



Student Guide: Onboarding Remotely During COVID-19

The public service is committed to hiring students during these exceptional times created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it has had to re-think how work gets done in a remote context, your energy, fresh perspective, new ways of solving problems, and savvy in the use of technology is refreshing and rejuvenates the workforce.

If this is your first time working for the public service as a student, welcome aboard! The onboarding process you are about to experience may differ from your other work experiences in two ways. First, working with any level of government comes with some new processes and procedures. Second, you may be experiencing the onboarding process as a remote worker, and in some cases, a combination of remote and on-site worker.

If you are a returning student, welcome back. You will notice that your onboarding experience will be different than in past years. Although you may not be greeted in a physical workplace, given a tour of the office, and taken to your workspace, you are joining a virtual workforce that presents opportunities to get work done in new ways.

Why is onboarding important during COVID-19?

This is an opportunity to connect with your teammates, employees outside of your team, develop relationships, understand the work of the team, and get to know your department and the government of Canada, all within a virtual context. It is an exciting time to work with new technologies and showcase your talents. Set yourself up for success by keeping an open mind, learning from the people around you, and contributing your ideas. You can make a difference!

This guide is designed to provide you with a positive remote work experience, to support your meaningful work and help you explore future career paths within the public service.

Have a Voice

Your questions, views and ideas matter, and the more you become engaged in the process, the more you will learn about your job, the workplace and how you fit in.

1. Connect with your Manager and Team:

At the beginning of your work term, discuss with your manager the way that you will stay connected to each other, based on whatever is most comfortable for

both of you. Consider exploring new communication methods and tools beyond email and telephone to add variety to your communication. Do the same with your team members. Remain flexible throughout your term – the platforms and tools may change during your placement depending on network access, tools available, etc. Feel comfortable talking with your manager about what tools work for you, how often you'd prefer to connect with your manager and in what way (i.e. videoconference, phone call, text, etc.). Don't forget, you may already be an expert in this area.

2. Ask Questions:

Don't hesitate to ask your manager, teammates, and new colleagues any questions you might have about the workplace, working in the federal public service, or anything else that's on your mind. Remember that every person in your office was once a new employee and they'll be happy to help!

3. Take Care of Yourself:

There is no one right way to manage your mental health while working from home during a pandemic. The public service has many resources to help employees deal with stress. [The Centre of Expertise on Mental Health in the Workplace](#) has resources, tools and services to help employees maintain their mental health. If you are experiencing personal difficulties during your work placement, speak with your manager. They are there to listen and help you find the right supports.

4. Write it Down:

Ask your manager to confirm tasks and decisions in writing and you do the same. Choose a single location to store and manage these tasks. This makes sure that work is clear, you understand what is expected of you, and you have a guide for measuring your progress. When a lot of information is exchanged with you in a conversation, it could be overwhelming, especially when starting a new project. Writing it down will help you stay organized and help document your accomplishments.

5. Ask for Support:

Working remotely comes with its own set of challenges especially when juggling between school, family, friends and work. Let your manager know your circumstances and what assistance you may require at this time to succeed. If you are taking university courses while working, you may find it challenging to balance both, especially during exam time. Talk to your manager about your situation and what flexibilities would be helpful for you to be productive.

6. Invite Feedback:

Ask your manager for preliminary feedback on your performance and take time to clear up any misunderstandings or confusion. This will help you stay on track.

Seek Opportunities

Gaining work experience in the public service goes beyond physical tasks and projects. It is about creating and maintaining connections that will keep you engaged and motivated to work. By expanding your network and building relationships, you will begin to feel part of the workplace, even if it is done remotely.

1. Get Connected:

Get involved in young professional groups or other employee networks that are open to students. This is a good way to virtually meet new people across the public service who may share similar interests. It also provides professional development and networking opportunities and is a forum for young people to share views with leaders on issues that matter to them. Ask your manager about the student networks within your department or region.

Start with the [Federal Youth Network](#) (FYN), a national network for young and new public servants across the public service of Canada. The [Federal Youth Network's GCwiki page](#) provides links to other networks and information about activities, the FYN Virtual Learning Series, and events including workshops and webinars where speakers share their experiences and take questions from participants.

2. Register on GCcollab:

[GCcollab](#) is a collaboration platform for public servants to connect with one another as well as the general public by invitation, based on common interests and projects. Join groups and explore content that interests you. These resources are helpful to conduct research, collaborate with others, and seek new opportunities within the public service.

3. Register on GCconnex and Career Marketplace:

Both GCconnex and Career Marketplace are tools open to government employees. [GCconnex](#) provides opportunities to exchange ideas with other public servants and join interest groups, while [Career Marketplace](#) matches employees to at-level job opportunities such as casual work opportunities and micro-missions.

The "[How to Build a Great GCconnex and GCcollab Profile](#)" video tutorial on YouTube will walk you through the steps to create a user profile.

