Form

Stay Interview Participant

Facility:		Unit/Department:	
Staff Member Name/ Role:		Shift:	
Date:		Interviewer:	
Length of Employment:		Follow-Up Date:	

Stay Interview Questions

#	Question	Staff Response
1	What keeps you working here? <i>Listen for meaningful work, relationships, scheduling, leadership support, pay/benefits, recognition, and growth.</i>	
2	What part of your workday gives you the most pride or satisfaction? <i>Connect responses to resident-centered care, teamwork, role clarity, and strengths.</i>	
3	Describe a recent day that went well. What made it a good shift? <i>Look for staffing, supplies, communication, workload, teamwork, and leadership presence.</i>	
4	What makes your work more difficult than it needs to be? <i>Separate quick fixes from long-term issues. Ask what would make the biggest difference.</i>	
5	What support, flexibility, resources, or recognition would make the biggest difference to you? <i>Probe for break coverage, scheduling flexibility, reliable supplies, coaching, and recognition preferences.</i>	
6	What skills, interests, or career goals would you like us to support or put to better use? <i>Consider mentoring, restorative aide interest, career ladder, certified nursing assistant (CNA)-to-licensed vocational nurse (LVN)/registered nurse (RN) interest, or committee participation.</i>	
7	What is one practical thing leadership could improve upon in the next 30 days? <i>Keep the ask realistic. Identify owner, action, and follow-up.</i>	

#	Question	Staff Response
8	What might cause you to consider leaving? <i>Listen without judgment. Identify whether the issue is pay, schedule, workload, respect/culture, supervisor support, or career growth.</i>	

Common Themes Checklist

After the interview, check off the themes that came up, marking each one as a strength that keeps the employee here or a concern that puts retention at risk. The stay and exit checklists use the same theme list, so the QAPI committee can compare what keeps staff with what drives departures.

Theme	Strength	Concern	Notes
Pay/Benefits	☐	☐	
Schedule/Flexibility	☐	☐	
Workload/Staffing	☐	☐	
Leadership Supervision	☐	☐	
Workplace Culture/Respect	☐	☐	
Training/Orientation	☐	☐	
Career Growth	☐	☐	
Commute/Relocation	☐	☐	
Personal/Family Considerations	☐	☐	
Other	☐	☐	

Nursing Home Administrator Name:			
Signature:		Date:	

Nursing Home Exit Interview Guide

Purpose

Use exit interviews to learn from departing employees, identify workforce trends, and inform retention planning and QAPI activities. Review feedback respectfully and analyze it to identify recurring themes and priorities.

When and How to Use This Tool

- Offer exit interviews when feasible and apply the process consistently across roles.
- Participation is voluntary; employees may decline any question or stop at any time.
- Use results as one input for retention action planning and the monthly QAPI review.
- Manage responses in accordance with facility policy and privacy requirements; review in aggregate.
- Route safety, abuse, or other compliance concerns through established reporting processes.
- Conduct and document the interview using the form on the following pages.
- Use the opening script (see below) to start the interview.
- Have the administrator sign each completed form to confirm receipt and visibility.

Interviewer Quick Reference Guide

Step	How to Prepare
Prepare	Review the employee's role, unit/shift, length of employment, and separation reason. Schedule a private conversation before the last day worked and explain that the purpose is organizational learning, not discipline or performance review.
Listen first	Ask open-ended questions, take brief objective notes, and let the employee share his/her perspective without interruption. Do not debate, defend, or rebut feedback; ask clarifying questions as needed.
Close the loop	Thank the employee, summarize what you heard, and explain how feedback will be used in aggregate. Route items needing follow-up to the appropriate owner rather than promising outcomes.
Protect trust and confidentiality	Manage responses according to facility policy; share themes in aggregate during QAPI or leadership review; and route safety, employment, or compliance concerns through the facility's established process.

Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback. The purpose of this conversation is to understand your experience and identify opportunities for improvement. My role is to listen. I may ask clarifying questions, but I will not debate, defend decisions, or attempt to change your views, and you may choose not to answer any question. Information you share may be combined with other employees' feedback to identify trends, and any concerns that require mandatory reporting will be handled in accordance with facility policy.

