

Retaining Rural Teachers: A process for addressing teacher working conditions



STEP 01

Review research and local data

to determine categories of working conditions that are most pressing and relevant to meet local needs.

Review the [Addressing Working Conditions to Improve Teacher Retention: An Exploration of the Research](#) fact sheet to understand which working conditions are related to teacher retention. Then look at existing data such as climate surveys and exit interviews to understand which working conditions need to be addressed in your district. Review strategic priorities to think about aligning a focus on working conditions with existing priorities. Identify which working condition(s) you'll be focusing on for Steps 2–5.

Example

You may decide to focus on the category School Leadership, with a focus on the principal providing meaningful feedback to teachers and serving as a supportive instructional leader.

STEP 02

Conduct root cause analysis

to uncover the underlying potential causes and inform solutions.

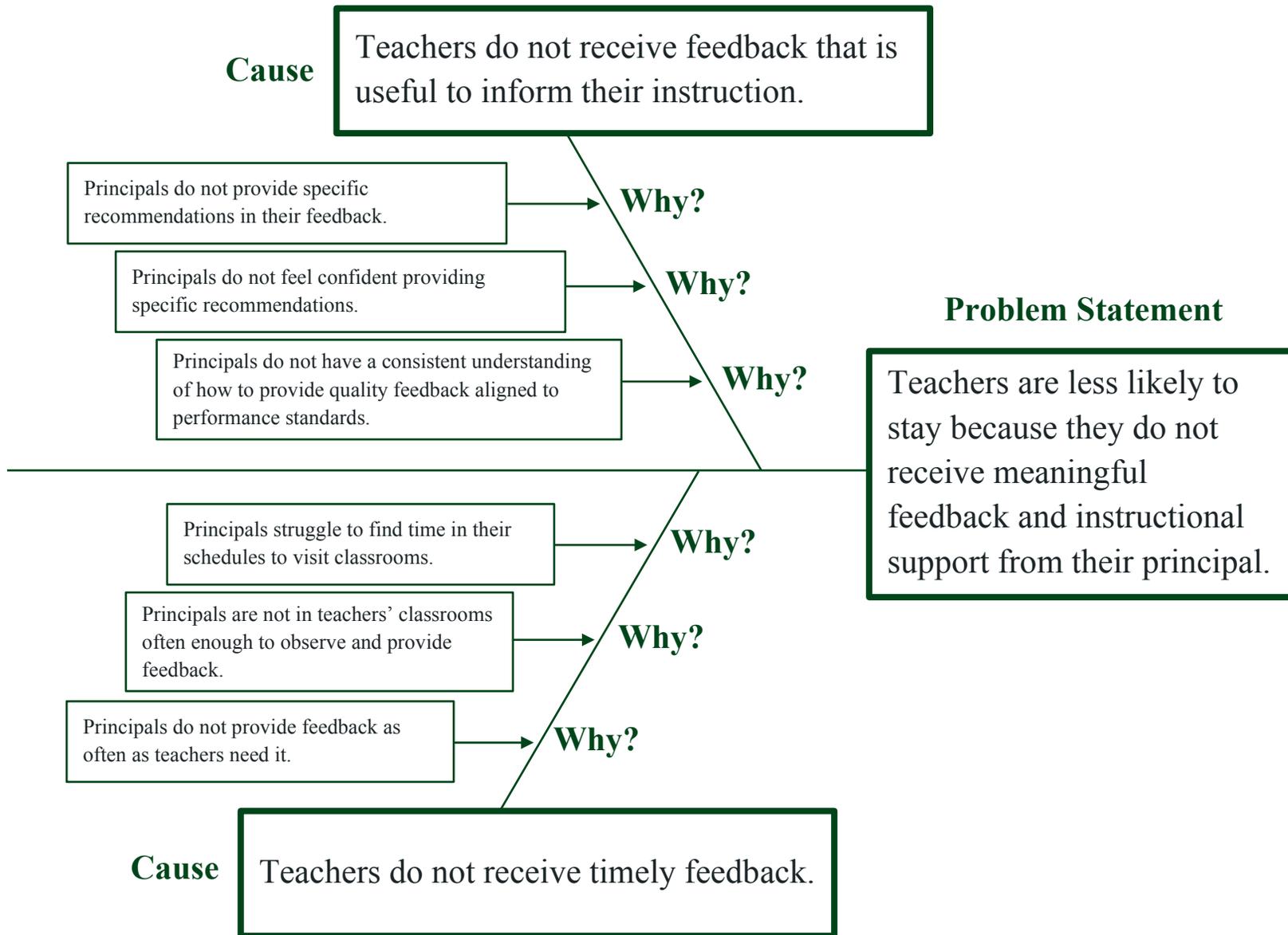
Start by filling out the Fishbone Diagram Template to identify the root causes for the working condition category you chose in Step 1. Use the resulting root causes to develop a theory of action.

