

Crafting a dynamic onboarding program for Clinical Trials Office employees Kerry Traub, BA, Susan Bolt, MSP, Christine Jerome, MS, Rachael Dampman Weiss, BS, Katherine Senter, MPH, Kristin Herman, MBA

Background

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, high rates of staff turnover continue. Feelings of not being valued and not belonging are top reasons employees choose to leave an employer.

A structured, organized onboarding program can help ameliorate those feelings and **build employee engagement**.

From 2018-2021, the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center (SKCC) Clinical Trials Office (CTO) had no dedicated staff to onboard new employees. Those years coincided with our turnover rate doubling. Experienced engaged staff are indispensable to our CTO's success.

Goals

To create a **structured** and **consistent** training and **onboarding** experience for newly hired SKCC-CTO staff.



Solutions and Methods

A dedicated **Clinical Research Educator** (**CRE**) was hired in June 2021. The new CRE interviewed employees, including directors, managers, and clinical staff, about their onboarding experiences and training needs.

Greater structure and having a "go-to" person to contact for help were **chief concerns**. This feedback informed the new onboarding program.

Outcomes

- Upon offer acceptance, the **CRE** meets with the **hiring** manager to discuss onboarding plans and tailor the education strategy.
- **Constant communication** between the **CRE**, manager, administrative coordinator (for equipment and system) access needs), and even **directors** bolsters an efficient and productive entry.
- Prior to starting, **new employees** receive a **welcome email** from the **CRE** with **instructions** for their first day.
- Much of a new employee's **first week** is spent **with the CRE**, who provides essential information and spends time getting to know them as a person. This helps **new** employees feel welcomed and valued and allows their managers to focus on higher-level content.
- Paper **training materials**, formerly presented in an unwieldy and expensive 4-inch binder, were converted to digital content. The new system involves cloud-based digital storage, allowing these materials to be accessed anywhere.

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Outcomes (cont.)

Interactive digital checklists were created to ensure nothing is overlooked and to provide new employees with a sense of structure, organization, and empowerment as they track their own onboarding.

Detailed orientation schedules are created and shared with new employees, their managers, and selected others, detailing their first weeks.

• The schedule and checklist are stored on a **personalized** private onboarding webpage so that everyone works from common documents.

"I feel like your roles really made a difference."

-recent new-hire to CRE at the end of their first week

"Both [new contract employees] have had raving reviews on their onboarding experience, the team's warm welcome, and are really happy to be on the team."

-recruiting manager for contract agency in email to CRE

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

New employees appreciate the **structure** and **ease** of accessing their onboarding content. A second educator was hired recently to **expand** the current onboarding program, provide more **individualized attention**, and create **new** materials and **continuing education**. We continue to improve our onboarding checklists, **clarifying expectations** for the whole team in the onboarding process.

In collaboration with our CTO Engagement Committee, an onboarding **satisfaction survey** is being developed that will be administered at designated time points to ensure new employees' needs are being met.

Aware of potential information overload during onboarding, we have begun inviting current employees to attend **refresher** sessions and monthly continuing education. We hope to expand the range of topics, work with employees longer and more closely, and collaborate with other staff to create a more **comprehensive** experience.