Nursing Home Exit Interview Form

Exit Interview Participant

Facility:		Unit/Department:	
Staff Member Name/Role:		Shift:	
Last Day Worked:		Interview Date:	
Interviewer:		Voluntary or Involuntary Separation:	

Exit Interview Questions

#	Question	Staff Response
1	What were the main reasons you decided to leave? <i>Consider compensation, scheduling, workload, leadership, workplace culture, career growth, commute, personal circumstances, or other factors.</i>	
2	What aspects of your job did you find most rewarding. What was most challenging? <i>Explore workload, resources, staffing, communication, and resident care barriers.</i>	
3	How would you describe the work environment on your unit or shift? <i>Consider teamwork, communication, respect, inclusiveness, trust, and leadership visibility.</i>	
4	What feedback would you like to share regarding supervision, communication, or follow-up on concerns? <i>Assess whether employees felt heard and supported.</i>	
5	Did orientation, training, and mentoring adequately prepare you for your role? <i>Identify opportunities to strengthen onboarding, training, and competency development.</i>	
6	How did staffing, scheduling, and workload affect your experience? <i>Look for trends related to staffing levels, overtime, breaks, and scheduling flexibility.</i>	
7	Did you feel recognized for your contributions and supported in your professional growth? <i>Explore opportunities for career advancement, continuing education, and recognition.</i>	
8	What could the facility have done differently that may have influenced your decision to stay? <i>Focus on actionable, realistic improvements.</i>	

#	Question	Staff Response
9	What recommendations do you have to improve staff retention? <i>Capture ideas that may inform future workforce initiatives.</i>	
10	Would you consider returning to this facility or recommending it as a workplace? Why or why not? <i>Helps assess workforce reputation and future recruitment opportunities.</i>	

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Training/Orientation	☐	☐	
Career Growth	☐	☐	
Commute/Relocation	☐	☐	
Personal/Family Considerations	☐	☐	
Other	☐	☐	

Nursing Home Administrator Name:			
Signature:		Date:	

QAPI Follow-Up

Act after the interviews. Findings move through three monthly steps: (1) tally the themes from completed interviews, (2) review the results with the QAPI committee, and (3) choose one or two priority themes to act on.

Monthly Theme Count

Each month, count how often each theme was checked across all stay and exit interview forms. Write the totals in the Strengths and Concerns columns below for analysis through the QAPI Program.

Theme	# of Strengths	# of Concerns
Pay/Benefits		
Schedule/Flexibility		
Workload/Staffing		
Leadership Supervision		
Workplace Culture/Respect		
Training/Orientation		
Career Growth		
Commute/Relocation		
Personal/Family Considerations		
Other		

Monthly QAPI Review

Bring the theme tally to the monthly QAPI committee meeting. When the same themes persist month over month consider a root cause analysis or a performance improvement project (PIP).

Month	# of Departures	# of Interviews	Top Themes	Priority Decision

Retention Action Plan

From the monthly review, choose one or two priority themes and define a small, testable improvement for each. Assign an owner and a target date and report results at the next QAPI meeting.

Priority Theme	Action to Test	Owner	Target Date	Follow-Up Result

References

1. American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing (AAPACN). Stay interview retention plan. April 2022. Available at: https://www.aapacn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Stay-Interview-Retention-Plan_FINAL.pdf. Accessed on: August 19, 2026.
2. CMS. Revised guidance for long-term care facility assessment requirements (QSO-24-13-NH). June 18, 2024. Available at: <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-24-13-nh.pdf>. Accessed on: August 19, 2026.
3. Medical Group Management Association (MGMA). Sample exit interview questions for a medical practice. 2023. Available at: <https://www.mgma.com/getkaiasset/1d4cc768-5b41-4080-8ba3-71d26d23b607/Sample-Questions-Exit-Interview.pdf>. Accessed on: August 19, 2026
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6. Washington State Office of Financial Management. Exit interview template. Available at: [ExitInterviewTemplate.doc](#). Accessed on: August 19, 2026.
7. Washington State Office of Financial Management. Sample exit interview letter. Available at: [SampleExitInterviewLetter.doc](#). Accessed on: August 19, 2026.