For an example of a more detailed facilitation guide, refer to REL Midwest's [Continuous Improvement Through Networked Improvement Communities: Root Cause Analysis and Theory of Action Facilitator's Guide](#).

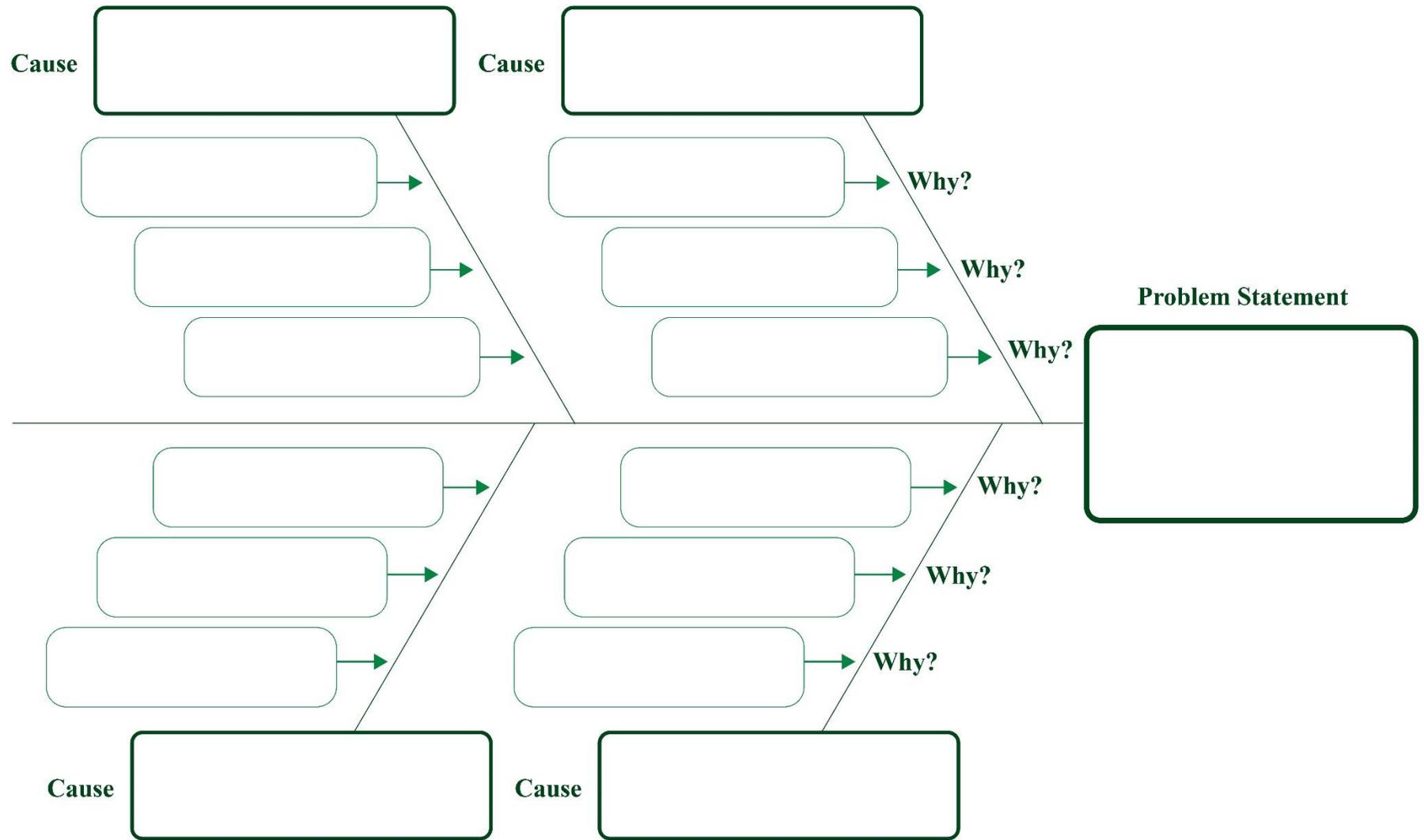
Example

Through the root cause analysis, you may hypothesize that teachers perceive that they are not receiving meaningful feedback because principals do not feel confident to provide feedback and principals struggle to find time to observe classrooms and provide feedback. Below we present a root cause analysis demonstrating this hypothesis (figure 1).

Figure 1. Root cause analysis example



Fishbone Diagram Template



STEP 03

Develop a theory of action

to specify a progression of strategies—that is, which strategies are foundational for other strategies to be successful—and identify indicators for monitoring the success of these strategies.

Develop a set of strategies that need to occur to address the root causes you identified in Step 2. Then, sequence which strategies are foundational for others to occur and create a plan by using the Theory of Action Template on the next page. Determine an indicator for each strategy in addition to your ultimate outcome.

Example

You may determine that principals need training on how to provide quality instruction as a first step to address the root causes: principals do not have a consistent understanding of how to provide quality feedback aligned to performance standards, and principals struggle to find time in their schedules to visit classrooms. Below we present a theory of action demonstrating steps to address these root causes (figure 2).

Figure 2. Theory of action to improve teacher perceptions of feedback

Root Cause(s)	Step 1: Strategies (If ...)	Step 1: Indicators (Then ...)	Step 2: Strategies (If ...)	Step 2: Indicators (Then ...)	Outcome	Outcome Measure
