Onboarding
at the City of North St. Paul

March 2, 3014

Team 5
(C. Casey, M. Gondorchin, J. Kim, K. Meschler)

Employee Development – HRIR 8034
North St. Paul – Resilient Communities Project

This project was supported by the Resilient Communities Project (RCP), a program at the University of Minnesota that convenes the wide-ranging expertise of U of M faculty and students to address strategic local projects that advance community resilience and sustainability. RCP is a program of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) and the Institute on the Environment.

This publication may be available in alternate formats upon request.

Resilient Communities Project
University of Minnesota
330 HHHSPA
301—19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
Phone: (612) 625-7501
E-mail: rcp@umn.edu
Web site: http://www.rcp.umn.edu

A New Standard: Proposal to Create, Implement, and Evaluate a Formal Onboarding Program for the City of North Saint Paul

---

The Importance of Onboarding at North Saint Paul, Summarized

Onboarding is the process of welcoming and integrating a new employee into an organization and its culture. This includes not only an introduction to the tasks they will be doing, but also how work is conducted in the setting of a certain organization. Onboarding is an important component to an employee's future performance and tenure with an organization. According to Michael Watkins, the first 90 days of an employee's experience at a company can be the difference between an employee who stays for a decade and one who is gone before the year is out. The process of onboarding helps new employee's get off to a good start by understanding their new job, with whom to work, and the culture within the team and company (Doepner-Hove, 2014).

A Brief Overview of NSP's situation

Currently, the city of North Saint Paul (NSP) does not have a formal or informal onboarding program. The city does not hire many employees yearly, and due to the infrequency of hiring, they have not needed to create an onboarding structure. However, when we visited the NSP in January employees explained that there is a lack of role clarity in their jobs and wished they were properly trained. Additionally, teams rarely socialize during or after work. They do not have lunches or happy hours.

Implications of Onboarding at NSP

From a high level perspective, there are a few factors and implications that NSP should consider when creating an onboarding program. Some will be addressed in further detail later in this paper, but it is paramount to address them initially. First, as mentioned previously, the city does not hire many people at once. This gives them flexibility with their onboarding program, and they can personalize the training to fit the needs of the new employee.

Also, not every department may have the same onboarding needs. The police department may have different onboarding requirements from public works, and public works may have different needs from administration. It might be best to give the city a general onboarding list that can be tailored to the respective departments.

Challenges, Risks, and Mitigation

We also think that the city employees may not understand the importance of onboarding and why it is needed. Each department head should be trained on onboarding as a standard procedure and an introduction to the work culture while showing the importance of onboarding

to increased productivity and retention. Another area of improvement is the process of welcoming the employee to the city and current employees. There is currently no formal welcome for new employees. This can be harmful because current employees are not expecting new hires and may not properly introduce themselves.

Also noteworthy is union involvement. The three unions have an established relationship with the city employees, and it is best for everyone if they are introduced to the new employees early in the process. Finally, in order to create union buy-in and allow for a smoother transition with the new onboarding program, we suggest union representatives be part of the supervisor training, in so far as to ensure the understanding of the importance of adopting this new program.

Onboarding Recommendations to Implement at NSP

But First, a Caveat and Fair Warning

After considering the implications of the current situation at NSP and our learnings from our class discussion, we have created general, standard onboarding recommendations. Many of the components in our recommendations should be implemented across all departments, but some may not be applicable or easily applied to every unit. Also, some departments may need to add their own elements to onboarding.

It is also worth noting that it will take a collective effort from the entire staff to make the onboarding program successful. This means receiving support from a new employee's supervisor and coworkers is principal to making sure the suggestions above are effective. As we mentioned earlier, training is necessary to help the collective team at NSP understand how to do its part integrating new employees. Supervisors especially need to be familiar with each component of the onboarding program because they are responsible for their new employee acclimating to the workplace. Ultimately, training supervisors on the new onboarding program will also enable proper tracking throughout the new hire's progress.

