



Manager Guide: Onboarding Students During COVID-19

The exceptional circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic is challenging the public service to re-think the way of working, including how we onboard new team members in a virtual or remote context, and in some cases, a combination of virtual and physical workplaces.

Why is onboarding important during the COVID-19 context?

Under “normal circumstances” onboarding is critical to establish a positive first impression with new employees, welcome them to the team and engage and embrace them into the organization’s culture. Doing this well can increase employee satisfaction, engagement, performance and retention. The employee experience is even more important in a context where we may not have access to a physical workplace, office equipment and supplies, “in-person” meetings, regular and reliable communication tools, not to mention the nature, pace and scale of work may have changed.

Building on [Beyond2020](#) pillars, this guide is designed to set you up for success to provide students with a positive experience, the opportunity to do meaningful work, and an understanding of career opportunities within the federal public service. This also contributes directly to [Canada’s Youth Policy](#) Employment priority.

Be Agile

The situation calls for you to re-think, explore and leverage new ways of engaging employees, keeping them motivated and on-track while providing them with resources and connecting them to co-workers. This is a time for creativity and learning how to lead virtually, while equipping your new hires for success. This is also the time to demonstrate that your work unit is inclusive and values the contribution of all team members.

1. Have a Plan:

Have a plan for the student, their integration into the team, and the work you are planning for them. Be prepared to adjust your plan based on the student’s needs and have an open conversation about how you can best support them. Prepare for their arrival, including how you will address any workplace accommodation needs in a timely manner, with a plan for the first day and week and to review progress throughout the work placement. Remain open to understanding the student’s preference for how they would like to be engaged and that this may change and evolve over time. Use the checklists at the end of this guide to help you with each step.

If the student will be working on-site, make sure to advise them of any measures put in place to keep the workplace safe. Be prepared to answer their questions and address concerns.

2. Assemble a Digital Welcome Package:

Assemble information and resources available in digital and accessible formats so that they can be shared and accessed remotely (documents, links, networks, etc.). Remember to consider where and how you share this information as some students may not have access to your internal networks or to the software required to read documents immediately. Think of alternative ways to communicate the information (e.g. virtual information session, assigning a virtual buddy) to help the student become familiar with the work and business practices.

3. Connect with Your Human Resources Department:

Find out what material may already be available on-line to support onboarding and learning. Keep adding to this resource so that it remains relevant and up to date.

4. Schedule Virtual Welcome and Introductions:

Be the first person to welcome the student with a face-to-face video-based (i.e. Microsoft Teams, WebEx) meeting to establish a personal connection. Be sure to ask the student about the virtual meeting platform they are most comfortable with.

Schedule face-to-face virtual introductions with team members at meetings using video technology to put faces or voices to names.

Ask your Human Resources (HR) or Information Technology (IT) Department about the types of face-to-face communication available in your department.

Be Equipped

Take the time to equip yourself with the tools you need to manage people and teams in a remote or virtual context and what is available in your department. This means making sure your technology is working, it is available to the team, and that you continue to build your personal toolkit around virtual work, leadership and creating an inclusive and accessible work environment.

One of your key responsibilities is ensuring students have the tools they need on their first day. If the student is unable to have a government laptop and/or access to the online network, have a discussion with the student to understand their level of access to technology, internet connectivity and comfort with different online platforms. Do not

assume that all students have the same understanding of how to use new online approaches.

There is a wealth of information and resources for managers and it is growing all the time. Take a moment to explore these before the student begins and integrate these practices into your team's management:

1. Connect on FlexGC:

The FlexGC Network is a grassroots collective of public servants who are volunteering their time to share best practices and provide peer-to-peer guidance to any GC employee or manager who needs help working remotely. Connect with them on the [GCcollab](#) page or on Twitter [@FlexGCInfo](#).

2. Engage the National Managers' Community:

The [National Managers' Community \(NMC\)](#) is a horizontal network that connects managers across the federal public service with peers and useful resources. The NMC holds weekly virtual talks, aimed at providing managers with timely information, tips, tools and best practices to assist them in leading and supporting their teams virtually. Follow the NMC on [GCconnex](#), [Twitter @NMC_CNG](#) or on [Facebook @NMCCNG](#).

3. Use the Canada School of Public Service:

The [Canada School of Public Service](#) offers a suite of learning products to support all public servants, including managers and students. The new [Learning path for managers and supervisors of students working in a virtual environment during COVID-19 pandemic](#) provides resources to support managers and supervisors in onboarding students. The [Learning path for students](#) provides students with resources and learning opportunities to gain basic knowledge for working in both a virtual and non-virtual environment.

4. Designate a Virtual Buddy:

Ask an employee who is familiar with your department's role and functions to act as a virtual buddy to the student and help guide them through their first few weeks. The virtual buddy will help the student settle into their new job, answer questions and point them to useful resources.

5. Ask the Expert:

Students can be a wealth of knowledge in using technology. Ask them to help you learn about and use the latest applications, download them on your devices, and navigate through the software. Also consider reverse-mentoring opportunities to empower the students and increase knowledge within your organization.

Be Inclusive

Part of building a positive work experience includes ensuring employees feel valued and appreciated and recognizing their contributions. Creating a nurturing, welcoming and inclusive workplace culture is a key element to support students, and all employees, in providing their best effort and reaching their potential. Use the [Take Me With You](#) approach to bring students along to your meetings and provide them with a better understanding of your department, your role and business processes.