Principals do not have a consistent understanding of how to provide quality feedback aligned with performance standards. Principals struggle to find time in their schedules to visit classrooms.	Provide deeper training with new principals and ongoing training with current principals on how to give quality feedback.	Principals understand how high-quality feedback is defined in the district.	Provide consistent training to all principals on instructional leadership.	Teachers report more timely and useful feedback.	Improved teacher perceptions of feedback	Pre-/post-survey administered to teachers.
	Provide inter-rater reliability training for the evaluation system to build consistency in ratings and feedback.	Principals have greater confidence in providing feedback.	District addresses time management concerns, so principals have protected time to be in classrooms for feedback/ observations.	Principals and teachers report more feedback conversations.		

Theory of Action Template

Root Cause(s)	Step 1: Strategies (If ...)	Step 1: Indicators (Then ...)	Step 2: Strategies (If ...)	Step 2: Indicators (Then ...)	Outcome	Outcome Measure

STEP 04

Develop plans to implement strategies and collect indicator data

to gauge how strategies are working to meet indicators and long-term goals.

Use the [Implementation Plan Template](#) to describe the steps to implement each strategy from Step 3. Use the Indicator Data Needs Template to identify what ongoing data you will collect to assess whether each indicator is met. Then, use the Annual Data Collection Plan Template to document your plans for data collection throughout the school year. document your plans for data collection throughout the school year.

Example

Based on each determined strategy from creating the theory of action, complete an implementation plan, plan for indicator data needs, and create an annual data collection plan. The implementation plan (figure 3), indicator data needs (figure 4), and annual data collection plan (figure 5), presented below, provide examples related to the theory of action to improve teacher perceptions of feedback.