Planning for the Entire Onboarding Program

Our suggestions include an introduction to the organization and its history, traditions, and culture. In addition, our ideas create a favorable impression of the organization and account for adjustment to it. Information about the job, performance expectations, organizational and departmental policies and rules, and benefits information are also encompassed. In fact, even before the employee begins working, we have developed a list of activities that the city could implement to help the employee feel a part of the broader organization.

Recommendations Concerning Offerings to Current Staff

Currently, there are not many socialization practices at NSP. In addition to new employee's socialization practices, there needs to be activities after the onboarding program to maintain employee morale and connectedness with the organization. During our visit to NSP, staff mentioned past activity such as "Fun Fridays." These are great practices within the organization and help with departmental relationships and employee interaction. We recommend bringing them back.

In addition, we also recommend having simple activities such as celebrating employee's birthdays at the end of every month and/or having consistent monthly meetings with employees. After implementation of a socialization activity, it is important to follow through and conduct them with consistency. For example, trivia questions can be sent out to all departments each month with the winning department receiving points. After six months, the department that received the most points can receive a luncheon or a mini trophy. A simple activity such as this can improve teamwork and allow opportunities to build 'smart' camaraderie (Smith, 2013). If the same employees from large teams are solving the trivia, it may be more useful to have employees pick teams of four to increase participation and prevent free riders. Also, having incentives, such as being spotlighted in a monthly will increase participation.

Recommendation for the City Newsletter

Having hired a new employee, welcoming them is a critical moment for both NSP and the new employee. As part of an initiation process, NSP should highlight each newly hired employee via a citywide newsletter. This announcement will provide awareness to every department and give team members the opportunity to learn more about the new employee. The newsletter can include a picture of the new employee, formal or informal, and highlight basic information such as where they previously worked, their past experiences, and favorite hobbies and foods. In addition, the supervisor should include a brief welcome note for the new employee sent to them before their start date (Martin, 2014). It is notable that it is best to request a picture from the employee rather than selecting one after searching on Facebook or LinkedIn.

Recommendations for Resources

For each employee, we suggest supervisors create a new employee binder to include all of the resources they will need to be successful as they start the new position. Included in this binder should be: the job description, performance review forms, an NSP acronym cheat sheet, reference sheet for contact information for NSP employees and important stakeholders, the organizational chart, a brief description about the value they will bring to NSP, the employee

handbook and benefits information, and finally a quick checklist of to-dos will be provided (Appendix I**).** This sheet can outline all the materials new employees need to receive, with whom to meet, and what documents need to be completed within certain timeframes in order to properly finalize their onboarding.

Recommendations for Department Heads

Even though each department will not have the exact same onboarding program, all department heads should take part in the new employee onboarding program. There is a possibility that some may need to tailor their program and add department specific steps. Examples of this would include policies specific to the NSP Police or Fire Departments, both of which could utilize our onboarding tool shown on page 11 (Appendix II).

Recommendations to Manage Onboarding Program Owners

Every employee will go through the onboarding program of completing documents, learning NSP's culture and policies, touring the facilities, and more. However, with no formalized Human Resources Department, there will need to be positions assigned for each step of the Onboarding Checklist (Appendix I). These individuals are known as owners. In addition to the city manager, supervisors and current employees can be owners to specific parts of the onboarding program. For example, a current employee should take ownership of making sure the new employee is given an employee handbook, welcome folder, copy of the newsletter, and any other relevant material. Once this step is complete, the current employee can sign off and allow the new employee to move forward in the Onboarding Checklist.

It may be difficult to determine participants to help facilitate this program, but it is important to include employees in the process to help create buy in and follow through. The city manager can assign an employee to collect evaluations and feedback from new and current employees for future improvement of this part of the program.

