***Understanding and Managing Attrition in AWS re/Start: A Guide for Collaborating Organizations***

Maintaining strong learner retention throughout the AWS re/Start program is crucial for achieving optimal outcomes and ensuring program sustainability. Lower learner retention or high attrition, have important costs for AWS re/Start and its collaborating organizations and therefore it should be reduced to a minimum in order to maximize the impact and scale of available resources. Lower attrition helps to reduce the cost per graduated learner and maximizes the funding received and investment made by you and other collaborating organizations. The analysis of internal AWS re/Start data has also shown that low attrition is generally a sign of a healthy program and delivery across its main operational areas: acquisition and selection of learners; delivery of curriculum and hands-on training of learners; engagement with future employers and placement rates. This guide provides insights and practical guidance to help you, as a Collaborating Organization (CO), to understand, measure, and effectively manage attrition. It covers the following aspects of attrition management:

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##### 1. Understanding Attrition

AWS re/Start aims to keep a lower than industry average attrition across its program, close to the outcomes of in-person reskilling programs regardless of the cohort’s delivery format. Although this is an ambitious goal, in particular with the growth of hybrid and online cohorts since 2020, understanding the main opportunities and challenges of each delivery model helps you set realistic expectations and implement appropriate strategies to reduce attrition.

Typically, in-person reskilling programs experience low attrition rates as they benefit from direct interaction, hands-on learning and community support, but they are also more challenging to scale, involve higher operational costs and limit accessibility for some learners. Online programs tend to experience high attrition rates, often due to lack of learner engagement, technical issues, feelings of isolation, and difficulty balancing coursework with other responsibilities. However, effective learner support, interactive course design, and community-building strategies help improve retention as many of AWS re/Start COs have repeatedly shown. Hybrid programs, which combine in-person and online learning components, are able to often leverage the benefits of both delivery formats, with attrition rates that fall in-between other delivery models. Successful hybrid programs require a careful sequencing of online and in-person modules, as well as seamless coordination between the two delivery modes and a correct management of learners’ expectations.

In addition, free reskilling programs, while providing access to more learners, often experience higher attrition rates as learners have lower intrinsic motivation, due to a lack of financial investment. In the case of programs serving vulnerable, disadvantaged or underserved populations, these should count with robust learner support services in order to offer responses to unexpected challenges, when and where needed.

##### 2. Preparation – Setting up your delivery for success

Successfully managing attrition begins well before the program starts. You should consider implementing the following preparatory measures to establish a strong foundation for learner retention:

**Learner Selection and Assessment**

* Implement a thorough selection process to identify candidates who are most likely to succeed. Aspects like individual commitment, previous interest in the sector and a proactive attitude will help the learner to complete the program.
* Consider introducing a "Week 0" or “Welcome” period during which learners can: interact with instructors and previous learners; understand the program expectations and intensity; and learn about cloud career opportunities from recruiters or current professionals working in the sector. This takes place before learners are added to the Canvas environment.
* Utilize assessment tools like an online test to evaluate technical aptitude, learning style, and commitment level. This can also include the requirement to complete pre-program activities such as the "Introduction to Cloud 101" course available in [AWS Educate](https://aws.amazon.com/education/awseducate/?nc1=h_ls). This is available in multiple languages and learners who complete it will receive a [badge](https://www.credly.com/org/amazon-web-services/badge/aws-educate-introduction-to-cloud-101) that they can add to their LinkedIn profile.

**Support System Development**

* Establish comprehensive support mechanisms that add value to the technical curriculum before the program’s launch like: tutoring resources; mentorship activities in collaboration with potential future employers; career guidance sessions led by HR professionals; and professional sessions with cloud professionals.
* Build relationships with local NGOs and social services to provide additional support for learners in vulnerable situations.
* Create clear internal escalation paths for learners experiencing challenges which can be related with quality of instruction, group dynamic or other.

**Resource Planning**

* Align cohort size with available resources. Smaller cohorts (under 30 learners) typically show lower attrition rates so you need to ensure adequate instructor-to-learner ratios for larger groups. Allocated resources should also be aligned with the previous experience or technical knowledge of learners.
* Prepare contingency plans for common challenges: technical issues; learning pace variations among the group; or new or temporary personal change of circumstances.

**Instructor Preparation**

* As AWS re/Start guidelines on instructors indicate, it is important to select instructors with both technical expertise and strong teaching skills. You should also look for instructors with experience working with the same type of learners that your organization supports and in formats similar to those used by you.
* Strengthen the quality of your instructors by providing training on: engaging diverse learner groups; identifying early warning signs of potential dropouts; managing different delivery formats (in-person, online, or hybrid) in engaging ways.
* Follow guidelines provided on instructor selection. You can find the most updated information on CO Portal > Resources > Instructor Requirements. Instructors are expected to go through the AWS re/Start Instructor Preparedness Training and Knowledge Check on regular basis.

**Program Structure Design**

* Consider local context and learners’ needs when choosing delivery format, course hours and even its calendar. For example, you might need to adapt to school calendar, a specific number of teaching hours per day or to deliver the training within certain periods of the day, based on cultural aspects or specific needs of the learners’ groups you serve.
* Plan regular checkpoints to monitor learners’ progress.
* Include community-building activities throughout the program and engage local potential employers from the beginning of the program.
* Plan internal competitions, group projects or project challenges as a way to motivate learners and support the building of their technical confidence, vocabulary (lingo) and portfolio.

