

# *Supervisor Guide to Onboarding Veterans and Military Service Members*



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



**VETERAN EMPLOYMENT  
SERVICES OFFICE**

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 Veterans Onboarding Program will help facilitate the transition to a career at VA.

As supervisor, 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 your new employee becomes productive while directly affecting employee engagement and retention. Using the resources from the VA Veterans Onboarding Program will make your job easier as you 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

Getting new employees off to a good start can make a big difference in their feeling welcome and in their job effectiveness. An onboarding program helps new hires get up to speed much more quickly and reduces the costs associated with on-the-job learning.

## VA Veterans Onboarding Program

The VA Veterans 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.

In a short time the new hire will become familiar with policies and procedures and will begin to understand VA culture, performance expectations and the day-to-day responsibilities for the department or unit.

The VA Veterans Onboarding Program provides you with information and resources to successfully bring onboard a newly hired Veteran or Military Service Member. This program focuses on the first six months of employment.



### 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 Veterans 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 supervisor, you have the most contact with the new employee and a unique opportunity to affect the new hire's decision to stay at VA.

### Supervisor Role and Responsibilities

You play a critical role throughout the entire onboarding process. To ensure a smooth and efficient transition, you will need to dedicate time in your already busy schedule. The planning time you invest today will return dividends in the future and ultimately save you time, reduce potential confusion and errors and increase employee productivity and morale.

Your role is essential in supporting VA's mission to retain a workforce of Veterans serving Veterans. The onboarding program consists of a series of simple tasks listed on the [Supervisor Checklist](#).

To make it easier for you and your team, each role has its own onboarding checklist. Each individual role is clearly defined on the [Onboarding & Mentoring Roles and Activities](#) tool so that all you need to do is what a good leader already does—praise progress and provide guidance when needed.

Your goal is to create an onboarding experience that reaffirms the new employee's decision that VA is a great place to work. You want to ensure a positive first impression and to engage the new hire from the start.

### Tips for Success

- Learn the correct pronunciation of his or her name.
- Build some fun into the first few days.
- During the first week, check in with the new hire as often as possible.
- Express an enthusiastic welcome and help the new hire feel that he or she has made the right choice.
- Talk about the qualities or skills that most impressed you and those who made the hiring decision.
- Discover what motivates the new hire.
- Give the new hire some responsibility for onboarding and for self-paced learning.
- Create and maintain a positive and friendly environment in the workplace.
- Keep the new hire's family in mind. A new job means adjustment for the entire family, especially if they have relocated. Do what you can to ease the transition and help them feel comfortable in the community.



## Before the New Hire's First Day

What you do to prepare for the first day sets the tone for the entire onboarding process. Aside from organizing the work space, selecting an onsite sponsor is one of the most important tasks. Keep in mind the first impression you want to create for the new employee when choosing an onsite sponsor.

### Onsite Sponsor Selection

The onsite sponsor is appointed by you and partners with the Veteran or service member during the first 30 days to help orient him or her into VA. The onsite sponsor helps the new hire become more comfortable in his or her new role in less time.

The person you select will be the one who answers basic questions about the office and office procedures as well as the one who supports, advises and encourages the new hire. Carefully review the [Onsite Sponsor Checklist](#) to better understand the role and activities involved.

After you select the onsite sponsor, discuss your expectations with him or her. Take the time to help the onsite sponsor understand the role and the importance of what they do. Additional onboarding resources for the onsite sponsor can be found on the [VA Veterans Onboarding Program](#) website.

### Onsite Sponsor Selection Criteria

The onsite sponsor should be a peer to the new employee and act as a role model by exemplifying the following qualities:

- Successful in position and a high performer
- Patient and supportive
- Skilled communicator with solid interpersonal skills
- Willing to help and trustworthy
- Capable of maintaining confidentiality
- Proud of the organization
- Committed to the mission, vision and values of VA



## Communication

Remember that first impressions about the organization have already begun with the interview and contact from HR. Sending a welcome message to the new hire sets the right tone. You should also inform the staff when the new hire will start. Review the sample welcome messages to the new hire, onsite sponsor and to your staff to determine, if applicable.

A brief biography of the new hire may be included in the onsite sponsor and staff communications.

You will set clear performance expectations for your staff by emphasizing the importance of supporting the new hire.

The email to the new hire introduces the onsite sponsor. Coordinate sending your welcome message to the new hire with the onsite sponsor's welcome message. You will want to send your email to the new hire before the onsite sponsor sends their welcome message.



## Point of Contact List

Develop a list of the staff and other key people you want the new hire to meet. Provide the onsite sponsor with a copy of the [Point of Contact](#) (POC) list prior to the first day. Talk to the onsite sponsor about the importance introducing the new hire to people on the list.

The new employee can use the [Guided Conversation](#) template as a meeting planner. Identify key people on the POC list who you expect the new employee to meet with and use the agenda to guide the conversation. The new employee will quickly develop an understanding of how the work contributes to the success of the organization.

## Setting Performance Expectations

Plan the first few weeks of meaningful work assignments before the new employee's first day. As a result, you will be prepared to engage the new hire and to generate enthusiasm to contribute and a willingness to learn early on. You want to help him or her be productive as quickly as possible.

