

DCIF Project – Onboarding Tool 3: Creating an Inclusive In-Person Onboarding Experience

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Who is this tool for?

High Priority:

- Direct Line Managers

Useful to Know:

- **DEI** and HR professionals

What guidance does this tool provide?

- How-to information for developing an inclusive and accessible onboarding experience

Take home points

- Provide the employee lists of materials on the typical orientation topics covered, so they can access them when they need them. Ideally the information should be available in multiple formats depending on the individual's needs.
- Follow 3 steps to provide a comfortable and supportive introduction when onboarding: welcome, equip, and inspire
- After orientation and onboarding, set aside time to check in with the new worker and have a conversation about how they are adjusting.
- Sometimes small changes or accommodations will need to be made to the existing process to make for the most effective orientation.

Creating an Inclusive and Accessible Onboarding Period

In 2018, just under 2.5 million persons with disabilities were in the labour force in Canada¹ – a significant portion of the talent pool companies simply cannot afford to ignore.

According to surveys from an established recruiting platform:²

*More and more workers are not afraid to keep looking until they find a job that feels worthwhile.
In fact, over a third of new workers quit their jobs within six months of starting.*

Recent research indicates that only 12% of new workers believe their company had a good onboarding process.³ Top employers recognize how essential it is to make all new workers feel welcome and safe in the workplace. If an organization is not able to create and maintain a working environment that is inclusive of persons with disabilities, they risk losing the diverse talent they worked so hard to secure.

Before the Worker Starts

Planning for the onboarding period should take place well in advance of the new worker's first day. If a new hire has disclosed their disability to you, try your best to anticipate barriers they may experience. Work alongside the individual to ensure that they have what they need to be successful. Keep in mind that while you can prepare for the arrival of a new worker, it is up to them to decide what, if anything, they disclose to their new colleagues. Before the worker starts, think about these key steps:⁴



The Fundamentals

- Reaching out to local service providers or disability organizations for support in preparing for the onboarding period – they may have services or personnel who can provide advice and help you and your team through the process
- Ensure that all staff within your organization undergo, at the very least, disability acceptance and appreciation training [\[link to training landing page\]](#)
- Ensure all staff know how to greet, communicate, and interact with people with disabilities [\[link to the Accessible Communication Tool landing page\]](#)

Grow Your Team's Disability Confidence

On top of setting the expectation that inclusivity is everyone's responsibility, encourage your team to review resources and materials for developing an inclusive workplace culture. Give them the opportunity to ask questions about disability that they may not have felt comfortable asking in other settings and proactively address their concerns:

- Create an atmosphere that allows for open, honest conversation about disability
- Acknowledge the way your staff are feeling and present them with information to broaden their understanding/awareness. For more information on misconceptions, please visit [Corporate Strategy Tool 3 - Starting Your Journey Towards Disability Confidence](#)
- If you feel comfortable, share stories about your personal understanding disability and how it may have changed over time
- Communicate an open-door policy so that conversations around disability can continue in an ongoing fashion
- Add disability acceptance and appreciation messaging around your workplace

Lay the Foundation for Success

Onboarding is just as much about settling in, as it is about ramping up. To ease the arrival of any new worker, including those with disabilities, make sure you also focus on the needs of the current team:

- Clearly communicate the new worker's start date, so team members are aware of when to welcome them
- Ask the incoming worker to provide a short bio that can be shared with the current team
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of the new hire so that current workers can understand how their new colleague will contribute to the success of the team
- When sharing need-to-know information about accommodations with colleagues, always consult the worker before bringing it to the attention of those affected and ensure privacy and confidentiality about the nature of the accommodation. Do not disclose the worker's disability to other workers. For more information about privacy and confidentiality, please visit [Accommodations Tool 4 - Protecting Workers' Confidentiality and Privacy](#)
 - For example, "Sadaf will be working from 10 – 6 pm instead of 8:30 – 4:30 pm each day. Please adjust your communication with Sadaf accordingly."
- Find an experienced individual to be a mentor and the first point of contact for the new worker during the onboarding period

Note: Some workers may request to come in ahead of time to obtain orientation from a trained disability professional. For example, a new worker with low vision may ask that an expert from a disability organization, such as the [Canadian National Institute for the Blind](#), visit the workplace and help the worker get situated with their environment before their first day.

