

# Getting On Board

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A Model for Integrating and Engaging New Employees

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MAY 2008



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Booz | Allen | Hamilton



In recent years, the issue of revitalizing our federal workforce has received increased attention, ranging from the Government Accountability Office's designation of strategic human capital management as a government-wide high-risk area to the White House's inclusion of human capital as one of the five areas of focus for the President's Management Agenda. While this new emphasis on our federal civil service is encouraging, we must be careful not to think of the issue too narrowly. Many people equate tackling government's human capital challenges with successfully recruiting top talent, but that is only one piece of a broader picture. No component of human capital management has been more overlooked by our federal government than the process of integrating new employees into their agency work environments — a process increasingly called onboarding.

To address this underappreciated issue, the Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton teamed to analyze how federal agencies integrate new employees. We systematically gathered information about onboarding practices across the federal government. Through research on private sector practices, focus groups with new federal employees and interviews with agency officials, we assessed how best to meet the needs of new employees from the time they accept a new job through their first year of service. This report, "Getting On Board: A Model for Integrating and Engaging New Employees," outlines our findings and offers recommendations that agency leaders and human capital professionals can use to integrate new employees into their agencies more quickly, effectively and productively.

As the nation faces increasingly complex challenges, our federal employees need to be fully productive and fully engaged as quickly as possible. We hope this report will help federal leaders improve onboarding programs at their agencies, because doing so will ultimately help them operate more effectively and efficiently.

Sincerely,



Max Stier  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After playing his first game, does a rookie or newly-acquired free agent instantly become a veteran who no longer needs extra coaching and additional evaluation to ensure he is assimilating well to his new team and fully utilizing his talents? Of course not. Sports franchises understand that a player's first year with a team is disproportionately important to his long-term professional development and his relationship with his new employer. From the moment a new player is acquired to the last game of his first year, that player is still considered a rookie and receives extra attention and guidance.

The same principles apply to the regular workplace. That is why effective organizations increasingly focus on integrating new talent and providing new hires with the tools they need to succeed throughout their first year. The private sector has even given this process a new name: onboarding. A growing body of research illustrates the potential impact of effective onboarding. When done intelligently, it improves employee engagement and performance. It increases employee retention. And it accelerates the time it takes for a new hire to become productive.

The Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton set out to examine how our federal government does when it comes to onboarding new employees. We found, for most new federal employees, that opening sports hypothetical is not reality. Few agencies approach onboarding strategically, and most simply view orientation for new hires as a short-term, mechanical activity to get new employees started. Instead of a rookie season, onboarding for many federal employees boils down to opening day.

More specifically, this research revealed seven key findings about federal onboarding policies:

1. There is no consistent approach to onboarding in the federal government.
2. Onboarding-related activities often lack a focus on the mission, vision and culture of the organization.
3. The onboarding process typically fails to integrate the activities of stakeholders or hold them accountable for success or failure.
4. Onboarding is inconsistently executed across employee groups and locations.
5. Agencies are interested in using technology to support onboarding, but few have invested in developing these capabilities.
6. Most agencies gather immediate feedback on orientation but do not measure the long-term impact of onboarding activities.
7. Agencies with more sophisticated onboarding activities often integrated them as part of larger retention strategies.

This report diagnoses the current challenges facing federal onboarding and presents a model for strategic onboarding, which can serve as a guide for agency reforms. This model outlines a set of overriding principles that underpin effective onboarding programs. It identifies key stakeholders and clarifies their roles in the process, breaking down the onboarding process into five distinct time periods and explaining what agencies should be doing during each phase.

The conclusion of this report includes a series of recommendations for how best to implement this model.

Effective onboarding is hardly a panacea for all of government's human capital challenges. But it is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to enhance employee performance and improve retention. If sports franchises can figure this out and make it work for them, there's no reason federal agencies can't do it too.

## INTRODUCTION

Two dollars and 85 cents. That's how much change was left in the desk of a new federal employee. We know this, because he showed up for his first day at work with no computer at his desk and nothing better to do than count the loose change carelessly left in his drawer. While he may have been lonely that morning, he is unfortunately not alone. Far too often, federal employees have negative experiences at the onset of their new jobs, often as the result of small, easily avoidable mistakes. These errors might be small, but they can have a large impact on a new worker's view of government service. What federal agencies do, or don't do, to correct these situations will influence their ability to manage their workforce effectively.

While many agencies understand that making a favorable first impression through the recruitment process is immensely important, it is often not reinforced during a new hire's first year on the job. In contrast, the private sector increasingly leverages onboarding as a way not only to engage new employees, but also to retain them and accelerate their path to productivity. Onboarding is the process of integrating new employees into an organization and equipping them to become successful and productive. The federal government needs to share this focus and invest in effectively integrating its most valuable resource — its people.

In fiscal 2007, the federal government hired more than 195,000 new employees into the civil service, and that number is likely to increase in the coming years.<sup>1</sup> With nearly a third of the full-time, permanent federal workforce projected to leave government in the next five years, the majority through retirement, our government faces the challenge of filling hundreds of thousands of vital jobs.<sup>2</sup> For “mission-critical”

“My first week was terrible. I didn't have any equipment, I wasn't given any assignments, there was nothing on my desk, and my supervisor did not even come to see me for the first three days I was there.”

— Focus Group Participant

nology, engineering, business and finance, the federal government will face fierce competition from the private sector and other levels of government. Many agencies are planning for this situation by focusing on the first step — recruiting needed talent. However, they often fail to recognize that effective onboarding is needed to turn new hires into productive employees who will contribute over the long term. The looming retirement wave offers a rare opportunity for the federal government to invest in the crucial second step — comprehensive onboarding programs that will quickly and effectively engage a large new cohort.

To determine how agencies integrate new employees and to identify best practices, the Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton conducted a literature review, identified leading private sector practices, held focus groups with current federal employees and interviewed agency officials at several departments and their subcomponents.<sup>4</sup> We gathered data from the federal organizations through structured interviews, often with one or more staff from the human capital office.

“I was sent to a conference room where someone from HR helped me complete a bunch of forms. I was not introduced to anyone, I had no one to go to lunch with, and no one had set up my computer access so I sat there and stared at the wall. By the end of the day I felt like I had made a terrible mistake in leaving my old job.”

— Focus Group Participant

While many agencies employ innovative tactics, almost all agencies interviewed have room to improve the way they integrate and acculturate new employees, most notably in *using the onboarding process strategically*. This report presents leading practices from federal agencies, key findings in current practices, recommendations for improvement, and tools agencies can use to improve their onboarding, including a strategic onboarding model.

1 Fedscope Accession data, FY 2007, 107,000 full-time permanent and almost 88,000 full-time temporary hires. Many of the temporary hires are expected to convert to permanent hires over time.

2 Partnership for Public Service projections from OPM data.

3 Partnership for Public Service, *Where the Jobs Are: Mission Critical Opportunities for America*, 2007.

4 See Appendix B for a list of contributors to this report.

## ONBOARDING OVERVIEW

### WHAT IS ONBOARDING?

Many organizations, including federal agencies, focus on the new employee's first day. This first day, during which the new employee typically completes forms and learns about benefits, is commonly called *orientation* and represents a "transactional" approach to bringing on new employees. That is, this orientation is viewed as a discrete, stand-alone event, not integrated with other first-year experiences for new employees. In contrast, high-performing organizations, particularly in the private sector, use a more comprehensive strategic approach to bringing on new employees called "onboarding." *Onboarding is the process of integrating and acculturating new employees into the organization and providing them with the tools, resources and knowledge to become successful and productive.*

Onboarding is the second of four stages of an employee lifecycle (see Figure 1). Each of these stages must be carefully planned and executed to optimize human capital performance. Once talent has been recruited and hired, onboarding serves as a critical second step to ensure that new employees connect with and effectively contribute to the mission of the organization as quickly as possible. Lack of strategic focus or advanced planning during the onboarding phase can be a barrier to success for the employees' remaining tenure.