1. Demonstrate Empathy:

Pay attention to mental health and express empathy towards students who may be living alone and/or feeling isolated. Understand that they may be facing significant challenges within their living spaces, academic institutions, and social environments, including how their peers and family may have been challenged with COVID-19. Be open to a discussion and accommodate them in any way that you can, whether this means more flexible working hours, extended timelines, or adjustments to work assignments. The stress and disruption from the global pandemic may have an impact on how they cope in the workplace.

[The Centre of Expertise on Mental Health in the Workplace](#) has resources, tools and services to help employees maintain their mental health.

2. Create an Inclusive and Accessible Workplace:

Make sure that you have discussed and put in place accommodations for students before their first day. Work with your HR and IT departments to take advantage of the services and resources available from the [Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology \(AACT\) Program](#) for any accessibility, accommodations and adaptive technology requirements.

Visit the [Office of Public Service Accessibility's GCpedia](#) page for resources on how to create accessible documents and guidance for managers and employees on the [GC Workplace Accessibility Passport](#).

To learn more about planning inclusive meetings, consult the [Guide to Planning Inclusive Meetings](#) available on Employment and Social Development Canada's [Accessibility Resource Centre](#).

3. Invite Feedback:

Once you have onboarded your student, it can be easy to lose track of progress. Ask your student for feedback once they have started working and follow-up on issues they may raise. Long-term onboarding effectiveness depends on how well you integrate your student beyond the first few weeks. The connections and experiences they gain will be valuable to them even after their work-term has ended.

4. Support Students in the Employment Opportunity for Students with Disabilities:

The Employment Opportunity for Students with Disabilities is a national initiative under the Federal Student Work Experience Program that provides both managers and students with resources, tools and services to improve inclusion of persons with disabilities within the public service.

When you onboard new employees, they are in the best position to tell you what they require. They can also explain potential barriers they might encounter and how to best eliminate those barriers, including topics such as training and performance of certain tasks. That way, you can plan accordingly and give them the tailored content they require, instead of trying to guess their expectations.

The [Employment Opportunity for Students with Disabilities' Resource Page](#) on GCpedia provides many tools and resources to support managers and participants.

5. Support Students in the Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity:

The Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity is a national initiative under the Federal Student Work Experience Program that provides both managers and students with resources, training, activities, and support services with the goal of improving the inclusion of Indigenous students into the public service.

Strengthen your understanding of Indigenous culture, protocols and rituals to help you work and develop a good relationship with an Indigenous student. The [Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity Resource Page](#) on GCpedia provides many tools and resources to support managers and participants.

Onboarding Stages: Manager Checklist

Pre-Arrival:

This is an opportunity for you to prepare for your new employee's arrival and to make an initial good impression. Try to make them feel welcome and part of the team before they arrive.

- Maintain communication by e-mail, phone or video prior to start date to answer any questions about forms, logistics, technology, work expectations or learning opportunities.
- Work with HR and IT to complete all administrative tasks well ahead of student arrival and ensure pay documents have been processed according to the Pay Centre timelines. The process and timelines may be different in each department

and modified in response to the COVID-19 situation (e.g. letter of offer, forms, technology set-up for home use).

- Arrange for accommodation requirements well in advance of the start date in order to provide enough lead time to make these arrangements, especially for working remotely (work schedule adjustments, specialized workplace equipment, hardware or software).
- Plan to communicate with, integrate and support the student for the duration of their work period, including a good understanding of the best way and time to communicate with the student.
- Identify work and tasks the student can accomplish within the first week of arrival.
- Identify a virtual buddy from the team to support the student.
- Assemble an accessible welcome package.
- Schedule time to meet and orient the student on the first day.

First Day and Week:

The first day and week marks the beginning of a significant period of adjustment for the new employee. They may feel nervous and apprehensive.

- Welcome your new employee on their first day of work through accessible virtual conferencing tools.
- Review key issues and documents with the student. Ensure the student completes all HR and administrative forms.
- Introduce the student to co-workers and the team.
- Set your student up with a virtual buddy and meet with them to show your support.
- Establish preliminary work objectives and a learning plan, including all required courses and training. Explain how your organization, as well as their tasks, contribute to the mandate of the organization.
- Provide the student with their first assignment during the first week.
- Get the student to register on [GCcollab](#) and to set up an account on [GCcampus](#).
- Establish a weekly or bi-weekly check-in schedule.
- Provide the student with a list of pay resources. Consult with your HR and IT departments.

First Month:

After the first month, your student will likely feel more settled in the new job. They might still be adjusting to a new routine, the context of working remotely, and getting to know their colleagues and the culture of the organization.

- Follow-up with the student to confirm they are receiving their pay and it is accurate.
- Offer to assist the student with finding a mentor.
- Invite your student to attend a variety of meetings with you to gain a better understanding of the government procedures and decision-making process.

- Invite your student to chair a team meeting.
- Encourage the student to join formal and informal networks (e.g. [Federal Youth Network](#), employment equity networks, or any other group on [GCconnex](#)).
- Check-in regularly with the student to see how they are adjusting to working remotely and encourage them to speak freely about their overall experience to date.

End of Placement:

- Review their work.
- Provide feedback.
- Invite feedback for your improvement.
- Recognize and celebrate the student for their contributions.

Additional Resources:

Here are a few resources to assist you in maximizing your knowledge of student employment.

- [Directive on Student Employment](#)
- [Directive on Terms and Conditions of Employment for Students](#)
- [Student Rates of Pay](#)