



Equity & Inclusion Moments That Matter: Onboarding

Onboarding is an indicator of whether words match practice.

- Onboarding is where institutional commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are either reinforced or undermined.
- The earliest days in a role strongly influence whether new faculty and staff feel welcomed, respected, and seen as part of the community.
- Effective onboarding increases satisfaction, engagement, and retention, especially for members of historically, systemically, persistently marginalized groups.
- A thoughtful process shortens the time it takes for new hires to contribute fully in teaching, research, clinical, and administrative roles.
- The way a department introduces people establishes what “normal” looks like (e.g., whether collaboration, respect, and inclusion are part of the culture).
- Without intentional onboarding, those with informal networks have an advantage; structured onboarding levels the playing field.

What should we emphasize in the onboarding process?¹

Clarity*

Transparency of information

Share expectations, policies, and unwritten norms openly so no one has to “figure it out” through hidden networks.

Consistency and flexibility

Provide a clear, structured process for all new hires, while adapting to specific needs (e.g., cultural context, accessibility, caregiving responsibilities).

Belonging

Multiple entry points for connection

Facilitate introductions across ranks, disciplines, and equity-deserving groups; create mentoring or buddy systems.

Respect for identity and lived experience

Acknowledge and support diversity in religion, culture, language, gender identity, disability and Indigenous or international backgrounds.

Practical support for thriving

Address not just the role, but also well-being; provide orientation to available resources (mental health, family supports, EDI offices, accommodations).

*Examples provided are non-exhaustive

Direction

Leadership visibility and accountability

Department leaders should be present in onboarding, signal inclusive values, and model the behaviours expected in the community.

Feedback and continuous improvement

Invite input from new hires on their onboarding experience; adapt practices to close equity gaps.

You can help change the narrative around onboarding in your unit.

Less of this...

“Here’s your office key and computer login. You’ll figure out the rest as you go.”

“We don’t really have a formal orientation; just ask around if you need something.”

“We treat everyone the same, so there’s no need to talk about equity or accommodations.”

“You’ll catch on to how things work here eventually.”

More of this...

“We’ve set up a structured orientation so you know who to connect with, what resources are available, and how we work as a team.”

“We’d like to know if there are accommodations or supports that would make your transition smoother.”

“You’ll have a peer mentor for the first few months to help navigate both academic and cultural aspects of the department.”

“Our department values include collaboration and equity...here’s how we try to live them day-to-day.”

Additional Onboarding Resources

For best practices for onboarding in the Faculty of Medicine, visit the [Office of Human Resources website](#) or contact the [Office of Organizational Development & Recognition](#).

- [New Hire’s Onboarding Checklist](#)
- [Manager’s Onboarding Guide](#)

Adapted from

Ryan RM, Deci EL. Self-determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic motivation, Social development, and well-being. American Psychologist [Internet]. 2000 Jan;55(1):68–78. Available from:

https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000_RyanDeci_SDT.pdf

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