FIGURE 1  
EMPLOYEE LIFECYCLE



Onboarding, a relatively new term in the federal government, differs from traditional orientation activities in several key ways and requires a commitment to fully integrate new employees into an organization using robust processes supported by appropriate technology. Figure 2 shows how onboarding differs from orientation.

### THE CASE FOR ONBOARDING

Federal agencies must do more than attract new talent. They also need to lay the groundwork that will encourage new employees to grow and stay. Investing in effective onboarding helps new employees get up to speed quickly, equips them with the information they need to excel at their jobs and creates a sense of commitment to the organization.

Research clearly shows that effective onboarding:

#### Improves employee performance

Research conducted in 2005 by the Recruiting Roundtable revealed that effective onboarding programs can improve employee performance by up to 11.3 percent.<sup>5</sup> Key onboarding activities, such as clearly communicating performance expectations, providing feedback, involving co-workers and peers, and providing training, are integral to boosting performance. Onboarding also helps a new employees' peers and manager better assess his strengths and weaknesses, how he "fits" within the organization and, ultimately, whether or not he is the right person for the job. This is especially true in the federal government, where an employee's first year is typically a probationary period. After this period ends, it is more difficult to remove low performers. A comprehensive onboarding program will both affirm the employee's choice to work in that organization and help the organization accurately assess the quality of the employee.

#### Increases employee engagement

If the new employee is highly engaged, he is less likely to leave the organization or become disinterested in his work and the organization. A 2003 study by Hewitt Associates found that companies that invested the most time and resources in onboarding enjoyed the highest levels of employee engagement.<sup>6</sup>

#### Increases employee retention

Research conducted by the Aberdeen Group in 2006 found that 90 percent of employees decide whether or not they will stay at an organization or begin looking for a new job during their first six months on the job.<sup>7</sup> Between 2003 and 2007, new federal employees

5 StaffingAdvisors.com, *Get 'Em Started Right: Enhancing Performance and Retention through Effective Onboarding*.

6 Lee, David, "Successful On-boarding: How to Get Your New Employees Started Off Right," *SilkRoad Technology*.

7 LaShawn, Thompson, "On-boarding: Maximizing Productivity and Retention," *PM Boulevard* (June 2007).

FIGURE 2

## ORIENTATION VERSUS ONBOARDING

| TYPICAL ORIENTATION                                                    | ONBOARDING                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Transactional focus and goals                                          | Strategic focus and goals                                                                              |
| Less than one week                                                     | Includes first year                                                                                    |
| Owned and executed by human resources office                           | Integrates multiple offices, functions and individuals                                                 |
| Addresses some new employee needs                                      | Addresses all new employee needs — from information, equipment and accounts to training and networking |
| Employee attends                                                       | Employee is active participant with vested interest in success                                         |
| Yields new hires with completed paperwork and some general information | Yields successful first year for new employees — maximizes employee engagement and retention           |

voluntarily left their agencies at rates ranging from 10 percent to more than 18 percent. This turnover is much higher than the 3 to 3.5 percent voluntary attrition rate of all federal employees over the same time period, underscoring the fact that the first year is a particularly consequential time.<sup>8</sup> Beverly Kaye, co-author of *Love 'em or Lose 'em: Getting Good People to Stay*, argues that an organization is far more likely to keep new hires if it onboards them well.<sup>9</sup> Other research shows that effective onboarding programs can improve employee retention by 25 percent.<sup>10</sup> This can reduce the high cost of turnover that, by some estimates, costs organizations 30 to 50 percent of the annual salary of entry-level employees, 150 percent for mid-level employees and up to 400 percent for specialized, high-level employees.<sup>11</sup> Also consider that, when a new employee quits, it may take more than a year to recruit and train a replacement. This creates productivity losses, and other employees may grow demoralized and consider leaving as well.

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#### Accelerates time-to-productivity

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New employees who go through a comprehensive, structured onboarding process are likely to reach higher levels of productivity more quickly than those who do not. In one example, Texas Instruments found that a strong onboarding program helped employees reach full productivity an average of two months ear-

lier than their colleagues who did not receive similar onboarding attention.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these clear benefits, onboarding is not a silver bullet for employee productivity and engagement. For a well-structured and comprehensive onboarding program to have maximum impact, organizations must integrate it into human capital programs and with strategic goals. Good onboarding will not compensate for other problems that create sagging engagement and high employee turnover, such as a bad hiring process, weak managers or poor human resource practices.

The good news is that a carefully planned and successful onboarding program can be relatively inexpensive, yet generate a variety of short- and long-term benefits. And, as research reported above shows, the costs of neglecting new employee onboarding can be high.

#### ONBOARDING IN FEDERAL AGENCIES TODAY

Seven key findings emerged when comparing current onboarding practices for the federal agencies we studied with best practices collected through public- and private-sector research.

1. **There is no consistent approach to onboarding in the federal government.** Few agencies viewed the process of bringing new employees into their organization as a comprehensive or coordinated effort. Interestingly, whether an agency used the term “onboarding” or “orienting” to describe the way it welcomes new employees was a good indication of how strategically they approached this issue. While interview

8 FedScope. Calculations are for all full-time, permanent employees.

9 Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans, 246-248.

10 LaShawn, Thompson, “On-boarding: Maximizing Productivity and Retention,” *PM Boulevard* (June 2007).

11 Blake, Ross, “Employee Retention: What Employee Turnover Really Costs Your Company,” *ManagerNewz.com* (July 2006).

12 Lee, David, “Successful On-boarding: How to Get Your New Employees Started Off Right,” *SilkRoad Technology*.

participants understood the definition of onboarding, few used this terminology or approach. Exceptions, such as NASA and Government Accountability Office (GAO), actively use the term onboarding for bringing on new employees and even contractors.

2. **Onboarding-related activities are often viewed as transactional, lacking a focus on the mission, vision and culture of the organization.** The most common or consistent onboarding activities agencies use are processing new employee paperwork, explaining employee benefits, and key administrative and security policies. Few agencies approach onboarding as a comprehensive, strategic process or include activities that directly link to the mission, vision and culture of the agencies.

“I was sworn in as a federal employee in a hallway with no American flag. It was very uninspiring.”

— Focus Group Participant

Organizations that did incorporate the agency’s mission, vision and culture did so primarily in orientation programs, commonly by having senior leadership communicate this information. While senior leadership participation and buy-in is inconsistent across surveyed agencies, it is valued and positively impacts new employees where it exists. New employees in agencies without senior leadership involvement said this is a flaw in their agency’s onboarding program.

3. **The onboarding process typically fails to integrate the activities of stakeholders or hold them accountable for results.** Most onboarding activities are performed within the functional offices that own them. For example, the IT department provides computers, human capital oversees orientation, security provides access badges, and managers assign work to the new

“We provide guidance to our regional managers on first-day requirements, but how and if they execute these is left to them.”

— Interview Participant (HR Manager)

employees. These stakeholders may perform their roles or functions without knowledge of other related onboarding processes, without understanding the interdependence between one process and another, and without accountability for success or failure.

