



Australian Government

# Workforce Australia

## Actions: Designing and implementing a supported returner program

Attracting and retaining previously underutilised sources of talent, including women, is key to addressing a skills shortage facing Australian businesses.

A supported returner program is an employer-funded, paid employment opportunity, usually lasting between 3 and 6 months that support women to transition back into the workforce after a significant period out of the workforce. Participants undertake significant work based on their skills, interests and experience and the employer offers support which might include training, mentoring and reskilling.

Implementing a supported returner program can provide cost-effective recruitment of skilled and qualified employees.

### Where to find information:

- Harvard Business Review: [Return to work programs come of age](#)

### What longer term actions you can implement:

- Design and implement a supported returner program using the [Supported returner program resource](#).
  - Identify a business area within your organisation to trial a returner program.
  - Consider the physical environment – is it safe and appropriate for male and female employees?
  - Consider the manager competency and commitment – are managers engaged and educated on how they can contribute to performance in mixed gender environments?
  - Consider options for flexible work.
  - Consider training options and availability to support returners who have been out of the workforce for an extended period to understand changes that have occurred in the industry, technology requirements and the broader strategic environment.
  - Partner with local communities, clubs and skills-based networks to build awareness of opportunities for returners.
  - Consider advertising in both traditional and non-traditional domains, including Facebook, fitness centres, childcare centres, shopping centre notice boards and online forums.
  - Communicate the business case and strategy for the returner program to employees and managers. Equip employees and managers with the language and tools to share opportunities at your organisation.
  - Develop a tailored induction process, which includes training, mentoring and transitions to support work. Ensure that training can be done at different times and locations to suit other commitments returners may have outside work.



## Scenario:

As part of the Career Revive initiative, [Encompass Community Services](#) designed a pilot returner program for disability support workers. The pilot returner program supports and upskills female staff seeking to return to work following a career break. It will be a first of its kind for both the disability sector and unique to the Geelong area.

The pilot returner program will be trialled in late 2021 and will run for twelve months. It will hire, train and retain two disability support workers. If successful, the pilot returner program will be expanded to recruit returners every six months.

## Scenario:

[AECOM](#) is implementing an industry wide approach to addressing a national engineering workforce recruitment challenge. Equity, diversity and inclusion are core to AECOM's vision. AECOM recognises that those who want to enter the engineering industry don't all start from the same place because advantages and barriers exist. They aim to correct the imbalance, ensuring that everyone has access to the same opportunities for professional development, career advancement and business opportunities.

To address this challenge, AECOM in North Queensland joined the Career Revive initiative and has since implemented several new initiatives, including:

- **Career Reload:** a returner program to support engineers transitioning back into the workforce in a supported environment. Career Reload is being piloted in Queensland, with plans for a national program in the future.
- **Partnering with Engineers Australia** to promote and support EA's workforce diversity efforts. Their first activity is hosting an EngConnect event to connect and support engineers who are on parental leave, working part-time or on sabbatical.
- **A regional ED&I Committee** that drives the strategy and develops strategic workforce activities to guide AECOM's diversity, equity and inclusion agenda.
- **Engaging a dedicated recruiter** to focus on attracting and retaining underrepresented groups in the engineering community, including women.

## Scenario:

Leaders at [OneFortyOne](#) (OFO) were galvanised to engage with the Career Revive initiative to combat the low representation of females in the forestry and timber industry.

Attracting a diverse workforce has been a key area of focus for OFO in their Career Revive journey. OFO have implemented a number of activities, including:

- Development of a Supported Returner Program for women transitioning back to work which has been adapted from the work experience program for its Drymill. If successful, OFO's Returner Program will be scaled for other areas deemed suitable in and across the organisation.
- Exploration of attraction programs for broader marginalised communities in Mount Gambier.
- Promotion and showcasing of real-life employees on their social media and web channels, to shift perceptions about working in the industry.
- Experimenting with the standardisation of neutral language in recruitment advertisements to remove barriers to entry.
- Prompting cross-organisational conversations about environments that support and enable staff to thrive, with a specific focus on workplace flexibility.

## Scenario:

[Regional Australia Bank](#) participated in Career Revive, as part of the 2019 intake, to address the challenge of finding the time and resources to improve its approaches and policies, so that it can continue to provide ongoing support to its staff and the broader community.

As part of the Career Revive initiative, Regional Australia Bank held a morning tea to better understand staff experiences of maternity leave and the pressures facing women who wished to balance work and careers.

Attendees completed a short and anonymous survey used to examine the appetite to introduce a formal mentoring program for new or expectant mothers.

Regional Australia Bank also wished to create opportunities for women who had been out of the workforce for an extended period.

The challenge was to create an accessible program, which provided practical support and training to aid women's re-entry into the workforce.

Regional Australia Bank examined gaps in its current and future workforce and considered areas of the business that were best suited to support, re-train and retain skilled women from the local community.

To further inform design activities, Regional Australia Bank sought employee input on the qualities, motivation and behaviours that made it a great place to work.

Through a dedicated design workshop, the executive sponsor, HR and learning staff discussed:

- Areas where staff could work flexibly within the business;
- Technical supports required;
- Dedicated supports for returners; and
- Program timing and intake.

A part of the Career Revive initiative, Regional Australia Bank also reviewed its recruitment approach, changing its search parameters on Seek to reach more diverse candidates.