



REMOTE ONBOARDING GUIDE

Onboarding is a dedicated process designed to acclimate your new employee to the entirety of the University of Tennessee. It should inform and integrate our values and the welcoming and belonging culture of Vol Means All and Vol is a Verb. Onboarding should demonstrate our identity, our mission, our structure and how the work we accomplish connects to this. It should build a new employee's connection to the University, their department and their colleagues.

The onboarding process is the foundation for a successful transition to the University of Tennessee, your area or department and its role in the University, positive relationships with colleagues and stakeholders, and the skills necessary to complete the tasks and work the position requires.

Onboarding is not simply the training of skills needed to perform work or tasks. Focusing only on that or any attempt to rush this process can and will likely lead to a less engaged and less effective individual.

It is normal and expected that an effective onboarding process is not completed prior to the end of the first 6 months of employment, (the probationary period). Depending on the role it can easily last the entire first year or maybe even longer.

Onboarding remote employees can create unique challenges not present with in-person hires. To assist leaders we have compiled an extensive list of steps that can be helpful when onboarding remote employees. These are designed to provide that foundation for a new employee's transition to employment at the University of Tennessee.

Please review these strategies and find those that you can begin to integrate before you make your next hire. Also, please consider these for any remote hires you have made recently. While it is best to intentionally plan prior to a new employee's arrival, you can adopt these as needed even if the hire has already been made. Reflect on where that person is and start there.

While these have been targeted to remote workers, they can easily be adapted to in-person new employees also.

ESTABLISH THE WELCOME

Start Your Onboarding Process Early

Do not wait until an employee's first day to get the ball rolling with onboarding. Effective onboarding should start well before your new team member's first work day.

Notify your team when an offer is accepted. Share any relevant information about your new employee and encourage them to make contact.

Receiving information and/or items from new colleagues is very exciting. Send out a welcome packet as soon as you complete the hiring process for your new employee. It should include at least the names, titles and emails of the team members. If you can add any photos or easy biographical information that only helps.

It can also include things like:

- UT related reading material
- Onboarding plan
- Department swag, if available
- Any needed documents to sign or share
- Something fun for their remote office
- Handwritten notes from you and others or introduction videos
- An e-card distributed to all members of your team and then sent via email to the new hire

Receiving this package will help minimize first day jitters and build connection. It can help new hires feel welcomed to your team before their first meeting, and they'll be more inclined to hit the ground running.

Pre-Employment Meet and Greet

Thoughtfully consider a team-wide meeting prior to the first day of employment, if the new hire is available. A video call with others can spring board relationship building and open up discussion about the Knoxville if the new hire is planning on relocating to this area.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Assign a Go To Mentor

Partner up one employee with your new hire. This one person will be their designated go-to employee to "show them the ropes" and be there if they get stuck. They'll feel less confused about where to ask for help and more comfortable knowing they always have someone to talk to.

Consider partnering your new hire with an employee they'll be working with regularly. Doing this during the onboarding process means they can start forming a close bond right away.

Have them check in on a set schedule and communication patterns that work for them, synchronous or asynchronous or both. This will balance their tasks with schedules and not overwhelm either employee.

This go-to mentor help to make both spoken and unspoken aspects of organizational culture explicit to the new team member. They can also demystify and explain norms that exist within the in-person mode of work, as well as the virtual setting.

Social Connections

At the office, relationship-building comes naturally during "water cooler" moments. For remote new hires, leaders need to think differently. Consider scheduling small talk, online, get-to-know-you meetings or incorporate this thinking into staff/team meetings. For example, through monthly "coffee chats," new hires can get to know colleagues they don't typically work with, develop friendships and uncover mentorship opportunities. Leaders should set an example, modeling the types of relationships they expect new hires to maintain.

Depending on your team size, use breakout rooms of no more than 4 to uncover more about each other. Come up with a few lighthearted prompts to ask during these moments. You could ask everyone to share fun/silly facts about them that most people wouldn't guess. Other possible topics might include:

- Favorite TV show
- Current hobby
- First pet
- Favorite place to travel/dream vacation
- One thing to get rid of in your home

Set Virtual Group Meetings for the Work Team

Virtual team meetings give everyone a chance to learn about who they'll be working with and how each contributes. Set-up team work team meetings where employees outside your team may be present. Review what the employee will be doing and where some connections may exist. Then, encourage one-on-ones or meetings with those the employee will closely work with. Find the solution that works for everyone, including your team, just don't ignore or assume a simple introduction will lead to effective relationships.

Establish Meeting Time with Unit Leadership

Time with the Head of a Unit will create opportunity to set this important relationship. This meeting should aim to inform the new employee about the unit and how he/she will play a vital

role. Setting this relationship early will help provide clarity in the connection between daily work and the goals and vision of the unit.

Encourage Longer Term Employees to Reach Out

A brief, genuine encounter with an experienced team member, regardless of working relationship can leave a great impression on a new hire. For example, a message asking, "How was your first week?" not only is welcoming, but it also encourages connection and may serve to bring needed perspectives to both the new hire and the experienced employee.

These can be short and sweet for all parties involved, perhaps 10-15 minutes max. This time won't disrupt too much of the workday, and new employees won't feel pressure to "be on" for a long time.

Provide a List of Key Stakeholders

Hiring managers should create a list of key stakeholders the person will be working with within their new role and share contact information and relevant context with the new hire. Why is this person important to their role and responsibilities? How might they work together in the future? Establishing top stakeholders from day one and encouraging (or setting up) meet and greets accelerates onboarding.

