

Mentoring Program Checklist Series

Onboarding and Induction

How does your organisation minimise barriers during the onboarding and induction process?

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Funding for the Canberra Blind Society Mentoring Program is provided by Department of Social Services as part of the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Program.

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Background

The first day in a new job is daunting for every new employee. This checklist is designed to confirm the policies you may already have in place with additional areas to consider when welcoming a new employee who is blind or vision impaired. A majority of vision impaired employees are very independent and with the right orientation do not need a great deal of assistance. There are other employees, both with vision impairment and also those with no shared disabilities, who might need a bit more support in the early stages of their new job. Being open and asking all your new employees how they are feeling and what support they might need will assist everyone in the first few weeks of a new job.

A well-designed onboarding and induction process is more than simply setting up IT needs and finalising HR paperwork. Preparation is key and meeting the needs of individual new employees reduces the challenges from day one.

General Principles

Applying the on-boarding policies you follow for all employees to a new employee who is vision impaired will work well alongside any additional actions required or requested. These could be outlined in your Diversity and Inclusion and/or Disability Policies and also by your communications with your new employee. You should always ask the employee to tell you their needs and adjust your on-boarding processes where appropriate.

Communication

- Communication, managed well, limits confusion.
- Too much or too little information presents different challenges.
- Please do not go silent. Employees understand there may be delays to finalising details, start dates or other areas for a multitude of reasons. Delays are expected but lack of information is frustrating.
- Once the appointment is confirmed, ask the employee about their communication preferences and work together to ensure good communication.

Confirming contract – be proactive

- Send contract and additional hiring paperwork to the new employee.
- After sending the contract, book in a phone call to check the documents are accessible, go through details and answer any questions.
- For some employment contracts there is a whole range of extra information and documents required to confirm the job. For example: identification documents, clearance requirements, health checks, personal contacts, bank details etc. For many organisations all this information is required to be uploaded to databases

and websites. If these digital platforms are not fully accessible, which unfortunately is common, the new employee could struggle. To avoid this barrier, we suggest setting up an appointment, in person or over the phone, to go through all the paperwork requirements and work together to get all this information into the system in an efficient and supportive way.

Confirming start date

Following are key areas to remember before confirming the start date. Workplace Adjustment requirements can take time. Being honest about the timing and the process through regular communication with all stakeholders is helpful to everyone involved.

- Check organisation calendar of events. Does the new employee's first day clash with an existing event? If there is a big workplace event scheduled decide if that is a good start date or perhaps a challenging date? While in theory joining on a day when everyone is 'in the office' might seem a good idea, for many this could be an overwhelming or negative experience. Your onboarding team might be busy with other duties and not be able to help the new employee with first day questions and needs.
- Pick a date that works for both the new employee and the induction team alongside when equipment is ready to be set up and used.
- Once the date is set work backwards to ensure everything is in place for the best possible day one.

Getting Ready for Day One

Equipment Requirements – for example IT and/or other equipment

- What is required to do the job?
- What does the organisation provide and what workplace adjustments for equipment need to be acquired? (<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/>)
- How long will equipment take to arrive after approval and ordering is complete?
 - Remember to check that equipment works with the software. For example, JAWS and ZOOMTEXT take up quite of lot of memory space on a laptop. Therefore, equipment for employees with a vision impairment may need more memory space.
- How long will equipment take to set up?
- What training is required? Check trainer availability.

Orientation needs for getting to and from work

- NDIS funding covers a range of areas including training to get a new employee to and from their new workplace. <https://ourguidelines.ndis.gov.au/how-ndis->

[supports-work-menu/mainstream-and-community-supports/who-responsible-supports-you-need/employment](https://www.visionaustralia.org/services/find-services/adults/mobility/)

- Vision Australia offer mobility training
<https://www.visionaustralia.org/services/find-services/adults/mobility/>
- Guide Dogs NSW/ACT offer mobility training
<https://nsw.guidedogs.com.au/services/orientation-mobility/>
- Job Access funding covers training within the workplace.
(<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/>)
 - Employment Assistance Fund – EAF -
<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employment-assistance-fund-eaf>
 - Workplace Adjustments Information with a workplace focus -
<https://www.afdo.org.au/what-are-reasonable-adjustments/>
- Another orientation resource is called **Bindi Maps** - a mobile app that locates users precisely in indoor spaces. It uses a simple, natural language audio system to describe where users are and what's around them, and the best way to get to their chosen destination. Your organisation might like to investigate an investment in using Bindi Maps technology in your workplaces.
<https://bindimaps.com/>

Your new employee with a vision impairment, depending on their condition will have their own supports for day-to-day life. Early stages of reduced vision might mean the support is needed for computer work only and general mobility is managed well. There are individuals who use a cane to assist with their mobility and others who work with their guide/assistance dog to assist their mobility.

Guide/Assistance Dog Information

(Following information provided by <https://www.pesau.net.au/employer-tips-for-supporting-staff-with-assistance-dogs/>)

Accommodating assistance dogs in the workplace includes:

1. Discuss What To Expect

It is important you have an accurate understanding of guide/assistance dogs and what is required of the employee and the animal. Do your own research and more importantly have a discussion with your new employee, you will probably learn more this way.