New employees in agencies that lacked coordination across offices were frustrated by the inability to begin work or training quickly. Delays in getting necessary equipment, access to accounts or online training reduce productivity in the first days and weeks. Organizations with better onboarding processes had fewer of these missteps.

“When I showed up for work on my first day, my manager had no idea I was coming. Apparently HR had not informed her of my start date.”

— Focus Group Participant

4. **Onboarding is inconsistently executed across employee groups and locations.** Of the agencies interviewed, about one-third focused mostly on onboarding staff in mission-critical positions. Employees not designated as being in mission-critical positions often do not participate in structured onboarding activities other than orientation or may have much more limited programs available to them. These inconsistencies are further magnified by differences in the onboarding process across organizations with regional or field components. Often, agencies with decentralized onboarding processes inconsistently execute them.

5. **Agencies are interested in using technology to support onboarding, but few have invested in developing these capabilities.** There was widespread recognition of the value technology can play in onboarding new employees and considerable interest in hearing how technology can be used. A few agencies already leverage technology to facilitate onboarding. The most common uses of technology included:

- *Electronic forms:* New employees prefer to use electronic forms. Completing paperwork in advance saves time and eliminates what many consider to be the tedious process of completing forms in a group on their first day.
- *Informational Web sites:* Providing a central source of information about onboarding creates process efficiencies and helps meet the needs of both new employees and stakeholders involved in onboarding.
- *Case management systems:* Automated systems that alert various stakeholder offices (e.g., IT and facilities) about incoming employees once a start date has been set have proven beneficial. These systems increase efficiency and minimize the chance that a new employee is overlooked upon arrival.

6. **Most agencies gather immediate feedback on orientation but do not measure the long-term impact of onboarding activities.** Agencies typically conduct orientation session evaluations and, to a lesser extent, new employee surveys. They use this feedback to make changes in their orientation activities. Few agencies, however, measure the longer-term impact of onboarding activities, such as their effect on employee productivity or turnover. Some agencies expressed a desire to better understand these efforts but were challenged by how to measure the longer-term impacts.
7. **Agencies with more sophisticated onboarding activities integrated them as part of larger retention strategies.** Agencies like the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (Department of the Treasury) developed structured programs for new cohorts of employees whose retention is critical to the agency's mission. These programs gauge new employee progress at regular intervals and are linked to the mission of the organization. These onboarding programs integrate necessary training and involve managers in the onboarding process.

These above seven findings point to a plan of action — ways agencies can onboard new employees in a strategic and comprehensive manner to effectively cope with the anticipated increase in hiring over the next five years.

# STRATEGIC ONBOARDING MODEL

A strategic onboarding model addresses all of the attributes that constitute a comprehensive way to integrate and acculturate new employees. A model provides a foundation for organizations to develop or refine their onboarding programs.

The strategic onboarding model outlined in Figure 3 lays out the key aspects of a comprehensive onboarding program, which apply to any organization and any employee in the organization. While this model is comprehensive, agencies should customize it to meet their specific employee needs. The model can be customized for specific groups of employees (e.g., senior leaders or mission-critical occupational groups) or for specific employee needs (e.g., varying generational learning styles, new government employees and contractors).

The strategic onboarding model consists of four key components:

## Principles

Four key principles provide strategic direction and alignment for the entire onboarding process.

## Roles

These roles include process owners who own and integrate the onboarding process, process champions who directly interact with the new employees to support their acclimation and the new employee who is responsible for being an active participant in all activities.

## Process Phases and Key Activities

The five-step onboarding process begins when a new employee receives his or her offer of employment and ends after the first year of employment. The key activities are the specific actions performed in each process step and may be performed by any of the key role players.

## Outcomes

Successfully integrating the principles, roles, process and activities leads to several desired outcomes, as well as the opportunity to rigorously assess new employees. These measurable outcomes highlight the impact or return on investment of having an aligned and integrated onboarding process.

FIGURE 3  
ONBOARDING MODEL

PRINCIPLES

|                                    |                                                           |                                        |                               |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Align</b> to mission and vision | <b>Connect</b> to culture, strategic goals and priorities | <b>Integrate</b> across process owners | <b>Apply</b> to all employees |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------|

ROLES

|                  |                     |            |
|------------------|---------------------|------------|
| + PROCESS OWNERS | + PROCESS CHAMPIONS | + EMPLOYEE |
|------------------|---------------------|------------|

PROCESS PHASES AND KEY ACTIVITIES

| BEFORE FIRST DAY                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | FIRST DAY/ ORIENTATION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | FIRST WEEK                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | FIRST 90 DAYS                                                                                                                                                                                   | FIRST YEAR                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extend personal welcome to employee</li> <li>Communicate first day logistics to employee</li> <li>Send paperwork in advance and/or online portal access</li> <li>Prepare for employee</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on sharing the mission and values</li> <li>Incorporate senior leadership</li> <li>Orient employee to organization and office norms</li> <li>Introduce employee sponsor</li> <li>Meet immediate requirements for employment</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure direct managerial involvement</li> <li>Set performance expectations and job scope</li> <li>Assign meaningful work</li> <li>Communicate resources or networks required for work</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide essential training</li> <li>Monitor performance and provide feedback</li> <li>Obtain feedback through new hire survey and other means</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize positive employee contributions</li> <li>Provide formal and informal feedback on performance</li> <li>Create employee development plan</li> </ul> |

OUTCOMES

|                                             |                                               |                                                     |                                     |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| High employee <b>job satisfaction</b> level | <b>Retention</b> of high-performing employees | Continued <b>employee engagement</b> and commitment | Faster time-to- <b>productivity</b> |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|

## PRINCIPLES

Onboarding principles ensure the onboarding process is comprehensive, integrated and reflective of the organization's human capital needs. These principles also drive positive outcomes. The four principles are:

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### Align to mission and vision

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To help new employees feel connected to the organization, onboarding programs must present, explain and allow new employees to understand how their jobs contribute to an organization's mission. It is not enough to assume an employee can make this connection on his own. Learning about and internalizing an organization's mission must be a key part of an onboarding program. —*NASA schedules tours of its facilities for new employees to really understand its mission and their contribution.*

#### IDEAS TO INTEGRATE ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION

- Provide a copy of the organization's mission that can be displayed at employees' desks/workplaces
- Have senior executives discuss the organization's history in-person or through video at orientation
- Perform an orientation exercise where new employees discuss in small groups how their jobs will help support the organization's mission

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### Connect to culture, strategic goals and priorities

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The onboarding program must accurately reflect the mission and culture of the organization. It should paint a realistic picture of the organization's culture so that employees experience consistent messages once they transition to their jobs. The program must also align with other organizational priorities. Onboarding goals should be built around these priorities.

#### KEY GOALS AND SAMPLE ONBOARDING ACTIVITIES

##### Goal: Decrease new employee time-to-productivity

- Automated system for new employees to complete paperwork in advance of their first day
- Enhanced training in core job skill areas
- Standardization of manager and new employee interaction

##### Goal: Ensure cultural integration of new employees

- Cultural exercises in orientation program
- Comprehensive sponsor or buddy program
- In-person senior executive presentation about organizational culture and values at every orientation

Onboarding goals must also be measurable so that performance against them can be monitored. In ad-

dition, agencies must measure results to produce feedback for continuous improvement.