The [GCTools Tip Sheets](#) on GCpedia will help you make better use of these tools in your everyday work practices.

Reach Your Potential

There is a wealth of information and resources for students and new employees and it is growing all the time. Take the time to explore these early on as this will give you a good head start in understanding how the public service works and how to navigate it in a virtual environment.

1. Learn About Canada's Youth Policy:

The government's first ever [Youth Policy](#) reflects the values and priorities of young Canadians and the issues that are important to them. You can also find additional tools and information about youth on the [Youth shaping Canada](#) and [Young Canadians](#) websites.

2. Get to Know Your Department:

Explore your department or agency's website and understand its mission, mandate, and values. Learn the management structure and the names of important leaders within your organization. Ask for commonly used acronyms that are exclusive to your workplace – it will be useful to learn these as quickly as possible!

You are not on your own here – your department may have already assembled a welcome package for you and your manager may provide you with more useful resources during your first few weeks.

3. Learn at Every Opportunity:

The [Canada School of Public Service](#) offers a suite of learning products to support all public servants, including students. The [Learning path for students](#) provides students with resources and learning opportunities to gain basic knowledge of working in the public service in both a virtual and non-virtual environment.

4. Get the Right Technology:

Ask your manager to provide you with access to the digital tools that you both will use to connect with one another and the team. This may include dial-in instructions to participate in departmental teleconferences. You may also be asked to download teleconference applications on your personal devices that

may or may not be accessible through the government-wide network. A popular tool is Microsoft Teams.

5. Diverse, Inclusive and Accessible:

You are in the best position to let your manager know what type of accommodations you require to overcome barriers while working at home. Let your manager know well in advance of your start date what resources you will need to be successful.

The Accessibility, Accommodation and Adaptive Computer Technology (AAACT) Program supports employees who require accommodations in the workplace due to disabilities or injuries. It also provides this service to employees who are working remotely. Work with your manager well in advance of your start date to find out how the program can help accommodate your needs.

Explore the resources and services available through the Employment Opportunity for Students with Disabilities and the Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity programs. You will find resources and support for managers and students to help make your experience memorable and meaningful.

6. Find a Mentor – Be a Mentor:

If you're interested, ask your manager to help you find a mentor that could answer questions about your career and professional development. Your department may even have a mentorship network. Share your professional goals, aspirations, and areas you'd like to improve.

Consider reverse mentoring. Perhaps there is a manager out there who is interested in learning more from your perspective, your experience and your skills.

Onboarding Stages: Student Checklist

Pre-Arrival:

This is an opportunity for you to prepare for your upcoming work experience and make an initial impression on your manager.

- Sign the letter of offer and any required forms and return them to your manager.
- Make sure that you are set up with the appropriate information technology equipment that you will need to work remotely which may include using your own devices, government equipment, or a combination of both.

- Let your manager know if you require any special equipment or workplace accommodations. Accommodations can include work schedule adjustments, and specialized workplace equipment (hardware or software).

First day and week:

The first day and week mark the beginning of a new work experience. If this is your first job in the government, you may feel nervous, especially working in a remote environment. If you are a returning student, you may already know what to expect.

- Confirm all your documents are complete, that your technology works, and your accommodation needs have been addressed.
- Meet your manager and co-workers virtually. This can be done in several ways (e.g., a pre-scheduled video call, email, or telephone).
- Review orientation information and ask for key contact information such as telephone numbers, e-mails and websites that you can access in the coming weeks for support (e.g., human resources, information technology, pay system, etc.).
- Review your work objectives, upcoming assignment or project and ask your manager what is expected of you.
- Ask about a Virtual Buddy and set up a meeting to have an initial conversation.
- Set up your profile on [GCconnex](#) and [GCcollab](#).
- Register on [GCcampus](#) to access public service-wide on-line courses and videos.
- Register for [myKEY](#) in order to access pay information.

First month:

After the first month, you will likely feel more settled in your new job. You might still be adjusting to a new routine and getting to know people and the culture of the organization.

- Make sure you have been paid and let your manager know if you are experiencing any delays.
- Check in regularly with your manager for guidance, feedback on your work, and anything else that is on your mind.
- Register for and complete any training required to do your job.
- Join formal and informal networks in your department and/or the public service. Your co-workers can point you in the right direction.
- Ask your manager to help you find a virtual mentor.
- Ask your manager or teammates if you can attend meetings with them as this will give you exposure to the files they are working on.

End of work term:

- Review your work with your manager and wrap up all your deliverables.
- Ask for concrete and constructive feedback about your performance and learning.

- Provide feedback to your manager about your experience and learning.
- Plan to return equipment and resources.
- Thank the people who have supported you.
- Congratulate yourself on your successes.
- Reflect on what you have learned and update your learning plan and career goals.

Resources for Students:

Here are a few resources to assist you in maximizing your student onboarding experience:

- [Wellness, inclusion and diversity in the public service](#)
- [Accessibility in the public service](#)
- [About your public service pay](#)