A Spotlight on Accessibility

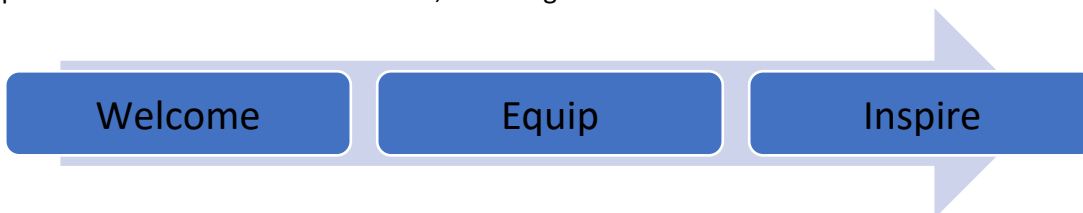
As a manager, there are specific accessibility considerations you must keep in mind:⁵

- **Preparing Documentation: develop a few copies of essential documents in alternative formats**
 - Prepare all documentation, including company policies, operating procedures, safety procedures, emergency instructions, benefits, etc., and ensure that alternative formats are available (e.g., written or large text, [Braille](#) materials, audio, or plain language)

- Budget extra time to produce alternative formats so that a worker with a disability can onboard in a timely manner – a new hire’s start day shouldn’t have to be delayed because you weren’t able to plan ahead!
- **Preparing Accommodations: make workplace supports readily available during the onboarding period and beyond.**
 - Natural Supports:
 - Encourage colleagues to offer guidance, feedback, and assistance to new hires
 - Appoint a mentor or close teammate with a similar job to ‘show the ropes’ or facilitate workplace integration
 - Employer Supports:
 - Ensure that contracts and preliminary documentation during the negotiation period are available in alternate formats
 - Promote zero tolerance for discrimination or harassment of employees with disabilities in onboarding materials and within the workplace
 - Reiterate your accommodation policy in onboarding materials and in early check-ins with new employees
 - Offer focused training on the accommodation process at your company, who to direct your request to, etc.
 - Provide access to mental health supports in the workplace or refer employees to specific resources or partner organizations
 - Include extended health benefits that cover medication, physical therapy, occupational therapy, etc., as they may be important accommodations for persons with disabilities
 - Ensure that onboarding materials are available in alternate formats
 - Be prepared to implement accommodations in a timely manner
 - Ensure they are implemented and ready to be used on the employee’s first day
 - Note: As much as possible, accommodations should be prepared for a first day. If you are not able to meet this standard, be prepared to notify the new employee to potentially reschedule their start date as a last resort

Best Practices on the First Day

On the first day, focus on the worker’s experience. What can you do to show that your organization prioritizes accessibility and inclusivity? The following suggestions for creating an accessible onboarding experience are valuable for all workers, including those with disabilities:^{4,6}



Welcome

A positive start to a career at a new company can reap dividends – ensure worker with disabilities feel welcomed and included on their first day:

- ✓ Send a warm welcome the new worker at the beginning of their day to introduce yourself and provide information about the organization
 - Be sure to communicate your commitment to accessibility and inclusion, as well as your organizations DEI policy
- ✓ If you feel comfortable, share your name and pronouns to create a safe space for workers to express themselves and ask any questions
 - Add your pronouns to your handle on your video platform such as Zoom
- ✓ Introduce the new worker to their immediate team and other colleagues with whom they might be working
 - Create a list of points of contact for questions that the new worker may have
- ✓ Provide an organizational chart they can learn more about their new colleagues and where they fit in the organization
- ✓ Set up introductions between the new worker and other members of your company who can help welcome and integrate them

Equip

Don't skimp when it comes to supporting the needs of your new worker. We all have different preferences and workstyles – ask your new colleague about how you can develop an environment that empowers them to do their best work:

- ✓ Provide orientation materials in a suitable format for the worker (e.g., written or large text, Braille materials, audio, or plain language)
- ✓ Prioritize the communication of essential information such as job instructions, work manuals, staff rules, grievance procedures, health, safety, emergency procedures, and other relevant processes
 - Accessible employee egress in the event of emergencies in the workplace is critical. After a new worker reviews your emergency procedures, check in with them to see if they have any questions or suggestions for improvement
- ✓ Provide a detailed tour of essential workplace areas, including the lunchroom, accessible washroom, supply room, etc.
- ✓ Reiterate that workplace accommodations are available
- ✓ Ask the employee how their current accommodations are working, and if anything needs to be changed
- ✓ Obtain preliminary feedback from the worker, as well as their immediate team, to better support their learning and development

Inspire

As with any new environment, time is needed to get settled into a new workplace. During onboarding, allow enough time for a worker to learn about your organizational culture before diving into job-related tasks. Foster a sense of engagement from day one:

- ✓ Use the onboarding period as an opportunity to share information on the culture of your organization and the company's values
 - Highlight company policies on diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as those on bullying, harassment, discrimination, and other relevant topics
- ✓ Inform the new worker about diversity, equity, and inclusion at your organization, including any **employee resource groups** (ERGs) or **assistance programs**, inclusive employee benefits, etc.
 - ERGs are an excellent way to engage new workers on important topics such as **disability confidence**, accessibility, and diversity, equity, and inclusion
 - Share information about how ERGs were founded at your company and the types of services or initiatives different ERGs have hosted
 - Invite new hires to be a part of the different communities within your company

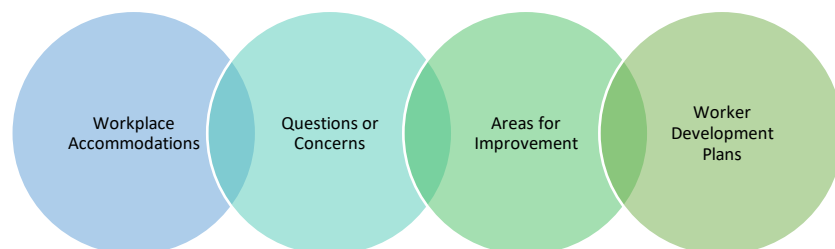
For more information on worker engagement, please visit [Culture Tool 6 - Strategies to Engage Workers with Disabilities](#)

After Orientation and Onboarding

While it's important to give workers ample time to sit with all the new information they have learned during onboarding, you should not take a hands-off approach. Instead, you should periodically check-in and gauge how they are doing. Through consistent communication, you can identify and address barriers to accessibility as soon as they arise.