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### Integrate across process owners

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An effective and efficient onboarding process should identify and integrate all process owners. While human capital is traditionally the key onboarding process owner, several other functional process owners are involved, such as security, IT and facilities departments. Integration should also occur within the human capital office — across all elements, such as new employee payroll and benefits processing, orientation, training and performance management. All process owners must be held accountable for their performance and for meeting shared onboarding goals. This principle also promotes leveraging technology, where possible, to reduce cycle time and error rates of transactional activities.

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### Apply to all employees

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The most successful onboarding programs cover the basics for all employees, regardless of location and level, and are also tailored to specific types of employees. Onboarding should consider the needs of new employees by understanding what employees need and want out of the onboarding experience, in addition to meeting requirements for mandatory activities. New employees can be brand-new entrants to the workforce or come from organizations with different cultures and norms. In the latter case, these employees need onboarding too, because how they conducted work in their old organizations may or may not apply to their new organization. —*GAO includes contractors in its onboarding program.*

## ROLES

Identifying and assigning roles and responsibilities for onboarding are just as critical as having a robust, comprehensive process. While many onboarding activities are routinely performed within each responsible office, few organizations view these activities as part of a coordinated process. There are three types of roles inherent in the onboarding process (see Figure 4): process owners, process champions and the new employee. Each role depends on the other to ensure a successful onboarding process. Roles must be clearly defined and communicated for the organization to achieve its desired onboarding outcomes.

FIGURE 4  
ONBOARDING ROLES

|                                                                                                        |                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>PROCESS OWNERS</b><br>Human Capital<br>Information Technology<br>Security<br>Training<br>Facilities | <b>PROCESS CHAMPIONS</b><br>Senior Leadership<br>Manager/Supervisor<br>Sponsor<br>Human Capital Liaison |
| <b>EMPLOYEE</b>                                                                                        |                                                                                                         |

**PROCESS OWNERS**

*Process owners must take accountability for executing the mechanical aspects of onboarding while coordinating with others.* There are multiple owners of the onboarding process, and they are charged with handling many of the functions associated with onboarding. The level of engagement of process owners tends to be very high initially, as a new employee joins the organization, but subsequent involvement tapers as the employee settles into the organization. Unfortunately, when there are multiple owners of a process, a common problem is that no one really owns the process. That is why the responsibilities of process owners must be clearly defined and coordinated. Key process owners fall into a number of categories:

**Human Capital**

The office of human capital “owns” the conceptualizing, planning and coordinating of the onboarding experience. It is also charged with holding responsible offices accountable. The specific functions of the human capital department include:

- Setting goals and developing onboarding programs;
- Processing new employee paperwork (e.g., benefits);
- Developing and overseeing orientation;
- Developing and overseeing training;
- Integrating all aspects of onboarding to ensure the process is streamlined and effective; and
- Measuring the impact of onboarding.

**Information Technology**

IT supports the onboarding process with enabling technology and by providing new employees with technology assets and accounts. Key functions include:

- Issuing and setting up equipment (e.g., computer, telephone) for new employees;
- Setting up accounts (e.g., e-mail);
- Granting access to appropriate platforms (e.g., shared drives or other internal systems);

- Developing or deploying software or other technology solutions that support onboarding; and
- Training new employees on IT systems.

**Security**

Physical and personnel security offices have key responsibilities in onboarding new employees, including:

- Processing any employee suitability and/or clearance requirements;
- Ensuring all new employees are aware of security procedures; and
- Granting access privileges (e.g., badges).

**Facilities**

Facilities departments arrange for office space to accommodate new employees. Specific duties include:

- Identifying and arranging the new employee’s desk and office space; and
- Preparing office supplies for the new employee.

**Acquisition**

Where relevant, acquisitions offices are responsible for managing the onboarding of contractors.

**PROCESS CHAMPIONS**

*Process champions are primarily responsible for motivating new employees and helping them understand how their jobs are critical to the fulfillment of the agency’s mission.* Process champions facilitate onboarding through targeted interaction or communication with the new employee. Common categories of process champion roles include:

**Senior Leadership**

New employees want to meet and hear from senior leadership in their first days, weeks and months. Senior leadership involvement sends a clear message that the organization is invested in the new employee. Senior leaders can support the onboarding process by finding ways to communicate and reinforce the mission and values of the organization by speaking at the orientation session, stopping by new employees’ desks or sending signed welcome letters. The frequency of involvement and how it is achieved will vary based on factors such as agency size and organizational structure. —*General Services Administration has a quarterly New Employee Celebration where senior leaders actively participate.*

## IDEAS FOR SENIOR LEADERSHIP ROLE

- In-person participation in orientation
- Welcome video
- Brown bag lunches with new employees to answer questions
- Participation in new employee celebrations
- One-on-one meetings with new employees (depending on the size of organization and the number of new employees)

**Manager (and/or Supervisor)**

The manager's importance in onboarding cannot be overstated. This onboarding role is often left to the discretion of each particular manager and is not given the same level of standardization or support as other onboarding elements. Having said that, developing and providing tools for managers can help educate managers about the importance of their roles, enhance manager onboarding capabilities and encourage desired behaviors. All managers should:

- Welcome new employees;
- Meet with new employees as soon as possible after orientation activities are completed;
- Communicate job responsibilities;
- Explain and set cultural expectations (e.g., when to "cc" the manager on e-mails, what decisions can be made without manager approval, communication styles);
- Review the organization's performance management system and process with the new employee and develop an individual performance plan that sets performance expectations;
- Assign meaningful work;
- Discuss career development; and
- Monitor performance and provide formal and informal feedback throughout the employee's first year.

## MANAGER TOOLS

- Checklist with timeline of key activities
- Links to forms and/or sample performance plans
- Talking points for the first discussion with new employees
- Welcome e-mail template to send to the new employee's team

**Sponsor**

New employees should be assigned a "sponsor" or "buddy" who can help integrate them into the organization and help them understand the organizational culture. Sponsors are generally peers who are matched with new employees to help them:

- Understand the written and unwritten elements of the organizational culture;
- Learn how to navigate the organization;

- Meet colleagues and other essential staff;
- Answer any questions; and
- Identify useful new employee resources (e.g., intranet sites, points of contact, information).

## SPONSOR TOOLS

- Sponsor training guide
- Suggested sponsor activities
- E-mail templates
- Helpful points of contact

**Human Capital Liaison<sup>13</sup>**

Many organizations (particularly those with decentralized organizational structures) use this role to bridge the gap between the human capital office and managers and sponsors. This role is typically filled by someone who works in the same office or branch as the new employee and works directly with the human capital office or other process owners to support employees in the work unit. The human capital liaison works closely with the human capital office's process owner and performs key tasks, such as:

- Providing information to the new employee after he accepts the offer;
- Assigning a sponsor;
- Initiating processes to arrange a new employee's workspace;
- Educating new employees about timekeeping or other office-specific information; and
- Distributing office-specific reference material and answering questions.

## NEW EMPLOYEES

*New employees are responsible for being active participants in their own onboarding.* Onboarding works best when it is a two-way process. The organization provides information, resources and equipment; the new employee is engaged and ready to embrace new ways of doing work and adapt to new office norms and work styles. New employees must also complete all required paperwork and take mandatory training, as well as work proactively to develop relationships and seek the resources and information they need to do their jobs.

<sup>13</sup> This role varies across organizations based on the extent to which support functions, such as onboarding, are centralized or decentralized. In decentralized organizations, more onboarding functions may be performed within the new employee's business unit, while in more centralized organizations the human capital office will have a larger share of onboarding activities.