SET MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS

Lean into Learning.

A new hire is eager to learn about their job and UT. A good onboarding program will explain the history and origins of UT, and perhaps more importantly, how the new hire's work promotes the greater mission and purpose of UT. When employees understand why and how their job fits into our bigger picture, they can start delivering relevant work faster.

Onboarding should be an invitation for new hires to learn and participate in your area culture. Help them see and feel how your culture plays out and how they fit into it. Sharing real examples about your area's service and what your area does and how that impacts your customers can help create that feeling. Focus on areas of emphasis or what is most important for your work, i.e. ethics, accuracy or compliance. Onboarding can include a more extensive look into past experiences that highlight these.

New staff also need to understand how your area handles internal transactional items like time off requests, sick notifications, dress code, scheduling, etc. These things can often be the product of informal rules and practices, so inform clearly how they are handled.

Create and Share an Onboarding Schedule and Connect to Information Sharing Tools

Along with sending a welcome package, we also recommend that you put together a calendar/agenda that contains a schedule of how your new hire's onboarding and first two weeks

will go. Share that as soon as you can. If possible, extend this schedule through the first couple of months.

This gives your new team member a preview of what's upcoming in their first weeks with UT and helps them plan and be prepared (without overwhelming them). It's also an excellent way to acclimate them into a remote schedule and working with your team.

Add new employees to Teams/Outlook/Shared Files to be certain they have access to information that is shared. This gives your new employee connection to information and time to get familiar with using these tools. Make your existing team aware of the new employee's access.

Communication in General

Remote employees can feel isolated if communication is infrequent. As you set expectations, you should develop a schedule for regular check-ins and prioritize those. Each point of contact will help build a trusted relationship and accelerate success. Communicate this to your existing staff also. Keep them informed and ask for their commitment to sharing and contact as well.

Minimize communication that occurs after established work hours and set clear expectations on what type of follow-up is expected. Be clear in an email or message what you expect or set that expectation earlier on verbally. Statements like, 'we can talk about this tomorrow' or 'not urgent, no need to reply now' will help your employee set boundaries and prevent unneeded pressures.

Project based check-ins

Project check-ins are essential for remote workers, so it's necessary to prioritize this. For example, you can schedule one-on-one online conversations to assess each new hire's progress on tasks. This should be accomplished by managers, or project leaders. These can be incorporated in any communication moment. The goal is to stay proactive, stay ahead of deadlines and establish clarity. This can help solve problems as they occur without waiting for a crisis or urgent situation.

Schedule and Offer any Opportunities for Virtual Trainings

Think about scheduling virtual training sessions in your new hire's onboarding plan. You can use File Sharing, Zoom, Teams, etc., for training presentations, sharing internal training materials, or send them links for online tutorials. Encourage them to scan K@TE to see if there are any applicable and appropriate learning opportunities to engage in. These will help them get up to speed on a schedule that fits with their own and begins their individual development.

Think about providing pre-scheduled live one-on-one video calls between subject matter experts and new hires to help employees learn the basics of their roles, software instruction or quirks, etc. Give them the time and date of these, and set expectations to let them know whether they'll need to be on camera.

Assign Easy Tasks to Build Confidence

To help build confidence before any high scale, high visibility work has to be done, prepare a few easier tasks for your new employees to complete early on. Delegate some easier tasks that can help familiarize them with people and process. These can help get simple or overlooked questions or kinks out of the way. Consider utilizing Teams/Zoom/Outlook/Shared Files to build competence and confidence. Gradually ease them into taking on larger scale, higher visibility work.

CONTINUING ONBOARDING AND ENGAGEMENT

Managers maintain an active role

Managers must be involved and available throughout new hires' onboarding journey. Managers are culture conduits who must embody shared values and provide learning experiences that bring the culture to life. With the right development and training, managers can become coaches who immerse new hires in the culture, connecting them with the right people and providing the support and mentoring they need.

Informal Check-ins to Maintain Contact

Employee check-ins are essential for remote workers, so it's necessary to have a mindset that supports that. Even when there are no project based check-ins or formal progress check-ins it can be helpful to just say hi and maintain contact. These might result in a deeper discussion helping them solve problems and answering questions as they occur.

30, 60 and 90 day Reflections and Probationary Period Review

In addition to regular project and assignment check-ins, connect with your new employee at periodic intervals to discuss the overall onboarding process and their own personal progress to date. Prepare a fixed agenda and share it, planning so you can meet your intentions and goals. Stay curious in these opportunities to reconcile the new employee's perceptions and evidence with your own and reach mutual understanding on the overall status in areas such as:

- Technology performance
- Communication
- Relationships
- Examples of successes
- Areas for additional growth

Set goals and continue to monitor at the next reflection date, providing feedback and support as needed for successful goal achievement.

For anyone, an occasional cancellation is understandable, but frequent and consistent cancellations will be problematic, need to be addressed and can leave remote workers feeling undervalued and isolated and uncertain about their work.

The 30, 60, 90 day Reflections and Probationary Period Review will help assess how new hires are progressing, give opportunity for acknowledgement and celebration for what's going well and clarity for what needs to be addressed or changed.

One Year Celebration

Take time to recognize this significant milestone in your new employee's career. They have dedicated their past year to your team and your area efforts, this is a big deal. Celebrate the progress they have made and let them know how much you appreciate this. Invite your other team members to also connect and share congratulations.

- Consider a UT Swag gift
- Consider a departmental card
- Consider virtual department get together

Any gesture that will tangibly demonstrate your appreciation and recognition will be appreciated.