**Documentation and Communication**

* Assure that all team involved in the delivery of AWS re/Start program is familiarized with the Program Guide and other documents relevant to their area of responsibility.
* Communicate clearly program guidelines and expectations with the learners during the selection process, including policies regarding attendance and participation, course work and certification.

##### 3. Implementation – Strategies and best practices during program delivery

Effective learner retention requires consistent monitoring and proactive intervention throughout the program duration. The following strategies, together with those proposed above under the “Preparation” stage, have proven successful across our global network of COs:

**Early Intervention and Monitoring**

* Implement a systematic approach to tracking learner engagement as well as attendance and participation patterns. These will help you to detect early signs of potential dropouts like missed sessions, incomplete course work, declining performance or participation, or persisting technical difficulties.
* Track progress of curriculum milestones, completion of Knowledge Checks (KCs) and Labs in Canvas Gradebook during the program. Although this can be time consuming, being proactive avoids issues or unexpected low graduation rates at the completion of the program.

**Learner Support and Engagement**

* Provide multi-layered support throughout the program like regular one-on-one check-ins with learners, peer study teams, additional tutoring for challenging topics, or mental health and wellness resources.
* Foster a strong learning community: encourage peer-to-peer interaction, plan group projects and activities, create spaces for informal communication, and celebrate small wins and achievements.

**Quality Instruction and Content Delivery**

* Ensure consistent high-quality instruction and balance between technical content and soft skills development.
* Maintain engaging content delivery: mix theoretical and practical learning, include real-world examples and case studies that relate to your community of learners, and incorporate interactive elements.

**Career Development Integration**

* Embed career-focused activities throughout the program. This can be regular exposure to industry professionals or local events, company visits or virtual sessions with employers, CV building and interview preparation, and technical project portfolio development.
* Connect training to job opportunities throughout the program: highlight relevant job roles and career paths, share success stories from previous graduates, organize networking events with potential employers, and promote learners’ attendance to career fairs and relevant sector events.

##### 4. Measurement – Tracking and improving retention rates

The analysis of learners’ retention data enables you to make informed decisions and continuously improve your delivery. An outstanding track record of retention rates can also be used to support grant applications or attract more prospective future learners. Here are some proposals on how to approach measurement systematically:

**Key Metrics to Track**

* Core attrition indicators: overall attrition rate (including detailed analysis by sub-groups like age or gender); week-by-week retention numbers; completion of Knowledge Checks (KCs) and Lab completion rates on week-by-week.
* Cohort-specific metrics: cohort size impact, delivery format effectiveness, and instructor and course coordinator performance.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

* Implement systematic data collection beyond cohort or attrition-specific metrics: regular attendance tracking, learner feedback surveys, and exit interviews for departing learners.
* Analyze patterns and trends like timing of dropouts, common reasons for attrition, correlation with cohort characteristics, and impact of support interventions.

**Continuous Improvement**

* Have in place regular internal and external review cycles like for example weekly program team meetings, monthly performance assessments, quarterly trend analysis, or annual strategic planning.
* Action planning: identify areas for improvement, develop specific interventions, set measurable goals, monitor intervention effectiveness.
* Work with AWS re/Start team to understand how your performance compares with similar organizations in the region or other COs that server similar groups of learners.

##### 5. Tools and Resources – Recommended approaches and support systems

Successful attrition management requires the right combination of tools, systems, and resources applied throughout the three phases as indicated previously: “Preparation”, “Implementation” and “Measurement”. Below you can find recommended approaches and support mechanisms that you can implement:

**Assessment and Selection Tools**

* You should have a clear and trackable learner intake assessment that measures technical aptitude, learning style, commitment level. We have included some recommendations that you should tailor for your organization and learners’ community. You can also engage with other AWS re/Start COs to learn about their methodologies or used tools like CRMs tailored for your type of organization and processes.
* Pre-program activities support learners in better understanding if the course is right for them. You should include Week 0 orientation activities, a brochure on program expectations with examples of successful stories, and success guidelines (based on past best practices and feedback from the learners.)

**Monitoring and Tracking Systems**

* Through AWS re/Start Learning Management System (LMS), in the Canvas Gradebook, you can track progress, assignment completion, engagement metrics and Knowledge Check results. This can complement other tracking tools you already have in place to spot early signs of future attrition.
* Attendance and participation management tools also help you in detecting early warning indicators.

**Communication Platforms**

* Build a community around the program and promote peer support among learners. For this you can use platforms than include features like virtual meeting platforms, discussion forums, messaging forums or announcement channels.
* Feedback mechanisms, as already mentioned, should be in place at all stages of your activities. Feedback can be collected through group surveys, but also one-on-one meetings, progress reviews or exit/placement interviews.

**Best Practice Resources**

* As a global program we work proactively to learn, share and promote best practices among all our collaborating organizations. This is done through our [AWS re/Start CO Portal](https://www.awsrestartprogram.com/) resources like this document, global and regional CO sessions, peer learning opportunities and during your regular calls with our Program Managers.
* In addition to this, you should promote internal best practices through program delivery guides. These can be instructor handbooks, support service protocols, intervention or pre-attrition mitigation strategies, or templates to share success stories and case studies.