FIGURE 5

## PHASES OF THE ONBOARDING PROCESS



## ONBOARDING PROCESS PHASES AND KEY ACTIVITIES

Employee needs for onboarding do not end in the first days or weeks of employment. Thus, the onboarding process consists of five phases, beginning when the employee accepts the job offer and continuing through his first year of employment (see Figure 5). The five phases vary in length but represent critical steps an employee experiences during his onboarding experience.

---

**Begin the onboarding process for new employees the moment they accept their offers, not the moment they show up on their first day.**

---

This first phase of the onboarding process is **the time after the employee accepts the job and before his first day of employment**. During this time, human capital staff notifies other process owners such as IT, sends paperwork and communicates logistical information. The new employee may be filling out paperwork, learning a new commute or otherwise preparing for the first day in the new job. For agencies that require suitability or clearance investigations before new employees can begin work, this period may be weeks or months. Agencies can use this time to begin communicating with new employees, rather than waiting until the first day, to provide a smoother transition.

In particular, agencies can complete the following activities before a new employee's first day:

- [ ] Send the new employee a welcome letter or welcome packet signed by a senior official with a small token welcoming them to the agency. The packet should provide important information and express excitement that the new employee will be joining the organization. —*The Office of the Comptroller of Currency (OCC) sends a gift basket to welcome new bank examiners — a mission-critical occupation.*
- [ ] Provide the new employee with information about the agency and his job.
- [ ] Arrange for, and encourage, paperwork to be completed and reviewed prior to the first day. Ideally, all paperwork that does not require “live” signatures

should be submitted electronically before the first day.

- [ ] Contact the new employee to answer questions and set expectations for the first day.
- [ ] Assign a sponsor to answer the new employee's questions.
- [ ] Ensure that the new employee's workspace is assigned and supplies are ready upon arrival.
- [ ] Ensure that “office essentials” (e.g., computer, phone, e-mail and training accounts) are in place on the first day by coordinating with responsible offices. Where possible, leverage a workflow or case management system to streamline coordination across multiple offices.

---

### Make the first day a compelling and valuable experience.

---

The second phase, “**first day/orientation**,” refers to the first day the employee reports to work and any orientation activities in the first few days. Since orientation may be the first substantive encounter for a new employee with his new organization, it is a critical part of the overall onboarding process and sets the tone of that employee's first impression. For most government organizations, orientation begins on an employee's first day. Generally, the human capital process owner welcomes the new employee for orientation and ensures that orientation covers required activities, such as badging, paperwork and swearing-in ceremonies.

On an employee's first day, agencies should:

- [ ] Personalize the experience. Label tent cards in the orientation room or leave small agency-related gifts for each new employee.
- [ ] Begin the day by describing the organization's vision and mission, and the importance of the new employee's job to this mission. Administer a formal oath.
- [ ] Introduce the new employee to his sponsor.
- [ ] Have a senior leader welcome new employees (in person or through recorded means).

- [ ] Explain benefits and policies.
- [ ] Arrange for new employees to eat together or for someone from each employee's office to eat lunch with them on their first day.
- [ ] Provide realistic information about the organization and its culture. Avoid "over promising."
- [ ] Complete paperwork and security requirements as efficiently as possible. Do not make this the focus of the day.

#### TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ORIENTATION PHASE

- Start new employees in groups
- Focus on the positive framing policies in terms of what new employees can do (not what they can't do)
- Ask a senior employee to conduct orientation rather than a contractor or junior employee
- Save forms for later in the day if forms aren't filled out before the first day

---

#### Maintain energy from the first day, and make sure a new employee has meaningful work to do in the first week.

---

The third phase, "**first week**," refers to the first five business days the employee is on the job (excluding time in orientation). To use another sports metaphor, traditionally one of the least attended games of the year for baseball teams is the second game of the season, after the excitement of opening day has worn off. Agencies should take affirmative measures to ensure new employees don't experience a similar letdown on their second days. Colleagues in the new employee's office — manager, peers, sponsors, executives — will play a key role motivating and acculturating new employees during this time. The new employee should be able to spend some or all of this week engaging in purposeful work, seeking resources required to perform work, and acclimating to the job and surroundings.

"[The first week] there were a lot of meetings and a lot of downtime, but my agency provided a checklist of things I should review on the Internet during my downtime, including information about the agency, background on senior leaders and other helpful background information. It was a good way to fill in time gaps in the first week."

— Focus Group Participant

During the remainder of a new employee's first week, agencies should:

- [ ] Ensure that job roles and responsibilities are clearly communicated to the new employee. —*New employees at EPA develop performance expectations in the form of critical job elements with their managers and subsequently establish a performance plan.*
- [ ] Introduce the new employee to other employees and senior staff.
- [ ] Provide meaningful work for the new employee, either training or substantive work related to the new job.
- [ ] Ensure that a senior leader (in the new employee's office) welcomes the new employee(s).
- [ ] Review the organizational structure and key staff.
- [ ] Provide a list of contacts who can address the new employee's questions on a variety of issues.
- [ ] Gather feedback about the orientation program from new employees.

---

#### Deal with issues early when they can be most easily remedied, and make sure the employee is on the right path.

---

The fourth phase, "**first 90 days**," refers to the time between the new employee's first week and the first three months of employment. During this time, the new employee finalizes all paperwork and completes new employee training. New employees should begin to acquire a full workload while managers monitor performance and provide early feedback. Like the first day, this period is critical to forming new employee perceptions about the organization and job. A lack of focus on this phase can have negative consequences if employees do not feel integrated by the end of their first 90 days. —*Both FDIC and OCC begin a very structured approach for training and feedback for large cohorts of mission-critical occupations during the first 90 days.*

During this period, agencies should:

- [ ] Review performance objectives and set individual development goals.
- [ ] Give feedback early and often.
- [ ] Provide training, as needed, to help the new employee understand internal systems, general operating practices, and to obtain other information or skills required in the performance of his job.

- [ ] Discuss individual work styles and preferences.
- [ ] Arrange for the new employee to meet key stakeholders from other departments.
- [ ] Check with new employees regularly to ensure that they continue to assimilate and expand their capabilities.

---

### Spend less time hand-holding and more time empowering employees and evaluating progress.

---

The last phase, “**first year**,” refers to the time in between the new employee’s first three months and the end of the first year of employment. For most agencies, formal activities related to onboarding do not extend into this period. But for the employee, the feeling of newness and the accompanying learning curve linger. Continued support during this time can increase an employee’s contribution to an organization’s mission and help speed employees to full productivity. —*OCC has a “culture of measurement.” It conducts focus groups with new employees at six-month and one-year intervals, during two and three day sessions. A variety of issues are discussed, such as issues impacting retention and practices that are going well. OCC also performs exit interviews and surveys to measure its return on investment and employee success for training.*

During this phase, agencies should:

- [ ] Provide training to build competencies and fill any skill gaps.
- [ ] Conduct a new employee survey and address any issues surfaced.
- [ ] Periodically, formally and informally assess the performance of the new employee and provide feedback.
  - Informal “manager check-ins” should occur regularly in addition to formal performance assessments, which should be completed at least after six months and one year.
  - The human capital office should send a reminder e-mail to managers at the six-month and one-year mark to ensure that formal performance reviews are occurring.
- [ ] Send a congratulatory e-mail or letter from a senior executive on the employee’s one-year anniversary (can be done automatically without requiring the executive’s time).