Schedule Frequent Check ins with Worker

After orientation and onboarding, set aside time to check in with the new worker and have a conversation about how they are adjusting. For instance, book a lunch meeting within the worker's first month and give them the opportunity to share their experience so far. At these touch points, here are some ideas for what you could discuss:



- **Workplace Accommodations:**
 - If the worker currently has an accommodation in place, ask them how it is working and whether any adjustments need to be made
 - If the worker has not requested an accommodation, be sure to reiterate your accommodation policy and create space for them to identify their needs
 - Explore formal and informal supports, such as flexible work hours or scheduling
- **Questions Or Concerns:**
 - Reinforce a culture that supports an 'open-door policy,' where workers can speak with their managers about any questions or concerns
 - Keep multiple channels (e.g., email, phone, in person) open for communication

- Develop methods where workers can anonymously submit questions or concerns
- **Areas for Improvement:**
 - Invite all workers to voluntarily provide anonymous feedback on the recruitment, hiring, and onboarding process
 - Be sure to make it clear that their feedback will not impact their job
 - Ask them questions such as:
 - i. Tell us about your experience during the recruitment process.
 - ii. Tell us about your experience during the interview process.
 - iii. Tell us about your experience during the onboarding process.
 - iv. What suggestions do you have to enhance the accessibility or inclusivity of these processes?
 - Hiring an external company to evaluate and present a summary of the survey results has unique benefits:
 - i. The privacy and anonymity of your staff are better protected
 - ii. A more objective third party can provide feedback to you about the inclusivity of your hiring process
 - iii. Staff will be able to focus on other aspects of their jobs
- **Worker Development Plans:**
 - Talk to your new worker about their employment goals
 - Discuss potential career paths and advancement opportunities that they can look forward to
 - Set out a time frame for more formal performance management meetings after their probationary period

For more information about performance management, please visit [\[link to landing page for Performance Management Tools\]](#).

Build a Mentorship Program

To successfully onboard new workers, it is important that they feel familiar and comfortable with their new colleagues and the company culture. Assigning a mentor to support the new worker is an excellent way to smooth the transition. Mentorship in the workplace is sometimes known as a ‘buddy system.’

[Visit this valuable resource for learning more about implementing a mentorship program.](#)

Dolphin Disabilities Mentoring Day

Dolphin Disabilities Mentoring Day facilitates the pairing of job-ready persons with disabilities with companies that want to use the skills they have or are developing. The mentoring day uses technology to bridge the talent, communication, and knowledge gaps between business, employment and community supports, and persons with disabilities.

Mentees	Mentors:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gain insight from practicing professionals around job requirements, jobs duties and tasks, and how their skillsets fit specific roles ● Demonstrate their diverse skillsets and career potential to local employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Get the opportunity to spend time with job-ready persons with disabilities ● Learn about the breadth and depth of skills that persons with disabilities offer ● Understand how they can ensure that company policies and facilities are welcoming to all persons

Goals for Dolphin Disabilities Mentoring Day:

- To provide mentees access to workplace contacts, environments, skills, and HR process,
- To increase confidence among students and jobseekers with disabilities,
- To enhance internship, co-operative education, and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities,
- To dispel employers' fears about hiring people with disabilities and promote **disability confidence**,
- To give employers an opportunity to benchmark themselves as being accessible to what is a largely untapped pool of talent as well as a massive consumer market.

To learn more about Dolphin Disabilities Mentoring Day, or participate in the next event, please visit:

<http://disabilitiesmentoringday.org/about-dmd/>

References

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²Bamboo HR. *What People Really Want From Onboarding [Infographic].*

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³Gallup. State of the American Workplace Report. *State of the American Workplace.*

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⁴AccessibleEmployers.ca (2021). Inclusive Orientation & Onboarding Checklist. *Presidents Group.*

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Onboarding Process. <https://askjan.org/articles/Incorporate-Reasonable-Accommodation-Practices-into-your-Onboarding-Process.cfm>

⁶Hire For Talent. *6.2 Employee Onboarding Checklist.* [https://hirefortalent.ca/service-providers/list/tool-](https://hirefortalent.ca/service-providers/list/tool-6-hiring/171)

[6-hiring/171](https://hirefortalent.ca/service-providers/list/tool-6-hiring/171)