Figure 3. Example implementation plan for activities to improve teacher perceptions of feedback

Activity	Strategy	Implementation Steps	Most Responsible Person	Timeline	Resources/Notes	Complete?
Provide deeper training with new principals and ongoing training with current principals on how to provide quality feedback.	Develop a district feedback model	Review research on quality feedback.	Regional Educational Laboratory (REL)	February–March 2023	Partner with REL to summarize and share research to inform the model.	Y
		Identify examples from principals who have success providing quality feedback.	Assistant Superintendent	May–June 2023	Conduct interviews with principals to identify how they define quality feedback to inform the model.	Y
	Provide training on the district feedback model	Develop training on the feedback model that allows principals to share promising practices and how to overcome roadblocks.	Director of Educator Effectiveness	June–July 2023	Work with Superintendent and Director of Instructional Programs to develop training.	N
		Create and provide introductory training for new principals and a refresher and calibration training for returning principals.	Director of Educator Effectiveness	July–August 2023	Work with Superintendent and Director of Instructional Programs to develop training.	N

Figure 4. Indicator data needs

Indicator	Who do we need to ask?	What do we need to ask them?	When?
Principals understand how high-quality feedback is defined in the district.	Principals	Which areas of the feedback model are you having the most success with? Which areas of the feedback model do you need more guidance around?	
Principals have greater confidence in providing feedback.	Principals	Agreement with statement “I look forward to having feedback conversations with my teachers.”	
Teachers report more timely and useful feedback.	Teachers	Agreement with statements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Feedback was provided as often as I needed it.” • “I received feedback that was useful in guiding personal reflections on my practice.” • “I received feedback that was useful in making changes to my practice.” 	
Principals and teachers report more feedback conversations.	Principals, Teachers	During the first half/second half of the school year, how often did you have informal or formal feedback conversations with your teachers?	

Figure 5. Annual data collection plan

Month	Data	Notes
August	Percent of principals attending feedback training	Beginning in 2023; annually thereafter
January	Teacher survey feedback questions	Focused on the first half of the year
January	Administrator survey feedback questions	Focused on the first half of the year
May	Teacher survey feedback questions	Focused on the second half of the year to gauge changes
May	Administrator survey feedback questions	Focused on the second half of the year to gauge changes

Implementation Plan Template

Activity	Strategy	Implementation Steps	Most Responsible Person	Timeline	Resources/Notes	Complete?

Indicator Data Needs Template

Indicator	Who do we need to ask?	What do we need to ask them?	When?

Annual Data Collection Plan Template

Month	Data	Notes

STEP 05

Conduct ongoing data collection

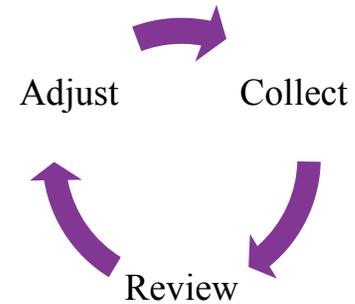
to gauge how strategies are working to meet indicators and long-term goals and inform adjustments to strategies.

Collect data using the plan you created in Step 4. Review indicator data as available to ensure activities are addressing the indicator. If not, make adjustments to your plan to better address the desired outcomes.

Example

If your initial data suggests that school leaders are still struggling with giving feedback, consider why your plans are not working.

For example, you may conduct another root cause analysis, review the implementation of your plan, determine a more appropriate step within the theory of action, etc.



References

- REL Midwest (2018). *Continuous improvement through networked improvement communities: Root cause analysis and theory of action facilitator's guide*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/midwest/pdf/eventhandout/REL-Midwest-Iowa-NIC-Coaching-Module1-Facilitators-Guide-508.pdf>
- REL Northwest (2023). *Addressing working conditions to improve teacher retention: An exploration of the research*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/northwest/pdf/230308_Teacher-Retention_Final%20FactSheet_508.pdf

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