## ESSENTIAL ONBOARDING ELEMENTS

There are two essential elements of onboarding that should be embedded across all phases of the process described above: technology and measurement. These two elements are critical to making the onboarding process more effective, helping identify areas that need attention and supporting continuous improvement.

### Technology

By its nature, onboarding is a distinctly human activity. However, technology can enhance and streamline the process in several ways. Common uses for technology include:

*New employee paperwork:* Federal employees must complete a vast amount of forms and paperwork. When performed manually, this may take several hours and is often done on the new employee’s first day of work. Automation can expedite this process and allow employees to complete forms before their first day, allowing the first day to be spent on more inspirational and substantive content. Automation also reduces the workload of the process owner. —*A Department of Homeland Security component has automated virtually all new employee forms so that they can be completed online in advance of the first day of work.*

Automation may be achieved in several ways:

- In its simplest form, the agency can provide new employees with links to required information and forms through the organization’s Web site. Forms can be printed out and completed before the first day of work.
- In a more sophisticated model, new employees fill out the forms on the agency’s intranet and submit them electronically, reducing the need for physical paperwork.
- At the highest level, information provided during the hiring process (name, address, social security number, etc.) can be pre-populated into these forms, requiring the new employee to provide only the information not already available.

*Onboarding portals:* Centralized portals with onboarding information and tools can greatly enhance the onboarding process. These portals can contain a few pieces of helpful information, or be robust repositories of information and tools. Examples of the kinds of resources that are most frequently included in an onboarding portal are checklists, timelines, talking points, contact lists and training guides. —*NASA uses its Workforce Transfor-*

*mation and Tracking Tool (WTTS) to automate almost all of its forms and communicate onboarding guidance.*

*Case management:* Agencies typically need to perform a specific set of activities to provide new employees with necessary assets and accounts. This may include assigning and preparing a workspace, providing computers and telephones, or setting up e-mail accounts. Automated case management systems can streamline and track these activities, ensuring they are all being completed before the new employee shows up for work. —*GAO has an online system that notifies appropriate stakeholders in advance of the arrival of the new employee to prepare IT equipment and establish related accounts, ensure the new employee's office is up to standard and notify the stakeholders of the new employee's start date.*

### Measurement

Onboarding programs must be evaluated to determine their impact and success, as well as areas for improvement. Organizations should establish and track metrics to gauge the effectiveness of the onboarding program against its goals. Metrics can be operational (e.g., percent of employees who have e-mail accounts ready by day one, percent satisfaction with orientation programs) or strategic (e.g., performance, satisfaction and attrition of new employees).

### OUTCOMES

Research shows that effective onboarding yields clear benefits and outcomes. For example, FDIC has less than an eight percent failure rate during the first year for bank examiners who are part of a comprehensive training and onboarding program.

A structured approach to measurement, linked to onboarding principles, will enable organizations to track operational performance and gauge outcomes. Potential outcomes of effective onboarding include:

- Higher employee job satisfaction levels;
- Increased retention of high-performing employees;
- Continued employee engagement and commitment; and
- Faster time-to-productivity.

An additional benefit of more actively engaging a new employee through a structured and long-term onboarding program is the ability to more accurately assess the new employee over the course of the initial probationary period (usually one year within the federal government).

Comprehensive onboarding programs can set high performers on the path to productivity and success more quickly. However, a good onboarding program can also help to identify individuals that are not a good organizational or occupational match. The enhanced focus on employees throughout their first year provides greater opportunity for managers and peers to assess the new employee during this time.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Optimizing the onboarding process can maximize employee productivity, engagement and retention. The strategic onboarding model described in this report provides a framework for federal agencies to best integrate their new employees and to achieve these results. The keys to a successful onboarding program include:

- Adopting a comprehensive definition of onboarding that focuses on linking onboarding to the mission, vision and culture of the organization;
- Moving beyond simple transactional activities, such as orientation, to a strategic approach;
- Understanding who the key stakeholders are and defining their roles in effectively onboarding new employees;
- Consistently onboarding all employees and effectively using technology in the onboarding process; and
- Sustaining a strategic onboarding program by measuring results, and soliciting and using feedback — all to improve onboarding programs.

We recommend the following five actions to put these key principles into practice.

### 1 KNOW WHERE YOU WANT TO BE: DEFINE ONBOARDING GOALS & ATTRIBUTES

Strategic onboarding programs help integrate new employees into their jobs and the organizational culture. This yields more engaged, productive employees who are more likely to stay with the organization longer. Beyond these universal goals, onboarding programs should be built on specific goals that provide the foundation for onboarding activities and map directly to areas the organization wants to address. Together, goals, programs and activities must:

- Align the onboarding program to the agency’s mission and vision;
- Connect to culture, strategic people and organizational goals, and priorities;
- Apply onboarding to all employees;
- Integrate across process owners;

- Clearly define and assign roles and responsibilities;
- Create an onboarding program that includes strategic activities that span beyond the first week or month; and
- Perform key activities during the five process phases: before the first day, first day/orientation, first week, first 90 days and first year.

### 2 KNOW WHERE YOU ARE: ASSESS YOUR ONBOARDING STATUS

After setting goals and determining desired accomplishments, an organization must baseline the current status of its onboarding program. Before making changes, it is important to understand and document current practices and responsibilities. This involves assessing the approach, scope and effectiveness of current onboarding practices.

### 3 SEEK QUICK WINS

Once the differences between current onboarding practices and desired onboarding attributes become clear, gaps should then be identified and prioritized. For many organizations, relatively minor improvements to an existing onboarding program can have a big impact. These improvement opportunities are “quick wins” — onboarding activities that can generally be implemented in a few months, using existing resources. Examples of onboarding activities that can significantly enhance a new employee’s experience without requiring significant time and resources include:

- Sending out a welcome e-mail to the new employee after an offer of employment has been accepted;
- Providing a point of contact before the first day to answer any questions the new employee may have;
- Assigning a sponsor to help the new employee in the first days and weeks on the job;
- Developing new employee checklists — both for new employees and managers/supervisors and posting them electronically;

- Ensuring orientation programs contain information about organizational history, mission/core values; and
- Involving senior leadership in orientation and subsequent onboarding activities.

After implementing quick wins, agencies should focus on additional onboarding improvements using a phased approach that will realistically maximize success. A dedicated implementation team can help achieve these results.

## 4 TAILOR ONBOARDING CONTENT BY TYPE OF EMPLOYEE

Organizations that have the onboarding “basics” addressed can move on to tailor onboarding programs to specific new employee groups. Tailoring the onboarding program and content to the needs of different types of employees, such as executives, mid-level managers, more junior employees and transfers, can enhance their onboarding experiences by focusing on what they consider to be important. An example of this type of tailoring is allowing new employees who have worked for the federal government before, and are simply transferring existing benefits to their new agency, to opt out of orientation information about federal government benefits.

## 5 DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL — BORROW IT

Every organization, public or private, onboards new employees. In seeking to improve onboarding programs, looking to best practices from others and leveraging them can provide benefits without “reinventing the wheel.” For example, NASA and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency have invested considerable time and resources developing sophisticated online and electronic portals that accomplish a wide range of onboarding activities. Other agencies wishing to do the same can leverage what has already been developed. This minimizes duplication of effort, creates efficiencies across the government and allows best practices to be leveraged in more organizations.

Another benefit to the universal nature of onboarding is that tools and technologies are commonly available commercially to support different aspects of onboarding. Onboarding capabilities can be purchased and used “as-is,” purchased and customized, or created internally. Evaluating all of these options will help each organiza-

tion select and implement the best solutions for its particular needs.