Implementing a Buddy Program

Seeing as NSP does not have a HR department, implementing a mentoring program may not currently be feasible. Therefore, we recommend assigning a Buddy to each new employee. A Buddy is similar to a mentor, but the process is more informal. The Buddy will be a current employee who assists with learning the new environment, culture, and jargon as well as answering general questions. The Buddy will also provide introductions to employees around the department.

There have been suggestions that "Buddy" may not be the best term to use for this informal mentor, so we would suggest renaming this position to something that is meaningful to your culture and organization. Also, this position will be an ambassador of NSP's culture and

may be a coach to the new employee, we suggest all potential Buddies go through a training session to learn more about how to coach and translate the intended culture to the new employee. The Buddy position is a position that will need commitment and consistency throughout all new employees. Over time, we highly recommend branching out the Buddy system into a formal Mentorship Program when possible.

Evaluating the Onboarding Program to Ensure Improvement

Along with creating a formal onboarding program, it is equally important to evaluate the onboarding program. Any of the recommendations that are implemented ultimately need to be measured for effectiveness in order to ensure the program is doing what was intended and to continuously improve the program. In fact, feedback from new hires can shed light on what is working and what they thought was helpful, but also what was missed. It should not be a surprise that properly utilizing it would bring about improvements quickly.

The easiest manner of collecting feedback is in the form of a simple questionnaire. We have included an example of an onboarding evaluation survey in Appendix IV, which is used and was created by the University of North Carolina-Charlotte (2014). We suggest a form similar to this survey be filled out at the end of the onboarding program, which may be as far out as six months. The responses can essentially be used to improve onboarding procedures while closing any gaps in the employee's individual development.

Proper Implementation and Risk Mitigation

The Case for Implementation

While there are a lot of steps and elements within our recommendation, we feel that it is with good cause and will provide true value for NSP. Obviously, all of the steps will not all occur on the same day and should be spread across many months. A gradual rollout is the most practical approach for success. Granted, since there are many components that will be spaced over a long period of time, ensuring follow-through may be difficult. Therefore, we included tracking sheets for all of the steps (Appendix I and II). The tracker will have a space to mark completion, the task with a brief description, a date by which they need to complete the task, and who is the contact or owner of that task. We also added another option to format the checklist. The design of this checklist and highlighted steps were also created by the University of North Carolina-Charlotte (2014), but we have added a list of our suggestions for the Onboarding Program and formatted the text at the beginning of the checklist to be specific to NSP. This option can be found in Appendix III.

At each check-in time with the supervisor, they should look over the tracker and assess what has been completed and what is left to ensure everything gets done. For the employee, this can be given to them in their orientation binders. You can see examples of these trackers in the Appendix II. If you prefer to track the information in a digital format, we suggest excel for the sorting capabilities.

Pitfalls and Prevention

As we have stated, there are challenges and risks. The most likely pitfall is that department heads may not want to implement this program. Since they are in charge, they could simply do that. However, guidance from the city manager coupled with proper training should mitigate this possibility. Another pitfall we have not yet mentioned is that it may be difficult to introduce the new employee to all of the different departments since they are in different buildings. It will be up to the supervisor to decide whether or not the new hire needs to meet everyone and how they should meet. Lastly, current employees may not see the value of the program, so having proper sponsorship from leadership, including unions and department heads, will truly help prove the worth of the onboarding program.

A Final thought and Offer

We understand that there is a great deal of work as we introduce change, and potential difficulties to implementing our recommendations. However, we stress the importance of following through with the creation of the onboarding program as it will improve the overall experience for everyone involved. Our team wants to note that we are always willing to expand on this information and be a resource if there are any questions.

References

Doepner-Hove, S. (2014). HRIR 8034 Lecture. 19 Feb. 2014.

Martin, A. (n.d). How to Announce a New Employee in a Newsletter. Chron. Retrieved February 25, 2014 from <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/announce-new-employee-newsletter-22241.html>.

Smith, J. (2013, September 24). How Much Coworker Socializing Is Good For Your Career?. Forbes. Retrieved February 27, 2014 from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2013/09/24/how-much-coworker-socializing-is-good-for-your-career/>.

