Northwestern | HUMAN RESOURCES

Onboarding Staff Peer Partner Toolkit

Peer Partners are a critical component of the team that supports a new staff member through a positive onboarding experience. Peer Partners serve as a trusted touchpoint to the new employee to answer questions and add context to the new employee's experiences. This toolkit provides an overview of the Peer Partner role and resources to assist you.

Sections

I. Role and Responsibilities of a Peer Partner

**Note: A Peer Partner does not take the place of a manager. The hiring manager/supervisor is responsible for the employee's overall job performance and development.*

Role

- Offer advice
- Point the new employee toward resources
- Help the new employee acclimate to their new role
- Help them understand their team, school/unit, and University culture
- Answer questions related to their role and to the University

Responsibilities

The responsibilities of a Peer Partner can vary based on the school/unit and the manager who has selected you. Schedule a brief meeting with the manager to understand your role and their expectations. Below are some potential responsibilities you could take on:

- Serve as the point of contact for the new hire or transferring employee for day-to-day questions
- Set a meeting cadence with new hire
- Commit to 5-15-minute weekly check-ins at a minimum for the first month
- Meet formally once a month for at least 30 minutes in-person or virtually

- Familiarize new hire with communication tools such as email distribution lists, Microsoft Team channels, and department social media forums
- Establish a rapport with new employee and communicate openly
- Offer to shadow or accompany employee on initial meetings or phone calls
- Make introductions to other team members and/or key stakeholders
- Help socialize the new employee to Northwestern's culture, processes, and expectations
- Assist new hire or transferring employee with trainings or new systems
- Provide encouragement to new employee
- Be a role model for the new hire

II. Establishing and Maintaining the Relationship

Your role as a Peer Partner is integral to supporting the new employee in their onboarding journey. Below are some tips to help you get started as a Peer Partner and guidance to convey to the new employee.

Peer Partner tips

- Be patient, positive, and supportive
- Establish trust
- Offer encouragement and suggestions from your own experience
- Ensure a line of open communication with the employee
- Do not worry about being perceived as the expert
- We all have a preferred communication style. Talk about each other's preferences, as the new employee may have a distinctive style from yours
- Maintain confidentiality
- Remain open-minded and avoid being judgmental

Guidance to convey to new hire

- Recognize the first three months of a new job can be overwhelming
- Don't be shy about asking questions
- Be patient with yourself (learning takes time) and stay open
- Take notes as role progresses
- Be an active listener and ask for advice and feedback
- Don't be afraid to reach out for support or answers to questions (big or small)

III. Sample Meeting Schedule

Day 1

- Coordinate a time with the manager to introduce yourself in-person or reach out via email/Microsoft Teams to welcome new employee to the team

- Find a date and time in the first week to meet with new employee

First Two Weeks:

- Meet with the new employee in-person or via Zoom (grabbing breakfast, lunch, or coffee is great) (allocate 30 min-1 hr.)
    - Kick off meeting with an ice breaker, make introductions, and learn about each other's backgrounds and interests
    - Share expectations of the role of the Peer Partner and the new employee in the Peer Partner relationship
    - Answer any questions that have come up about the new employee's role or the university
    - Establish preferred communication methods and accessibility
- Other potential discussion topics:
    - Check in to see if all technological items and access are working properly (Teams chat, phone number, access to share drive, etc.)
    - Share ideas on local places around the office to grab lunch or coffee
    - Offer a tour or provide an overview of the office and/or relevant office buildings
    - Introduce job-related technologies such as enterprise systems, databases, spreadsheets, functions in myHR, distribution lists, connectivity outlets (Zoom or Teams' channels), etc.
    - Review office equipment such as departmental printers, scanners, etc.
    - Review workplace culture (e.g., Workplace Strategies, casual Fridays, etc.)
- Schedule weekly check-ins for the first month, or a meeting cadence mutually agreed upon in-person or virtual
- Be accessible for any further training or advice you can offer to the new employee
- Consider inviting the new employee to any relevant business or social events and introduce them to others at Northwestern
- Continue to check in on the new employee in between formal meetings to see how things are going and answer any questions
- Continue to offer encouragement and feedback as the new employee gets accustomed to the department's structure and culture
- After the first few months, consider how to transition the relationship and discuss if/what support might look like moving forward