The tools provided in this report can also serve as helpful documents to guide the implementation of new onboarding processes and activities. They can be downloaded electronically at [ourpublicservice.org](http://ourpublicservice.org) and customized as needed.

## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To determine how agencies bring new employees on board and identify best practices, the Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton conducted a literature review, identified leading private-sector practices, held focus groups with 16 current federal employees and interviewed 29 agency officials in 11 agencies and sub-components. We gathered data from the federal organizations through structured interviews, often with more than one staff member from the human capital office. Agencies were selected based on their employee engagement scores from the Partnership's *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* rankings, attrition rates for new employees, size, and organizational structure (e.g., headquarters, regional office, subcomponent).<sup>14</sup> We selected agencies that have diverse backgrounds, are appropriated and non-appropriated, and that have missions ranging from regulating banks to protecting the environment.

A special thanks to those from the Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton who contributed to this report.

### **Booz Allen Hamilton**

David Dye  
Shelly Gupta  
Sharon Light  
David Mader  
Leslie Ann Pearson  
Melissa Scott  
Abe Zwany

### **Partnership for Public Service**

Cali Ence  
Kristin Esham  
Laura Howes  
Bevin Johnston  
Jonathan Kappler  
Bob Lavigna  
Katie Malague  
Tyler Overstreet  
John Palguta  
Lamar Robertson  
Lara Shane  
Kevin Simpson  
Max Stier

<sup>14</sup> *Best Places* rankings based on the results of the Federal Human Capital Survey administered by OPM in 2006.

## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATING FEDERAL ORGANIZATIONS AND OFFICIALS

|                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Department of Education</b><br><i>Headquarters</i>                  | Toni Pope<br>Human Resources Specialist<br>Joel Rubenstein<br>Supervisor of Headquarters Recruitment and Classification                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Department of Education</b><br><i>Office of Federal Student Aid</i> | Debra Bennett<br>Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer<br>Lisa Gilbert<br>Human Resources Analyst<br>Dr. Ann Manheimer<br>Workforce Development Services Director<br>John Mondragon<br>Human Resources and Workforce Services Director<br>Anne Teresa<br>Skills Development and Business Advisory Director<br>Monica Woods<br>Deputy Director, Human Resources and Workforce Services |
| <b>Environmental Protection Agency</b><br><i>Headquarters</i>          | Nicole Early<br>Human Resources Specialist<br>Mike Hamlin<br>Acting Deputy Human Resources Director<br>Patricia Midgett<br>Human Resources Specialist                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Environmental Protection Agency</b><br><i>Region 5</i>              | Tom Davison<br>Human Resources Officer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation</b>                           | Eugene Bell<br>Assistant Director<br>Human Resources Service Center, Human Resources Branch<br>Marcia Chalmers<br>Corporate Recruitment Program Manager                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Government Accountability Office</b>                                | Cynthia Heckman<br>Chief Human Capital Officer<br>Beth Hoffman Leon<br>Senior Analyst<br>Jackie McDaniel<br>Director, Analysis and Systems Center<br>Barbara McWhirter<br>Director, Recruiting and Hiring Center                                                                                                                                                                   |

**General Services Administration** William Kelly  
Director of Human Resources

**National Aeronautics and  
Space Administration** Candace Irwin  
Director, Workforce Systems and Accountability Division  
Sherri McGee  
Director, Workforce Management and Development Division  
Linda Pultz  
Senior Human Resources Specialist  
Joan Youravich  
Senior Human Resources Specialist

**National Archives and  
Records Administration** Analisa Archer  
Director of Human Resources Services  
Tammy Stovall  
Recruitment Coordinator

**Department of State** Janine Brown  
Human Resources Specialist  
Pamela Mills-Edmonds  
Human Resources Specialist  
Mary Ann Millard  
Staffing Division Chief  
Office of Civil Services Personnel Management

**Department of the Treasury** Patricia J. Pointer  
*Office of the Comptroller of the Currency* Deputy Comptroller for Human Resources

# APPENDIX C: BEST PRACTICES ONBOARDING CHECKLIST

**NEW EMPLOYEE INFORMATION**

|                            |                      |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Name:</b>               | <b>Start Date:</b>   |
| <b>Position:</b>           | <b>Supervisor:</b>   |
| <b>Office/Cube Number:</b> | <b>Phone Number:</b> |

| Task                          | Status                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                          |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>BEFORE FIRST DAY</b>       | Send welcome packet with important information (e.g., benefits and first day logistics) and welcome letter                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Provide agency and job information                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Encourage the review and completion of paperwork (if feasible) before Day 1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Contact new employee to answer questions and set expectations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Assign a sponsor/buddy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Assign and prepare workspace and provide office supplies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Ensure "office essentials" (e.g., computer, phone, e-mail, training accounts) are set up                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>FIRST DAY/ ORIENTATION</b> | If possible, personalize the experience with something unique for the new employee (e.g., welcome note, flowers, nameplate)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Communicate vision and mission, and administer a formal oath                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Introduce new employee to sponsor/buddy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Complete paperwork and security requirements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Explain benefits and policies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Have a senior leader welcome new employees (in person or through recorded means)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Arrange for new employees to eat together or for someone from each employee's office to eat lunch with them on their first day                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Provide realistic information about the organization and its culture and avoid "over promising"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>FIRST WEEK</b>             | Ensure that job roles and responsibilities are clearly communicated to the new employee                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Introduce the new employee to other employees and senior staff                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Provide meaningful work for the new employee — either training or substantive work related to the new job                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Ensure that a senior leader (in the new employee's office) welcomes the new employee(s)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Review the organizational structure and key staff                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Provide a list of contacts who can address the new employee's questions on a variety of issues                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Gather feedback about the orientation program from new employees                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>FIRST 90 DAYS</b>          | Review performance objectives and set individual development goals                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Give performance feedback early and often to the new employee                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Provide training, as needed, to help the new employee understand internal systems, general operating practices and obtain other information or skills required in the performance of his or her job                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Discuss individual work styles and preferences                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Arrange for the new employee to meet key stakeholders from other departments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Check with new employees regularly to ensure that they continue to assimilate and expand their knowledge and capabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>FIRST YEAR</b>             | Provide training to build competencies and fill any skill gaps                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Conduct a new employee survey and address any issues surfaced                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Assess the performance of the new employee periodically — formally and informally — and provide feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal "manager check-ins" should occur regularly in addition to formal performance assessments, which should be completed after six months and one year.</li> <li>• The human capital office should send a reminder e-mail to managers at the six-month and one-year mark to ensure that formal performance reviews occur.</li> </ul> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                               | Ensure a senior executive or manager sends a congratulatory e-mail or letter on the employee's one-year anniversary (can be done automatically without requiring the executive's time)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## APPENDIX D: PRE-FIRST DAY COMMUNICATION PLAN

There is a critical need to communicate with new employees between the time they accept an offer and their first day on the job. This communication helps to provide information, answer questions, reduce administrative processing on the first day, and allow a smoother transition as the new employee comes on board. Communication should be structured and occur at specific times during the onboarding process. The table below summarizes recommended timing, who initiates the communication, what and how it is communicated.