UNCC. (2014). New Employee Onboarding Six Month Evaluation. Retrieved February 26, 2014, from https://hr.uncc.edu/sites/hr.uncc.edu/files/media/forms/6MEvaluation.pdf.

UNCC. (2014). Supervisor/Mentor Checklist for New Employee Onbaroding. Retrieved February 26, 2014, from http://hr.uncc.edu/sites/hr.uncc.edu/files/media/forms/SupervisorMentorChecklist.pdf

Appendices

Appendix I

NSP Employee Onboarding Checklist Example

Completed	Task	Owner/Contact	Key
	Complete employment paper work	Admin Asst.	Complete First Day
	Get tour and introductions	Supervisor	Complete First Week
	Check sign in information	Supervisor	Complete First Month
	Go through orientation binder	Supervisor	Complete by 6th Month
	Go through job description	Supervisor	
	NSP history	Supervisor	
	NSP Policies*	Buddy	
	Departmental Policies*	New employee	
	Team lunch	Supervisor	
	Create goals with supervisor	supervisor	
	Cross departmental informational interviews**	each interviewee	

* These may want to be broken out by each policy
** These may want to be a line for each interview

NSP Administrative Checklist Example

Completed	Task	Owner/Contact	Key
	Create Email Account	Supervisor	Complete Prior to Start
	Enter into Payroll/ Human Resource System	Admin Asst.	Complete First Day
	Enter W4	Admin Asst.	Complete First Month
	Enter Direct Deposit	Admin Asst.	
	Enter I9 information	Admin Asst.	
	Ensure payroll is calculated correctly	Supervisor/ Admin Asst.	

Appendix II

NSP Supervisor Onboarding Checklist Example

Completed	Task	Key
	Clean Desk	Complete Prior to Arrival
	Send Welcome Letter	Complete First Day
	Put new employee bio in the newsletter	Complete First Week
	Team meeting	Complete First Month
	Departmental tour and introductions	Complete by 6th Month
	Set out welcome cookies and sign on desk	On Going
	Go over job description with EE	
	Go through orientation binder	
	check in on progress	
	Work with employee to set goals	
	Create orientation binder	

Appendix III

UNCC's Design for the Supervisor Checklist

Supervisor/Mentor Checklist for New Employee Onboarding

Purpose: This checklist will guide the Supervisor in effectively bringing a new employee on-board at the City of North St. Paul. It can be used to integrate an existing employee who transfers into the work group as well. This checklist will walk you through the steps to successfully orient your new employee. *It is meant to guide, rather than restrict.* Not all items may be applicable to your area or to a transferred employee.

Note: As a Supervisor, you may choose to assign some tasks to a Mentor/Buddy – *a co-worker with a good performance standing and a positive point of view*. However, **where the Mentor's column is shaded, we highly recommend the supervisor maintain responsibility for the completion of these tasks.**

Instructions: Review the relevant items and plan time for the items on your schedule. Record the completion date for each item. **When finished, place a copy in the employee's folder.**

Employee Name:	Title:	Hire Date:
Department:	Supervisor:	Mentor:

Pre-Arrival	Date Completed	
	Supervisor	Buddy/Mentor
• Send welcome letter.		////////
• Call the new employee a few days before arrival to welcome and to briefly inform of arrival time, location, first day agenda, parking, dress code, etc. **If new employees: Remind to bring two forms of ID on the first day and to bring their license plate number.**		////////
• Create email account for new employee.		////////
• Put new employee in Newsletter.		////////
• Enter into Payroll/Human Resources System.		////////
• Prepare the new employee's workstation (supplies, phone, computer & printer connectivity, paper, pen and writing pad items).		////////
• Meet with the staff of the new team member; to discuss the new employee and their role and answer any questions the team may have.		////////

	Supervisor	Mentor/Buddy
• Appoint an experienced, star employee to act as a Mentor/Buddy and discuss the purpose of the role.		
• Review the position Competency Profile and prepare a Work Plan form.		
• Develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP). Contact Jason/Department Manager for training and guidance in developing a training plan.		
• Identify training resources and corresponding personnel to discuss training registration and training timeframes.		
• Create Orientation Binder for the new employee		
• Plan small work task for employee to perform on the first day.		
• Arrange team lunch with new employee on the first day.		