Use the [Job Performance Expectation Meeting](#) template to plan ahead. Assemble the following materials:

- Position Description
- Training Requirements
- Performance Goals and Expectations

Provide the new hire with a copy of the materials before the meeting to ensure that there is enough time to review the documents.

As you plan, think about how you can link work and learning tasks together to set a strong foundation from which to build confidence.

## Tips for Success

- Plan ahead and create a strong welcome experience.
- Reaffirm that the new hire made the right decision to join VA.
- Reinforce the match between the new hire's skills and the business need.
- Build a long-term relationship.

## VA for Vets Resources

As you plan to onboard the new hire, explore the online resources available at the *VA for Vets* website ([VAforVets.VA.gov](https://VAforVets.VA.gov)) for you and the Veteran or service member.

### Veterans As Mentors Program

*VA for Vets* established a [Veterans As Mentors](#) (VAMs) program to help newly hired Veterans and Military Service Members transition from the military to the federal civilian workplace. The mentor provides cultural mentoring and transition assistance to the new hire. The mentoring relationship may last up to six months.

## New Hire's First Day

As you know, the goal of the first day is to ensure that the new hire feels welcome—that he or she forms a good first impression, is comfortable and feels engaged. Because the first day is filled with orientation activities, and the onsite sponsor is the main POC, you may not have much contact with the new hire.

Inform the new hire and onsite sponsor of your availability for lunch and when and where you will check in with him or her at the end of the first day. Schedule the time and location for the first meeting.

## New Hire's First Week

New hires are eager when starting a new job. They are motivated to learn, to experience, to contribute and to find out what new challenges lay ahead. Capitalize on this excitement by introducing initial work assignments during the first week.

Find out what motivates the new hire to succeed. He or she is most open to new ways of doing things at this stage. Take advantage of this moment by teaching him or her how to best complete assigned tasks.

### Onboarding Check-In Meetings

Effective onboarding is about keeping in touch with the new employee. Make it easy for the new hire to tell you what is on his or her mind and how they are doing. Create a time and private place to meet regularly.

Weekly, biweekly and 90-day check-in meetings are recommended. Make the meeting formal by scheduling a time and by providing an agenda. Use the Check-in Meeting template and the suggested questions to help you plan each meeting.

Facilitate a 30-minute weekly check-in meeting within the first month, a biweekly check-in meeting within the second month and a one-hour meeting at the end of 90 days.

By scheduling frequent check-in meetings, you will build trust with and instill confidence in your new employee. During these meetings, praise progress and clarify expectations.



## First Month

New hires want to know how to succeed by demonstrating the behavior that the organization needs to meet its goals. He or she is looking for cues from you. These cues can lead to job satisfaction and stronger performance as the new hire gains stability and grows in the position.

At the start of a new task, the new hire needs clear direction and support. An appropriate level of direction and support will influence attitude and behavior. Ensure the new hire understands his or her role and expectations and that he or she feels like part of the team.

### Goals and Expectations

Goals for the new hire are established during the first month through formal performance planning.



Schedule a separate [Job Performance Expectation Meeting](#) with the employee to explain the goal-writing process. During the meeting, provide clear guidance to help the employee effectively write performance goals.

Make sure the new hire understands the relationship between his or her job and the success of the organization. Discuss overall job responsibilities, performance goals and expectations with the new employee. Review organizational charts and relevant policies and procedures.

Explain that you will provide ongoing performance improvement feedback in preparation for the six-month performance review check-in meeting.

### VA Websites

Review the [VA Websites](#) template to add any additional web-based resources you want the new employee to use for on-the-job learning.

Discuss the tool with the new employee and provide clear direction on how much time her or she can devote to this method of learning.

Allow the new employee time to explore the onboarding materials. This practice will ultimately help you and the new hire with career planning and development.

## Second and Third Month

At this point, you can see how planning pays off. You have set the tone for a successful onboarding experience. Now use what you have prepared and implement the activities on the checklist.

Review the [Planning for Your Success](#) at VA resource. Schedule a meeting with the new employee and explain the difference between the Performance Plan and the Individual Development Plan (IDP). Make sure the new hire understands how these tools are used in your organization for performance planning and career development. Discuss the performance goal-writing process.

### 90-Day Check-In Meeting

Schedule a one-hour meeting at the end of the first 90 days to provide preliminary performance feedback. Take time to reflect on previous meetings and try to build on your success. Use the suggested questions in the [Check-in Meeting](#) template to structure your agenda.

## Fourth through Sixth Months

Ensure the employee has integrated successfully into the culture, is motivated and performing at a full working level. Continue to build on your success by implementing the activities on the checklist.

Consider discussing career development opportunities during one of the monthly check-in meetings. [MyCareer@VA](#) delivers engaging career development tools to help employees explore and establish a long-term career path at VA. Help coordinate the development of the [IDP](#) with the new employee.

Make sure the new hire is familiar with any annual training or certification requirements for his or her VA position.



### Six-Month Check-In Meeting

Use the suggested questions in the [Check-in Meeting](#) template to plan your six-month meeting. Provide more direct feedback on performance elements and standards. Set clear expectations for the coming months. Consider discussing the overall experience and whether the new hire's impressions match his or her expectations.

## Summary

The VA Veterans Onboarding Program ensures new employees are quickly on their way to establishing productive and satisfying VA careers. You will make a difference in the first six months and shape another meaningful VA career.

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

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

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