| Timing                                           | Initiator                                                                 | Messages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Communication Method                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| After employment offer is accepted               | Human Capital Office<br>OR Human Capital Liaison in New Employee's Office | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome</li> <li>• Introduce self</li> <li>• Explain upcoming new employee process (e.g., forms that need to be completed, suitability or clearance process) and set expectations</li> <li>• Provide basic information for the first day (e.g., parking, dress, where new office is, what will happen for lunch)</li> <li>• Information on sponsor/buddy</li> <li>• Answer questions and provide contact information</li> </ul> | Phone call with follow-up e-mail (sponsor/buddy will be copied on this e-mail) |
| OPTIONAL After Suitability/ Clearance is granted | Human Capital Office<br>OR Human Capital Liaison in New Employee's Office | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For agencies that conduct suitability and/or clearance investigations before the first day of work, an additional contact should be made after this eligibility is granted</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | E-mail or phone call                                                           |
| 2-3 Days before First Day                        | New Employee Sponsor/Buddy                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reiterate basic information on first day (e.g., parking, dress, where new office is, what will happen for lunch)</li> <li>• Describe lunch and pick-up process (if first day is orientation)</li> <li>• Provide contact information</li> <li>• Answer questions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                      | E-mail or phone call                                                           |

### EXAMPLES OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS

PRE-FIRST DAY TELEPHONE TALKING POINTS  
(FOR HUMAN CAPITAL OFFICE OR HUMAN CAPITAL LIAISON IN NEW EMPLOYEE'S OFFICE)

- Introduce yourself; include where you work with the agency.
- Explain that you are there to help them through the pre-first day process.
- Give them your name and phone number, and let them know you are their “go to” person, and that they can contact you with any questions or concerns.
- Briefly explain the process they will go through before their first day. Include any paperwork they will have to complete, any suitability and/or clearance process they will have to engage in, and any other activities that will be required of them.
- Contact them immediately prior to their first day to ensure they have received their orientation instructions and to let them know who their assigned buddy/sponsor will be.
- Reiterate first day logistics, including any information about lunch and what they will do once orientation is over.

## SAMPLE BUDDY INTRODUCTORY E-MAIL

TO:  
FROM:

SUBJECT: Welcome to [Agency]

Dear xxxxxx:

Welcome to [Agency]! We are excited that you will be joining us for your first day on MM/DD/YYYY.

I will be your new employee buddy, someone who can help you get settled on your first day, show you around, answer any questions you have and serve as a resource over your first few weeks.

Let's begin by meeting for lunch on the day of your orientation. I will come to meet you at lunchtime.

If you have any questions between now and then, please feel free to call me at (###) ###-####.

Sincerely,

Name

## APPENDIX E: TOOLKIT FOR MANAGERS

Managers play a critical role during an employee's first few days on the job. Over the long term, managers directly affect the employee's job satisfaction. Given this impact, it is vital for managers to be informed about the onboarding process, know their role, and consistently welcome and assign work to new employees.

An Onboarding Toolkit for Managers provides managers with the tools, resources and consistency of approach to ensure the employee has a positive and meaningful onboarding experience.

Samples of tools/templates that can be included in a Manager Toolkit include:

- Checklist with timeline of manager responsibilities
- Links to key forms and sample plans (e.g., Job Description, Performance Plan and/or Individual Development Plan)
- Suggested talking points for:
  - First discussion with new employee
  - Six-month check-in
  - One-year performance review
- Template for welcome e-mail to send to new employee's team
- Overview of different experiences and expectations from government transfers versus employees with no previous government experience

## EXAMPLES OF MANAGER TOOLS

### FIRST DISCUSSION WITH NEW EMPLOYEE TALKING POINTS

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- Introduce yourself, and talk about your role in the organization.
- Discuss how your office fits into the larger organization and the role it has in supporting the organization's mission.
- Review the new employee's job description — discussing the work he will do, who he will be working with and performance expectations.
- Review the performance appraisal process.
- Talk about your style as a manager and expectations for employees who work with you (i.e., do you prefer phone calls or e-mails? Do you have an "open door policy" or do you prefer people schedule time with you in advance? What is your general managerial style? How can someone work best with you?)
- Let the new employee know how often he will or should interact with you.
- Ask if they have any questions.

### SAMPLE WELCOME E-MAIL

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TO: Team  
FROM: Manager

SUBJECT: Welcome Jane Doe

Dear Team:

Please welcome Jane Doe, a new Program Analyst, to our team. Jane's first project will be leading the Performance Management initiative.

Jane comes to us from the Department of Education, where she was an Assistant Program Manager for three years. Before that, she worked in the private sector for Atlantis Corp. Jane is originally from San Francisco, but enjoys living in Washington, D.C., which she considers her adopted home. In her free time, Jane is an avid cyclist and enjoys reading legal thrillers.

Jane's first day of work is June 12, and she will sit in cube 2-314. Please stop by and introduce yourself.

Sincerely,

Manager

## APPENDIX F: EMPLOYEE REFERENCE GUIDE

An employee reference guide is provided to new employees on their first day or week. The materials serve to help orient the new employee to his new organization and surroundings. An example of key sections and materials for an employee reference guide is included in the list below.

### ABOUT US

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#### Organization overview

- History
- Mission statement
- Core values
- Basic organization structure and organization chart

#### Overview of each office (organization chart and functional statements)

- Leadership profiles: photos and brief biographies of key leaders
- Commonly used acronyms

### NAVIGATING THE ORGANIZATION

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How to find people in the organization: an overview of sources of information for finding individuals, contact information, etc.

Office overviews/brochures: one page or brochure for each key support office with information on what the office does and contact information

Web resources: overview of the organization's intranet and its capabilities (with screenshots and links)

Booking conference rooms

Key communication vehicles (e.g., weekly bulletins)

### POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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#### Key policies and procedures

- Major ethics rules
- Equal opportunity policy
- Sexual harassment policies
- Civil rights
- Whistleblower Act
- Procurement

#### Human capital policies and procedures

- Time charging policy
- Family Medical Leave Act

- Request for leave or approved absence form
- Organization holiday schedule
- Payroll planning schedule
- Copy of time sheet

#### Benefits

- Health Insurance
- Leave
- Parking
- Transit benefits
- Other benefits

#### Performance management policies

#### Training requirements

#### HR information

- Employee personal page overview
- Pay bands
- SES definition

#### Security policies and procedures

- Key security policies
- Sensitive security information, if applicable
- Emergency

#### Travel policies and procedures

- Government travel card program overview (include link to application)
- Overview of travel
- Contacts
- FAQ

### BASIC IT INFORMATION

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#### Key IT policies and management directives

#### Computer access agreement

#### Default for new e-mail accounts

#### Voice-mail instructions

#### Sample voice-mail and extended absence greetings

#### Instructions for using IP phone

#### Overview of Outlook, etc.

IT support services tips and tricks

Audio conferencing instructions

How to add a printer to your desktop

Using government equipment for personal use

Help Desk

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ABOUT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: FOR NEW  
GOVERNMENT HIRES

Links to key government Web sites:

- Benefits Web site
- Snow policy Web site

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YOUR NEW NEIGHBORHOOD: INFORMATION ABOUT  
THE BUILDING AND SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD

Building

- Address of building
- Building map
- Driving, parking and public transportation directions
- Visitor process
- Where key offices are located
- Cafeteria information
- Building regulations
- Mail distribution plan (mailstops)
- Conference room locations
- Building resources (e.g., graphics, printing, fitness center, mother's room, meditation room/chapel, contact for HQ customer service/building maintenance)

Local services and other organization locations

- Banks
- Post offices
- Health clubs
- Restaurants and shopping
- Hotels
- Pharmacies
- Catering
- Info on other organization buildings and directions





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