First Day Arrival	Date Completed	
	Supervisor	Mentor/Buddy
• Welcome the employee (if possible, make the welcome eventful, potentially including treats and a sign at their desk and other employees stopping by to welcome the new employee).		
• Take to team lunch		
• Introduce to team members (or direct reports and management team).		
• Introduce to the Mentor/Buddy.		
• Complete required employment paperwork. (e.g. I-9,W4, direct deposit, emergency contacts, etc.)		
• Take building tour (work facilities/ washrooms, break room, copier, gym).		
• Share the job description with the employee.		
• Provide the Orientation Binder		
• Show video or any media about the history of North St. Paul		

First Week	Date Completed	
	Supervisor	Buddy/Mentor
• Take on general tour of all areas of the city		
• Help new employee get registered for necessary training.		
• Clarify unofficial office do's and don'ts		
• Share any other necessary and advantageous information.		

First Month	Date Completed	
	Supervisor	Buddy/Mentor

	Supervisor	Buddy/Mentor
• Schedule monthly coaching sessions during the six month onboarding process. Create goals working with the supervisor.		
• Devote time to listen to comments, concerns and observations. And provide clarity to employee's questions.		
• Have employee set up and conduct informational interviews with department managers		
• Discuss working agreements, leadership style & communication preferences.		
• Discuss and complete Environmental Health and Safety required information.		
• Discuss protocol for handling issues/concerns		
• Have a team outing to celebrate the first month		
First 3-6 Months	Date Completed	
	Supervisor	Buddy/Mentor
• Continue to coach for success.		
• Review and modify IDP as needed.		
• Determine probationary status and discuss with employee.		
• Retain a copy of this checklist for personnel file.		
• At six months, have employee complete the onboarding evaluation questionnaire.		

Appendix IV

Example of a New Employee Onboarding Survey created by UNCC

Six Month Evaluation

It has been several months since you began employment with the University. You have been presented with information on the organization's culture, mission, vision, values, policies, procedures and benefits. You've attended new employee orientation and perhaps other employee development. Your feedback on your onboarding experience at the University is important to us. Please complete both pages of this evaluation and return to HR.

Part 1: Please indicate Yes (Y) or No (N) for each statement.

How do you feel about your experience?

_____ I feel welcomed at the University.

_____ I work in a friendly and supportive environment.

_____ I feel engaged and productive in my work.

What do you now know about the organization and your job?

_____I received information about the organization's culture, mission, vision and values.

_____I received information in a timely manner.

_____I know what is expected of me by my supervisor.

_____I know what is expected of me by my coworkers.

_____I know what my performance expectations are.

_____I understand my job responsibilities.

_____I understand the purpose of my job.

_____I understand how my job fits into the mission of the University.

_____I have the supplies, equipment, and support to do my job or know where to find them.

_____I understand the organization's policies on workplace harassment, drugs, alcohol abuse

Part 2: Answer the questions in the space provided. Use the rating scale to provide your overall opinion of how well the organization implemented the new employee onboarding process.

1. What were the most helpful activities or information covered during your first six months?

2. What activities or information do you feel was not helpful or not needed?

3. What suggestions do you have for improvement?

4. What other comments do you have about your onboarding experience?

5. What overall rating would you give your onboarding experience? Please circle.

Poor (1) Fair (2) Good (3) Very Good (4) Excellent (5)

6. Name (Optional) _____

7. Department (Optional) _____

8. Month Hired_____