

# *Onsite Sponsor Guide to Onboarding Veterans and Military Service Members*



## Message from the Veteran Employment Services Office (VESO)



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) established the Veteran Employment Services Office (VESO) to focus solely on recruiting, retaining and reintegrating qualified Veterans into the VA workforce.

VA wants to be the employer of choice for Veterans and Military Service Members (in the National Guard or Reserves). The VA Veteran Onboarding Program will help facilitate the transition to a career at VA.

As onsite sponsor, you play an important role by creating an onboarding experience that affirms to our Veterans and service members that they have made the right career choice.

You can make a significant difference in how quickly the new employee becomes productive while directly affecting employee engagement and retention. Using the resources from the VA Veteran Onboarding Program will make your job easier as you help to welcome new employees into your daily operations.

First impressions of our organization—both good and bad—are made the first day. Think back on your first day at VA. What do you remember?

You can help shape another meaningful VA career. Thank you for supporting those who serve our country, both in uniform and at VA.



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## Introduction

Remember your first days as a new VA employee? Those initial experiences go a long way in determining how quickly you became an effective, fully contributing member of the workforce.

Now it's your turn to help ensure that the new Veteran hire's first days on the job are a positive experience. You have been selected as an onsite sponsor because you exemplify special qualities and are a role model for the new employee. An onsite sponsor should be available to:

- Answer questions or find someone who can.
- Offer suggestions and advice about VA and the local area.
- Help the new hire find his or her way around at work.

Typically, you can expect to serve as an onsite sponsor from the day the new hire accepts the job offer to about a month after his or her start date.

## VA Veteran Onboarding Program

The VA Veteran Onboarding Program is more than simply equipping new hires with the tools and resources to perform the job. It's about creating a positive experience that starts before the new hire comes in the front door.

The VA Veteran Onboarding Program provides you with information and resources to successfully bring a newly hired Veteran or Military Service Member on board.

### Why Is Onboarding Important?

Successful onboarding directly affects employee retention. Statistics show that employees need the most support during the first 18 months of employment. Making a strong first and lasting impression is essential.

The VA Veteran Onboarding Program is important because it can:

- Reduce turnover and retraining costs
- Help the new hire transition quickly and become productive sooner
- Affect employee retention and overall job satisfaction
- Build a cohesive team

As the onsite sponsor, you will have direct contact with the new employee during the first month and a unique opportunity to affect the new hire's decision to stay at VA.



## Onsite Sponsor Role and Responsibilities

In your role as the onsite sponsor, you will support the new hire during his or her first 30 days of employment. To foster a positive and productive work environment, you will advise and encourage the newly hired Veteran or service member. Some of the responsibilities of the onsite sponsor include helping the new employee to:

- Feel welcome
- Understand the structure, culture, policies and practices of VA
- Become familiar with the available services and location of resources he or she needs to do the job

Review the [Onsite Sponsor Checklist](#) and the [Onboarding Timeline](#) resources to prepare to welcome the new hire on his or her first day. Direct any questions you may have about your role and responsibilities to your supervisor.



### Before the New Hire's First Day

Sending a welcome message to the new employee sets the right tone. It's your opportunity to introduce yourself and to extend an offer of support before the first day of employment. Ask your supervisor about sending a welcome message to the new hire. Use the welcome message template to send your email greeting. Be sure to coordinate sending your [welcome message](#) with the supervisor's email.

Check with the supervisor to see if you can help prepare the new hire's work space with supplies and instructions, such as:

- Phone directory of contacts, e.g., Human Resources
- Voicemail instructions
- General office supplies (stapler, tape dispenser, pens, scissors, paper, etc.)
- Instructions for requesting technical support for the computer and/or phone

Having the necessary supplies and instructions available for using the equipment on the first day of work allows a new hire to feel welcome and more comfortable.

### New Hire's First Day

An employee's first day is full of excitement and anticipation. Not only must the new hire adjust to an entirely new environment, but he or she must also learn and remember new names and locations.

The better prepared you are to welcome the new hire on his or her first day, the easier this transition will be for everyone. Feeling welcome at the start supports that all-important positive first impression of the organization.

During the first days, an onsite sponsor should provide:

- Advice, guidance and encouragement
- Help in understanding the culture of VA
- Suggestions on how to balance office communications via email, the telephone, or in person
- Help in building networks and relationships within the work group

Show the new hire how to locate the onboarding materials for [new hires](#) on the *VA for Vets* website. Share the Onboarding Timeline tool with the new hire. Let him or her know that you are a resource for the first 30 days.

The supervisor will provide you with a Point of Contact list of key people who the new hire should meet. Share the list with the new employee and use it for tracking purposes. Explain that you will introduce the new employee to key people over the course of the first month.

Before introductions, ask the new hire to say his or her name, and then repeat back his or her name to ensure you are pronouncing it correctly.

Show the new employee around the workplace. A tour of the facility should include:



- Restrooms
- Break/lunch rooms/kitchen
- Vending machines
- Supply room, including any office procedures
- Emergency and first-aid supplies
- Copier and fax machine, including instructions on use
- Mail center(s)
- Transportation services and stops
- Elevators and stairwells for exiting the building in case of evacuation

After the tour, make sure the new hire knows how to contact you, his or her supervisor and the HR professional.

If possible, try to eat lunch together on the first day and invite other coworkers to join you. It is important to build a social network at work and to help others get to know the new employee.

A new job often means an adjustment for the entire family, especially if they have relocated. Ask about hobbies and interests and do what you can to ease the transition to help him or her feel comfortable in the organization.

## New Hire's First Week

Make time to review the resources and tools on the *VA for Vets* website ([VAforVets.va.gov](http://VAforVets.va.gov)). Encourage the new employee to review the VA Veteran Onboarding Program web pages and to set up a [VA for Vets](http://VAforVets) account.



## First 30 Days

During the next several weeks, help the new hire settle into the organization and answer day-to-day questions. Encourage the new hire to build relationships with other coworkers. Maintain frequent contact and share some unwritten rules such as traditions (e.g., casual Friday), nuances and relevant incentive programs. Discuss initial experiences and whether they match the new hire's expectations.

## Summary

The VA Veteran Onboarding Program ensures new employees are quickly on their way to establishing productive and satisfying VA careers. You can make a difference in the first 30 days by fostering a positive and productive work environment.

At the end of the VA Veteran Onboarding Program, VESO will send you and the new hire an onboarding feedback form. You are strongly encouraged to complete the form.

Thank you for supporting those who serve our country, both in uniform and at VA.

If you have questions about the program, please contact VESO at [vaveteranonboarding@va.gov](mailto:vaveteranonboarding@va.gov).

## Onsite Sponsor Tips



### ✓ DO

- Be patient and positive. It takes time to develop a relationship.
- Look for a preferred style of communication.
- Remember that listening may be more important than giving advice in some instances.

### ✗ DON'T

- Try to cover everything right away.
- Worry about being perceived as the “expert.” Your experience is important to the new hire, but you don’t have to know all of the answers.
- Try to force a relationship.
- Judge and be careful not to draw conclusions without exploring why someone feels or acts the way they do.