2. Educate All Your Employees

It is important other employees understand the boundaries and expectations of a guide/assistance dog. In many cases, it may not be appropriate to pat the dog while it's working. This could be done via a training session, and ongoing written reminders can be beneficial for staff and visitors to your workplace.

3. Minimise Distractions

Even though we know it is a guide/assistance dog there are times when people could be distracted. In a workplace where the employee works in a common area or shared space, do your best to provide a workspace that minimises the distractions.

4. Create An Animal-friendly environment where possible

Providing good access to the environment, based on different requirements, need to be discussed and negotiated upon employment.

5. Make a contract

It is important that the workplace accommodation should be included in the employee's contract. This includes how to plan toilet and other breaks required by the guide/assistance dog. This will help prevent any confusion or legal issues.

Regulations Around Assistance Dogs In The Workplace

According to the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 Section 9 the legal definition of an guide/assistance animal as a dog or other animal that:

- is accredited under a State or Territory law to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effects of disability; or
- is accredited by an animal training organisation prescribed in the regulations; or
- is trained to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability and meets standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.

Often mistaken for pets, guide/assistance dogs can provide a variety of assistance with essential daily functions for those with a disability. The most commonly recognised being for a person who is blind or has a vision impairment. However, the recognition and application of their support in many other areas is growing in use.

Some other areas they can provide trained support include:

- people who are Deaf or hearing impaired;
- for people who require physical support for mobility or other functional tasks;
- people who experience episodic and serious medical crisis (e.g. epilepsy, changes in blood pressure or blood sugar);
- and people who experience psychiatric disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety, hallucinations, panic attacks or suicidal ideation.

Links to information about Guide/Assistance dog links:

- <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/projects/assistance-animals-and-disability-discrimination-act-1992-cth>
- <https://www.pesau.net.au/employer-tips-for-supporting-staff-with-assistance-dogs/>
- <https://ourguidelines.ndis.gov.au/supports-you-can-access-menu/equipment-and-technology/assistance-animals-including-dog-guides>

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Information for Day One start

Send an informative welcome email and proposed plan for the first couple of weeks including onboarding, induction and training requirements.

If there are delays in equipment set up, offer the new employee opportunity to read relevant information while waiting for revised start date or confirm they can wait till their start date to read information. This information could include:

- Employee handbook – Make sure new employee can access this document. Remember that sometimes accessibility notifications by different software does not always mean accessible. Never assume accessibility. Always double check with the receiver that the document is accessible to them and offer assistance, if needed, to make it accessible. This usually doesn't take too much extra time.
- Inform them of company policies – provide an accessible summary and then more details once they commence work.

Day One

Work area set up

In discussions with the new employee ask if they have a preferred location for work area and work together to find the most convenient location based on need and availability.

There are workplaces that have moved to or are moving to a workplace designed for activity-based working (ABW). Under activity-based working arrangements, employees will not have a designated workstation/desk. If possible, consider having a set work area for at least the first few weeks while the new employee with a vision impairment becomes accustomed to their new workplace.

IT Set up

Assist new Employee to set up best location for computer hardware at workspace:

- Test computer hardware works;
- Set up and test workplace accounts and logins; and
- Confirm and discuss computer training schedule.

Organise an office/workplace tour

Talk to your new Employee about priorities for the office/workplace tour on day one. For example, lifts, kitchen, and toilets.

- Showing everything and meeting everyone on the first day is not always the best approach. First days on the job are daunting for everyone. New people, new workplace and new tasks. For some people with vision impairment spacing out the orientation over a few days might work better.

- It might be helpful to divide office/workplace into shorter tours each day of the first week. Again, discuss with new employee to confirm if doing a complete tour on day works well or whether a staggered approach over a couple of days better meets their needs.
- Discuss how much or how little information and assistance is needed during the tour. Sharing too much detail, while well intentioned, may not be necessary.

Week One

Support in new role

- Assign a member of the work team as a Mentor/Peer Support/Buddy to your new employee to help with 'how, what, where, why and who' questions in the early days. If the Mentor/Peer Support/Buddy has not worked with someone with a vision impairment offer support and training prior to the new employee's start date.
- Allow time and space for new team members to build productive supervisor/manager and staff relationships.
- Provide contact details for a Human Resource/People Team member, who knows the new employee's background, to provide ongoing Human Resources, Diversity & Inclusion and workplace adjustment assistance when required.

Getting down to business

- Discuss job expectations for first few weeks and upcoming role requirements.
- Introduce information about company culture and how the work team operates.
- Discuss the induction training requirements and ongoing professional development process. Build in extra time to complete if needed.
- Put together a schedule or time plan for the first month and review periodically to check progress and if the support provided is working well.

End of Week One

- Schedule time for onboarding feedback – what has been achieved, what still needs to be done, what are the barriers and what is the best way to begin Week Two.

First Month Check-in

- Schedule time for ongoing onboarding feedback – what has been achieved, what still needs to be done, what are the barriers and discuss together what is the best way for the new employee to be as productive as possible in their new role.