

- Tip sheet

Onboarding remotely

Onboarding new employees to work remotely during COVID requires early planning and a structured approach. Ahead of time you will need to:

- ensure they have the right information and equipment to be able to perform in the role
- create a clear plan for helping new starters understand their role and the agency they have come to work for
- plan how they can quickly and successfully connect with their new team.

This tip sheet will get you started, but as COVID-19 restrictions are eased, you may need to adjust your approach further so that your onboarding practice stays effective.

Ensure their resources are ready

Establish well ahead of your new employee's start date the IT assets and software (or other equipment) they will need in their home office to perform their role. It's also a good idea to check with your new employee any preferences they might have for screen size, for example, and whether your IT team can accommodate this via a short-term loan (if that is your agency's approach). Make sure your new employee is advised how to access your agency's network, email and intranet and e-filing system, including passwords or other security requirements.

Identify who is responsible for setting this access up (and delivering any equipment) and how they will arrange a COVID-19-compliant delivery, so you can notify your new employee. Communicate any expectations around use of technology, such as security measures, how meetings are conducted online, and how to switch off.

The ['Using technology well' tip sheet](#) will assist you to clarify your expectations with your team if you haven't already done so.

You'll also need to check whether any software, compulsory agency or accreditation training is needed, and book them into any modules/seminars well in advance. Send the details for it in their onboarding information.

Have a first-week plan prepared

An ideal way to prepare for your new employee's first day is to make a first day/week induction agenda to send to their personal email the week before their start date. Useful things to include are:

- what time to be online
- when you (or a delegate) will call them on their first day to welcome them and get them started

- team meeting details, scheduled via <Skype/MS Teams> to meet their colleagues
- scheduled meetings with other internal or external stakeholders (if external, brief them first)
- any training that has been pre-scheduled, and note how the call will take place (via Skype/ phone etc.)
- who their buddy is and their contact details, and when/how they will be in touch
- IT/HR contact details.

Where possible, document team expectations about 'the way we do things' (when team meetings occur, how decisions are made, how to collaborate with the team, how to contact team members, expectations around use of technology and any other 'rules of the road').

Prepare all the background info they need for their first day

Ready for their first day, pull together the usual documentation about their role and the organisation, relevant legislation, policies and procedures, and anything else they will need to understand up front and that you usually provide a new employee to help orient them to their role and its purpose. Hard copies can be provided with their equipment.

If they're new to the organisation and you have them booked into additional software, agency or accreditation training, ensure you outline how this will take place, what they need to do, who is responsible for providing the training and when it will occur. Information that is particularly relevant to provide a new employee at this time includes:

- how to use your various computer systems when away from the office
- guidelines or training about working remotely such as WHS
- how to access feedback channels that were pre-existing or that have been set up within your team or agency to provide extra support for employees during COVID-19

At your first meeting, ensure you clearly set aside time to discuss the work, but then discuss separately their preferences for working flexibly and any team guidelines for using it – to see if their hours or location might be different to the rest of the team, and whether that could affect the team's meeting or crossover days. The Manager's Conversation Guide provides a helpful structure for this discussion. You could give them the employee's version of the guide and suggest they read it ahead of the conversation, as it will help them understand what flexible working options are available to them and how to ensure their preferences fit with the rest of the team.

In subsequent check in meetings, take the time to set up a good, detailed performance plan as soon as possible. This assists remote workers by providing clear guidance on their deliverables and goals as they start their new role. It's also a good idea to discuss how the way they work could be different during COVID-19 than usual, or how it could evolve as you return to your typical workplace.

Finally, ensure you ask over this early period if there is anything about the onboarding experience so far that could be improved, check that any mandatory training has been completed and that any adjustments they have are still working and relevant. If your agency is large, it is likely that you will use onboarding surveys or focus groups with multiple employees as well.



Building belonging and connection

Explore with your existing team what you can do to help your new colleague feel connected and included. You could consider ideas such as:

- Filming quick video introductions or writing 'welcome' messages about themselves and what they enjoy about working in the team. You could then invite your new employee to send back the same, perhaps about their background and interests.
- Sending a welcome pack along with the IT equipment delivery, full of 'working from home survival items' such as snacks, merchandise with the agency logo or something else in theme with your team's work.
- Nominating someone from your team who is willing to act as 'new starter buddy' for the person, so that they have a colleague they can go to for help who is not a manager.
- Encouraging all of your team to make an extra effort to connect regularly online with their new colleague, be welcoming, and reach out professionally and personally to support them in their role and socially within the team.
- Asking your team to share their 'top tips for working here' – all the things that they noticed or that helped them when they were first employed within the same agency.
- Scheduling in a virtual team lunch in the new employee's first week or so with the whole team, if possible, to really make them feel welcome.

This tip sheet will be enough to get you started, but if you feel you need more help or to go deeper, post your query on our LinkedIn group, talk to your manager or a trusted peer, or consult with your HR representative to explore any courses your agency may have access to.

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FLEXIBLE WORKING